

ART AND PROPAGANDA: THE PROBLEM WITH IDEALIZED COLONIALISM

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Penn's Treaty with the Indians When he Founded the Province of Pennsylvania in North America. Benjamin West. 1771-72. Oil on Canvas. 75 ½ x 107 ¾ in. Accession # 1878.1.10. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection.

This paper examines the power of art commissions as a means for political and cultural gain through art narration at the detriment of some sectors of society. These ideas are explored through the art commission of Benjamin West by Thomas Penn, son of William Penn, which sought to solidify the Penn family legacy in the United States and was widely circulated as a form of political propaganda. Through the use of primary and secondary sources, this paper demonstrates the influential command of commissioned artwork and the dangers of keeping high art in the hands of the select few without equal opposing discourse.

NARRATIVE maintains power. Any intricate political system understands that the party which controls words and images controls the society's identity and truth. Art is commissioned for many reasons, but forming society's narrative is the most prized among them. The power of art has long been established by pharaohs and kings and continues to remain predominantly in the hands of churches, wealthy elites, and government agencies.¹ Art greatly influences public opinion; to demonstrate this, I will examine the case of Thomas Penn's commission for *Penn's Treaty with the Indians* by Benjamin West. The Penn family carefully used this commission to reflect specific assertions: their entitlement to lands already occupied, reinforcement of colonial power over current residents, and the right to garner venture capitalists for the region. The Penn family further solidified its legacy of colonial legitimacy by systematically circulating West's commission as propaganda, thereby dodging pains that arose after the American Revolutionary War. Many previous scholars have examined West's piece before but never in the vein of commission. Through examining Penn's commission, I will demonstrate the power art narratives hold for those who commission art and its influence over societies' percep-

1 Artworks used to promote and display kingly, religious, or governmental powers include items such as, (1) *the palette of King Narmer*, Hierakonpolis, Egypt, (2) *Victory Stele of Naram-Sin*, Susa, Iran, (3) *Last Judgement*, west tympanum of Saint-Lazare, Autun, France, (4) *Presentation of Captives to Lord Chan Muwan*, Bonampak, Mexico, and (5) and Joe Rosenthal's *American Marines Raising American Flag on Mount Suribachi*, Iwo Jima.

tion of the past.

Thomas Penn: A Public Relations Disaster

William Penn is known as the founding father who created peace with Pennsylvania's Native nations, but his legacy was bolstered by his heir, Thomas, through widely circulated commissioned art. Benjamin West sent letters to William Darton in February 1805 indicating that Thomas commissioned the painting of Penn's Treaty around 1771 (Abrams, 1982, pp. 61, 68; Brinton, 2012, p. 102).² Thomas requested this commission of his father's legacy during the recovery period after the French-Indian War, which had occurred between 1754 and 1763 ("French and Indian War," 2020). The request strategically followed the French-Indian War after a tumultuous fall from grace for the Penn family which rendered them extremely unpopular (Abrams, 1982, p. 61). With this commission, Thomas and West were able

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to seize upon settler resentment for Native groups to reestablish the Penn family as famous Native conquerors.

The Penn family's popularity declined around 1737 when the family experienced a period of financial hardship.³ The family authorized a controversial land grab now known as the "Walking Purchase," which confiscated Native lands to be given to settlers (Abrams, 1982, p. 61).⁴ During the original creation of the

² There is some ambiguity over whether Thomas, or his wife, first approached West to commission the painting. The full letter is available on p. 115 of Brinton's article.

⁴ Favorable land located above the Falls in Bucks county was under sales negotiation with Thomas Penn, Lasse Cock, Måns Cock, and several settlers. As part of the

Province of Pennsylvania, William Penn created the *Certain Conditions and Concessions* land law, which granted the Penn family 10,000 acres for every 100,000 acres given to settlers. Additionally, the Penn family began surveying the best tracks of land in the province and ordered that every 500 acres must be occupied by one family or the land be seized and resold. After the land was seized, the owners would be given commensurate lands in less desirable locations (Cocoran, 1994, p. 480). These land grabs provided apparent benefits to the financially strapped Penn family. However, these agreements angered Native and settler populations because the Penn family failed to live up to their promises. Native nations soon went on the defense and started to arm their lands from further seizure, ending any foreseeable peace between Natives and settlers (Abrams, 1982, p. 61).

