'Embrace the Prudent Alliance': William Byrd of Westover and Intermarriage between Europeans and Native Americans

Katie Rose Guest Pryal, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/pryal/8/
- the philological association of
  the Carolinas -
marcel proust - jean toomer - william
butler yeats - franz kafka - flannery
o’connor - vergil - mary shelley -
richard wright - john donne - eduardo
mallea - nathalie sarraute - herman
melville - carson mccullers - josé
donoso - william shakespeare - maya
angelou - joseph conrad - jean-paul sartre
- doris betts - elizabeth barrett
browning - e t a hoffman - edgar allan
poe - virgina woolf - cervantes -
emily dickinson - william faulkner -
james dickey - eudora welty - molière -
jack london - sylvia plath - calderon de
la barca - richard ford - boris vian -
mrs.humphry ward - toni morrison -
thomas mann - nathaniel hawthorne -
carlos fuentes - william gilmore simms -
marguerite duras - rainer maria rilke -
saul bellow - lucretius - paule
marshall - james joyce - mikhail
lernontov - jane austen - dashiell
hammett - george bernard shaw - sappho
- kate chopin - james baldwin - seamus
heaney-

PostScript
PostScript

PUBLICATION OF THE PHILOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION OF THE CAROLINAS
NUMBER 23 ~ SPRING 2006

Editors: Cynthia Ho and Merritt Moseley

Postscript publishes selected papers read at the annual spring meeting of the Philological Association of the Carolinas. Anyone reading a paper may submit it for consideration to the Session Chair or directly to the Editors. Please include name, address, and academic affiliation with submitted papers. All papers should be accompanied by a disk copy as well.

Address correspondence to
Postscript
c/o Cynthia Ho or Merritt Moseley
Department of Literature and Language
University of North Carolina, Asheville
Asheville, NC 28804
Moseley@unca.edu, cho@unca.edu

ISSN: 1070-0986
CONTENTS

Samson, Delilah, and Yahweh: Character and Prejudice
Peter Whelan.................................................................1

The Merchants of Venice: The Importance of Context in Film Versions of the Play
Richard Vela...............................................................30

"Embrace the Prudent Alliance": William Byrd of Westover and Intermarriage between Europeans and Native Americans
Katie Rose Guest..........................................................51

The Tyrant Motif and Nosferatu: 1922, 1979, and 2000
Andrew Brooks.............................................................89

Girls Coming of Age During World War Two and the Postwar in Austria: Novels by Christine Nöstlinger and Renate Welsh
Kirsten A. Krick-Aigner ..................................................102

Archive and Origins in Los perros del paraíso
Brian Chandler............................................................127
Preying on the Working Mother:
Michael Crichton’s Real Villain
Ellen Arnold........................................................................139

Coyote Beautiful: The Joy of Sisterhood in
Barbara Kingsolver’s Prodigal Summer
Marsha Taylor........................................................................156

Aesthetes, Ogees and “The Lady”:
Queer Complications in The Line of Beauty
Lorena Russell......................................................................169
"Embrace the Prudent Alliance":
William Byrd of Westover and Intermarriage between Europeans and Native Americans
Katie Rose Guest

In the History of the Dividing Line, William Byrd of Westover ostensibly argues for intermarriage between Native Americans and European settlers in the British American colonies. He writes that intermarriage is the only way to solve the two greatest challenges facing European-Indian relations: the establishment of a lasting peace between Indian tribes and European settlers, and the conversion of Indians to Christianity. Byrd’s argument for European intermarriage with a racial Other is situated in a uniquely American
political and legal context. For example, colonial Virginia's racial intermarriage laws first forbade, then later permitted, white intermarriage with Native Americans, reflecting changing opinions regarding Native peoples and the pragmatism of political leaders (Woods 53). In the pre-revolutionary era, Thomas Jefferson wrote favorably on white-Indian intermarriage. These theories of early American statesmen were based on a savvy political foundation: the Native tribes of Virginia (and other regions of North America) preferred peace treaties that were formed by clan ties. Byrd's proposal of intermarriage can only be read in its complex sociopolitical and legal contexts. The tone of Byrd's writings could be read to imply an ironic stance on the part of the author. I argue, however, that because of the significant issues he addresses—war, land rights, and religion—and the seemingly favorable context in which he wrote, his ironic tone masked a serious intent. In the first part of this paper, I examine the texts of Byrd's prose works for his ideas on intermarriage. In the second part, I place Byrd's writings in the context of the policy debates over intermarriage in the seventeenth century. In the final part, I examine more closely the implications of
sexuality and gender in the rhetoric and reality of colonial intermarriage.

