

CHAPTER ONE

THEODORE DE BRY'S TIMUCUA ENGRAVINGS-FACT OR FICTION?



STUDENTS DISCOVER HOW AN INACCURATE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS CAN HAVE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES.

WHAT'S THE CONTROVERSY?

In 1591, Theodore de Bry published a book about the French explorations of Florida. He claimed that the artwork had been created by artist Jacques Le Moyne, an eyewitness at the French colony in Florida. Who was de Bry? He was a Belgian engraver who had never even been to America. Engravers made copies of pictures onto copper plates so that they could be printed in books. Photocopier technology had not been invented in the 1500s.



This is a de Bry engraving of a Timucua religious ceremony to ensure a good harvest.

Religion leaves very few marks in the archaeological record. In this instance, a posthole in the ground would be the only remains of this village-wide ritual.

Historians were dazzled by these engravings. What an amazing resource! The images and text provided a window into Florida's past, a way to learn about the extinct Timucua people.

In time, however, historians and archaeologists began to acknowledge the glaring errors scattered throughout these engravings.

- 1) The Timucua have European facial features.
- 2) The vegetation and the mountains don't belong in Florida.
- 3) The deer is a European Red Deer.
- 4) The war clubs shown in battle scenes are clearly Brazilian.
- 5) The shell bowls used for the Black Drink ceremony should be made from whelk shells. Instead, they're made from a chambered nautilus, a Pacific sea shell.
- 6) The alligator in the alligator hunt has external ears and eyebrows, and it's far too big.
- 7) Timucua villages did not have palisades (walls) built around them, and the huts weren't so close together.
- 8) The Timucua did not use recurved hunting bows.
- 9) There is far too much similarity between these engravings and the ones that de Bry engraved about other cultures.

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In 2005, Florida archaeologist Jerald Milanich published an article in *Archaeology* journal. This article provided evidence that de Bry had fabricated these engravings. It seems that he used a mixture of European eyewitness accounts, borrowed images from other cultures, and his own imagination to create the images himself.

Why are a few faked pictures such a big deal? The problem is that de Bry claimed the engravings were true descriptions of Timucua life. And with the “original artist” dead, there was no one to set the record straight. De Bry could claim anything he wanted. So de Bry’s work stood as “truth” for a long time. For years, archaeologists and historians have worked diligently to understand what these images could teach about the Timucua.

No one knew that de Bry had inserted falsehoods and fantasy into his engravings. The research based on this faulty information produced conclusions that were also full of errors. These flawed conclusions were written into social studies books, museum displays, and informational signs at parks, spreading de Bry’s falsehoods even further.

Now that we know these engravings are fabrications, where do we go from here? Very few images of Contact Period Native Americans exist, so de Bry’s engravings are used constantly. They can be found at museums and parks from south Florida all the way up to Virginia. It will take a long time for news about these not-so-true images to spread, and even longer before park signs and school textbooks are updated.

In the mean time, should we stop using these images as teaching tools? Not at all. These engravings provide a unique opportunity for modern Floridians to build a connection with the Timucua. We’ve always known the Timucua didn’t have the European features engraved by de Bry, but his engravings still helped us feel a connection with our ancient neighbors.

De Bry’s engravings are fabrications, just one man’s interpretation of what life might have been like for the Timucua. We can still learn from the engravings. But we must always seek an additional source to back up our conclusions. What kinds of sources?

- 1) Other historical documents
- 2) Archaeological excavations
- 3) Botanical studies of plants native to Florida
- 4) Bioarchaeology clues about what the Timucua were eating (analysis of skeletal remains)
- 5) Comparative anthropological studies (making comparisons with modern native cultures)

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WHO WAS JACQUES LE MOYNE?

Jacques Le Moyne was a French artist and mapmaker. In 1564, he joined the French expedition to found a colony in the New World. His job on the mission was cartographer – map maker. In 1565, the Spanish attacked Ft. Caroline and killed most of the French. Le Moyne was one of about twenty survivors that escaped and sailed back to Europe.