Thomas had gained proprietary control of Pennsylvania from his father (before the French-Indian War) in 1746 when the province was plagued by territorial disputes and rising violence between Native nations and settlers.⁵ This violence continued to increase as German and Scotch-Irish immigrants poured into Pennsylvania, encroaching upon Native lands relentlessly. At the same time, Thomas experienced conflicts with the Quaker Assembly due to the Penn family's ties to the Anglican Church before their Quaker conversion (Abrams, 1982, p. 61).⁶ The constant land disputes with-

negotiations, the Natives demanded a large number of goods to be delivered from England before relinquishing the land to settlers. Thomas Penn never delivered the goods, but the draft deed was used to acquire land from Bucks County to the Poconos. For more on the "Walking Purchase," see Soderland, p. 173.

⁵ William Penn was 58 years old when Thomas was born, and Thomas was 61 when his son Granville was born, which explains the expansive amount of time that the Penn family controlled Pennsylvania. For more on Penn's genealogy, see Brinton.

⁶ William Penn converted to the Quaker faith, but his father was a well-known and respected member of the Anglican

in the colonies in conjunction with territorial disputes among European rulers led to the French-Indian War, a proxy war for Europe's Seven Years War. The war created alliances in Pennsylvania that greatly varied based on economic, national, and religious affiliations far beyond this paper's scope ("French and Indian War," 2020).⁷

The postwar society Thomas encountered was very different from the one crafted by his father (Abrams, 1982, p. 61).⁸ Many residents felt the Penn family's unscrupulous land dealings influenced the war development, and citizens vocalized for Thomas to step down as proprietor.⁹ The most vocal of these citizens was Benjamin Franklin, who traveled to London in 1765 to request Thomas's removal and replacement with a royal government.¹⁰ While the Royal government denied Franklin's request, Thomas faced the severe threat of losing support

church. Anglicans regularly persecuted Quakers early-on in the faith's development. For more on Penn's family, see Schwartz.

⁷ The French and Indian War started over which Empire, French or British, would retain control of the upper Ohio River valley. In this region, certain Native tribes aligned themselves with either French or British settlers, both of which made promises to the Natives in exchange for their loyalty on the battlefield. This dynamic created unusual bedfellows during the war.

⁸ Many Quaker residents were against arming the Colony (in opposition to Quaker teachings) and felt Thomas Penn was regularly using Native disputes to increase the Colony's armory at taxpayer expense. Thomas Penn himself was exempt from these taxes, which created further animosity.

⁹ During this period Pennsylvania was experiencing an increase in violent interactions between Natives and non-pacifist settlers (non-Quakers). A gang of backwoodsmen called the "Paxton Boys" led massacres on Native villages and attempted to overthrow Pennsylvania's government. For more, see p. 65.

¹⁰ Franklin lost his position as head of the Quaker Assembly due to the increased violence. In response, he returned to London in 1765 to recruit support for Thomas Penn's removal. He also called on Benjamin West to pay his respects, which may have been an attempt to use West to gain access into prominent circles. Franklin and West later became close friends, with Franklin becoming the godfather to West's son.

in the province (Abrams, 1982, p. 66).¹¹

Thomas' final controversy before commissioning West's painting was at the *Treaty of Fort Stanwix* in 1768 (Abrams, 1982, pp. 68-69).¹² Thomas hoped to use the negotiations as a public relations event to emulate his father's legacy for himself. However, now that the Native nations had a better understanding of the Penn family's intentions, Thomas's minimal gifts were scoffed at, and negotiations were problematic.¹³ This event demonstrated another attempt by the Penn family to grab lands greedily through treaty transactions, and many citizens again complained of the Penn family's abuses against settlers and Natives (Abrams, 1982, p. 68-69).¹⁴ Thomas spent the remainder of his proprietorship fretting over Native violence, lack of settler support, and Franklin's constant campaign to remove him. Eventually, in 1775, Thomas Penn would suffer a stroke and die, after which his wife would retain ownership of West's art commission (Abrams, 1982, p. 69).¹⁵

"Savages Brought into Harmony"¹⁶ (on Canvas)

After Thomas Penn's failed negotiations at Fort Stanwix, West created the

¹¹ For a short period, the feud between Franklin and Penn paused as the two men joined forces to fight the Stamp Act. Implemented by Britain, this act increased taxation on imports, directly impacting settlers and merchants.

¹² Thomas Penn tried to extend the Pennsylvania border to the Ohio River and annex Pittsburg with this treaty. Led by John Penn (Thomas' nephew) and Sir William Johnson (the Native agent), the meeting was held at Fort Stanwix.

¹³ Neither party was willing to budge on their demands, and negotiations were problematic. The Natives required more money and goods, and the Penns requested more land.

