

Colonial Transplants: Imagining, Settling, and Constructing the New World

(Summary of key points from first half of chapter 2)

Chapter 2 begins with the European parallel to the pre-contact cultures of Chapter 1. For the purposes of the story of your textbook, this parallel is not primitive civilization in Europe but the images and ideas held by Europeans BEFORE they have had real encounters with the “new” world. This point is very important because the images which we see at the beginning of this chapter were not made by people who had any familiarity with the new world. In a sense, an image such as the one by Jacques Le Moyne is valid only as a document of the imagination of the man who produced it; it is no more valid than a contemporary filmmaker’s vision of aliens in outer space!

An important theme in this chapter is the idea of the “middle ground,” the phrase used by the historian, Richard White: not simply an accommodation between the myths or realities of paradise and savagery; it is also a state of co-existence between the life styles of the new settlers and the indigenous populations. It was not easily or often achieved, and on the east coast, it was most recognizable in terms of trade and objects made for the market. Your book provides several examples of a process which might be associated with numerous colonized cultures – the incorporation of new ideas into traditional media and formats and the appropriation of traditional formats by new users and new purposes [horse effigy comb – new subject, familiar object; pipe tomahawk is a particularly puzzling example which unites two distinctive objects into something which could only have been intended as a gift; a wall pocket, c. 1800, indigenous form and technique, unites Christian and native iconography; used for a purpose which was a colonial European function].

The second half of this chapter does begin to document the earliest encounters which take place between European and native American cultures. Since this material continues into chapter three, I’ll save the outline for later.