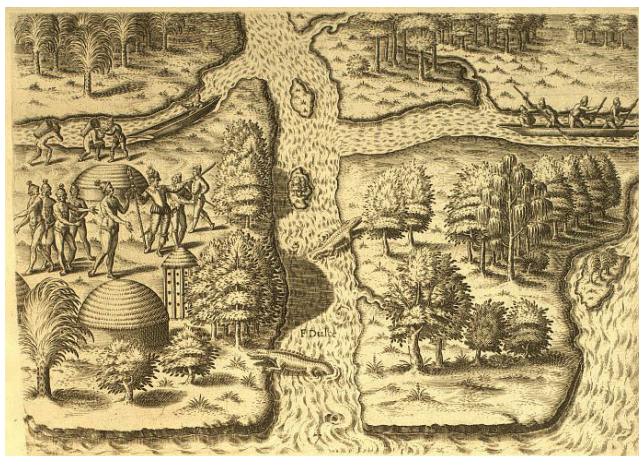
After his death in 1588, de Bry approached Le Moyne's widow to try and purchase any illustrations he had made during his stay in Florida. De Bry claimed to have bought these illustrations and the descriptions that went along with them. He then used these materials to create a book about the French experiences in the New World, titled *A Brief Narration of Those Things Which Befell the French in the Province of Florida in America*.

Unfortunately, none of Le Moyne's Florida drawings can be found today. This is unusual because many other memoirs and illustrations from that time period have been recovered. In addition, we have about 50 botanical illustrations that Le Moyne produced after his return to Europe. So, what happened to the Florida illustrations?



Above: Jacques Le Moyne's Apple, photo from Wikipedia

Historians are finding good evidence that de Bry never actually owned Le Moyne's artwork. What kind of evidence? Le Moyne's botanical works show exceptional attention to detail. The apple above includes realistic observations, like the faint outlines of the apple's core and leaves damaged by insects.



De Bry's engraving of rivers and vegetation

To the left, de Bry's engraving of Florida rivers includes a variety of plant life. None of the trees are readily identifiable as Florida species. In fact, the palm trees in the upper and lower far left don't look anything like sabal palms. The weeping willow to the middle right is native to China, not North America. It seems unlikely that Le Moyne – with his exquisite attention to botanical detail – would make mistakes like these. Any Florida illustrations made by Le Moyne were likely destroyed when the Spanish attacked Fort Caroline. Until someone finds

the Le Moyne originals, historians and archaeologists have agreed that de Bry composed the Florida illustrations himself and attributed them to Le Moyne. Why? He probably felt he could sell more books if the images seemed to come from an eyewitness account.

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THE MAN WHO CAUSED THE MISCHIEF: THEODORE DE BRY

Theodore de Bry was born into a family of Belgian engravers. He published several volumes of engravings and histories that introduced Europeans to the exploration of the Americas. He never travelled to America. Instead, he relied on personal memoirs and paintings created by people who had made the journey.

He engraved John White's watercolors of the Algonquin Indians alongside the text written by English explorer, John Harriot. The book, titled *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, came out in 1590. It sold extremely well. In the introduction to this book, de Bry tells readers that he had intended to publish a book on Florida natives first, because the French were in Florida well before the English were in North Carolina (called Virginia back then). Only a year later, in 1591, de Bry published his next volume about the New World, finally able to focus on the French experience in Florida. The book, titled *A Brief Narration of Those Things Which Befell the French in the Province of Florida in America*, was also quite a money maker.

In 1593, de Bry went on to publish a third book in this series, which included the descriptions and engravings of many Europeans who had visited the New World. It was titled *Grand Voyages to America*. It included, among others, the stories and engravings associated with Hans Staden's capture by the Tupinamba Indians of Brazil.

De Bry produced a huge number of engravings throughout his lifetime. After his death, his sons continued his legacy, completing several projects that he'd left unfinished.

Today, historians and archaeologists believe that de Bry fabricated "Le Moyne's" Florida engravings. He "borrowed" images from John White and Hans Staden, and lifted complete sections of text from the memoirs of French explorers. Why did he do this? There are two schools of thought. Perhaps they are both true.

The first points out that these "borrowed" images and stories made his books more sensational and easier to sell. More sales meant more profit. The second focuses on his strong belief in the Protestant faith. De Bry was raised a Protestant. When he was young, his family had to leave their home in the Netherlands to avoid persecution by Spanish Catholics. As a result, de Bry detested the Spanish, who had already made great strides in colonizing the New World. He became passionate about promoting Protestant colonies to compete with the Spanish ones.