¹⁴ Settlers feared a resurgence in violence and criticized the Penn family's handling of the situation. The settlers accused the Penn family of using these treaties to refill their declining wealth by holding one-tenth of each land negotiation before selling the remainder.

¹⁵ Abrams notes that Penn had suffered a "stroke of Palsy," dying four years later.

¹⁶ From reference list (Brinton, 2012, p. 114). Quoted from a letter by Benjamin West to William Darton.

painting (Abrams, 1982, p. 69). Today, the artwork should be understood for the public relations campaign it truly was. The painting was created as an homage to William Penn's right, as a colonial father, to Pennsylvania lands recently secured in hard-fought battles of the French and Indian War. In the painting, not only do the Penns receive the King's blessing, as is apparent by the many English merchant ships, but also the blessing of the Natives who represent the voice of the American motherland. West may have exaggerated the story, but he probably believed some of the information to be accurate.¹⁷ However, no physical treaty or writing has surfaced to prove that a meeting definitively took place as West painted (Brinton, 2012, pp. 110-112).¹⁸

Benjamin West was a Pennsylvania native son, born in 1738, in Springfield—fifty-six years after the supposed treaty between Penn and the Natives occurred (Brinton, 2012, p. 100).¹⁹ West left the Americas in 1760 to study with the art masters of Italy, thereby experiencing only a short segment of the French-Indian War (Abrams, 1982, pp. 64, 62).²⁰ West eventually chose to stay in England, living there from 1763 until his death in 1820 (Brinton, 2012, p. 101).²¹ West was

¹⁷ Brinton recounts that the legend of William Penn was perpetuated by West and shared in his "old age" to Thomas Clarkson, who wrote about William Penn and Quaker history in a variety of books.

¹⁸ Brinton defines the concept of "treaty" to mean a written agreement between two parties with written witnesses' accounts to be preserved in an archive. By this definition, a treaty between Penn and the Natives never occurred.

¹⁹ The birthplace of West, now known as the "Benjamin West House," is currently located at the Swarthmore College campus and has since been restored.

²⁰ West's good friend William Smith, a staunch supporter of Penn, secured West's trip to Italy by requesting William Allen's patronage. West traveled with Allen's son and mercantile heir Joseph Shippen, placing West in direct contact with elite circles. West apparently trained with a militia group under Colonel Isaac Wayne's direction, but never participated in the war. He was only present in America during the early years of the war.

²¹ West planned to only visit England on his way home

a popular artist among his fellow Americans, but achieved even greater success in the British Isles with the help of prominent colonial aristocrats (Abrams, 1982, pp. 62-65). While West was colony-born, he preferred residence in England, and his English patrons primarily influenced and informed his work. English art patrons during this time had a particular fondness for the Native populations of the Americas, and the story West created quickly went viral. Credited with circulating Penn's legend in English circles, West utilized the story to promote his painting and reputation as an artist (Brinton, 2012, p. 112). However, historical inaccuracies abound in the painting. West expressly discussed his desire to paint a positive narrative of William Penn. Based on the many inaccuracies in West's work, it is clear that the result is a piece of fiction which has been widely sold as an accurate depiction of peace among men.

One example of West's many inaccuracies in the painting is his depiction of William Penn. West confided in a letter to Mr. Darton that he utilized multiple mediums to achieve William Penn's likeness, including a wax medallion (Fig. 1 & 2) by Silvanus Bevan and descriptions by his father, John West (Abrams, 1982, pp. 69-70).²² Both of these depictions would have been versions of William Penn much later in life, when, in reality, West knew that Penn was a young man at the time of the alleged treaty (Abrams, 1982, pp. 69-70).

Additional inaccuracies occur in the painting as West opted to place Penn and his companions in modern Quaker

from Italy but found so much work in London that he sent for his bride to join him. They were married in St. Martins, and West was buried in Westminster Abbey after death.

²² The medal was drawn from memory by Bevan two years after William Penn's death, and all subsequent images of Penn tended to follow this medal's likeness. Coins like the Bevan medal were often given to tribal officers attending peace conferences as a sign of goodwill.



Fig. 1. Silvanus Bevan, William Penn Medal, front, 1720 (Abrams, 1982, p. 71).



