

TEACHING THE COLONIZATION OF AMERICA IN ALGERIA THROUGH AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

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Abstract

L'objet de cet article est de présenter brièvement la manière suivie par les colons européens dans leur entreprise coloniale en Amérique ; cet article essaie aussi, à travers quelques exemples, de montrer combien cette entreprise était similaire à l'entreprise coloniale française en Algérie. Enfin il montre que l'enseignement de la colonisation de l'Amérique est mieux assimilé par l'étudiant algérien quand cet enseignement s'appuie sur l'exemple de la colonisation de l'Algérie.

The purpose of this paper is to try to present the way in which the European settlers colonized America (what is the USA today). This article also attempts to draw a brief parallel between the means used in both North America and Algeria and show that similar approaches were used in both cases to take control of native lands. Therefore, for better pedagogical results, it is a good idea to teach the Algerian students taking the course of American Civilization through an intercultural approach that refers to the colonial experience of Algeria.

In the great colonial race for the big American pie which followed the 'discovery' of the New World, good perspectives of making quick and great profits - gold, silver and speculation on land - pushed different groups of European adventurers with charters from European monarchs and financial support from joint stock companies to mount expeditions to America, to explore the New World, develop trade and colonize it. The Spaniards sent missionaries to christianize and «civilize» the Indians whom they rather used as laborers in farming and in gold and silver mining. The French and the Dutch, also involved in the race, went to America to make quick profits from trade - fur trade in particular - with the Indians from whom, they seized territories often larger than their countries of origin. The first half of the seventeenth century was a period of great turmoil for England. During that period, many factors worked together, in different domains of the English life, to stimulate English expansion outside Europe. The defeat of the Spanish Armada, in 1588, together with the granting of royal charters to English joint stock companies opened the doors of America for English organized settlements and investments. This trend was further boosted by James I's repression and hostility to the project of the Puritans and the latter's pessimistic feeling as to their ability to purify the English Church from within which motivated them to start emigrating to America in small groups.

Furthermore, there was a mood of pessimism in the country caused by what Puritans considered as aggressions against English traditional liberties. The ensuing Civil War and the later widespread vagrancy among peasants caused by the introduction of the enclosure system succeeded in planting in many destitute groups a strong desire for emigrating. Thus, during this period, many waves of Englishmen crossed the Atlantic and decided to fight against all odds to make of the New World their permanent home.

The arrival of land hungry European settlers, in ever growing numbers, brought great pressure on the Indians of the Atlantic coastal plains. This pressure, brought about by more and more demand for land, was, at the beginning, particularly felt in Virginia and Maryland where European settlers had started cultivating tobacco extensively. Wars, about land, soon opposed Native Americans and European colonists ; these wars were often followed by truces or treaties signed by Indian tribes to be totally ignored or renegotiated by the colonists or the Federal Government as renewed pressures from white immigrants gained momentum again.

As a historian put it « ... with rare exception , no Europeans had the imagination or sensitivity to transcend the general view of primitive peoples as barbarians , devil worshippers , or noble savages to be sacrificed where necessary to the expansion of white settlement , trade, and power. » (6) The arrival of more European colonists meant that the Indians were pressed to abandon their traditional territories , their ways and go west of the Alleghenies where , the Royal Proclamation of 1763 promised , they could establish permanent homes and enjoy royal protection. But this proclamation infuriated the settlers who were, in this field, more than ever before, determined to take action in defiance of British authority encouraged in this by the mounting idea of independence. The independence of the settlers gave the problem a new dimension despite the recognition in 1788 of the special status of Indian tribes in the United States Constitution (article I, Section 8) :

« The Congress shall have power ...to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes. » One of the first measures taken by the federal government to keep peace with the Indians was the Northwest Ordinance by which it attempted to regulate the removal of the Indians westward. But the different ways tried to settle the problem boiled down to this : « The Indian had to be either assimilated or removed farther west to make room for the European civilization. »(8) For President James Menroe : « The hunter or savage state, requires a greater extent of territory to sustain it, than is compatible with the progress and just claims of civilized life and must yield to it. Nothing is more certain, than, if the Indian tribes do not abandon that state , and become civilized, that they will decline, and become extinct. »(9) The creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1824 as part of the war Department made things worse because the people in charge of it were rather ignorant about Indian life and

thoughts.(10) And so, in 1830 Congress passed the Indian Removal Act by which all Indians of the east were forced west of the Mississippi River.