Part I: William Byrd’s History and Theory of Whitening

William Byrd II of Westover (1674-1744), a wealthy planter, was a cultural and political leader of early colonial Virginia. He produced two major literary works in addition to his diary and extensive correspondence. The History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina and the Secret History of the Dividing Line recount his travels of 1728-1729. In 1728, Byrd joined a survey group composed of politicians, naturalists, and local hunters and scouts, including some Native Americans, from Virginia and North Carolina. They embarked on an expedition to draw the dividing line between the two colonies from east to west, beginning near Norfolk, Virginia. Byrd wrote two accounts of the journey. The Secret History was written for a private readership. In it, Byrd uses sarcasm and wit to describe the characters of the expedition and their many, often sexual, adventures. In contrast, the History of the Dividing Line was written for public consumption. In producing the History, Byrd altered
the Secret History by “excising the gossip, the sex, and the scandal” (Adams v). The History opens with a brief geographical and political history of the British colonies in North America. Byrd suggests that all of the British colonies were formerly part of Virginia. Subsequent colonies were “lopt off” of Virginia’s body (7); she was “dismembered” (6). He writes, “But what wounded Virginia deepest was the cutting off Maryland from it” (7). Byrd’s violent language suggests a loyalty to the Virginia colony and its borders. This recounting appears to have been a rhetorical strategy to argue that Virginia should benefit geographically from the survey expedition. He seems to have had much personal and financial investment in Virginia’s future.

Because Byrd was such a powerful colonial figure, his writings made a significant contribution to the debates over racial purity and the treatment of colonial Others, both African and Native American. In the historical prelude to the History, Byrd discusses the early colonists’ interactions with Native peoples. Often, these encounters ended in bloodshed. For example, Byrd explains that the Europeans of the first colony near the Roanoke Inlet in North Carolina disappeared because they “were either starved or cut to pieces by the Indians” (2). The first Virginia colony
at Jamestown survived only because of "the vigilance and bravery of Capt. Smith, who struck a terreur into all the Indians round about" (3). In Byrd's estimation, the native Others often brought violence upon the Europeans; in describing the acts of John Smith, he recognized the colonists' penchant for violence as well. Once a settlement had been permanently established at Jamestown, the colonists "made peace with the Indians" (3). However, Byrd argues, "there was one thing wanting to make that peace lasting. The Natives could, by no means, perswade themselves that the English were heartily their friends, so long as they disdained to intermarry with them" (3). Only intermarriage could have guaranteed the establishment of peaceful relations between the early colonists and the local Native Americans.

The passages in the History that discuss intermarriage with Native Americans must be read closely; Byrd's words are subject to multiple, often opposing, interpretations. Early in the text, Byrd appears to praise intermarriage and lists many reasons why the practice would have benefited the early colonists. I propose that these reasons should be considered sincere. Christianization and the establishment of a safe and peaceful colony were two major colonial objectives that Byrd addresses in his
writings on intermarriage. Byrd first argues that political trust could not be built between Europeans and Native Americans without intermarriage: the Native tribes would not believe that "the English were heartily their friends" without the creation of familial, or clan, ties (3). Byrd’s words were based on sound logic: intermarriages and tribal adoptions built alliances between whites and Native Americans. Second, Byrd argues that intermarriage was the surest way to convert the Native Americans to Christianity: "[H]ad the English . . . intended either to civilize or convert these gentiles, they would have brought their stomachs to embrace this prudent alliance" (3). Although the structure of this statement begs closer analysis, a facial reading reveals Byrd’s argument that intermarriage could have resulted in greater assimilation of local Native American tribes into European culture. Furthermore, he appears to believe that this assimilation would have benefited the early colonists.

When Byrd describes the early colonists’ distaste for intermarriage, he uses visceral terms: the colonists’ “stomachs,” not intellects, rejected the idea (3). We must approach this graphic language with care, for it could express a hidden argument that intermarriage is not a viable option. With his words,
Byrd may have been expressing sympathy towards the colonists, recognizing that the British were rendered physically ill by the idea of intermarriage. He could have believed that the colonists' rejection of intermarriage was well founded due to a proper British disgust felt toward a racial Other. On the other hand, Byrd's text also suggests that, had the British been using their heads, not their stomachs, they would have seen intermarriage as an opportunity. As a member of the Royal Society in England and a participant in the Enlightenment, Byrd would have advocated the use of reason and rationality in decision-making. He would have disdained judgments made from the gut, or "stomach" (3). He writes: "It was certainly an unreasonable nicety that prevented their entering into so good-natured an alliance" (120, emphasis added). Thus, for Byrd, the British colonists' rejection of intermarriage was irrational. He also provides very reasonable arguments in favor of intermarriage:

I may safely venture to say, the Indian women would have made altogether as honest wives for the first planters, as the damsels they us'd to purchase from aboard the ships. It is strange, therefore that any good Christian shou'd have refused a
wholesome, straight bed-fellow, when he might have had so fair a portion with her, as the merit of saving her soul. (122)

Byrd contrasts the low-brow, often criminal women that arrived in the colonies from England with the comparatively "honest" Indian women to make a logical argument in favor of intermarriage. An examination of Byrd's language in light of its social context could support a literal, rather than ironic, reading of the text.

