

ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER

Colonialism and Identity in
New Sweden and Beyond



NEW WORLDS

MEETINGS AND EXPECTATIONS

When the Swedes landed on the bank of the Delaware River in America in 1638 and declared the colony of New Sweden, their understanding and their descriptions of the New World and its inhabitants were colored by a prevailing set of ideas that had migrated with the settlers across the Atlantic. Portraying non-Europeans as different, strange and lesser human beings has a long tradition stretching back to classical antiquity. Those encounters with unknown places and people, whether imaginary or real, would then feed the powerful constructs of *sameness* and *otherness* that characterized the encounters as well as conflicts of later periods. Moreover, these stereotypes and misconceptions lingered on and play a role in today's debates on migration and other global issues. This exhibition, 375 years after the founding of New Sweden, takes a look at the construction of the concept of the Other and its life from classical antiquity to our days, and places the worldviews of the colonizers in a wider context.



In the 17th century, the royal cabinet of curiosities in Copenhagen included an Inuit family, captured in Greenland to serve as entertainment for Danish courtiers. From Holger Jacobaeus, *Museum regium*, 1696.

THE OTHER

In classical antiquity, foreign peoples were generally characterized as Others based on their contrasting physical appearances, strange languages, perplexing customs, as well as the unfamiliar landscapes they inhabited. The further one got from the center of civilization, and closer to the limits of the known world, the more outlandish became the bodies and manners of human beings. These ethnocentric geographies often combined a sense of fascination with the contempt for the alien and unfamiliar, where landscapes were portrayed as both beautiful and bizarre, and its inhabitants as both noble and immoral. These encounters, whether real or imagined, thus offered two opposite possibilities: a confirmation of the civility and superiority of the observers as well as a critique of their own deficiencies. The medieval writers, who drew their knowledge and inspiration from the classical sources, continued this tradition of identification partly out of habit and repeated it in many literary and artistic genres.

Images of the Other were so frequently repeated that they became widely accepted truths. The early modern explorers who ventured to the farthest reaches of the world expected to see, and allegedly sighted, creatures described by the classical and medieval writers. Routine interactions with native inhabitants of Africa, Asia and America, which were brought about by trade and colonial settlements, saw a revival of the classical construct of *otherness*, although now carrying the overtones of Christian morals. The indigenous populations were deemed to be primitive, heathen, child-like and unable to govern themselves – an image that was used to justify slavery and colonial encroachment.



Monstrous races, in Hartmann Schedels *Liber chronicarum*, 1493.

NEW SWEDEN

WHO WERE THE OTHERS IN NEW SWEDEN?

The Swedish colonists in 17th century America wedged themselves into a colonial space that was both culturally complex and politically contested. Even though some contemporary sources describe the land as empty and virgin, it was in fact settled by two Native American groups, the Lenape and the Susquehannocks, whose interactions with each other, as well as with Europeans in their vicinity, defined the area. Because of its limited size, New Sweden only managed to gain a marginal position on this cultural and political scene. However, it became an addition to the new map of a colonized America, and formed a borderland where identities and material practices were in constant flux. This is reflected in the descriptions of Otherness in the written sources. When the Swedish described the Lenape and the Susquehannocks, their gaze passed through a lens colored by European expectations of what a native population should look like and how it should behave. However, similar to the descriptions of the Others in classical antiquity and the medieval period, the accounts are filled with ambivalence. The natives were both admired because of their physical agility and strength, and condemned because of