The policy of removal of Southern Indians : the Creeks and Cherokees to a reservation west of the Mississippi had been outlined by President Andrew Jackson, a popular frontier leader, in his first message to Congress. In 1835, the Indians were compelled by a treaty to surrender their lands east of the Mississippi (11) As a result of the removal efforts applied to tribes in the North and Midwest as well as to those in the South, during the 1830s about 73,000 Indians moved west under this policy.(12) However, their removal west of the Mississippi was just another step in the colonial policy of the United States to be followed by more measures by which the federal government aimed at destroying the social structure of the Indian tribes.

In 1881 President Chester Alan Arthur recommended to Congress that : « The Indian [as an individual] should receive the protection of the law. He should be allowed to maintain in court his right of person and property. » By this recommendation President Arthur wanted Congress to legislate in favour of Indian individual private ownership of land to induce individual Indians to claim their allotments under federal protection and be able « to sever their tribal relations....A resort to the allotment system would have a direct and powerful influence in dissolving the tribal bond, which is so prominent a feature of savage life, and which tends so strongly to perpetuate it. » (13)The response of Congress came in the Dawes Act of February 1887 which decreed that the President of the United States was authorized to break up Indian tribal lands into allotments of 160 acres to be given to Indian family heads and any surplus land was to sold on the market. But as most Indians had no great experience in farming they sold their allotment for next to nothing to white settlers.

It is estimated that at the beginning of Europeans' settlement in America, there were about 3 million Indians living in the territories that would become the US. At the end of the 19th c., only about 250,000 remained. This is to say that about 90 per cent of the Indians were destroyed . Some died of diseases introduced to America by settlers ; while others died of malnutrition, because food supplies were diminished by European hunting methods ; more died in warfare and massacres at the hands of settlers ; but Indians were chiefly killed by the US Army

and their lands, apart from land reservations, were left free for European settlers.

In the curriculum of the licence, the Indian question is confined to the pre - colonial times in the chapter entitled : " The Original Inhabitants of America ". Furthermore, this chapter is not connected to the rest of the programme which gives the impression that the Indian question is totally settled and henceforth of negligible importance for the later developments of American history. The designers of the licence curriculum did not give the Indian question the importance it deserves . Through this biased approach, students are partially introduced to the Indian question. The dispossession of Native Americans of their traditional lands and the parallel massacres and warfare are left aside. The conflicting visions and the subsequent ways in which the colonization of America was conducted by the US Government are not in the programme.

Rather quickly then, the licence curriculum designers focus on the mercantilistic policy of England and the growing discontent in the Thirteen Colonies stressing the royal injustices and showing the grievances of the colonists with the obvious view of preparing the Algerian students to accept the idea of the independence of the colonies as a normal and just course of events that would, in turn, permit the colonists to have a free hand in America.. At least for pedagogical reasons, we think it is more appropriate that Algerian students be introduced to the Indian question through the process of colonization of America because the colonial experience of Algeria will help them understand the colonial experience of Native Americans in North America. Such an approach will help show the extent to which the Algerians' and Native Americans' experiences of colonisation were similar.

American historians have studied the impact and significance of long periods of confrontations and warfare to come to terms with the native populations of North America. They showed that the advance westward to take possession of more lands brought about large scale massacres of Native Americans and significantly contributed in shaping American character and values. The advance westward and the ensuing confrontation and warfare with the Indians, about the conquest of the continent, constitutes the basis of what is known in American history as the frontier experience and the frontier men.

