

Background Information

Teacher note: The purpose of this excerpt is to provide background information to support *Examining Cross-cultural Observations* MT. It is intended for use within the context of the *Modelling the Tools* resource only. Terminology found in the excerpt must be considered within the context of the historical time period.

The following excerpt is intended to help students recognize that anthropological accounts are culturally sensitive and, as such, may reflect elements of cultural superiority, ethnocentrism and stereotyping. In this account, historian W. L. Grant suggests that the observations (in italics) of early French explorers such as Marc Lescarbot dispel the notion that First Nations people were not civilized.

State of Nature

Europeans had difficulty understanding the society and culture of First Nations people. Many individuals thought that because First Nations people did not believe in the Christian God, they must indeed be ... uncivilized ..., a belief supported by their perceived “inferior” technologies and a continued reliance on hunting and gathering, instead of the “superior” practice of agriculture. French observations often suggested otherwise. The liberty, equality and justice often exhibited by First Nations people made some Europeans believe that First Nations people were not savages, but were instead living in a state of nature, uncorrupted by society and civilization. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, they were members of an ignorant, but noble, civilization.

And yet I would not so greatly depreciate the condition of the tribes whom we are to describe as not to avow that there is much good in them. For, to put it briefly, they have courage, fidelity, generosity, and humanity, and their hospitality is so innate and praiseworthy that they receive among them every man who is not an enemy. They are not simpletons like many people over here; they speak with much judgment and good sense. So that if we commonly call them Savages, the word is abusive and unmerited for they are anything but that, as will be proved in the course of this history.

W. L. Grant, ed., *Marc Lescarbot: The History of New France* (Toronto, 1907), pp. 32–33.

Adapted from Ruth Sandwell et al. *Early Contact and Settlement in New France* (Vancouver, BC: The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2002), pp. 33–60. Permission granted by The Critical Thinking Consortium for use by Alberta teachers.