Fig. 2. Silvanus Bevan, William Penn Medal, reverse, 1720 (p. 71).

dress instead of dress from the period.²³ West's use of this attire has been argued as a way to demonstrate "contemporaneity" in his work (Abrams, 1982, p. 72). However, I would argue, the fashions West painted are so distinct to Quakerism that he purposefully depicted it this way to distinguish Penn's ideology as progressive to a current audience. On the other hand, historian Anne Abrams (1982) argues that West's use of modern dress in the painting attempts to reassert his religious heritage after family disputes within the Quaker group (p. 72).²⁴

²³ Some accounts of the legend state that William Penn wore formal court dress at the ceremony to include a blue silk sash which is still preserved at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For more, see Brinton pp. 116-117.

²⁴ West's mother, Sarah Pearson West, second wife to West's father, was disavowed from Quakerism and therefore

In support of Abrams's argument, West chose to include and honor his family members in the painting, including his father, brother, and wife, further demonstrating his willingness to exaggerate the truth (p. 72).²⁵

West grew up as the son of a Quaker in Pennsylvania, well informed on William Penn's legacy and the Native Americans of the region. He paid particular attention to Native dress and customs in the painting by accurately depicting the items utilizing live models of authentic clothing as a guide (Abrams, 1982, p. 72).²⁶ West had a real fascination with Native Americans as a boy but described his move from Pennsylvania to England as a transition " [from the] Wigwoms [sic] of American savages [to the] refinements of the Royal Palaces of Europe," seeing it "[as] an extensive scale in human progress" (Abrams, 1982, p. 62).²⁷ West indicated Native Americans were stuck in a child-like state that, although admired, should be reformed by English paternalism. The artist's depiction of Penn echoes this very sentiment. West admitted his specific goal of depicting William Penn in a paternalistic light was to reference

not permitted to marry in a Quaker ceremony. Apparently, Sarah had "given way to a Libertine Spirit" and fallen from grace. Due to her behavior, Benjamin and his siblings were not birthright Quakers.

²⁵ West included John West (his father) and Thomas West (his half-brother) among the Quakers pictured next to William Penn although neither were in attendance. In a copy of *Quaker Biographies* (1909) by the Representative Meeting of Religious Society of Friends from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware (vol. I, facing p. 140), Horace J. Smith recounts the names of modern associates West included in the painting, also identifying the Native mother with child as being modeled after West's wife. For more on this, see Brinton p. 115.

²⁶ The Native dress Penn depicted in his painting also comprised a mix of historically accurate dress and modern dress. West used real Native garments from the Penn family collection as well as descriptions William Penn included in his advertisement to the Free Society of Traders.

²⁷ Originally recounted in letters located in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 1894, pp. 219-222. Also see J. Morris to B. West, May 16, 1796, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

his authority in conquering the Pennsylvania Natives. He highlighted his belief by expressing Penn's inherent superiority and righteousness in subduing their savagery, telling Mr. Darton:

The great object I had in forming that composition, was to express savages brought into harmony and piece [sic] by justice and benevolence, by not withholding from them what was their right, and giving to them what they were in want of, and as well as a wish to give by that art a conquest that was made over native people without sword or dagger [sic]. (Brinton, 2012, p. 114)

The artist paints Penn as a father figure, gently nudging the Native groups into compliance by appeasing their child-like "savage" side. The subsequent French-Indian War, in tandem with previously stated historical evidence, indicate that West's image of the peacefully subjugated "savage" is a gross overstatement of the political climate Penn perpetuated. West used his skills as a classically trained history painter to reinforce a colonial ruling class. The image intends to revisit a sentimental, idealized past that West believed to be greater. West's rendition reflects the hopes and desires of a select section of society without rebuttal, as Native nations were often silenced because their histories were predominately oral. By glorifying a conflict-free past that never truly existed, West removes the Native narrative from societal view.

Penn Propaganda Circumvents the Globe

West and the Penn family widely circulated the painting throughout the colonies and Great Britain between 1771 until it found its final resting place at the free exhibition in the National Museum,

Independence Hall, Philadelphia in 1873 (Brinton, 2012, pp. 99-110).²⁸ The painting reinvigorated the legend of the Penn family as early conquerors of Native nations. Many colonists were still psychologically recovering from the French and Indian Wars, which explains why West's piece of nostalgia for a more peaceful past became so popular.

West's imagery of Penn's idealized actions circulated heavily before the Revolutionary War and would also be copied and distributed across Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, and Mexico (Brinton, 2012, p. 99).²⁹ The painting is an allegory for British colonialism and provided a platform for the global retelling of a nation-building story (Abrams, 1982, p. 60).

