**Historical Mythbusting #4**

**The "Hindrance to Progress" Myth:** In order to ensure the survival and progress of modern American civilization, it was inevitable that the Native Americans be defeated.

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European progress was impeded not because the indigenous peoples were uncivilized and incapable of living harmoniously with the settlers, but because Europeans were unwilling and incapable of accepting the Native American political, social, economic, and spiritual traditions as civilized.

* Many firsthand accounts describe the indigenous peoples of the North continent and of the West Indies (Caribbean) as friendly, peaceful, and welcoming.
* Juan Rodiquez Cabrillo, when writing about his voyage along the Southern California coast in 1542, observed, "very fine valleys [with] maize and abundant food ... many savannahs and groves" that were "densely populated" and "thickly settled" with Natives who often greeted the Spanish ships in friendship and traded with them during peaceful ceremonies (potlatches). (Stannard, 1992:23.)
* If such communities were not comprised of uncivilized savages who threatened European settlement and white progress, why has the myth persisted? Several historians have flatly stated that the image of native barbarism and savagery serves to rationalize European conquest. [[1]](#footnote-1)[[2]](#footnote-2)[[3]](#footnote-3)

What, then, were the obstacles that got in the way of European acceptance of the indigenous peoples??

* + The Native Americans were not Christians nor did they have any visible forms of worshipping God.
  + They had made no effort to subdue the land - to make it profitable.
  + They had no concept or understanding of private property.
  + They were not willing to be ignored or evicted from their traditional lands

1. Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cost of Conquest.*Chapel Hill: Univ. of No. Carolina Press, 1975 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Stannard, *American Holocaust.*NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)