



THOMAS JEFFERSON
Notes on the State of Virginia
1787

QUERY VI
excerpt on Native Americans

[Discussion begins with comments on the Indians of South America]

The Indian of North America being more within our reach, I can speak of him somewhat from my own knowledge, but more from the information of others better acquainted with him, and on whose truth and judgment I can rely. From these sources I am able to say, in contradiction to this representation, that he is neither more defective in ardor, nor more impotent with his female, than the white reduced to the same diet and exercise: that he is brave, when an enterprize depends on bravery; education with him making the point of honor consist in the destruction of an enemy by stratagem, and in the preservation of his own person free from injury; or perhaps this is nature; while it is education which teaches us to *honor force more than finesse: that he will defend himself against an host of enemies, always chusing to be killed, rather than to †surrender, though it be to the whites, who he knows will treat him well: that in other

*Sol Rodomonte sprezza di venire

Se non, dove la via meno è sicura. Ariosto. 14. 117.

† In so judicious an author as Don Ulloa, and one to whom we are indebted for the most precise information we have of South America, I did not expect to find such assertions as the following. 'Los Indios vencidos son los mas cobardes y pusilanimos que se pueden vér:—se hacen inocentes, se humillan hasta el desprecio, disculpan su inconsiderado arrojo, y con las súplicas y los ruegos dán seguras pruebas de su pusilanimidad.—ó lo que resieren las historias de la Conquista, sobre sus grandes acciones, es en un sentido figurado, ó el caracter de estas gentes noes ahora segun era entonces; pero lo que no tiene duda es, que las Naciones de la parte Septentrional subsisten en la misma libertad que siempre han tenido, sin haber sido sojuzgados por algun Principe extrano, y que viven segun su régimen y costumbres de toda la vida, sin que haya habido motivo para que muden de caracter; y en estos se vé lo mismo, que sucede en los del Peru, y de toda la América Meridional, reducidos, y que nunca lo han estado.' Noticias Americanas. Entretenimiento XVIII. §. i. Don Ulloa here admits, that the authors who have described the Indians of South America, before they were enslaved, had represented them as a brave people, and therefore seems to have suspected that the cowardice which he had observed in those of the present race might be the effect of subjugation. But, supposing the Indians of North America to be cowards also, he concludes the ancestors of those of South America to have been so too and therefore, that those authors have given fictions for truths. He was probably not acquainted himself with the Indians of North America, and had formed his opinion of them from hearsay. Great numbers of French, of English, and of Americans, are perfectly acquainted with these people. Had he had an opportunity of enquiring of any of these, they would have told him, that there never was an instance known of an Indian begging his life when in the power of his enemies: on the contrary, that he courts death by every possible insult and provocation. His reasoning then would have been reversed thus. 'Since the present Indian of North America is brave and authors tell us, that the ancestors of those of South America were brave also; it must follow, that the cowardice of their descendants is the effect of subjugation and ill treatment.' For he observes, ib. §. 27. that 'los obrages los ariquilan por la inhumanidad con que se les trata.'

10 situations also he meets death with more deliberation, and endures tortures with a firmness unknown almost to religious enthusiasm with us; that he is affectionate to his children, careful of them, and indulgent in the extreme: that his affections comprehend his other connections, weakening, as with us, from circle to circle, as they recede from the center: that his friendships are strong and faithful to the uttermost *extremity: that his sensibility is keen, even the warriors weeping most bitterly on the loss of their children, though in general they endeavour to appear superior to human events; that his vivacity and activity of mind is equal to ours in the same situation; hence his eagerness for hunting, and for games of chance. The women are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people. With such, force is law. The stronger sex therefore imposes on the weaker. It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their natural equality. That first teaches us to subdue the

20 selfish passions, and to respect those rights in others which we value in ourselves. Were we in equal barbarism, our females would be equal drudges. The man with them is less strong than with us, but their woman stronger than ours; and both for the same obvious reason; because our man and their woman is habituated to labour, and formed by it. With both races the sex which is indulged with ease is least athletic. An Indian man is small in the hand and wrist for the same reason for which a sailor is large and strong in the arms and shoulders, and a porter in the legs and thighs.—They raise fewer children than we do. The causes of this are to be found, not in a difference of nature, but of circumstance. The women very frequently attending the men in their parties of war and of hunting, child-bearing becomes extremely inconvenient to them. It is said, therefore, that they have learnt the practice of procuring abortion by the use of some vegetable; and that it even extends to prevent conception for a considerable time after. During