The painting became so popular it was widely copied and recreated by various artists, lithographers, and engravers; it was even set into new forms of mediums such as fabrics (Fig. 3), china (Fig.4), tapestries, currency (Fig.5), and banners (Fig.6) between 1771 and 1888 (Brinton, 2012, pp. 133-189). These visual media proved highly effective at reaching both the educated wealthy and the uneducated impoverished through smaller versions of the image and everyday household objects. The constant reminiscence of Penn as the peaceful subjugator permeated media and households for years.

The mass-produced and widely spread image worked as a propagan-

²⁸ Upon completion, the painting went to the Royal Academy Exhibition, Stoke Park, near Winsor, and then to Thomas Penn until Joseph Harrison bought it at auction for £500. Harrison later presented it to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) in 1852. For the letter from Harris to the HSP, see p. 104. After Harrison's death in 1873, his wife sent the painting to the National Museum, Independence Hall, Philadelphia for display, but Mrs. Harrison formally relinquished ownership to the Academy of Fine Arts of Philadelphia.

²⁹ These circulations were mostly reproductions by other artists in the form of engravings. Slight variations in the rendition of West's work are documented in Brinton's detailed index of recorded images, pp. 133-193.

da machine for four years preceding the American Revolutionary War. This notoriety could not arrive at a better time for the Penn family because the Revolutionary War stripped the family of its granted lands and titles when the United States moved to form a new government (Vaux, 1839, p. iv).³⁰ The story of William Penn as the "founding father of Pennsylvania" assisted Thomas Penn's heirs in seeking compensation for these government adjustments during two separate litigations, one against the United States and one against Great Britain (Vaux, 1839, pp. iiiv-xvi).

The Penn family litigated against the United States first, with the argument that Pennsylvania's success was the direct cause of William Penn; thereby, the Penn family was owed compensation for its war losses.³¹ The new United States government endorsed the Penn family's argument and settled by compensating William Penn's heirs through post-war payments in the form of installation payments surmounting 130,000 pounds (Vaux, 1839, p. vi).

William Penn and his heirs presented a second argument to the British parliament with the council stating, "The merits and services of that family were so eminent in the history of this country and others, that he conceived it would be the wish of the committee, and the nation at large, to make a liberal provision," as the Penn family had remained faithful to the royal crown (Vaux, 1839, p. vi). After hearing the arguments, Her Majesty's Command ruled in favor of a 4000-pound, tax-free, annual annuity to

³⁰ From an abstract of Proceedings in Parliament, Feb. 1788, May and June 1790.

³¹ The proceedings were presented by Mr. Frederick Montagu on behalf of the Right Honorable Lady Juliana Penn, and her son, John Penn, Esq., and her nephew, John Penn, Esq., to the House of Parliament. In Montagu's presentation, the awards issued by the newly formed United States of America became his defense for compensations owed by the British government.



Fig. 3. Linen Design No. 2 Mr. Francis Brinton, West Chester, Pa., 35 ½ x 25, brown; Arthur J. Sussel, Phila., 33 ½ x 26, Brown (Brinton, 2012, p. 185). These linen patterns were used for curtains and bedcovers in many households. In 1788, at a public auction of Penn’s grandson’s (named John Penn) home in England, bed curtains, window curtains, and tassels in this pattern were recorded among his belongings. For more, see p. 128.

Fig. 4. China set of Blue Staffordshire by Thomas Green, 61 pieces, owned by Mr. Henry Paul Busch (p. 183). Thirteen designs illustrating William Penn, his companions, and Natives adorn various pieces of the China set first bequeathed to Busch’s mother.



Fig. 5. Banknote issued by the Sparkes Bank Exeter, England (p. 186).



Fig. 6. Engraving by Lambert Alpigini of the E.A. Wright Co., Philadelphia, 1913, 2 1/4 x 5. Used by the Pennsylvania Life Insurance Company from 1913 to 1934 at the top of their insurance policy forms (p. 186).

William Penn’s heirs indefinitely (Vaux, 1839, xii). This elevated treatment of William Penn and his heirs was very much influenced by the circulation of Penn’s legend, as depicted by Benjamin West.

The painting also transcended West’s lifetime, as Ellen Brinton (2012) details in her extensive catalog of Penn imagery, and recirculated during her lifetime in the 1940s before the United States entered World War II. This recirculation also featured smaller images and everyday items, generally tied to Christian holidays, in the hopes of reinvigorating the ideas of a more prosperous and peaceful past led by colonists (pp. 99-100, 133-166).³² These images helped fuel educational trends of children reenacting the first friendly encounters of Native Americans and colonists as part of their curriculum for decades.