Byrd's arguments in this early part of the History are based only on speculation: the early British colonists in Virginia did not intermarry with local tribes to any great extent. Later in the History, Byrd writes of the current relations between the Indians and the British in Virginia. The dividing-line expedition spent some time in Nottoway Town, a large Indian settlement of 200 people. According to Byrd, "These are the only Indians of any consequence now remaining within the limits of Virginia. The rest are either removed or dwindled to a very inconsiderable number" (116). Byrd describes the Nottoway Indians in detail, recounting their dancing rituals, body paint, division of labor, and other cultural behaviors and artifacts. He describes them physically with praise: "Tho' their complexions be a
little sad-colour'd, yet their shapes are very strait and well porportion'd” (114). He also describes what he considers to be the negative aspects of their culture:

Tho’ these Indians dwell among the English, and see in what plenty a little industry enables them to live, yet they chuse to continue in their stupid idleness, and to suffer all the inconveniences of dirt, cold, and want, rather than to disturb their hands with care, or defile their hands with labour.

(116)

With these words, Byrd demonstrates a lack of understanding of Native culture in the southeastern regions of America. That the Indians did not embrace a Protestant work ethic disappoints him, as does their lack of interest in European material goods. Yet he finds positive qualities in the Indian women: “Their faces are seldom handsome, yet they have an air of innocence and bashfulness, that with a little less dirt wou’d not fail to make them desirable” (114). His language sexualizes the Indian women, a problem that will receive closer examination, yet his argument appears to remain in favor of marriage, not mere sexual exploitation.

Byrd recognizes that the greatest challenge he faces in convincing his European audience to favor
intermarriage is skin tone: Native Americans represent a racial, not simply cultural, Other. Byrd makes many arguments that directly address the European distaste for the darker complexion of the Native Americans: "The Indians are generally tall and well proportioned, which may make full amends for the darkness of their complexions. Add to this that they are healthy and strong, with constitutions untainted by lewdness, and not enfeebled by luxury" (3). Here, Byrd describes the ideal "noble savage," worthy of European admiration: Indians have excellent physical attributes and a natural morality that more than make up for their dark skin. In the opening historical passages of the text, Byrd presents a cure of sorts for the dark skin tone of Native peoples. When he suggests that the first British colonists should have intermarried, Byrd writes: "Nor would the shade of the skin have been any reproach at this day, for if a Moor may be washed white in three generations, surely an Indian might have been blanched in two" (4). These words reveal a very different conception of racial difference than that held by white people in the United States even one hundred years later. According to Byrd's understanding, racial boundaries are not biologically
impermeable; they can be crossed via changes in outward appearances.

This notion of "whitening" becomes an important one for Byrd, the crux of his argument for intermarriage. Rhetorically, he frames his argument in this manner: first, he argues that all people on Earth possess certain inherent common traits, no matter what color their complexions may be. Thus, Englishmen and Indians share these common traits, for example, a "natural dignity" (120). Second, he argues that through intermarriage with white Europeans, the skin color of Indians will whiten sufficiently so that the offspring, too, can be considered white. This two-part argument is illustrated well by this passage:

All nations of men have the same natural dignity, and we all know that very bright talents may be lodg'd under a very dark skin. The principal difference between one people and another proceeds only from the different opportunities of improvement. The Indians by no means want understanding, and are in their figure tall and well-proportion'd. Even their copper-colour'd complexion wou'd admit of
blanching, if not in the first, at the farthest the second generation. (120)

Byrd draws parallel arguments between "improvement" of the "understanding" of the Native peoples and the whitening of their skin. This suggests a philosophy of racial superiority in which the "white" race is superior not only in appearance but also in its non-physical attributes. Once more in the text of the History Byrd alludes to the whitening of Native peoples: "Had the English done this [intermarry] at the first settlement of the colony, the infidelity of the Indians had been worn out at this day with their dark complexions" (120). Here, Byrd aligns whitening and Christianization, a professed goal of colonization. Through intermarriage, Byrd argues, the Indians would be twice improved: they would become Christian and white. Did Byrd speak in earnest when he suggested that the supposed problem of Native peoples' dark complexions could be resolved after two or three generations of intermarriage with whites?

As an advocate for intermarriage, Byrd was forced to contend with the visible racial differences between whites and Native Americans. With the mention of skin color in his writings, Byrd recognizes that the Europeans considered Native Americans to
be a racial, rather than an ethnic or cultural, Other. Byrd unknowingly diagrams for the reader the racial caste structure that was already entrenched in Virginia the early 1700s. When he writes that Native Americans would be "washed white" via intermarriage, he implies that white people occupied a more desirable social position than did the darker-skinned Native Americans. Higginbotham, in his study of race and the early American legal system, describes the racial caste structure of the servants of colonial Virginia. He writes, "Judicial recognition of the following strata, in order of social precedence, became apparent" (22). He then lists the strata in order: "white indentured servants," "white servants without indentures," "Christian black servants," "Indian servants," "Mulatto servants (with black or Indian parentage)," "Indian slaves," and lastly, "Black slaves" (Higginbotham 22, citing Helen Catterall). This list illustrates the complicated interplay of skin color, race, and religion in colonial America.