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When he engraved scenes showing the brutality of the Brazilian natives, he was showing their need for Christian teachings. When he engraved European features on these same native peoples, he made them seem more approachable. They were just people who needed missionaries to teach them a better way. Those elements of De Bry's work may have been designed to encourage Protestant colonists to go to the New World - and overcome the Spanish Catholic presence that was already growing strong.

It may have been a combination of greed and religious passion that moved de Bry to fabricate the Timucua engravings. Were his books meant to be sensational and entertaining? If so, readers during de Bry's time probably knew this and accepted that many of the images were works of fiction (it was the modern readers who mislabeled his book as a factual documentary).

Was there a religious agenda behind his manufacture of the Timucua engravings? Historians still aren't sure, but they continue to search through old documents hidden in ancient libraries. Maybe someday, one of them will find a letter de Bry wrote or some other bit of evidence to explain his motives. At present, all of the evidence suggests the Timucua engravings are complete fabrications, whatever his motives. Considering the way he "borrowed" from other artists and writers, the following quote from de Bry seems a bit ironic.

"In conclusion, I ask most earnestly that if anyone else should be found attempting to pirate this book of mine (for nowadays, there are many dishonest people who try to get the benefit of another's work), that no credit should be given to the counterfeit copy, for I have put many secret marks in my drawings which will certainly cause confusion if they are omitted."

Technology Note: De Bry mentions secret marks in his engravings. Are these some of the first watermarks? A watermark is a pattern or design added to a paper to ensure authenticity and prevent counterfeiting. It may be easily visible or only visible when held against the light.

WHO WAS JOHN WHITE?

John White was an English artist who joined the first English colony to the New World. In 1585, his ship landed in North Carolina, and White created several watercolor images of the Algonquin native peoples who lived in the area.

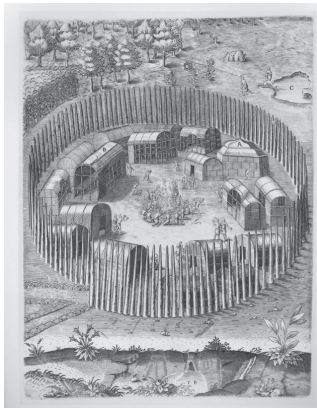
In 1590, his watercolors were engraved by Theodore de Bry and included in a book about the experiences of the English in the New World. Because most of White's original watercolors are still in existence today, we can tell by first hand observation, the changes that de Bry made when he engraved

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them. The Virtual Jamestown website, at http://www.virtualjamestown.org/images/white_debry.html/jamestown.html displays many of White's watercolors alongside de Bry's engravings, along with commentary that compares the two. It's an excellent historical resource.

DO YOU SEE ANY SIMILARITIES?



A de Bry engraving of an Algonquin village, attributed to John White, courtesy of the British Museum

VS.

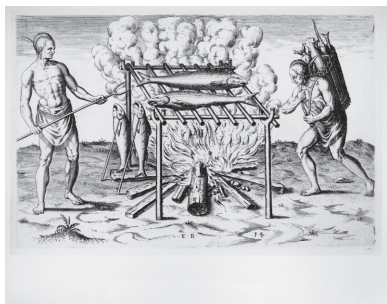


A de Bry engraving of a Timucua village, attributed to Jacques Le Moyne

Note: The Timucua did not have palisades around their villages.

When preserving animal meat, they didn't smoke the animals whole, but cut them into strips.

De Bry also engraved images for Hans Staden's memoirs. Look ahead to check out the cannibals' grill. Compare it to the grills to the left. Hmm, de Bry seems to have made a habit of "borrowing" images.



A de Bry engraving of the Algonquins cooking fish, attributed to John White, courtesy of the British Museum

VS.



A de Bry engraving of the Timucua preserving their meat, attributed to Jacques Le Moyne.