“Most of Us Were Born in this Country Long Before the Quakers Came”³³

So, as for the legend of William Penn, what really happened in 1862? Here is what we definitively know. In 1681, William Penn was granted a province within the English colonies by King Charles II. He called it Pennsylvania, after his namesake. William Penn was a convert to the Quaker faith, and as a young man, he rejected the Catholic religious ideas of his father (Schwartz, 1983, p. 289).³⁴

³² Brinton recounts in note two, p. 100, the circulation of West’s image during the 1940s. The items include (1) a Christmas card reproduction entitled *Peaceable Kingdom* by Edward Hicks for the Conde-Nast Company of New York, (2) a “Merchandise Gift Bond” for Gimble Brother’s department store engraved with West’s central figures, (3) a 1941 calendar inlay for the Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company of Philadelphia, (4) a February 1941 Edward Savage copy of West’s painting in the offices of the Philadelphia Electric Company.

³³ From reference list (Soderlund, 2015, p. 166). Quoted from a letter sent to Queen Anne of Great Britain in 1711 from the first settlers of Pennsylvania.

³⁴ Penn denounced the Catholic church and accused it of

Quaker values advocate for religious autonomy free from persecution by a central religious faction and the “free individual quest for truth” (Schwartz, 1983, 285). Penn viewed his new appointment as an opportunity to bring Quaker values to his province and economic vitality to the region (Schwartz, 1983, p. 293).

In 1682, Penn arrived in Pennsylvania hoping to create an experimental utopic society, which would operate under the tenements of tolerance for religious freedom without persecution.³⁵ In Penn’s view, a nation allowed to assert “individual liberty of conscience” built a healthier, less fractured society than one with religious uniformity (Schwartz, 1983, p. 285). Pennsylvania’s long-established community—Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish settlers living with the Iroquois-Seneca, Leni-Lenape, and Shawnee in relative peace—was the perfect hub for this social experiment (Schwartz, 1983, p. 295; Soderlund, 2015, p. 149).

Penn’s ideas were progressive, but his behaviors were plagued by Anglo-Christian supremacy and entitlement, which often accompanied colonial interaction (Penn, 1683, pp. 1-13). Despite his Quaker affiliation, William Penn was, first and foremost, a businessman and politician set on creating profits for himself, his heirs, and his Quaker patrons. Before Penn arrived in his Pennsylvania province, he actively recruited investors for lands he had never seen by encouraging financial prospects to relocate to his province and convert to the Quaker faith (Schwartz, 1983, pp. 292, 294-295).³⁶

corrupting the original intent of the scripture. In particular Penn disagreed with the Roman Catholic church’s custom of persecuting those that questioned the Pope’s authority.

³⁵ Quakerism, as a reformation, experienced an early period of individualism but was beginning to stabilize into an organized system of religion around the time Penn converted to it in 1667, at 22 years old.

³⁶ William Penn advertised Pennsylvania to the “Committee of the Free Society of Traders’ of that Province, residing in

Ahead of his arrival in the colonies, Penn sent his cousin William Markham, whom he appointed Deputy Governor, to orchestrate and establish transitional court governments.³⁷ Markham primarily constructed the new Pennsylvania court system on the existing New Netherland system under the Duke of York, with a twelve-man jury implementation. These twelve-man juries included a mix of first settlers and transplant English colonists (Soderlund, 2015, p. 150-156).³⁸

After Penn’s arrival in the winter of 1682, with more English colonists moving into the area, it became increasingly clear that political positions were quickly reassigned to prominent Quakers once held by first settlers (Soderlund, 2015, p. 157).³⁹ In a grievous letter sent by Swedish first settlers to Queen Anne, the dispute among old and new is articulated:

Most of us were born in this country long before the Quakers came, and...our ancestors and some of us their children living still...have reduced the natives here to general obedience, which was too difficult for men of Quaker principles to have done, so that the Quakers when they came found a country at peace. (Soderlund, 2015, p. 166)⁴⁰

London.” Penn’s advertisement contained a “Portraiture of Plat-forms thereof” and “Purchaser’s Lots,” describing them as the “Prosperous and Advantagious [sic] Settlements of the *Society*” on the pamphlet’s cover.

³⁷ Markham set up a council of nine inhabitants and temporarily continued the authority of the pre-existing Upland Courts; when Penn arrived later, he established his provincial assembly and county courts.

³⁸ This change was implemented on the existing Upland Court’s procedures during the transition between 1681 and 1682. These twelve-man juries included a number of first settlers, usually a mixture of Swedes and Finns.

³⁹ After 1682 Penn created new courts in multiple counties and dissolved the single court in Upland. Appointees to the new county courts over the next several years were predominately affluent English Quakers, leading to a stark decline in first settlers’ political power.