The legally enforced caste structure obstructed Byrd's proposal of intermarriage between whites and the Indian racial Other. Whites would lose status through interracial marriage; additionally, any offspring would be not-white and therefore without white caste privilege. Byrd does not challenge the
correctness of the caste structure. He does not seek to dismantle the system or to bring those of darker complexions into positions of greater status and privilege—i.e. into the white caste stratum. When he argues that the racial Other could be transformed white, he simply suggests that racial identity is permeable, and not entirely reliant on biological ancestry. Insidiously, he argues that whites can and should genetically eradicate people of a darker complexion altogether via mixing of blood. It may seem that the eradication of another race via intermarriage would be less diabolical than eradication via extermination, the plan eventually settled upon by the United States government. However, in the end, the goals of both intermarriage and extermination—eradication of a people and destruction a civilization—were the same.

Byrd’s theory of whitening is subject to two opposing interpretations. On the surface, he contends that the skin color of the Indians would indeed lighten sufficiently through intermarriage so that the children of such marriages would be white and possess all of the attending social benefits. However, when Byrd describes the whitening of Native American skin tone via intermarriage, he writes in the past conditional verb tense. He states that the
Indians' dark skin color *would have been* no "reproach at this day." His language implies that this whitening has not yet occurred, and he does not argue that it will. Instead, he implies that *had* the colonists intermarried, the skin tone of their offspring *would have* whitened. The subjunctive verb structure casts doubt on Byrd’s intention to introduce intermarriage as a social practice into his own era. A passage of Byrd’s Commonplace Book offers more insight into the roots of Byrd’s theory of whitening, and casts even more doubt on the sincerity of his advocacy for intermarriage:

A wicked West Indian boasted that he had washt the Black . . . White, and being askt by what art, he did it, he replyd, that in his youth he had an Intrigue with an Ethiopion Princess, by whome he had a Daughter that was a Mulatto. Her he lay with, believing no man had so good a right to gather the Fruit as he who planted it. By this he had another Daughter of the Portuguese complection and When she came to be 13 years old he again begot Issue Female upon her Body, that was perfectly white; and very honourably descended. (140)
The tone of this passage is cynical and ironic. After all, incest is hardly a means of “honourabl[e] descen[t].” The editors of Byrd’s Commonplace Book indicate that “the notion of ‘washing an Ethiopian white’ is proverbial, denoting an impossible attempt to change inherent natural qualities” (Berland, et al. 235). The editors point to Erasmus, who employed the axiom in Praise of Folly to describe a vain attempt “to disguise vice with facile words” (Berland, et al. 235). The passage at issue in Erasmus’s Folly criticizes the usage of misleading rhetoric: “Thus the wretched crow is decked out in borrowed plumage, the ‘Ethiopian washed white,’ an ‘elephant created out of a gnat’” (66). Looking into the historical sources of Byrd’s theory of whitening, we find that it is based on an atrocious story of incest and on a centuries-old proverb denoting impossibility and futility. These sources suggest that perhaps his intermarriage proposal was made in jest.

Part II: The Public Policy of Intermarriage

Despite the evidence that I have presented to the contrary, I maintain that Byrd’s proposal should be considered sincere. In the History, Byrd describes how the College of William and Mary and Virginia’s
Lieutenant Governor Spotswood tried without success to convert Indians to Christianity via education (Byrd 118). Byrd’s biographer Marambaud writes, “After the negative results of these efforts to win the Indians over to civilization and Christianity, Byrd came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to convert them permanently, even the younger ones, if they were to live among their countrymen” (Marambaud 243). Marambaud takes literally Byrd’s arguments in favor of intermarriage. He cites many of Byrd’s contemporaries who expressed similar opinions. Robert Beverley (1673–1722), a contemporary of Byrd who “visited [Indian] towns and won their friendship,” made similar arguments for intermarriage (243). John Lawson, an Englishman hired by the British government to explore Carolina and Virginia, wrote in 1708: “By the Indians marrying with the Christians, and coming into plantations with their English husbands or wives, they could become Christians and their idolatry would be quite forgotten” (Marambaud 244, citing Lawson). Marambaud acknowledges that Byrd’s stance on intermarriage “might have seemed a most unorthodox notion to Northern Puritans” (244). In response, he calls Virginia planters “far more liberal” and “more enlightened” than people of New England.
Marambaud also observes French policy in Canada: "The policy of Louis XIV in Canada was far better and greatly strengthened the French interest among the Indians" (244). He takes seriously Byrd's caution that the French might gain an "advantage over His Majesty's good subjects on the northern continent of America" due to their willingness to intermarry (244, citing Byrd).