30 these parties they are exposed to numerous hazards, to excessive exertions, to the greatest extremities of hunger. Even at their homes the nation depends for food, through a certain part of every year, on the gleanings of the forest: that is, they experience a famine once in every year. With all animals, if the female be badly fed, or not fed at all, her young perish: and if both male and female be reduced to like want, generation becomes less active, less productive. To the obstacles then of want and hazard, which nature has opposed to the multiplication of wild animals, for the purpose of restraining their numbers within certain bounds, those of labour and of voluntary abortion are added with the Indian. No wonder, then, if they multiply less than we do. Where food is regularly supplied, a single farm will shew more of

* A remarkable instance of this appeared in the case of the late Col. Byrd, who was sent to the Cherokee nation to transact some business with them. It happened that some of our disorderly people had just killed one or two of that nation. It was therefore proposed in the council of the Cherokees that Col. Byrd should be put to death, in revenge for the loss of their countrymen. Among them was a chief called Silòuee, who, on some former occasion, had contracted an acquaintance and friendship with Col. Byrd. He came to him every night in his tent, and told him not to be afraid, they should not kill him. After many days deliberation, however, the determination was, contrary to Silòuee's expectation, that Byrd should be put to death and some warriors were dispatched as executioners. Silòuee attended them, and when they entered the tent, he threw himself between them and Byrd, and said to the warriors, 'this man is my friend: before you get at him, you must kill me.' On which they returned, and the council respected the principle so much as to recede from their determination.

cattle, than a whole country of forests can of buffaloes. The same Indian women, when married to white traders, who feed them and their children plentifully and regularly, who exempt them from excessive
40 drudgery, who keep them stationary and unexposed to accident, produce and raise as many children as the white women. Instances are known, under these circumstances, of their rearing a dozen children. An inhuman practice once prevailed in this country of making slaves of the Indians. It is a fact well known with us, that the Indian women so enslaved produced and raised as numerous families as either the whites or blacks among whom they lived.—It has been said, that Indians have less hair than the whites, except on the head. But this is a fact of which fair proof can scarcely be had. With them it is disgraceful to be hairy on the body. They say it likens them to hogs. They therefore pluck the hair as fast as it appears. But the traders who marry their women, and prevail on them to discontinue this practice, say, that nature is the same with them as with the whites. Nor, if the fact be true, is the consequence necessary which has been drawn from it. Negroes have notoriously less hair than the whites; yet they are more ardent. But if cold
50 and moisture be the agents of nature for diminishing the races of animals, how comes she all at once to suspend their operation as to the physical man of the new world, whom the Count acknowledges to be ‘à peu près de même stature que l’homme de notre monde,’ and to let loose their
influence on his moral faculties? How has this ‘combination of the elements and other
physical causes, so contrary to the enlargement of animal nature in this new world, these obstacles to the developement and formation of great germs,’ been arrested and suspended, so as to permit the human body to acquire its just dimensions, and by what inconceivable process has their action been directed on his mind alone? To judge of the truth of this, to form a just estimate of their genius and mental powers, more facts are wanting, and great allowance to be made for those circumstances of their situation which call for a display of particular talents only. This done, we shall probably find that they are formed in mind
60 as well as in body, on the same module with the *‘Homo sapiens Europæus.’ The principles of their society forbidding all compulsion, they are to be led to duty and to enterprize by personal influence and persuasion. Hence eloquence in council, bravery and address in war, become the foundations of all consequence with them. To these acquirements all their faculties are directed. Of their bravery and address in war we have multiplied proofs because we have been the subjects on which they were exercised. Of their eminence in oratory we have fewer examples, because it is displayed chiefly in their own councils. Some, however, we have of very superior lustre. I may challenge the whole orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, and of any more eminent orator, if Europe has furnished more eminent, to produce a single passage, superior to the speech of Logan, a Mingo chief, to Lord Dunmore, when