⁴⁰ Quoted from a letter sent to Queen Anne of Great Britain

Penn's political slight toward the first settlers created a rift between the established population and new arrivals. In response, first settlers aligned themselves closely with their Native neighbors, forming informal political ties (Soderlund, 2015, pp. 166-167).⁴¹

One significant advantage first settlers had over Penn's entourage was their vast knowledge of the many languages and dialects in the region. This knowledge forced Penn to utilize them as intermediaries in negotiations for an extensive period, notably the Swedish interpreter Lasse Cock (Soderlund, 2015, pp. 156, 166).⁴² Soderlund (2015) notes in his research that the Swedish ambassador was quoted as saying, "[the first settlers know] all kinds of languages, Swedish, German, Finnish, Dutch, sometimes French, English, and American [Lenape, Susquehannock], as their own language, the greater part of them, while the English only know their own" (p. 167). The Native groups were much more trustful of the first settlers, with whom they had built relationships and shared language long before Penn's arrival.

However, part of Penn's Quaker marketing campaign aimed to assure prospective buyers that Penn was ethically sourcing the land from Native inhabitants (Soderlund, 2015, pp. 175-176).⁴³ Penn sent letters to Native tribes introducing in 1711 from the first settlers of Pennsylvania. Swedes opposed Quaker authority in Pennsylvania by seeking assistance from the Anglican queen due to their shared Anglican affiliation.

⁴¹ Soderlund quotes Andreas Sandal as saying, "[the local Natives] are so faithful to the Swedes that if one of them should hear that a Swede was in any kind of danger, he would be willing to run a hundred miles to warn him."

⁴² Soderlund notes that Swedish pastors described the Swede and Native relationship as "they are like brothers and sisters."

⁴³ Quaker beliefs strongly held to pacifist ideology, which made fair dealings with the Natives an attractive selling point to Quaker patrons. Taking lands from Natives by perceived unethical means would have been counterproductive to Penn's sales pitch for his customer base.

himself as the new Governor before he arrived. Once present in the province, Penn (1683) mailed detailed reports back to British investors espousing his close and peaceful relationship with the natives (pp. 1-13). Penn discussed his supposed interaction with a Native during negotiations in a promotional letter to the Free Society of Traders, stating:

"He first pray'd me, to excuse them that they had not complied [sic] with me the last time; he feared, there might be some fault in the interpreter, being neither Indian nor English, besides, it was the Indian custom to deliberate, and take up much time in Council, before they resolve; and that if the Young People and Owners of the Land had been as ready as he, I had not [would have not] met with so much delay." (p. 7)

Penn's words highlighted the genuine issue of having the first settlers as go-betweens with the Natives. Penn often remained in the dark during negotiations, and the closeness between Natives and first settlers placed him at a disadvantage. Penn was fully aware of this and worked hard to learn the Native language to cut first settlers out of negotiations (p. 5).⁴⁴ Penn further went on to say, "when the purchase was agreed, great promises past [sic] between us of kindness and good neighborhood, and that the Indians and English, must live in love, as long as the sun gave light" (p. 7). Penn's narrative was vague regarding timing and lands negotiated. It operated less as a factual document and more as a reinforcement to investors that Penn had everything under

⁴⁴ Penn writes, "Their language is lofty, yet narrow, but like the Hebrew; in signification full, like short-hand in writing; one word serveth in the place of three, and the rest are supplied by the understanding of the hearer: imperfect in their tenses, wanting in their moods, participles, adverbs, conjunctions, interjections: I have made it my business to understand it, that I might not want an interpreter on any occasion..."

control in his province.

In reality, most of the negotiations

with Natives (on record) occurred under Markham's guidance before Penn arrived in the province, with Lasse Cock as an intermediary.⁴⁵ Markham based his treaty negotiations on models already established under New Netherland's first settlers and reinforced them during new land acquisitions (Soderlund, 2015, pp. 167-173). Native negotiations sought to maintain the following guidelines: The Lanapes would (1) warn the English of planned Indian attacks, (2) hold annual meetings to renegotiate, renew, and resolve terms, and (3) file a grievance with Pennsylvania before launching attacks. In exchange, the Lenapes were granted right-of-passage on all lands for open hunting and fishing across Pennsylvania (Soderlund, 2015, pp. 170-171).⁴⁶

Historical accounts of Penn's interactions with Native nations and first settlers are not without controversy. In fact, many are akin to modern-day gentrification problems. Penn prematurely promot-

⁴⁵ The Natives also ensured that they would maintain right-of-passage on all lands, which they first negotiated with the Swedes in the 1640s. In the eyes of the Natives, they were to maintain full access to the lands William Penn purchased. This agreement did not transition well once the lands were resold to Penn's investors.

