

## Note on the Problematics of Word Choice and Usage



When applied to the Americas, the term “prehistory” has generally been used to designate that grand span of time before the Americas and their indigenous peoples entered into the writings and, hence, the mental world of Europe. Concomitantly, the term “the historic period” has referred to the period commencing with the appearance of the Americas and their peoples in European documents. Of course, the histories of the peoples of the Americas did not begin with Christopher Columbus’s voyage in 1492 or with those peoples’ earliest appearances in European texts and on European maps. These terms thus distort and truncate the long continuum of Native American presence in the Americas. But because several of my sources have used these terms, and because these terms continue to be operative across several disciplines, both locutions necessarily find their way into some of my chapters.

“Precontact” is another problematic term because it seems to imply the period preceding some certifiable *first* moment of contact between Europe (or elsewhere) and the Americas. Also, the word seems to attribute significance to that initial contact moment. My own research suggests that the concept of a first contact is a convenient European construction and may not reflect Native American understandings. The notion of *precontact* is thus slippery at best and, at worst, inherently imprecise. But, again, because the term is so prevalent in the historical and archaeological literature, I have been unable to avoid it in these pages.

Nineteenth-century references to the Scandinavian countries are often confused and confusing because, at the time, those countries were not the clearly separate independent nations they once had been and are today. Until 1814, Norway was a part of Denmark. Then, as an outcome of the Napoleonic Wars, Norway entered into a union with Sweden. After a peaceful secession from Sweden in 1905, Norway finally achieved its modern independence. As a result, some nineteenth-century writers described journeys to Denmark or to Sweden and incorporated time spent in Norway without naming it as such.

Some wrote about aspects of life and culture in Denmark or Sweden when they were really describing aspects of Norway. Similarly, Finland, which had long been a quasi-autonomous grand duchy under the control of Sweden, during the Napoleonic Wars was invaded by Russia and annexed in 1809. Finland's national identity was thus also sometimes blurred (or entirely lost) in some nineteenth-century texts.

Leif Eiriksson's name is differently spelled throughout these pages, depending on the source cited or quoted. All the variants are easily recognizable and often derive from attempts to replicate or transliterate Norwegian, Icelandic, Danish, or Swedish renderings of the name. My own choice for spelling his name follows the spelling used in the particular translation of the two Vinland sagas quoted in this book.

As used in these pages, "runes" and "runic writing" refer to ancient characters used in Teutonic, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian inscriptions, probably beginning as early as ca. A.D. 300. Runes were used extensively in northern Europe, Iceland, and the British Isles through the Middle Ages and appear to have persisted in parts of Scandinavia until the nineteenth century. Adapted to carving and later to vellum and paper, runic characters consisted of perpendicular, oblique, and a few curved lines. Ancient runic inscriptions have been found all across Scandinavia.

The term "Native American" is now commonly used in the U.S. to refer to the indigenous peoples of North America. In Canada, the terms "Aboriginal," "First Nations," or "First Peoples" are commonly used and have sometimes been adopted by both Native and non-Native writers in the U.S. Also used in both countries is the phrase "Native peoples." While most Native peoples of my acquaintance identify themselves by the name of their pueblo, tribe, or ethnic community, they also write and speak of themselves as "Indians." Because it is not my place to privilege any one of these locutions over the others, I have employed almost all of them in these pages.

One important aspect of the decolonizing project of Native peoples has been the reappropriation of the right to name themselves. While, in some instances, this entailed a dramatic throwing-over of names imposed by European writers and administrators, in other cases this meant little more than a change of spelling to correct a linguistic error. The relatively recent preference for Mi'kmaq over the older "Micmac" is one such example; the preference for Maliseet over "Malecite" is another. Wherever possible, I have endeavored to use the name currently preferred, although older forms repeatedly appear in some of my quoted sources. Where the currently preferred name has not yet

been widely adopted or would not be recognizable to most readers, I have retained the older name to avoid confusion and indicated the current preferred name in parenthesis. In this way, for example, I hope to make clear that the people once called the Montagnais now call themselves the Innu.

Although the term “tribe” is used within quoted materials in this book, wherever possible I have tried to avoid using it in relation to the particular Eastern Algonquian-speaking peoples who are the main actors in some of these chapters. Europeans originally coined the term as a way of designating groups whom they considered inferior as compared to the supposedly superior established nations or organized states of the “civilized” world. Later, the U.S. imposed the term on Native peoples as a means of defining them as legal entities and simultaneously also imposed a centralized political organization on Indian communities, many of whom traditionally had functioned in a variety of ways, including through villages, bands, and chiefdoms with shifting and often temporary alliances. While the Maliseet, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Mi'kmaq who make up the Wabanaki Confederacy each today have centralized governments with elected chiefs (or governors) and elected councils, throughout most of their history and into the early decades of the nineteenth century, these groups were constituted by shifting alliances between various bands and villages, each with their own unique structures of organization and authority. In the twenty-first century, many ethnologists and anthropologists (including Native anthropologists) prefer to speak of Eastern Algonquian-speaking peoples in terms of ethnicities, linguistic groups, and dialect differences. Among these groups, only the Penobscot Nation officially calls itself a “nation” (even though the official title of their historian is “Penobscot Nation *tribal* historian”). Where appropriate to some particular Indian group, the term “tribe” is used in these pages.

As much as possible, I have tried to avoid using totalizing racially inflected constructs such as “white man,” “red man,” and “black man.” Nonetheless, where this terminology actively informs the texts or particular situations that I am examining, in order not to distort the text being discussed, I am sometimes unable to avoid these usages.