
RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

*Taking Vengeance
on the Beaver*

"The War Between Indians and Animals"
by Calvin Martin, in *Natural History*
(June–July 1978), Box 6000, Des Moines,
Iowa 50340.

The pre-modern American Indian is widely viewed as a noble savage who lived in harmonious balance with nature, taking from it only what necessity demanded and respecting animals and plants as fellow spiritual beings. A new look at the historical record by Martin, a Rutgers historian, shows that at certain periods the Indian perceived his relationship with nature to have gone awry and engaged in a fearful slaughter of game that amounted almost to a declaration of war.

A striking example of this behavior, Martin writes, occurred in eastern Canada in the late 15th century just before there was major direct Indian contact with whites. Diseases such as smallpox and influenza, brought by European fishermen and voyagers to the Canadian shore, preceded the newcomers inland and decimated aboriginal populations totally lacking in immunological resistance.

The Indian, believing that game animals possessed the power to inflict disease, and as yet unaware of the white menace, felt that the game had broken the traditional "compact of mutual courtesy" between animals and men. For some obscure reason, the wildlife had become angered and had unleashed their most potent weapon against man. In response, the Indians of the Northeast counterattacked with a vengeance. As some Micmac Indians termed it, they were "making war upon the beaver."

When the French and British fur traders arrived on the scene with manufactured goods to exchange for furs, the psychological basis for near-extinction by Indian hunters of many varieties of Canadian wildlife had already been established.

*The Battle
of the Fibers*

"Cotton Versus Polyester" by T. Leo van
Winkle, John Edeleanu, Elizabeth Ann
Prosser, and Charles A. Walker, in *Ameri-
can Scientist* (May–June 1978), 345 Whit-
ney Ave., New Haven, Ct. 06511.

Environmentalists in recent years have extolled the benefits of "natural" processes and products over "synthetic" ones—especially those man-made items derived from such nonrenewable resources as petroleum. But in terms of energy consumption, it is not at all clear that cotton, a "natural" fiber, is less costly to society than "synthetic" polyester fibers made from oil and gas.

An analysis by van Winkle, a Catholic University engineering professor, and three colleagues, compares the energy consumption involved