

What did Europeans see when they looked at the New World and the Native Americans ?

Collected by Peter Pappas
www.peterpappas.com

Document 1: From a letter by Christopher Columbus
October 12, 1492

“I gave to them some red caps and to others glass beads, which they hung about their necks, and many other things of slight value, in which they took much pleasure.

They all go quite naked as their mothers bore them. None of them more than 30 years old, very well built, of very handsome bodies and very fine faces. They ought to be good servants and of good skill, for I see that they repeat very quickly whatever is said to them.”

Document 2: Amerigo Vespucci describes the Indians in a letter of 1502

“We found the region inhabited by a race of people who were entirely naked, both men and women. They have no laws, and no religious belief, but live according to nature alone. They know nothing of the immortality of the soul; they have no private property, but share every thing in common. They have no boundaries of kingdom, they obey no king, for it is unnecessary because they have no laws, and each one is his own master.

They dwell together in houses made like huts in the construction of which they use neither iron nor any other metal. This is very remarkable, for I have seen houses two hundred and twenty feet long, and thirty feet wide, built with much skill, and containing five or six hundred people. They sleep in hammocks of cotton, suspended in the air without any covering; they eat seated upon the ground, and their food consists of the roots of herbs, or fruits and fish.

They are warlike people, and extremely cruel. The most astonishing thing in all their wars and cruelty was that we could not find out any reason for them. They made wars against each other, although they had neither kings, kingdoms, nor property of any kind. They were without any apparent desire to plunder, and without any lust for power. These are the things that always appeared to me to be the main causes of wars and anarchy. When we asked them about this, they gave us no other reason than that they did so to avenge the murder of their ancestors.”

Document 3: *The Discovery of America*, Jan van der Straet, 1575
Amerigo Vespucci awakens America



America Americus rexit, Semel vocavit inde semper excitam

Document 4: From an account of Spanish governor de Soto's three year exploration of the lands between Florida and Texas 1539-42. De Soto died during the failed expedition. The account was written by his secretary.

“The next day Governor de Soto came to the crossing opposite the village, and the chief Indians came with gifts and the woman chief, a lady of that land whom the Indians carried on their shoulders with much respect, in a litter covered with delicate white linen. And she crossed in the canoe and spoke to the governor quite gracefully and at her ease. She was young girl and she took off a string of pearls, which she wore on her neck, and put on the governor as a necklace as a sign of goodwill.

The Indians spent 15 days with the Spanish in peace, and they played with them. They swam among Spanish and helped them very much in every way.

Later the Spaniards continued on their journey to another village where they rounded up the Indians and put them in iron collars and chains. They took the Indian prisoners to keep them as slaves or servants to carry the supplies, which they received from the Indians by gift or by force. Some of the Indian prisoners had died, and others ran away or tired out, so that was necessary to replace them with more prisoners.”

Document 5: Spaniard Cabeza de Vaca describes attack by Indians
De Vaca was part of a failed expedition to Florida which landed at Tampa Bay in 1528. Almost all of the entire party of 600 died. de Vaca and a few others survived, he published an account of his adventures among the Indians.

“On the second day of our journey we came to lake that was difficult to cross. When we reached the middle of the lake, we were attacked by many Indians from behind trees, who had covered themselves so that we might not see them. Some of our men were wounded, because the good armor they wore did not help. We even saw two red oaks, each the thickness of the lower part of the leg, pierced through from side to side by arrows because of the power and skill with which the Indians are able to shoot them.

The Indians we had so far seen in Florida are all archers. They go naked, are large of body, and appear at a distance like giants. The bows they use are as thick as the arm, of eleven or twelve palms in length, which they will shoot at two hundred paces with so great precision that they miss nothing..”



