AUGUST 1998

# Rhode Island History

Volume 56, Number 3

Published by
The Rhode Island Historical Society
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152
and printed by a grant from the State of
Rhode Island and Providence Plantations,
Lincoln Almond, Governor;
James R. Langevin, Secretary of State



CONTENTS




RHODE ISLAND HISTORY (ISSN 0035-4619)

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY (USPS no. 464-780) is published in February, May, August, and November by The Rhode Island Historical Society at 110 Benevolent Street. Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152. Periodicals postage is paid at Providence, Rhode Island. Society members receive each issue as a membership benefit. Institutional subscriptions to RHODE ISLAND HISTORY and the Society's quarterly newsletter are $22.50 annually. Individual copies of current and back issues are available from the Society for $5.00. Manuscripts and other correspondence should be sent to Marta V. Martínez, editor, at the Society. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Rhode Island Historical Society, 110 Benevolent Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152.


MASSACHUSETTS
INDIANS
RIVER
Connecticut R.
TOLLAN R. Co
WINDHAM Co
Windsor
Hartford
Wethersfield
Middletown
COUNTRY OF
MOHEGANS AND
CONNECTICUT
PEQUODS
Narragansetts
RHODE ISLAND
PLYMOUTH
41°
30'
Hudson R.
Fairfield
Ft Saybrook
Pequod R.
Capt. Mason's
Ft Mystic
Fort
Royal Fortress
Narragansett B.
Pequod R.
NAMES.
English. Indian.
Hartford ..... Sukeag
Windsor ..... Massacoe
Wethersfield ..... Pyquaug
Middletown ..... Mattabesick
New London ..... Nameaug
New Haven ..... Quinipiack
PLACES
Mentioned in the History
OF THE
PEQUOD WAR

# Worlds Apart: Puritan Perceptions of the Native American during the Pequot War

TIMOTHY L. WOOD

When William Bradford wrote in 1633 about Roger Williams's recent departure from Plymouth, the Pilgrim leader remarked, with almost palpable relief, that Williams was "a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts but very unsettled in judgement."[1] Indeed, Bradford's assessment accurately reflected the theological uncertainties of many of the founders of Puritan New England, including Williams and his counterpart John Winthrop. During the 1630s those religious uncertainties motivated them to depart from what they perceived as England's apostate and corrupt ecclesiastical structure. Nevertheless, Puritans such as Winthrop, and their contemporaries like Roger Williams (who was led to very different religious conclusions by a set of virtually identical premises), encountered new challenges to their social and religious worldview in America. Those difficulties surfaced especially in their dealings with the Native Americans, whose culture was totally alien to their own.

By the latter 1630s, as the pace of English expansion quickened and the friction between the native and Puritan cultures intensified, two disparate interpretations of that conflict of cultures emerged. While astute natives recognized their plight as fundamentally a question of survival, the Puritans saw in the colonization of New England an eschatological struggle for the salvation of humanity, with native conversion the ideal outcome of that confrontation of cultures. However, when the natives resisted the Puritans' missionary efforts and the attempts to impose new social and cultural values on their traditional lifestyles, tensions between the two cultures grew. By 1637 those tensions erupted into a conflict known as the Pequot War, in which the English settlers proceeded to conquer by force what could not be won by argument and persuasion. Indeed, that conflict served as a convenient vent for the pressures that mounted as the settlers and Indians struggled to find their places in a rapidly changing world.

Conflicts such as the Pequot War served a definite purpose within the Puritan mentality. Indian aggression, even when provoked by the colonists, met the Puritans' expectation of resistance to their holy experiment, for it seemed absurd to think that Satan would allow the Puritan effort to revitalize the whole of the Protestant world to go uncontested. The idea that the natives held a pivotal role in the future of the colonial endeavor extended logically from the Puritans' preconceived notions concerning their spiritual mission into a hostile and corrupt wilderness. The Indians' state of mind provided the Puritans with a barometer that read the immediate spiritual future of the Bible commonwealth. When natives converted to Christianity, then the colonists could continue to rely on the power of persuasion to accomplish their objectives. But when the Indians resisted assimilation to Puritan ways, clung to their old religion, and advanced their own interests in opposition to English ones, then such defiance might be answered with violence.