Although Byrd's writings specifically describe the British-American colonial experience, his work is situated in a larger colonial framework. The New World was populated by many different European colonists and oppressed colonial peoples. The French had established a large colony in Canada, and fashioned relations with the Native peoples there. Additionally, Europeans had been importing Africans into Virginia to serve in bondage since 1619 (Higginbotham 20). Higginbotham explains that Africans were first brought to America by the Dutch: "about the last of August, there came to Virginia a Dutchman of Warre that sold us twenty Negers." John Rolfe, Secretary and Recorder of the Virginia colony, made the above entry toward the end of August, 1619. It survives as the earliest known record dating the arrival of blacks at an American colony" (20). Notably, Byrd proposes only intermarriage
between whites and Native Americans, not between whites and African Americans. He mentions intermarriage with a "Moor" merely for argument's sake. This limitation of the racial Other available for intermarriage suggests that Byrd made the proposal in earnest. He recognized that African-European mixing would not be acceptable to his fellow colonists and slave owners. Offspring of a black/white dyad could never be allowed to gain white caste status in the context of a slave society. Slavery made the creation of separate racial identities a legal imperative: white people needed to know who could and who could not be enslaved.

Indeed, the American legal system can be considered the most influential cultural apparatus in the creation of American racial identities. An examination of the codes and judicial decisions governing definitions of race illustrate just how fluid these identities have been over time. F. James Davis defines what Virginians came to call the "one-drop rule":

[A] black is any person with any known African black ancestry. This definition reflects the long experience with slavery and later with Jim Crow segregation. . . . In the South it became known as the "one-drop
rule,” meaning that a single drop of “black blood” makes a person a black. It is also known as the “one black ancestor rule,” some courts have called it the “traceable amount rule,” and anthropologists call it the “hypo-descent rule,” meaning that racially mixed persons are assigned the status of the subordinate group. (5) American laws, including those of Virginia, have explicitly established who was and was not black: a black person has any black ancestry. These race laws reflected social policy. As Davis explains, racial identity determined one’s place in the American racial caste system; furthermore, if a person was determined to be “black,” that person could be enslaved. In the post-slavery 1896 decision Plessy v. Ferguson, the U.S. Supreme Court made three legal assumptions important for the study of intermarriage between members of different racial caste strata. First, the court states that white people have the power to determine who is white. Second, the court states that white is the “dominant race,” thereby acknowledging that whites inhabit the most privileged caste stratum. Third, the court writes that the reputation of whiteness is an entitlement. Note that the court does not address being white, merely
the reputation thereof. The power of whites to determine whiteness becomes more important in the context of anti-interracial marriage laws that did not forbid intermarriage with Indians. Such permissive laws implied that an Indian, or her half-white offspring, might be absorbed into the white caste stratum. By excluding Africans from his proposal of intermarriage, Byrd pays respect to the American racial caste structure and also to the most significant racial structure of the day: American chattel slavery. Intermarriage between whites and blacks would have been detrimental to slavery as a public institution. On the other hand, white/Indian intermarriage served important public policy functions.

North American colonies were also maintained by Britain’s political rival France. In his writings, Byrd observes the French intermarriage policy in Canada:

The French, for their parts, have not been so squeamish in Canada, who upon trial find abundance of attraction in the Indians. Their late grand monarch thought it not below even the dignity of a Frenchman to become one flesh with this people and therefore ordered 100 livres for any of his subjects,
man or woman, that would intermarry with a native. (4)

Byrd continues in the text with an admonition that the French policy may give France a colonial "advantage" over the British. The mocking tone of this passage casts doubt on the seriousness of Byrd's proposition. However, international antagonism, rather than an ironic intent towards intermarriage, could be the source of this tone. After all, hostility between Britain and France has pervaded European history and extended well into the colonial period. The sarcastic tone of the passage could be read as an insult to France, rather than as a lack of serious intent concerning intermarriage. Historical scholarship of the colonial policies of New France shows that this passage of the History is based on historical fact. In her historical study of Native and Euro-Canadian intermarriage, Sylvia van Kirk writes: "At the beginning of the colonization of New France during the early seventeenth century, it appears that intermarriage might have been a key component of French colonization policy" (van Kirk 2). This intermarriage in Canada was "a vehicle for missionization and Frenchification" (van Kirk 3). After intermarriage failed to produce a significant colonial population, French policy shifted from
encouraging intermarriage to importing women from France. However, the policy change did not prevent intermarriage between Native Americans and French colonists, especially among fur traders: “The success of the fur trade (unlike settlement) depended on intricate social and economic interactions with Aboriginal people and intermarriage very much facilitated this process” (3-4). Thus, when intermarriage served a political function, colonists were more likely to intermarry.