Document 6: *Conquest. Miracle of Santiago*
According to legend, Santiago (St. James) converted Spain to Christianity. From a 17th century manuscript



Document 7: The 1562 Map of America by Diego Gutiérrez

With three details showing cannibals, giants and a sea monster



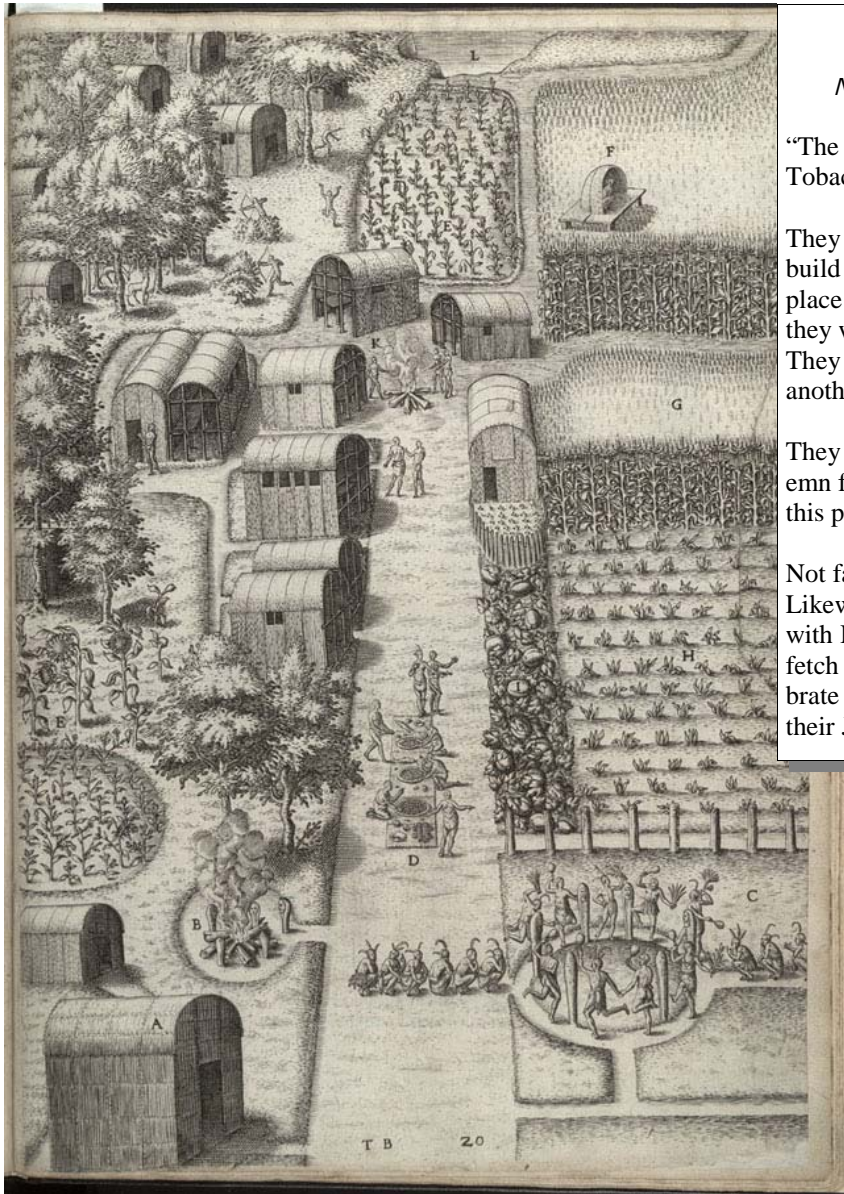
Document 8: Captain John Smith describes Virginia in his book *Historie of Virginia*, 1624

“The land is not populous, for the men be few; their far greater number is of women and children. Within 60 miles of James Towne there are about some 5000 people, but there are barely 1500 able men fit for their wars.

Their hair is generally black; but few have any beards. The men wear half their heads shaven, the other half long. For Barbers they use their women, who with 2 shells will grate away the hair to any style they please. They are very strong, of an able body and full of agility, able to endure to lie in the woods under a tree by the fire, in the worst of winter, or in the weeds and grasses in the summer.