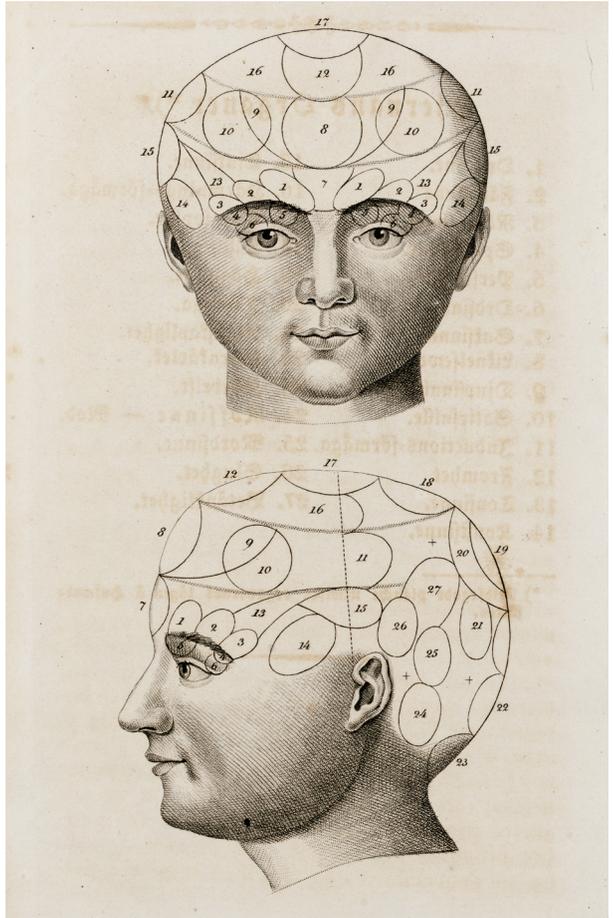


American Indians, as portrayed in Thomas Campanius Holm, *Kort beskrifning om provincien Nya Sverige uti America*, 1702.



Frontispiece from Thomas Campanius Holm, *Kort beskrifning om provincien Nya Sverige uti America, som nu förtiden af the engelske kallas Pensylvania*, 1702.

their indecent nakedness. They were described as »terribly barbarous heathens« and »revengeful,« and at the same time admired as »wise in trade and traffic; clever to do all kinds of things of lead, copper and tin.« Accounts like these, that express the field of tension between the unknown and the relatable, are paralleled in material practices. European objects were adopted and transformed by the native communities, while their customs were taken up by the colonizers and exotic native objects shipped back to Sweden and exhibited in the Cabinets of Curiosity. This borderland quality of the settlement also meant that the colonizers themselves were relatively free to move between cultures, both native and European, and often acquired important roles as middle-men in political and economic negotiations. This position would in turn color the Dutch and English accounts of the Swedish settlers as the Others, characterizing them by their peculiar customs and their suspicious familiarity with the native population.



The »science« of phrenology became popular among scientists and laymen alike in the 19th century. From Anders Johan Wetterbergh, *Konsten att af Menniskians utseende känna hennes Natur-anlag, Karakter och Fallenheter*, 1836.

stead, people awoke to a divided world where *otherness* was defined by a political front between East and West. At the same time, the European colonies gained their independence which in turn created a *third world* that was economically and culturally defined as the Other from a Western political point of view. When the Berlin wall was torn down in 1989, so too was the definition of a Western identity as absolute and undisputable. In today's globalized world, identities have become fluid, composite, and all the more based on an idea of personal choices. However, these choices are always constrained by the individuals' actual circumstances and possibilities. This has in turn divided the world into new categories of *otherness*, where some enjoy the freedom to move and choose freely in a world of seemingly limitless opportunity, while others have neither the freedom nor the opportunity to do so.

When the Swedes landed on the bank of the Delaware River in America in 1638 and declared the colony of New Sweden, their understanding of the New World and its inhabitants were colored by a set of ideas that had migrated with the settlers across the Atlantic. Portraying non-Europeans as different, strange and lesser human beings has a long tradition stretching back to classical antiquity. Those encounters with unknown places and people, whether imaginary or real, would feed the powerful constructs of sameness and otherness that characterized the encounters and conflicts of later periods. Moreover, the stereotypes and misconceptions lingered on and play a role in today's debates on migration and other global issues. This exhibition, 375 years after the founding of New Sweden, takes a look at the concept of the Other and its life from classical antiquity to our days, and places the worldviews of the colonizers in a wider context.

EXHIBITION AT LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
NOVEMBER 8, 2013 - MAY 2, 2014

UNIVERSITETSBIBLIOTEKETS UTSTÄLLNINGSKATALOG 67

PRODUKTION, TEXT, LAYOUT & TRYCK: Fredrik Ekengren,
Magdalena Naum och Ulla Isabel Zagal-Mach Wolfe, i samarbete med
Universitetsbiblioteket i Lund.

KONTAKT: utstallning@ub.lu.se

Universitetsbiblioteket,
Lunds Universitet
Box 3, 221 00 Lund
UB Media
ISSN 0281-3823
LULID/LIBR - 1547