XVIII. 145.¹

¹ Referring to text in Query XVIII. [NHC note]

* Linn. Syst. Definition of a Man. [NHC note: Carl Linnaeus, the originator of biological taxonomy, outlined the classifications of animals, including human beings, in the tenth edition of his *System Naturae* (1758).]

governor of this state. And, as a testimony of their talents in this line, I beg leave to introduce it, first
70 stating the incidents necessary for understanding it. In the spring of the year 1774, a robbery and murder
were committed on an inhabitant of the frontiers of Virginia, by two Indians of the Shawanee tribe. The
neighbouring whites, according to their custom, undertook to punish this outrage in a summary way. Col.
Cresap, a man infamous for the many murders he had committed on those much-injured people, collected
a party, and proceeded down the Kanhaway in quest of vengeance. Unfortunately a canoe of women and
children, with one man only, was seen coming from the opposite shore, unarmed, and unsuspecting an
hostile attack from the whites. Cresap and his party concealed themselves on the bank of the river, and the
moment the canoe reached the shore, singled out their objects, and, at one fire, killed every person in it.
This happened to be the family of Logan, who had long been distinguished as a friend of the whites. This
unworthy return provoked his vengeance. He accordingly signalized himself in the war which ensued. In
80 the autumn of the same year, a decisive battle was fought at the mouth of the Great Kanhaway, between
the collected forces of the Shawanees, Mingoies, and Delawares, and a detachment of the Virginia militia.
The Indians were defeated, and sued for peace. Logan however disdained to be seen among the
suppliants. But, lest the sincerity of a treaty should be distrusted, from which so distinguished a chief
absented himself, he sent by a messenger the following speech to be delivered to Lord Dunmore.

‘I appeal to any white man to say, if ever he entered Logan's cabin hungry, and he gave him not
meat; if ever he came cold and naked, and he clothed him not. During the course of the last long and
bloody war, Logan remained idle in his cabin, an advocate for peace. Such was my love for the whites,
that my countrymen pointed as they passed, and said, ‘Logan is the friend of white men.’ I had even
thought to have lived with you, but for the injuries of one man. Col. Cresap, the last spring, in cold blood,
90 and unprovoked, murdered all the relations of Logan, not sparing even my women and children. There
runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. I have
sought it: I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance. For my country, I rejoice at the beams of
peace. But do not harbour a thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on
his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan?—Not one.’²

Before we condemn the Indians of this continent as wanting genius, we must consider that letters
have not yet been introduced among them. Were we to compare them in their present state with the
Europeans North of the Alps, when the Roman arms and arts first crossed those mountains, the
comparison would be unequal, because, at that time, those parts of Europe were swarming with numbers;

² See below: “An Appendix Relative to the Murder of Logan's Family” published with *Notes* in the 1853 edition *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, v. II. [NHC note]

100 because numbers produce emulation, and multiply the chances of improvement, and one improvement
begets another. Yet I may safely ask, How many good poets, how many able mathematicians, how many
great inventors in arts or sciences, had Europe North of the Alps then produced? And it was sixteen
centuries after this before a Newton could be formed. I do not mean to deny, that there are varieties in the
race of man, distinguished by their powers both of body and mind. I believe there are, as I see to be the
case in the races of other animals. I only mean to suggest a doubt, whether the bulk and faculties of
animals depend on the side of the Atlantic on which their food happens to grow, or which furnishes the
elements of which they are compounded? Whether nature has enlisted herself as a Cis³ or Trans-Atlantic
partisan? I am induced to suspect, there has been more eloquence than sound reasoning displayed in
support of this theory; that it is one of those cases where the judgment has been seduced by a glowing
110 pen: and whilst I render every tribute of honor and esteem to the celebrated Zoologist, who has added, and
is still adding, so many precious things to the treasures of science, I must doubt whether in this instance
he has not cherished error also, by lending her for a moment his vivid imagination and bewitching
language. [Query VI continues.]

³ Cis: Situated on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. (American Heritage Dictionary)

[Optional Text]

120 **An Appendix Relative to the Murder of Logan's Family**¹

[NHC note: This appendix was written by Jefferson in the late 1790s and published
with the 1853 edition of *Notes* in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, v. II.]