Each household has their own lands and gardens, and most live of their own labors. For their apparel, they are some time covered with the skins of wild beasts, which in winter are dressed with the hair, but in summer without. The women adorn themselves most with copper beads and paintings. Their women some have their legs, hands, breasts and face cunningly embroidered with different tattoos, as beasts, serpents, artificially etched into their flesh with black spots. In each ear commonly they have 3 great holes, whereat they hang chains, bracelets, or copper.

Their women love children very dearly. To make them hardy, in the coldest mornings they wash them in the rivers, and with ointments so tan their skins, that after year or two, no weather will hurt them. The men spend their times in fishing, hunting, wars, and such manlike exercises, avoiding to be seen in any woman-like exercise. The men are often idle. The women and children do the rest of the work. They make mats, baskets, pots, mortars, pound their corn, make their bread, prepare their food, plant their corn, gather their corn, bear all kind of burdens, and such like.”



Document 9: The town of Secotam. Engraving and text from the book *The True Pictures and Fashions of The People In That Part Of America Now Called Virginia, Discovered By Englishmen*. Engraving by Theodore De Bry 1588.

“The houses are scattered here and there, and they have garden expressed by the letter E. where grows Tobacco which the inhabitants call Uppowoc.

They have also groves where they take deer, and fields where they sow their corn. In their cornfields they build as it were a scaffold where on they set a cottage like to a round chair, signified by F. where they place one to watch, for there are such number of fowl, and beasts, that unless they keep the better watch, they would soon devour all their corn. For which cause the watchman makes continual cries and noise. They sow their corn with a certain distance noted by H. other wise one stalk would choke the growth of another and the corn would not come unto his ripeness G.

They have also a several broad plot C. where they meet with their neighbors, to celebrate their chief solemn feasts and a place D. where after they have ended their feast they make merry together. Over against this place they have a round plot B. where they assemble themselves to make their solemn prayers.

Not far from which place there is a large building A. wherein are the tombs of their kings and princes, Likewise they have garden noted by the letter I. wherein they use to sow pumpkins. Also a place marked with K. wherein the make a fire at their solemn feasts, and near the town is a river L. from whence they fetch their water. This people are without greed and live cheerfully and at their heart's ease. But they celebrate their feasts in the night, and therefore they keep very great fires to avoid darkness, and to testify to their Joy.”

Document 10: *The Indians Should Be Conquered and Exterminated*
The Virginia Company of London, 1622

It was written by officials of the Virginia Company of London, the sponsor of the Jamestown Virginia settlement following the 1622 Powhatan Massacre that killed 347 Jamestown residents.

“The way of conquering them is much easier than civilizing them. For they are a rude, barbarous, and naked people, scattered in small villages. This would help us to victory, but be a hindrance to civilizing them. Besides that, we can conquest them all at once; but civilizing them is slow and will take much more effort. Victory over them may be gained many ways: by force, by surprise, by famine in burning their com, by destroying and burning their boats, canoes, and houses, by breaking their fishing wares, by interrupting their hunting, where they get the greatest part of their food in winter, by pursuing and chasing them with our horses and bloodhounds to draw after them, and mastiff dogs to tear them.”



Document 11: How They Till the Soul and Plant
 Engraving and text from the book, *The True Pictures and Fashions of
 The People In That Part Of America Now Called Virginia,
 Discovered By Englishmen.*

Engraving by Theodore De Bry 1588.

“The Indians till the soil very diligently, using a kind of hoe made from fish bone fitted to wooden handles. Since the soil is very light, these serve well enough to cultivate it. After the ground has been well broken up and leveled, the planting is done by the women, some making holes with sticks, into which the others drop the seeds of beans or maize. Then the fields are left alone, for the three winter months, from December 24 to March 15, are extremely cold. During this time the natives seek shelter in the woods, since they go naked. As soon as the cold winter is over, they return to their homes and wait for the crops to ripen. They gather the harvest and store it all for the rest of the year. None of it is used for trade unless they barter a small amount for some household article.”