Now, the question to put is : in Algerian universities, from which point of view is the module of American Civilization taught ? The way this module is presented in the licence curriculum gives the impression that we are teaching the old colonial propaganda literature which justifies the colonization of America by giving credit to the idea that America was an empty land or at best inhabited by primitive tribes good to be colonized by overpopulated Europe. To remedy the negative effects of this approach, in which Native Americans are presented as primitive or noble savages, a parallel between the colonization of America (what is the US today) and Algeria should be drawn in order to show that in both cases similar methods were used.

The fact that the Algerian student is generally aware of the colonial process that took place in Algeria and is somehow also aware of the means successive French Governments used to dispossess the Algerians of their lands and more particularly to take control of the Arsh (tribal) lands would significantly help him understand the colonization America. The following points could constitute the basis of an intercultural study to show that similar methods were used, in both cases, respectively by the European colonists in America and French colonists in Algeria to dispossess the natives of their lands and colonize the country.

In this respect, all land legislation passed by France at the end of the great resistance put by the Algerians in the 1830s and 1840s aimed at dispossessing the native population in the same way as it was done with the native people of America. In Algeria, the Senatus Consulte of 1863 aimed at deviding the Arch lands (tribal lands) and at promoting individual property so as to make land transaction possible ; the whole idea was that, through this stratagem, land was to be transferred at a very cheap price from Algerians to the European colonists. As a matter of fact, the mayor of El Khroub, in eastern Algeria, proposed that the Gouvernement général immediately establish land property and declare a total freedom of land transaction so that in a year or so 90% of algerian lands would pass under european control.

The Warnier law of 1873 subjected all imperial territoties to French law ; in Algeria, it particularly insisted that douars lands (hamlets) should be devided into individual allotments easy to transfer through transactions to European land purchasers. The French colonists seized even Habous lands in Algeria. In America, the European colonists did the

same with most sacred lands (religious lands) of the native people as was the case with the Sioux from whom they seized Paha Sapa (Black Hills).

As a matter of fact, in Algeria, the French colonists were not satisfied with the amount of lands brought under their control through the implementation of the Senatus Consult of 1863 and the 1873 Warnier law. A second Senatus Consult was enforced in 1887 the same year the Dawes Act was passed in America. In both cases, the aim was to break up tribal lands into small individual allotments in order to facilitate transactions in favour of Europeans and destroy the traditional social structure which permitted to sustain resistance.

When studying the chapter entitled: « The Original Inhabitants of America », in which students are introduced to different aspects of Indian life such as relation to land, religious beliefs, social structure etc., it seems very helpful to draw on students' knowledge of the colonization of Algeria to make parallels and comparisons with the way in which North America was colonized and how its native peoples were dealt with. Drawing parallels and comparing the Indians' colonial experience with the colonization of Algeria by the French, would give students more ground for a better understanding of the Native Americans question. Through this approach, we think we can help students get closer to the Indian way (civilization) and therefore help them get rid of the hard dying images hammered into their minds by hundreds of Western movies showing the Indians as primitive and blood thirsty peoples.

Notes

1. Hezel W. Hertzberg , *The Search for an American Identity* , Syracuse , N. Y. , 1972 , p. 2
2. Ibid. , p. 3
3. Ibid. , p. 3
4. Shelly Orenstein , 'American Indians' in *American Studies* , vol., 35 , January 1995
5. Andersen K.R., Hals K., Peel R., *Consider* J.W. Cappelen's Forlag, Oslo 1991 p.231
6. R. C. Simmons *The American Colonies: From Settlement to Independence* Longman House , Essex, 1976, p. 155
8. Orenstein, op., cit., p.4
9. Ibid., p. 4
10. Andersen K.R., op., cit. p. 232
11. Commager H. S., *Documents of American History*, Appleton, N.Y., 1963 pp . 259-60
12. Dinnerstein Leonard, *Native and Strangers :A multicultural History of America* Oxford University Press, New York, 1996, p. 39
13. Commager, op. cit., p. 557