The “Notes on Virginia” were written, in Virginia, in the years 1781 and 1782, in answer to certain
queries proposed to me by Monsieur de Marbois, then secretary of the French legation in the United
States; and a manuscript copy was delivered to him. A few copies, with some additions, were afterwards,
in 1784, printed in Paris, and given to particular friends. In speaking of the animals of America, the theory
of M. de Buffon, the Abbé Raynal, and others presented itself to consideration. They have supposed there
is something in the soil, climate, and other circumstances of America, which occasions animal nature to
130 degenerate, not excepting even the man, native or adoptive, physical or moral. This theory, so unfounded
and degrading to one-third of the globe, was called to the bar of fact and reason. Among other proofs
adduced in contradiction of this hypothesis, the speech of Logan, an Indian chief, delivered to Lord
Dunmore in 1774, was produced, as a specimen of the talents of the aboriginals of this country, and
particularly of their eloquence; and it was believed that Europe had never produced anything superior to
this morsel of eloquence. In order to make it intelligible to the reader, the transaction, on which it was

¹ In connection with this appendix see letter to Governor Henry, printed as Note in p. 89. [Jefferson’s note]

140 founded, was stated, as it had been generally related in America at the time, and as I had heard it myself, in the circle of Lord Dunmore, and the officers who accompanied him; and the speech itself was given as it had, ten years before the printing of that book, circulated in the newspapers through all the then colonies, through the magazines of Great Britain, and periodical publications of Europe. For three and twenty years it passed uncontradicted; nor was it ever suspected that it even admitted contradiction. In 1797, however, for the first time, not only the whole transaction respecting Logan was affirmed in the public papers to be false, but the speech itself suggested to be a forgery, and even a forgery of mine, to aid me in proving that the man of America was equal in body and in mind, to the man of Europe. But wherefore the forgery; whether Logan's or mine, it would still have been American. I should indeed consult my own fame if the suggestion, that this speech is mine, were suffered to be believed. He would have just right to be proud who could with truth claim that composition. But it is none of mine; and I yield it to whom it is due.

150 On seeing then that this transaction was brought into question, I thought it my duty to make particular inquiry into its foundation. It was the more my duty, as it was alleged that, by ascribing to an individual therein named, a participation in the murder of Logan's family, I had done an injury to his character, which it had not deserved. I had no knowledge personally of that individual. I had no reason to aim an injury at him. I only repeated what I had heard from others, and what thousands had heard and believed as well as myself; and which no one indeed, till then, had been known to question. Twenty-three years had now elapsed, since the transaction took place. Many of those acquainted with it were dead, and the living dispersed to very distant parts of the earth. Few of them were even known to me. To those however of whom I knew, I made application by letter; and some others, moved by a regard for truth and justice, were kind enough to come forward, of themselves, with their testimony. These fragments of evidence, the small remains of a mighty mass which time has consumed, are here presented to the public, in the form of letters, certificates, or affidavits, as they came to me. I have rejected none of these forms, nor required other solemnities from those whose motives and characters were pledges of their truth. 160 Historical transactions are deemed to be well vouched by the simple declarations of those who have borne a part in them; and especially of persons having no interest to falsify or disfigure them. The world will now see whether they, or I, have injured Cresap, by believing Logan's charge against him; and they will decide between Logan and Cresap, whether Cresap was innocent, and Logan a calumniator?

170 In order that the reader may have a clear conception of the transactions, to which the different parts of the following declarations refer, he must take notice that they establish four different murders. 1. Of two Indians, a little above Wheeling. 2. Of others at Grave Creek, among whom were some of Logan's relations. 3. The massacre at Baker's bottom, on the Ohio, opposite the mouth of Yellow Creek, where were other relations of Logan. 4. Of those killed at the same place, coming in canoes to the relief of their friends. I place the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, against certain paragraphs of the evidence, to indicate the particular murder to which the paragraph relates, and present also a small sketch or map of the principal scenes of these butcheries, for their more ready comprehension.

For the testimony of 18 persons presented by Jefferson and published in the 1853 edition of *Notes*,

see Appendix #5 entitled "Extract of a letter . . ." at

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefBv021.html>

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