Document 12: The Dances They Use at their High Feasts
 Engraving and text from *The True Pictures and Fashions ...*
 Engraving by Theodore De Bry 1588.

“At a certain time of the year they make a great feast with their neighbors from nearby towns, every man dressed in the most strange fashion and they have marks on the backs to declare of what place they be. The place where they meet is a broad plain, about the which are planted in the ground certain posts carved with heads like to the faces of Nuns covered with their veils . Then being set in order they dance, sing , and use the strangest gestures that they can possibly devise. Three of the fairest young girls, are in the middle, embracing one as others turn about in their dancing. All this is done after the sun is set for avoiding of heat . When they are weary of dancing, they go out of the circle.”





Document 13: Map of North America by Herman Moll, d. 1732.

Document 14: Captain John Smith Describes Virginia in an excerpt from his book, *A Map of Virginia*, published in 1612.

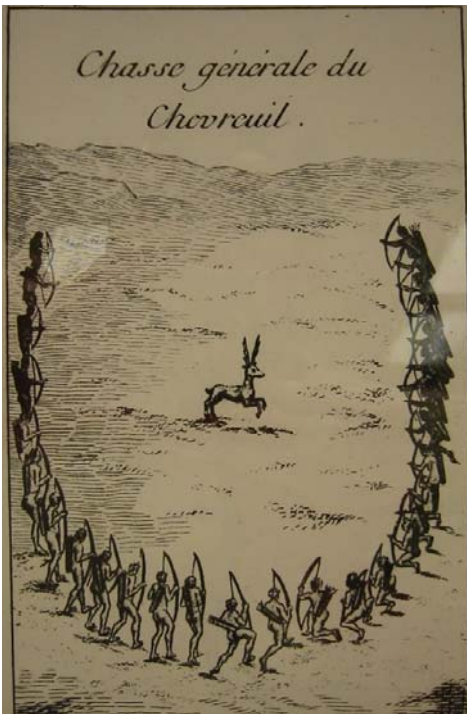
“Virginia is a Country in America that lies between the degrees of 34 and 44 of the north latitude. The bounds thereof on the East side are the great Ocean. On the South is Florida: on the north is New France. As for the West, the limits are unknown.

The temperature of this country is comfortable to the English once they get used to it - the summer is hot as in Spain; the winter cold as in France or England. There is but one entrance by sea into this country and that is at the mouth of a very large Bay the wideness of nearly 18 or 20 miles.