⁴⁶ Soderlund notes that Penn discusses in correspondence with Markham that the Native Tribes reoccupied lands which were not being inhabited, thereby requiring renegotiations. Penn writes, "The Indians do make people buy over again that land the people have not seated in some years after purchase which is the practice also of all these governments towards the people inhabiting under them." Penn acknowledges the similarity between the practices of the Native Tribes and European governments.

The colonial days of the past, idealized in art, have real implications that carry through into the present. When colonized groups are removed from the storytelling of history and only the colonial point of view is visually apparent in society, these groups are erased.

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first settlers and Natives already occupied the best tracts of land (Soderlund, 2015, pp. 149-150). So, Penn utilized his governmental powers to strong-arm residents. He then re-surveyed and re-allocated lands owned by first settlers to resell to his own investors (Soderlund, 2015, p. 163).

The Native Tribes of Pennsylvania could not ethically enter into a treaty with Penn because the treaty concept did not culturally translate for the Tribes. Cultural understanding, under Tribal law, designated that lands for hunting and planting could be shared and temporarily transferred but never permanently owned (Bevan, 2007, p. 95).⁴⁷ Native negotiations with Penn were probably understood as temporary transfers to be renegotiated at a later time. Penn's many real estate transactions in the region systematically pushed out the original small neighborhoods of mixed ethnic and linguistic groups by setting up large homogenous English Quaker communities. Ironically, Penn's actions created a society in direct opposition to his ideology—one of a robust multicultural society.

"[Not] Simply Seized by Conquest"⁴⁸

The colonial days of the past, idealized in art, have real implications that

⁴⁷ Smith accounts the Native cultural customs of land ownership in his history of land acquisition for the area which would later house the World Trade Center.

⁴⁸ From reference list (Minderhout & Frantz, 2008, p. 63).

ed the region as open for business but, upon arrival, discovered

carry through into the present. When colonized groups are removed from the storytelling of history and only the colonial point of view is visually apparent in society, these groups are erased. This phenomenon is seen throughout our country today, with very few statues erected to the colonized and marginalized, while many statues stand of the colonizer. Colonization, slavery, and the mistreatment of minority groups are part of American history, and equal space should be realized for art commissions that speak to these narratives. Additionally, the earlier falsehoods that were so quickly sold as historical facts should be rectified with visual counterarguments of truth. The Native tribes in Pennsylvania feel the effects of letting these mistruths continue without correction today.

Currently, the federal government and Pennsylvania deny the existence of modern Native populations in the state, offering no formal recognition or a reservation. However, the 2004 U.S. Census places the number of Native Americans in Pennsylvania at 18,348, while another 34,302 identify as partially Native American (Minderhout & Frantz, 2008, p. 61). Native Americans in Pennsylvania have consistently tried to gain state recognition, and the state has consistently denied them. In an ethnographic study conducted by David Minderhout and Andrea Frantz (2008), it was determined 32 unrecognized groups of Native American affiliates are living in Pennsylvania (p. 62). Minderhout and Frantz also stress that Native claims to land in Pennsylvania are deterred by the fact that William Penn supposedly purchased the grounds with “legal title” and that the lands were not “simply seized by conquest” (p. 63).⁴⁹

What is written and recorded is solidified over what is heard and fleeting-

ly observed, and unfortunately, colonizers were documenting history in the 17th century. For marginalized groups to truly become part of society, they must be visually reflected within it. Consider the remarks of a Pennsylvania Lenape man who says: “We are the only nationality that must prove we are who we say we are” (Minderhout & Frantz, 2008, p. 62). Similarly, a Lenape mother states, “You have a child and you raise him in your culture. And he goes to school and in the school he hears that there’s no such thing as the American Indian. Pennsylvania has no American Indians” (Minderhout & Frantz, 2008, p. 62).

The Penn family managed to control the narration of their legacy through Benjamin West’s images, and the effects persist in Pennsylvania today. In examining West’s depiction of *William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians* (and all historical art), it is essential to understand the purpose of its commission. For historians, one must always place art in its historical context and ask—Why was this message developed and for whom? But more importantly—Whose message is going unheard?

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⁴⁹ Minderhout and Frantz reference C.A. Weslager, *The Delaware Indians: A History*, Rutgers University Press, for this statement.

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