In a January 1623 letter to the governor of Plymouth, the Separatist pastor John Robinson expressed his dismay at the settlers' lukewarm attitude towards the Indians'

*Map by Samuel Maverick, 1828, to accompany Emma Willard's* History of the United States. *RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9041).*

*Timothy L. Wood is a Ph.D. candidate in early American religious history at Marquette University in Milwaukee.*

conversion and Plymouth's willingness to go to war with the natives before making a bona fide effort to win their souls:

> Concerning the killing of those poor Indians, of which we heard at first by report, and since by more certain relation. Oh, how happy a thing had it been, if you had converted some before you had killed any! Besides, where blood is once begun to be shed, it is seldom staunched of a long time after. You will say they deserved it. I grant it; but upon what provocations and invitements by those heathenish Christians? Besides, you being no magistrates over them were to consider not what they deserved but what you were by necessity constrained to inflict. Necessity of this, especially of killing so many (and many more, it seems, they would, if they could) I see not. . . . It is . . . a thing more glorious, in men's eyes, than pleasing in God's or convenient for Christians, to be a terror to poor barbarous people.[2]

Ideally, as Robinson emphasized, the Puritan settlers were to conduct themselves properly as ambassadors of Christ and initiate a process of Christianization and westernization that would sweep throughout native society. However, Christian faith and the English lifestyle made little headway into Indian culture. Sometimes cross-cultural misunderstandings frustrated the Englishmen's attempts at converting the natives. At other times the Indians directly rebelled against the settlers' efforts to extinguish their traditional religion and customs. During those times of failure, when through their words and actions the Indians called into question England's right to impose its values on a foreign people, the Puritan colonies stood ready to reassert their mission through force of arms. Thus the Puritans consistently demonstrated, through their often violent reaffirmation of their divine commission to occupy New England, the eschatological assumptions that had led them to America to begin with.

Historian Avihu Zakai described the settlement of New England as "a judgmental crisis and apocalyptic migration, marking the ultimate necessity of God's chosen people to depart from a sinful past and corrupt human traditions."[3] Whereas Virginia's settlers received the tacit support of the Church of England in their venture, the New England Puritans realized that they had embarked on their own and that England's religious establishment sincerely hoped that their project would fail. Consequently, the Church of England's opposition raised the stakes of the Puritan undertaking considerably. Virginia's failure would simply have been the collapse of a business enterprise, and a second try could have been launched from a friendly and sympathetic mother country. In New England, however, where "religion and profit jump together," as Edward Winslow put it, the failure of colonization would also have been a spiritual defeat of eschatological proportions.[4] If the Puritan settlers allowed their mission in America to fail, then God would have to accomplish his divine purposes in another way, and the Puritans would have undermined their own role in God's redemptive plan. The tensions inherent in that desperate struggle for the survival of American Puritanism set the stage for future conflict between the English Puritans who migrated to New England to bring about God's model community and the natives whose culture stood in the way of that experiment. Thus the events that led to the Pequot War can be understood in terms of the Puritans' intent and theological ideals in defending their Bible commonwealth against the real and imagined threats of the Indians.

A relative newcomer among the Indians of the Northeast, the Pequot tribe had quickly established a powerful presence in the Connecticut region. Originally the Pequots considered themselves members of the Mahican tribe that occupied the area around the upper Hudson River. At about the same time that the Pilgrims founded Plymouth, the Pequots migrated from what is now New York State into the Connecticut River valley, subduing other indigenous tribes there and forcing them into tributary relationships.