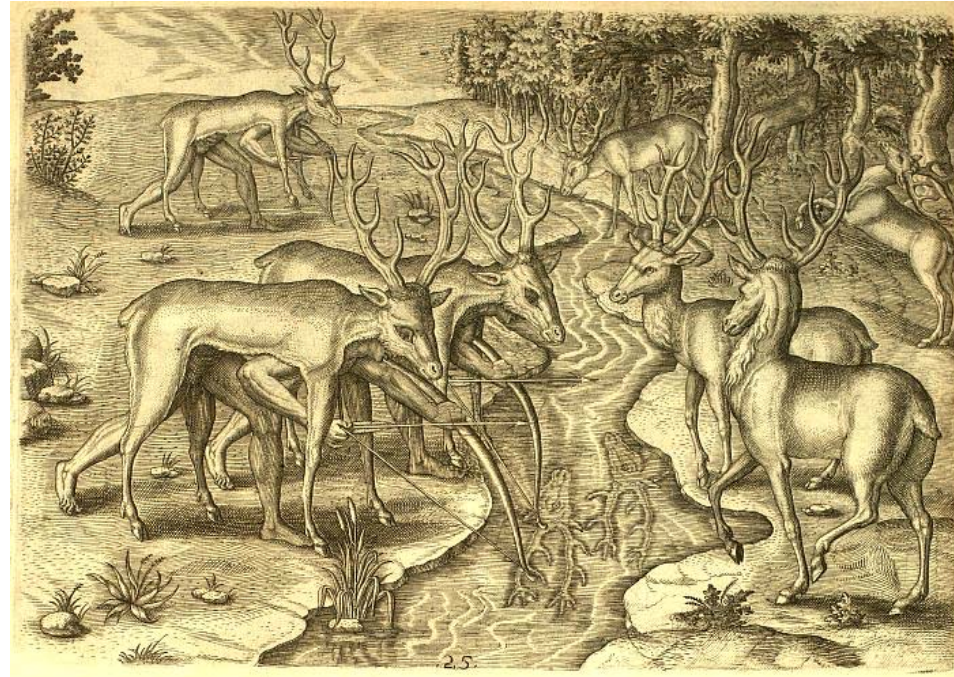
Virginia has many excellent vegetables and living Creatures. There are few grasses for all the Country is overgrown with trees. A small beast they have, they call the Opossum. It has a head like a pig, and a tail like a rat, and is as big as a cat. Under her belly she has a bag, where she lodges, carries, and nurses her young.

The Beaver is as big as an ordinary water dog, but his legs exceeding short. His front feet like a dogs, his hind feet like a swans. His tail somewhat like the form of a Racket. It is bare without hair. The Savages take Beavers with snares, and value the skins as clothes and ornaments. They also eat the Beaver and consider it a fine delicacy.

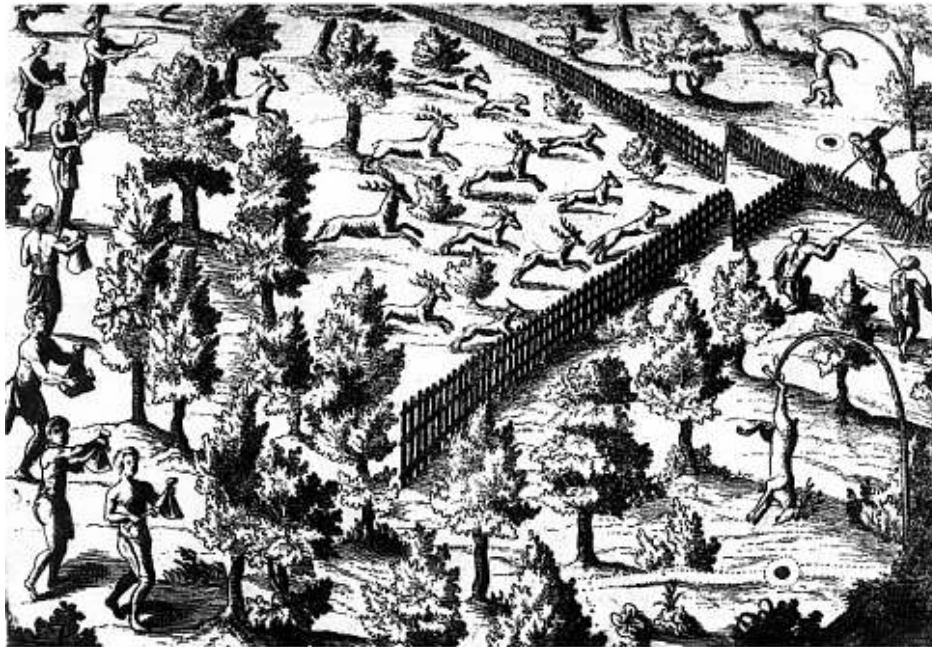
The mildness of the air, the fertility of the soil, and the situation of the rivers make it convenient for pleasure, profit, and mans’ sustenance. In that latitude or climate, will live any beasts, as horses, goats, sheep, asses, hens, etc. that were carried there. The waters, islets, and shoals, are full of safe harbors for ships of war or merchandise, for boats of all sorts, for transportation, fishing, etc. The Bay and rivers have many fish and places fit for salt drying, building of ships, making of iron, etc.”