Similar social and economic factors were present for British frontiersmen in Virginia and likewise encouraged intermarriage between white male traders and Native women. Like the fur traders in New France, people on the frontier in the American south found peace to be more easily established with indigenous peoples if family ties were created. Theda Perdue, in her study of intermarriage between Native Americans and whites, writes:

For southern Indians, human beings fell into two camps—relatives, who belonged within the community, and enemies, who did not. If a person had no ties of kinship to the community and no position within it, Native southerners regarded that person as an enemy . . . Circumstances, however,
sometimes demanded that a tribe convert enemies into relatives in order to open the door to peaceful relations between two peoples. (9)
Moreover, in the American south, “marriage engendered customer loyalty among a trader's [Native] in-laws, and the failure to marry an Indian woman often doomed a white man's business” (21).
As Perdue describes, both Native and white Virginians recognized that intermarriage would sustain peace and strengthen trade between the two peoples. Thus, Byrd’s suggestion that intermarriage was the only means to make “peace lasting” has contextual historical support.

Virginia’s intermarriage laws of the colonial and revolutionary eras reflect the dueling policy concerns that faced white Virginians: the desire to maintain a racial caste structure and the pragmatic need for peace with Native Americans. These concerns manifested through anti-intermarriage statutes that reversed position on Native Americans twice within a century. A study of early American anti-intermarriage laws suggests two ideas important for a reading of Byrd’s proposal of white/Native intermarriage. The laws indicate first that public feeling toward intermarriage with Native Americans
was unstable, and second, that public feeling toward intermarriage with African Americans was universally one of rejection. Karen Woods, in her legal study of American anti-intermarriage laws, argues that "miscegenation law seems to have developed only in English colonial contexts," rather than in the English common law (51). Anti-intermarriage laws, and their related bastardy laws, maintained the racial caste structure of the British North American colonies. As Martha Hodes explains, in her study of interracial marriages, if a colonial Other and a white American could not marry, then they could not bear legitimate children. Bastardy laws provided severe financial punishments for offending mothers. Interracial bastard children were subject to forced apprenticeships that were only minimally different from enslavement. In 1662, the Virginia colonial assembly passed a law that ensured the status of children of slave women: "Children got by an Englishman upon a Negro woman shall be bond or free according to the condition of the mother..." (Higginbotham 43, citing the Virginia colonial assembly). However, the laws governing intermarriage between Europeans and Native Americans were not as consistent as those governing the African-European dyad.
In 1662, Virginia passed its first anti-interracial marriage statute. The statute forbade “fornication” between “Christians” and “Negroes” (Woods 53). No mention was made in the statute of Native Americans. The statute is unclear whether “Christians” refers only to people of European descent, but consideration of the racial caste structure in place at the time suggests that whites would be forbidden to marry Christian “Negroes” as well. A 1705 Virginia statute states that if a white master (or mistress) who held the indentures of white Christian servants married a “negro, mulatto, or Indian, Jew, Moor, Mahometan, or other infidel,” then the white Christian servants would be freed (53). This statute attempts to negotiate both the race of the colonial Other and religion; the purpose appears to be the protection of the Christian faith of the white servants. Of course, the question remains how marriage to a Christian “negro, mulatto, or Indian” would have put the Christianity of the white servants at risk. We can only surmise that the caste structure of that era would not accept the possibility that a non-white person would own the indentures of white servants. However, in 1753, Virginia revised its intermarriage statute to permit intermarriage between whites and Native Americans (52). That the 1753 statute
removed Native Americans from its list of forbidden marriage partners for whites suggests that public opinion had changed to be more accepting of such unions. Byrd wrote his History before the passage of the 1753 statute: he died in 1744. However, Byrd wrote as the tide of opinion was shifting towards acceptance of intermarriage. Whether he wrote in earnest or with irony, Byrd’s writings made a significant contribution to the public debate about intermarriage.

Byrd asserts that another positive result of intermarriage would be the conversion of Native Americans to Christianity: “I cannot think the Indians were much greater heathens than the first adventurers, who, had they been good Christians, would have had the charity to take this only method of converting the natives to Christianity” (3). He argues that intermarriage is the only effective way to convert Indians to both European religion and lifestyle. Because he wrote at a time when missionary work by whites among the Indians was common, his words call into question the traditional methods of the missionary. Byrd’s tone and word choice could be read to mock intermarriage. In arguing that intermarriage is the best way to convert the Indians, he writes that a “sprightly lover is the most prevailing
missionary that can be sent amongst these or any other infidels" (160). The textual combination of sexual crudeness and religion suggests that his argument for intermarriage was made in jest. In other words, the vulgarity of Byrd's language could imply an opinion that intermarriage itself is vulgar. Such a reading of Byrd's writings suggests that Byrd used irony to contradict his surface argument in favor of intermarriage. On the other hand, perhaps Byrd was not mocking intermarriage, but rather the vocation of the pious missionary. It cannot be denied, however, that Byrd was very much preoccupied with the subject of sexuality.