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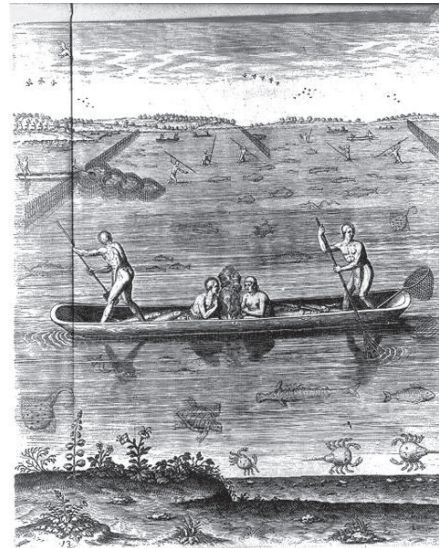
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COMPARING JOHN WHITE ORIGINALS WITH DE BRY ENGRAVINGS



Johns White's Original Watercolor of Fishing by North Carolina Indians, courtesy of the British Museum

vs.



De Bry's Engraving of White's Watercolor of Fishing by North Carolina Indians, courtesy of the British Museum



De Bry's Engraving of Le Moyne's Artwork of St. Andrews Sound, Georgia, showing weirs.



Modern Fishing Weir in Nantucket Sound, Photo courtesy of shareendavisphotography.com

Fishing Weirs – Historic and Modern. Fishing weirs are permanent fence-like fish traps used by native peoples around the world. The upper left image, by John White, shows a long fence with a simple box enclosure (North Carolina). The upper right, engraved by de Bry, is supposed to be an exact copy of the first, but he changed the structure of the weir completely. The lower left, also by de Bry, depicts several Georgia weirs that look mysteriously similar to the altered North Carolina weirs. The lower right shows a modern weir in Massachusetts. The modern weir has a heart-shaped structure similar to de Bry's fanciful weir engravings, above and to the left. Had he seen pictures of actual heart-shaped weirs in the 1500s? Or did he create them out of his imagination?

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WHO WAS HANS STADEN?

Hans Staden was a German soldier. He joined an expedition bound for South America, and became shipwrecked off the coast of Brazil in 1549. He was captured by the Tupinamba Indians and spent six years as a captive before his return to Europe in 1555. In 1557, he published an account of his captivity titled *True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America*.

In 1593, Theodore de Bry engraved illustrations to match Staden's story and included them in his book, *Grand Voyages to America*. The image to the lower is an example of de Bry's engraving work for this book.

Staden's original book had been illustrated using the woodcut technique. Wood was carved so that all of the white space in the image was carved away, leaving only thin lines that would transfer ink to the page. Woodcuts became popular in bookmaking around 1460, but eventually lost popularity to a different illustration process: engraving. In this process, a sharp tool scratched the image onto a sheet of copper. Its popularity was based on its ability to produce finer detail than woodcuts.

The images below both depict the same act of cannibalism witnessed by Staden during his captivity with Brazil's Tupinamba Indians. The image on the left is a woodcut from Staden's 1557 book. The image on the right is an engraving from de Bry's 1593 book.



Woodcut of cannibalism witnessed during Staden's captivity.

Courtesy of jrbooksonline.com/cannibals_Image3_sm.jpg

Note how much more detail the engraving allows compared with the woodcut.

This improvement in European printing technology provided a much more realistic feel to accounts from the New World.



De Bry's engraving of cannibalism witnessed during Staden's Captivity.

Photo by Wikipedia

Today, the archaeologists at the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) use website technologies to educate modern Floridians about the past. In the same way, these early printing technologies helped 16th-century Europeans learn more about the New World.

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WAR CLUBS FROM BRAZIL

These images are each cropped from larger engravings. The one on the left by Hans Staden depicts the Tupinamba people in Brazil (published in 1557). The one on the right is from de Bry's *Timucua* engravings. Both the war clubs and the headdresses are very similar. Historians now believe that de Bry plagiarized both the war club and the native headdresses, lifting them directly from Staden's work and inserting them into his images of the Timucua. Since Le Moyne didn't even arrive in Florida until 1564, there's no question about which image was made first.



