

INSIDE AMERICA'S CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Two Centuries of Internment and Torture

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THE ORIGINS OF INTERNMENT IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Scotsmen began immigrating to America only four years before John Turner was exiled to the colonies. By the time of his arrival more than seven hundred Scots had settled in a colony in New Jersey. Perhaps because of his nightmarish experiences in Scotland, Turner found life in a colony under British control not to his liking, primarily because of the fierce violence inflicted on Native Americans and the subsequent retribution inflicted on the settlers by the Indians. He traveled north into the New York wilderness and found work with a rowdy band of trappers who worked the forest north into Canada, where they gathered pelts that they sold to the colonists.

For five years, John traveled with the trappers throughout New York and across the St. Lawrence River into Quebec. It was on the St. Lawrence that he met explorer Rene-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, who told him about a paradise he had discovered on Lake Michigan, near what is

now called South Bend, Indiana. In 1693, after skirmishes with the Indians in northern New York and with English soldiers who demanded his valuable trappers' pelts, John left the trappers and headed south to Maryland, a territory known for its tolerance of Presbyterians.

Living among the settlers were several tribes of Algonquin Indians, including the Conoy (also called the Piscataway), a tribe that lived on the banks of the Potomac River on land that is now Washington, D.C. They were unique in that they were the only tribe in the colonies that allowed women to serve as chiefs. A peace-loving people, they traded with the settlers and responded well to teachings about Christianity. When they went to war, it was with Indian tribes to the south, not the settlers.

The Conoy were distinguished by black hair, dark eyes, and copper skin. They were taller than the colonists, even the women, and they had stronger builds than the whites. They wore their hair long, often pulled back into locks and tied with strings of shells. Many of the men shaved their hair from half of their heads. Some of the women had colored designs on their bodies that indicated whether they were single or members of the tribal leadership council. In the summer, men and women dressed in deerskin wraps that left their chests exposed; in winter they wore long cloaks, leggings, and well-insulated moccasins.

Soon after his arrival John witnessed a ceremony during which the leader of the Conoy, a tall, beautiful woman in her early twenties, strode into the white settlement with the bearings of a queen. John had never seen a female chief, and he was struck by her great beauty. After she left the settlement, he asked about her and was told that she was a chief but didn't yet have a husband.

John trapped and hunted on the Potomac for several weeks, unable to get the Conoy chief out of his mind. He returned to the camp, determined to make her his wife. Before the year ended, John married the chief, even though it was illegal at that time for whites to marry Indians. He renamed her Jane in an effort to promote her acceptance by whites. Despite the discrimination they faced from both whites and Indians, they were determined to have the freedom that John had dreamed of finding in America; but that proved difficult because life was changing radically in the colonies.

In the beginning, white settlers were content to build isolated settlements in America that respected the boundaries declared by Native Americans. But as white settlers arrived in ever-increasing numbers, creating an insatiable demand for settlement land, peaceful coexistence was replaced by a clumsily drafted relocation strategy of pushing Native Americans farther into the interior, the forerunner of modern-day internment. Advocates of that strategy were the powerful British corporations that garnered massive profits by seizing America's vast natural resources. Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, British corporations such as East India Company, South Sea Company, and Virginia Company were as wealthy and powerful as any twenty-first-century American corporation.

Corporate economic expansion in the colonies translated into racial and ethnic cleansing—residents who did not contribute to corporate economic expansion were forced out of their homes. John and Jane Turner found life in the colonies intolerable. For love, Jane had given up her leadership role with the Conoy and John had given up any hope of advancement in white society. They truly became stateless when the corporations pressured whites to seize Conoy land, thus cleansing the colonies of land-owning Indians. Unable to live among whites or Indians, John and Jane went westward, beyond the reach of nefarious corporations and racist Indian-haters.