Part III: Sexuality, Gender, and Intermarriage with a racial Other

The History and the Secret History are replete with stories about the sexual availability of Native American women to the white surveyors of the expedition. When the expedition group arrives in Nottoway town, Byrd writes that "the ladies had array'd themselves in all their finery" (114). His statement, though, is tongue-in-cheek: their "finery" turns out to be not so fine. Although "they have a mind to appear lovely," they are dirty in Byrd's
estimation: “the whole winter’s soil was so crusted on the skins of those dark angels, that it requir’d a very strong appetite to approach them” (114). We soon learn that Byrd and his white compatriots do not lack this strong appetite. The morning after their stay in Nottoway town, Byrd discovers that some of his fellow travelers had sex with Indian women. He writes: “Our chaplain observ’d with concern, that the ruffles of some of our fellow travellers were a little discoulour’d with pochoon [bloodroot, used by Indians as body paint], wherewith the good man had been told those ladies us’d to improve their invisible charms” (122). The Secret History relates a similar story: “But though Meanwell [a pseudonym for a Virginia commissioner] might perhaps want inclination to these sad-colored ladies, yet curiosity made him try the difference between them and other women, to the disobligation of his ruffles, which betrayed what he had been doing” (115).

The sexualization and attendant degradation of a female racial Other by white European colonizers helped solidify the colonizers’ perception of their own cultural and racial superiority. Sexual exploitation of the colonized becomes another form of oppression. Byrd describes that the sexual rules that governed Indian women were far more lax than those that
British women lived by: “It is by no means a loss of reputation among the Indians, for damsels that are single to have intrigues with the men; on the contrary, they account it an argument of superior merit to be liked by a great number of gallants” (116). Thus, Byrd explains the perceived sexual promiscuity of Indian women in ethnocentric terms. Whether advertently or not, these words serve to justify the sexual exploitation of Native women by the white men on the expedition; after all, the white men are not doing anything wrong. Byrd explains that he and his colleagues directly participated in this sexual exploitation. In the Secret History, Byrd describes an interaction with a Nottoway Indian woman: “the Queen of the Weyanoke told Steddy [Byrd’s pseudonym for himself] that her daughter had been at his service if she had not been too young” (115). This passage has a counterpart in the History: “We were unluckily so many that they [the Nottoway Indians] cou’d not well make us the complement of bed-fellows, according to the Indian rules of hospitality, tho’ a grave matron whisper’d one of the commissioners [presumably Byrd] very civilly in the ear, that if her daughter had been but one year older, she should have been a his devotion” (116). For Byrd and the other men on the expedition, Native
American women were exotic sexual objects available for their pleasure. The Native women were a racial and colonial Other, and sexualization furthered their objectification.

The sexuality of the female colonial Other emerges at another point in Byrd’s writings. In his history of the colonies, Byrd relates the “Dissenter” settlement in Massachusetts founded in 1620 (4). He mockingly calls the Pilgrims “saints,” and states that they had “the same aversion to the copper complexion of the natives” as did the early Virginia colonists. The Pilgrims would not intermarry with the Indians, “afraid, perhaps, like the Jews of old, lest they might be drawn into idolatry by those strange women.” Byrd writes that the colonists’ rejection of the Indians was based on a “false delicacy” and “exposed [the colonists] to various distresses” (4). Historical study supports Byrd’s assessment of the Pilgrims’ fear of Native women and intermarriage. Pilgrims and Puritans interpreted biblical injunctions against intermarriage literally. “In the Old Testament, the Lord repeatedly warns the Chosen People not to mix with the original inhabitants of the Promised Land . . . The real danger for the Israelites is that intermarriages would cause them to turn from their true God” (Woods 45). In particular, the Bible
“blames the Fall of Jerusalem on the foreign wives taken by the priests and by King Solomon himself” (45). The colonists in Massachusetts believed that “foreign women” posed a legitimate danger to the safety of their settlement, just as such women posed to Jerusalem in the Bible (46). Byrd addresses the spread of Christianity again when he describes the French colonial policy towards intermarriage. He writes that “their religion, such as it is, [is] propagated just as far as their love” (161). His language has a mocking tone when he describes the religion of the French. This mockery could extend to Byrd’s proposal of intermarriage as well. If the French, being Catholics, lack serious religion, would they have the moral guidance necessary to choose proper marriage partners? However, I suggest it is more likely that Byrd mocked the French while praising their sense to intermarry. His sarcasm would then be directed at his own people: after all, if the French have the sense to intermarry, why don’t the British?