Document 15: Indians Hunting a Deer from *Histoire de la Louisiana*, 1758



Document 16: Indians Stalking Deer
Jacques Le Moyne made a trip to Florida in 1564. He made many drawings of native scenes with descriptions and a map of the region.



Document 17: A 17th century picture of a deer hunt by Huron Indians, produced for the accounts of Samuel de Champlain's travels, published in Paris in 1632

Document 18: William Wood describes the health of the Indians north of Massachusetts Bay colony in a book written in 1639

“First of their stature, most of them being between five or six foot high, straight bodied, strong composed, smooth-skinned, merry countenance,... broad shouldered, brawny armed, long and slender handed, out breasted, small waisted, lank bellied, well thighed, flat kneed, handsome grown legs and small feet.

The reason is rendered why they grow so proportionable and continue so long in their vigor (most of them being fifty before a wrinkled brow or gray hair betray their age) is because they are not brought down with suppressing labor, bothered with annoying cares, or drowned in the excessive abuse of overflowing plenty, which oftentimes kills them more than hunger, as may appear in them. For when they change their bare Indian food for the plenty of England's fuller diet, it is so contrary to their stomachs that death or a desperate sickness immediately occurs, which makes so few of them desirous to see England.”

Document 20: In 1685 La Salle conducted a failed expedition to discover the mouth of the Mississippi River. He party included the Talon family who had three children. The children spent the next 3 years with the tribes, learning language and customs. Eventually they returned to Europe and their report became a fascinating view of life in the Indian societies of the Southeast.

“The Italian had lived a long time with the Indian tribe and had learned the language perfectly. But he made them angry, so they decided to kill him. He beat them with a trick, which marks his intelligence over the savages. Here it is. He told these idiots that they were going to kill a man who loved them so much that he carried all of them in his heart. If they doubted it, he would prove it to them the next day. He would show them his open heart, and they would all see themselves in there.

The savages spared his life until the next day and put him to the test. They came to him very early in the morning in great numbers to see him keep his promise, or kill him if he did not keep it. The Italian had placed a pocket mirror just over his heart. The savages, who had never seen a mirror, did not suspect the trick. One after another he said to each Indian, “There is my open heart – look and you’ll see yourself.” And each Indian saw himself in a mirror they were all amazed and allowed him to live and to leave the tribe safely.”

Document 19: Detail from Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony
1629-1684

Indian saying “Come over and help us.”



Document 21: John Lawson published his “New Voyage to Carolina” in 1709. It describes his journeys and his impression of the Native Americans he encountered.

“The Indians are really better to us, than we are to them. They always give us food at their homes, and protect us from hunger and thirst. But we do not do the same for them. We let them walk by our doors hungry. We look upon them with scorn and disrespect, and think them, little better than beasts in human shape. If we thought about it we would realize that even with our religion and education, we have more evils than these savages do.

These Indians are the freest people in the world and they are not intruding upon us. We are the one who left our home to drive them out and take their land. We do not give any allowance for their natural character, wilderness training and strange customs. We trade with them, it's true, but we have furnished them with the vice of drunkenness, and daily cheat them in every thing we sell.”

