During the early eighteenth century, John Lawson published his observations of the native Carolinian peoples. His “Account of the Indians of North-Carolina” includes his perception of Native American physique, intra-cultural interaction, and trade. In conjunction with his observations, Lawson also spoke of or alluded to the ways native peoples were changing as a result of the century-long European invasion. According to Lawson’s travel journal, from the beginning of the interaction between Native Americans and colonists, natives had continuously incorporated aspects of English origin into their culture while their European counterparts resisted change. Lawson extrapolated aspects of European influence on native behavior to convince his fellow English colonists to reform their actions towards their new neighbors in order to benefit both Christianity and the Crown.

Although English Colonists transferred their entire lives across an ocean, they attempted to maintain their identity as English citizens and consequently resisted any influence from the native cultures. Instead of adapting to the established way of life in the New World, the colonists immigrated to American soil with the intent of driving the natives away from their ancestral inhabitations. Colonists also refused to ideologically separate themselves from the English world. Upon arrival, settlers built permanent, houses based off of the construction of homes in Britain. This practice contrasted with both the nomadic native custom and the popular construction of the communal long-house. Around these settlements, colonists defined boundaries to their personal property and became irritated by how “oft as they [natives] enter our Houses, or hunt near our Dwellings.”

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English colonists also distanced themselves from natives in industries that had been introduced to the English upon their arrival in America. Although colonists had the opportunity to learn from natives about the cultivation of tobacco, the English developed their own curing process separate from the traditional native incarnation. Their inability to incorporate native practices into their New World venture exemplifies the settler’s resistance to change in the time period prior to Lawson’s travels. In an entirely different light, the Natives absorbed English practices into their everyday lives rapidly after their first European encounters.

Once English pioneers landed their ships on the Carolinian shore, the lives of the native peoples were forever altered. One of the first changes to take place was the shift in trade from a network solely between different groups of natives to a network that incorporated a multi-faceted partnership between the traditional native groups and also between the natives and the English. This new trade conglomerate affected the way natives expressed their identity through clothing. According to Lawson, the Paspitank Indians, who were traditionally cattle herders before they began trading with the English, now “wear Hats, Shooes, Stockings, and Breeches, with very tolerable Linnen shirts.” This wardrobe change radically deviated from the traditional “Tail-Clouts” that were once worn as a covering for the genitals. Additionally, trade between the British and the Native Americans had negative impacts on native culture. The introduction of alcohol to Native American people led to a remarkable wave of dependency on the addictive depressant. After alcohol’s introduction to the Americas, the King of a native tribe that had connections with English traders may decide to exchange the sexual services of a young woman.

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from his domain for a “large Dram” of rum⁸. The overwhelming popularity of alcohol throughout native groups reveals the large impact English goods and ideals had on the Native Americans. Unlike the English colonists, the Natives did not completely resist the different way of life that the English represented. Native trade, clothing, and customs all adapted to the new influence the English presence had on Native American life. In addition to changes that Natives had previously made, Lawson also discussed changes that were taking place during the time he explored through the Carolinian back-country.

In terms of changes that were still developing, Lawson focuses his attention on the Native Americans that he was studying and veers away from discussion of any contemporary changes the English were conducting within their American society. As a result of his emphasis on Native life, Lawson’s journal suggests that Natives were still changing more notably than their European neighbors. Both the changes to communication and occupation that Lawson notes, hinge on the bustling new trade opportunities that consistently establish an interdependency between Native Americans and colonists. As a result of this new trade network, some Natives slowly learn how to communicate with traders in English⁹. Lawson presents knowledge of the English language in a positive light, although many natives start off by learning curses, because it offers Natives a more sophisticated way of communicating than their seemingly rudimentary language, which leaves young men unable to understand their elders during “Councils and Debates”⁰. In addition, Natives also slowly acquire the abilities to “learn any Handicraft” that the English place value on and trade for readily¹¹. The Native man who “stock[s] Guns better than most of our [English] Joiners, although he never saw one stock’d before” exemplifies the

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change Lawson observed in Native practices. The Native peoples who had only worked for what was necessary for countless millennia, now centralized their development around trade with the English and consequently adopted the language and craftsmanship necessary to maintain a relationship with the English traders. As a result of the Native American willingness to continuously adapt their lives to the activities of the English, the colonists did not need to change their ways based on the traditional lives of the Natives. However, Lawson called upon his fellow Englishmen to change the ways they interacted with the native populations.

In Lawson’s opinion, the Natives had adapted to the harmful ways of the English for long enough, now it is time for the English to start adapting their ways to the landscape of the Americas. Lawson identifies certain reformations of English interaction with natives as advantageous to the interests of the Crown and individual Englishmen. For instance, Lawson cautions the English and suggests that they “ought to do them [natives] Justice, and not defraud them of their Land…for if we [the English] do not shew them Examples of Justice and Vertue, we can never bring them to believe us to be a worthier Race of Men than themselves”.

Lawson suggests that the English should temporarily change their conduct and concede to the Natives right to land in order to eventually accomplish the goal of convincing the natives of English superiority. Similarly, Lawson also suggests later in his work that the English should respect the Natives while teaching them about infidelity, Christianity, and handicrafts. Additionally, he proposes the idea that the English “give Encouragement to the ordinary People, and those of a lower Rank, that they might marry with these Indians, and come into…so many Acres of Land and some Gratuity of Money”. If the English change their previous actions and conquer the Natives in this manner instead of impressing themselves upon the Native’s land, then the English

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will successfully convert the Indians married to Englishmen and the children of those couplings to Christianity. Thus the Church gains millions of followers from the Englishmen’s adaptation to their current circumstances. Additionally, the English would successfully expand further into different Native territories once their new converts willingly help them understand the Native tongue. Lawson highlights the flaws in the current English settlement of America and uses these flaws to support his suggestion for the English to overcome Native culture by incorporating the Native peoples into English society. According to Lawson, if the English change more than the Native Americans in the future, then the colonists will gain glory and power for the Church as well as for the Crown of England. Seemingly, the English, in Lawson’s opinion should eradicate the Native population through assimilation.

Based off of the thorough observations of John Lawson, it appears that Native Americans residing in the Carolina region of the New World had changed and accordingly absorbed certain English practices over the century of interaction that occurred before Lawson’s arrival in Carolina. This process of absorption continued during Lawson’s exploration and study of different Native American groups. However, as a self-accredited expert of colonial life, Lawson did not terminate his journal with the things he could see. Instead, he continued to describe what he expected to see in the future if the English changed their current process and began to eradicate Native American life by weaving Native peoples into the threshold of English society. Therefore, the groups of Native Americans Lawson interacted with had concretely changed their way of life as a result of their interaction with English colonists while the colonists themselves had yet to make any changes to their way of life within this new territory.

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