John and Jane followed the directions that La Salle had provided and traveled west until they reached the St. Joseph River, south of Lake Michigan. It was an area that would later be named South Bend, Indiana (Indiana means *In dih an ah*, land of the Indians, so named because of the many tribes that migrated there after being pushed off their land by the colonists). Most of the indigenous Indians on the St. Joseph River belonged to the Miami tribe, a member of the Algonquin nation, which also included the Conoy. For that reason, John and Jane were allowed to settle on the river. They picked out a piece of land on a high bluff overlooking the river and built a cabin. Protected by the Miami, they hunted, trapped and fished, and traded with the French, who set up trading posts to receive furs from the Miami. They also had four children: two girls and two boys, Richard and Samuel, the latter of whom was born when John was thirty-six. Those were good years for the Turn-

ers, although they found it necessary, from time to time, to fight with the Miami against their common enemy, the Iroquois. That part of the country was so remote that the settlement of South Bend would not be established for another 120 years. For the first time in his life John found true happiness and sanctuary.

John lived to be one hundred years old, and Jane lived to be ninety-five. They remained close in their old age, always sitting near enough to each other to be able to reach out and touch. Never once did they return to the colonies. Jane often thought about her ancestral land, but she knew she would never return to lay claim to it. When the end came for John, he died with his head cradled in Jane's arms. She gave him a Presbyterian burial, courtesy of an itinerant preacher, and then prayed to the Presbyterian God that she be allowed to accompany him on his long journey. To that end, she sat for thirty days on the crest of the bluff overlooking the river, praying for death. On the final day, she slumped over, a smile on her face—and thus began the journey.

As white settlements proliferated on the eastern seaboard during the last half of the eighteenth century, Native American settlements quietly receded into the interior, confident that a series of boundaries established between the Indians and the English meant that Indian Territory was no longer open to settlement by the colonists.¹ Indeed, in 1763 the English government, which claimed sovereignty, declared all lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains reserved for the Indians. The British were not being generous in their allocation of land, for the dominate business acumen of the day put value only on coastal land that was accessible to ocean trade routes. The British considered interior territory that was not navigable by rivers with access to the ocean as essentially worthless, certainly not worth fighting over, so they gave it to the Indians.

Up until the 1770s, white settlers experienced conflicts with various Indian tribes on a regular basis, but nothing so severe that a forced relocation of entire tribes was ever considered a rational alternative. All that changed in 1776, when the British persuaded several Indian tribes to side with them against white settlers who supported the Revolution. Three

of the tribes, the Shawnees, Delawares, and Mohawks, encouraged the Cherokee to join them in hostilities against the settlers, thereby helping the British. Advised of Cherokee attacks against settlers on the frontier, Thomas Jefferson, for the first time, advocated relocation as a final solution to the hostilities: “I hope that the Cherokees will now be driven beyond the Mississippi and that this in future will be declared to the Indians the invariable consequence of their beginning a war. Our contest with Britain is too serious and too great to permit any possibility of avocation from the Indians.”²

By the time the War of Independence began, Richard and Samuel Turner were respected traders who moved safely and easily among the various Indian tribes that inhabited what later became Indiana and Ohio. By then, the Miami were governed by Chief Mehecannochqua (Little Turtle), a man who achieved fame as one of the greatest chiefs and warriors of the era. Both sons married, but Richard and his wife never had children. Samuel and his wife, a British-born woman named Asbury, had five children: three girls, whose names have not survived, and two boys, Joseph and Thomas. Thomas married an American-born woman named Scot and had five sons.

The War of Independence was hotly debated in South Bend. Chief Little Turtle, who lived about one hundred miles southeast of South Bend in an area that was later named Fort Wayne, supported the British, primarily because the French supported the revolutionaries and he despised the French.

Joseph and Thomas felt strongly about supporting the colonists and told their father that they felt compelled to enlist in George Washington’s army. Before they set off to war, Samuel talked to them about their grandfather, John Turner, and his experiences with the British. He passed on information that had been passed on to him by his father about the military tactics that James Turner had written about in his famous book, *Palas Armata: Military Essayes of the Ancient Grecian, Roman, and Modern Art of War*. He told them how to defeat those tactics by fighting an Indian-style war.