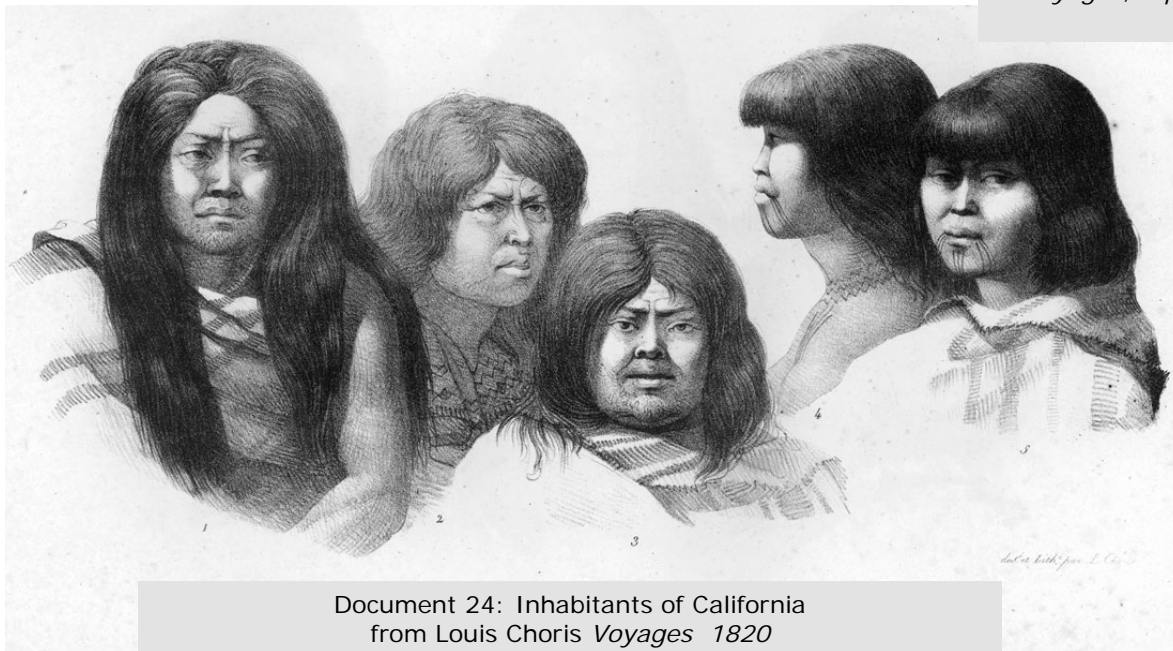
Document 22: Sebastián Vizcaino wrote a letter to the King of Spain on May 23, 1602, reporting on his voyage of exploration along the California coast. He describes the Ohlone Indians whom he encountered around the shores of Monterey Bay

“This region is thickly settled with people whom I found to be of gentle disposition, peaceable and obedient, and who can be brought readily within the fold of the holy gospel and into the rule of the crown of Your Majesty. Their food consists of seeds which they have in abundance and variety and of the flesh of game, such as deer which are larger than cows, and bear....

The Indians are of good stature and fair complexion, the women being somewhat less in size than the men and of pleasing face. The clothing of the people of the coast consists of the skins of the sea-wolves abounding there, which they tan and dress better than is done in Spain; they possess also, in great quantity, flax like that of Spain, hemp and cotton, from which they make fishing-lines and nets for rabbits and hares. They have vessels of pine-wood very well made, in which they go to sea with fourteen paddle-men on each side, with great agility -even in very stormy weather.”



Document 23: Boat in the Port of San Francisco
Illustration from a book by Louis Choris
Voyages, A picturesque tour of the World with Portraits of the Savages of America, Asia and Africa. 1820



Document 24: Inhabitants of California
from Louis Choris *Voyages 1820*

Document 25
Frenchman Joseph Jouveny describes
Canadian Indians in 1710.

“The care of household and whatever work there may be in the family are placed upon the women. They build and repair the wigwams, carry water and wood, and prepare the food; their duties and position are those of slaves, laborers and beasts of burden. The pursuits of hunting and war belong to the men. This explains the isolation and small population of Indians. Because of the hard work done by the women, they cannot give birth to fully-developed children, or properly nourish them after they have been born. They work so hard carrying water, gathering wood and other tasks, so that scarcely one infant in thirty survives until youth.”