*De Bry Engraving of Hans Staden's captivity in Brazil.
Courtesy of the Department of English,
University of California, Santa Barbara*

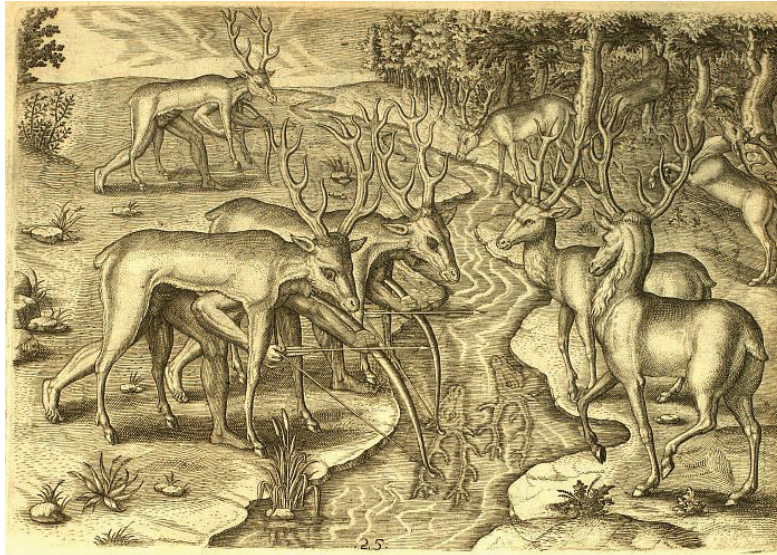


*De Bry Engraving of Timucua Indians
at War, attributed to Le Moyne*

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ANALYZING THE DEER HUNT



"The Indians hunt deer in a way we have never seen before. They hide themselves in the skin of a very large deer which they have killed some time before. They place the animal's head upon their own head, looking through the eye holes as through a mask. In this disguise they approach the deer without frightening them. They choose the time when the animals come to drink at the river, shooting them easily with bow and arrow." Text and image attributed to Jacques Le Moyne.

Native Americans across eastern North America used deer hide disguises to approach deer undetected (from downwind, of course).

De Bry's engraving suggests that the Timucua used this method as well. Because deer hides don't last in the archaeological record, we must depend on comparisons with other native cultures to corroborate this conclusion.

How can we be sure de Bry didn't copy this from a story he heard about a different native group?



This is a modern rendition of the de Bry engraving by artist Brett Pigon.

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ACTIVITY - WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?:

BACKGROUND: Historic engravings often include inaccuracies (elements that are not quite true). When studying these engravings, historians must utilize critical thinking skills to decide which parts of the engravings are true and which are not.

Questions to Ask about this Engraving	Critical Response
Did the original artist actually witness a native deer hunt?	Eye-witness accounts provide the most accurate information.
Or did the native people just describe the deer hunt to him?	Errors might occur because of language translation difficulties.
If they described the hunt, did they tell him the truth?	Humans throughout history have exaggerated their hunting and fishing stories.
Did the artist draw the deer hunt picture right then?	Drawing while the story is fresh in mind allows for the highest accuracy.
Or did he draw it later from notes, a sketch, or from memory?	The more time between the original experience and recording it, the more chance that details are forgotten or changed by memory.
Did the artist work with the engraver who made the image into a printable format?	Collaboration with the original artist would increase the accuracy of the final engraving.
Did the engraver copy the original drawing faithfully?	This would be far more accurate than an engraver who changed parts to suit his own artistic style.
Did the engraver actually copy the original images? Or was the engraving composed from unrelated texts?	The information in the engraving may still be based on historically accurate data, even if that data was a written story about the New World instead of a drawing.
Was the deer hunt engraving describing a Timucua technique? Or did the engraver borrow the deer hunt disguise from another native group?	Once it became clear that de Bry was borrowing images from other cultures, historians began to question whether this image even depicts a Timucua hunting style.
Did the engraver have an agenda other than the production of quality engravings?	If the engraver is trying to make more money, he might sensationalize his engravings to increase his sales.

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ACTIVITY - WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE? continued:

INSTRUCTIONS: Review the clues below. Use them to describe inaccuracies in the de Bry engraving.

- 1) Look closely at the deer in the engraving and compare to the deer photos below.

Inaccuracies in the appearance of the deer include...



Florida White-tailed Deer.
Photo by Wikipedia



European Red Deer.
Photo by Wikipedia

- 2) Many Florida rivers and lakes are dark brown due to tannic acid released from acorns and dead leaves. This phenomenon is common in the southeastern US and around the Amazon basin in South America. It is uncommon in Europe. *What inaccuracies do you see in the appearance of the water:* _____

- 3) Compare the habitat portrayed in the de Bry engraving with its modern counterpart. With only de Bry's engraving to use as a reference, what misconceptions might a 16th-century European have about the environment in Florida? _____
