

John Lawson's Assessment of the Tuscarora ^[1]

By the early 1700s, colonial settlers and native peoples had a century of contact. Colonial settlements were evergrowing and trade between settlers and natives was not uncommon. In his 1709 publication A New Voyage to Carolina, John Lawson wrote extensively about the natives and settlers' interactions with them. Below is an excerpt where Lawson discusses the Tuscarora in a mostly positive light, aside from their "aversion to Christianity."

Now, as I before hinted, we will see what grounds there are to make these People [serviceable to us](#), and better themselves thereby.

On a fair Scheme, we must first allow these [Savages](#) what really belongs to them, that is, what good Qualities, and natural [Endowments](#) ^[2], they possess, whereby they being in their [proper Colours](#), the Event may be better guess'd at, and [fathom](#) ^[3]'d.

First, they are as apt to learn any Handicraft, as any People that the World affords; I will except none; as is seen by their Canoes and [Stauking Heads](#), which they make of themselves; but to my purpose, the Indian Slaves in South Carolina, and elsewhere, make my Argument good.

Secondly, we have no disciplin'd Men in Europe, but what have, at one time or other, been branded with [Mutining](#) ^[4], and [Murmuring](#) against their Chiefs. These Savages are never found guilty of that great Crime in a Soldier; I challenge all Mankind to tell me of one Instance of it; besides, they never prove Traitors to their Native Country, but rather chuse Death than [partake](#) ^[5] and side with the Enemy.

They naturally possess the Righteous Man's Gift; they are Patient under all Afflictions, and have a great many other Natural Vertues, which I have slightly touch'd throughout the Account of these Savages.

[They are really better to us, than we are to them](#); they always give us [Victuals](#) ^[6] at their [Quarters](#) ^[7], and take care we are arm'd against Hunger and Thirst: We do not so by them (generally speaking) but let them walk by our Doors Hungry, and do not often relieve them. We look upon them with Scorn and Disdain, and think them little better than Beasts in Humane Shape, though if well examined, we shall find that, for all our Religion and Education, we possess more Moral Deformities, and Evils than these Savages do, or are acquainted [withal](#) ^[8].

We reckon them Slaves in Comparison to us, and Intruders, as oft as they enter our Houses, or hunt near our Dwellings. But if we will admit Reason to be our Guide, she will inform us, that these Indians are the freest People in the World, and so far from being Intruders upon us, that we have abandon'd our own Native Soil, to drive them out, and possess theirs; neither have we any true Balance, in Judging of these poor [Heathens](#) ^[9], because we neither give Allowance for their Natural [Disposition](#) ^[10], nor the [Sylvian](#) ^[11] Education, and strange Customs, ([uncouth](#) ^[12] to us) they lie under and have ever been train'd up to; [these are false Measures for Christians to take](#) and indeed no Man can be reckon'd a [Moralist](#) ^[13] only, who will not make choice and use, of better Rules to walk and act by: We trade with them, it's true, but to what End? Not to shew them the Steps of Vertue, and the Golden Rule, to do as we would be done by. No, [we have furnished them with the Vice of Drunkenness](#), which is the open Road to all others, and daily [cheat them in every thing we sell](#), and [esteem](#) ^[14] it a Gift of Christianity, not to sell to them so cheap as we do to the Christians, as we call our selves. Pray let me know where is there to be found one Sacred Command or [Precept](#) ^[15] of [our Master](#), that counsels us to such Behaviour? Besides, I believe it will not appear, but that all the Wars, which we have had with the Savages, were occason'd by the unjust Dealings of the Christians towards them. I can name more than a few, which my own Enquiry has given me a right Understanding of, and I am afraid the remainder (if they come to the test) will prove themselves Birds of the same Feather.

Indians Aversion to Christianity.

As we are in Christian Duty bound, so we must act and behave ourselves to these Savages, if we either intend to be serviceable in converting them to the Knowledge of the Gospel, or discharge the Duty which every Man, within the [Pale](#) of the Christian Church, is bound to do. Upon this Score, we ought to shew a Tenderness for these Heathens under the weight of [Infidelity](#) ^[16]; let us cherish their good Deeds, and, with Mildness and [Clemency](#) ^[17], make them sensible and forwarn them of their ill ones; let our Dealings be just to them in every Respect, and shew no ill Example, whereby they may think we advise them to practise that which we will not be conformable to ourselves: Let them have cheap [Penniworths](#) ^[18] (without [Guile](#) ^[19] in our Trading with them) and learn them the Mysteries of our Handicrafts, as well as our Religion, otherwise we deal unjustly by them. But it is highly necessary to be brought in Practice, which is, to give Encouragement to the ordinary People, and those of a lower Rank, that they might marry with these Indians, and come into Plantations, and Houses, where so many Acres of Land and some [Gratuity](#) ^[20] of Money, (out of a Publick Stock) are given to the new-married Couple; and that the Indians might have Encouragement to send their Children Apprentices to proper Masters, that would be kind to them, and make them Masters of a Trade, whereby they would be drawn to live amongst us, and become Members of the same [Ecclesiastical](#) ^[21] and Civil Government we are under; then we should have great Advantages to make daily Conversions amongst them, when they saw that we were kind and just to them in all

our Dealings. Moreover, by the Indians Marrying with the Christians, and coming into Plantations with their English Husbands, or Wives, they would become Christians, and their Idolatry [22] would be quite forgotten, and, in all probability, a better Worship come in its Stead; for were the Jews engrafted thus, and alienated from the Worship and Conversation of Jews, their Abominations [23] would vanish, and be no more.

Thus we should be let into a better Understanding of the Indian Tongue, by our new Converts; and the whole Body of these People would arrive to the Knowledge of our Religion and Customs, and become as one People with us. By this Method also, we should have a true Knowledge of all the Indians Skill in Medicine and Surgery they would inform us of the Situation of our Rivers, Lakes, and Tracts of Land in the Lords Dominions [24], where by their Assistance, greater Discoveries may be made than has been hitherto [25] found out, and by their Accompanying us in our Expeditions, we might civilize a great many other Nations of the Savages, and daily add to our Strength in Trade, and Interest; so that we might be sufficiently enabled to conquer, or maintain our Ground, against all the Enemies to the Crown of England in America, both Christian and Savage.

Primary Source Citation:

Lawson, John. *a New Voyage to Carolina Containing the Exact Description and Natural History of that Country..* 1709. London, England. The North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, UNC Chapel Hill Libraries, Chapel Hill, N.C. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/lawson/lawson.html> [26]

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From:

LEARN NC North Carolina History: A Digital Textbook [39]

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2008

Artifacts:



The stalking head Lawson praises was a deer head and skin worn by a hunter to camouflage himself while hunting.

3 January 2018

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