William Penn received a charter for what would become the colony of Pennsylvania (named in honor of his father) in 1681. Penn was a Quaker, and he looked forward to establishing a colony that would be free of the religious persecution that his people had encountered in England. Therefore, when he traveled to the colony in 1682, one of his first priorities was to establish friendly relations with the Delaware people of the area, whom he respected. The excerpt below includes Penn’s description of the physical characteristics and social customs of the Delaware.

XI. The Natives I shall consider in their Persons, Language, Manners, Religion and Government, with my sense of their Original. For their Persons, they are generally tall, straigh, well-built, and of singular proportion; they tread strong and clever, and mostly walk with a lofty chin: Of Complexion, Black, but by design, as the Gypsies in England: They grease themselves with Bears-fat clarified, and using no defence against Sun or Weather, their skins must needs be swarthy; Their Eye is little and black, not unlike a straight-look’t Jew: The thick Lip and flat Nose, so frequent with East-Indians and Blacks, are not common to them; for I have seen as comely European-like faces among them of both, as on your side of the Sea; and truly an Italian Complexion hath not much more of the White, and the Noses of several of them have as much of the Roman.

XIII. Of their Customs and Manners there is much to be said; I will begin with Children. So soon as they are born, they wash them in Water, and while very young, and in cold Weather to chuse, they Plunge them in the Rivers to harden and embolden them. Having wrapt them in a Clout [cloth], they lay them on a straight thin Board, a little more than the length and breadth of the Child, and swaddle it fast upon the Board to make it straight; wherefore all Indians have flat Heads; and carry them at their Backs. The Children will go very young, at nine Moneths commonly; they wear only a small Clout round their Waste, till they are big; if Boys, they go a Fishing till ripe for the Woods, which is about Fifteen; then they Hunt, and after having given some Proofs of their Manhood, by a good return of Skins, they may Marry, else it is a shame to think of a Wife. The Girls stay with their Mothers, and help to hoe the Ground, plant Corn and carry Burthens; and they do well to use them to that Young, they must do when they are Old; for the Wives are the true Servants of their Husbands: otherwise Men are very affectionate to them.

Document Analysis

What is the general tone of Penn’s descriptions? Did he seem to respect the Native Americans?
In his description of physical appearance, did he compare the Native Americans favorably with Europeans? To which peoples specifically did he compare them?
How did Penn describe the division of labor between Native American males and females?