With the History, Byrd entered a political tide that preceded and followed his own work. For centuries, Native Americans and European colonists fought for possession of land. In the History, Byrd addresses the unlawful land thievery of many whites in the
American colonies. He argues that intermarriage would provide a solution: “Besides, the poor Indians would have had less reason to complain that the English took away their land if they had received it by way of a portion with their daughters” (4). Byrd’s assessment of the political situation was shared by other men of his era. In fact, land politics often led white men to marry Native American women. Perdue explains that “many of the non-Indian men who married Native women did so in anticipation of financial gain through access to land and proceeds from land concessions” (29-30). Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, prominent white men married Native American women. These marriages suggest that intermarriage between whites and Native Americans was socially tolerated. Joseph Martin, an Indian agent, politician, and militia general in the late eighteenth century, married Betsey Ward, a Cherokee woman. Colonel Gideon Morgan married a Cherokee woman in the early nineteenth century to the chagrin of President Andrew Jackson (Perdue 29).

Native and white intermarriage persisted as an issue in public policy well after Byrd’s death. Woods recounts Patrick Henry’s stance on intermarriage after the American Revolution. During the years after the Revolution, Virginia turned its attention towards the
fighting between whites and Indians on its western border. In 1784, Henry presented a bill to the Virginia legislature to financially encourage intermarriage between whites and Indians (Woods 55-56). The bill also provided that “the offspring of the intermarriages aforesaid, shall be entitled, in all respects, to the same rights and privileges, under the laws of this commonwealth, as if they had proceeded from intermarriages among free white inhabitants thereof” (56). With this statute, Virginia attempted to legislate membership for the white caste stratum. The state tried to bestow upon the mixed-race children of intermarriage the same status as whites. The bill passed the legislature and became a statute, although it later lost favor (56). Another early American statesman, Thomas Jefferson, reveals his original support for intermarriage, or “amalgamation,” between whites and Indians. In an 1813 letter to Baron Alexander von Humboldt, the German explorer and scientist, Jefferson wrote:

You know, my friend, the benevolent plan we were pursuing here for the happiness of the aboriginal inhabitants in our vicinities. We spared nothing to keep them at peace with one another. To teach them agriculture and the rudiments of the most necessary
arts, and to encourage industry by establishing among them separate property. In this way they would have been enabled to subsist and multiply on a moderate scale of landed possession. They would have mixed their blood with ours, and been amalgamated and identified with us within no distant period of time. (1312)

Jefferson's "benevolent plan" was a form of racial annihilation: he hoped to "wash white" all indigenous peoples in America. Jefferson believed that intermarriage would have created a single people made up of whites and Indians; however, this new people would be white. There would not have been any "amalgamation," or mixing, at all. Rather, Native Americans would have been converted to white culture and religion, disposing of their indigenous cultures, communal land traditions, religions, and even complexions.

As I have shown, less than a century after he suggested it, Byrd's theory of whitening was echoed by Jefferson, then the President of the United States. Yet, by the early 1800s, Jefferson's plan of "biological assimilation" had failed (Woods 69). The United States soon undertook a different form of racial annihilation: extermination. Jefferson writes: "[T]he
cruel massacres they have committed on the women and children of our frontiers taken by surprise, will oblige us now to pursue them to extermination, or drive them to new seats beyond our reach” (1312-13). Woods suggests that one factor contributed to the failure of biological assimilation: by the time of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, “Americans increasingly believed that race was an uncrossable barrier and that religion and culture were fundamentally matters of biology” (69). Thus, “While the separation of Indians and Anglo-Americans had its origins in religious injunctions and uncertainties about the ‘other,’ the taboo against miscegenation intensified as race became a matter of biology and heredity” (70). In this context, Byrd’s writings demonstrate the willingness of early Americans to consider a racial Other fully human, biologically speaking, in ways that later white Americans would not. Byrd’s writing on intermarriage can be read effectively only through the lens of these sociopolitical and legal contexts: the Enlightenment, Christianization, colonial expansion, American chattel slavery, and the racial caste structure of the colonial era. Whether or not Byrd intended his proposal of intermarriage with Native Americans to be taken seriously, his writings remain an important artifact of European colonial attitudes
towards Native Americans, and played an important role in shaping early American policy toward the peoples that lived on American soil long before their arrival.

Notes

1 Although I find Professor Woods's work to be a model of serious scholarship, I disagree with her use of the word "miscegenation" to discuss interracial marriage or sexual relations in the colonial context. The term "miscegenation" was coined during the American Civil War era by slavery sympathizers in an effort to stir up interracial marriage paranoia among whites. Thus, there were no (anti-) miscegenation laws before the Civil War, because the word did not exist.

Works Cited


Andrew Brooks. When F.W. Murnau released his film version of Bram Stoker's novel Dracula in 1922, he initiated one of the great genres of film as a veritable stock character for the film industry. The movie was such an achievement, in fact, that in addition to the countless other "vampire movies," ranging from Bram Stoker's Dracula by Francis Ford Coppola to the 1970's farce Love at First Bite, it elicited a very direct copy of itself by Werner Herzog in 1979, and another movie, Shadow of the Vampire (2000), about the making of the original film. These three films, in handling the same basic idea in three very different situations—in terms of time and location of production—allow the viewer to compare them and to determine which