The entry of the Pequots into New England brought about substantial changes in the region by altering the balance of power among the tribes; for example, the comparatively weak Niantic tribe was forced into a division, with its western part subordinated to the Pequots and its eastern part subordinated to the Narragansetts. Even the tribal name of the Pequots testified to the aggressive nature of the Pequot nation; it was an Algonquin word meaning "destroyers of men," given the tribe by its conquered Indian neighbors.[5]

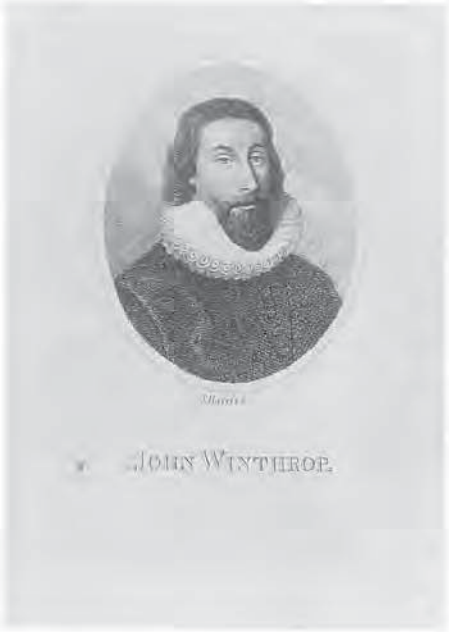
The arrival and subsequent population growth of Europeans in New England further upset the already fragile balance of power among the tribes of the Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut area. The promise of mutually beneficial trade and struggles for military supremacy created alliances and entanglements between the English and the various Indian nations, thus altering preexisting relationships. Many tribes saw in the Europeans the potential for advantageous defense alliances to shield them from the aggression of other tribes.

When Roger Williams arrived at the head of Narragansett Bay in 1636 after his banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, he found himself squarely within the territory of the Narragansett Indians. Here he forged ties to the Narragansett tribe on behalf of both the Massachusetts Bay and Rhode Island colonies. Although the Pequots were also seeking trade and friendship with the English, their efforts were impeded by the animosity that already existed between the Pequots and Narragansetts, animosity that tended to spill over into English-Indian relations. By attempting to trade with both the Narragansetts and the Pequots, the colonists exacerbated the hostility between the tribes and complicated and strained their own dealings with them, and thus they helped draw the battle lines for future conflict in the region.

A violent killing brought those tensions into stark relief in 1634, when a Pequot war band murdered Captain John Stone, a disreputable English seaman and merchant, together with his crew while the Englishmen were engaged in some questionable business along the Connecticut River. Because of Captain Stone's reputation, few Puritans mourned his death at the time. Stone's shady dealings and criminal exploits had become notorious in Massachusetts: his detractors spread rumors of his engaging in cannibalism during his sea voyages; his drunkenness was legendary; he had even hatched a plot to stab the governor of Plymouth.[6] While being detained in Boston in 1632 to await the resolution of piracy and theft charges against him, he was caught by a shocked intruder in the act of adultery with one Mrs. Barcroft. "Thus did God destroy him that proudly threatened to ruin us," remarked one relieved Puritan on hearing of Stone's death.[7]

The earthly cause of Stone's murder probably lay in an incident between the Pequots and the Dutch.[8] Seeking to maintain their trade monopoly in the Connecticut River valley, in 1633 the Pequots attacked and killed a band of rival Indians, most likely Narragansetts, who were en route to a Dutch trading post. Outraged at this interference with their commerce, the Dutch seized the Pequots' sachem the next time he appeared for trade and held him for ransom. The Pequots paid the sum demanded, only to receive their leader's dead body in return. In retribution, the aggrieved Indians murdered the crew of the next European ship they encountered—but unfortunately for the Pequots, they had avenged themselves not upon the Dutch but upon the Englishman John Stone and his crew.

After the murder, the New England colonies at first allowed their demands for justice to be tempered by both their desire to avoid an incident with the Pequots and Stone's unsavory reputation. Reinforcing this attitude was the Pequot claim that Stone had actually kidnapped two of their fellow tribesmen. Initially the Bay Colony accepted the




*Despite their differences, Roger Williams and Massachusetts governor John Winthrop held each other in high esteem. Engraving from* Book of Indians of North America, *by Samuel Drake (Boston, 1837). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9044).*

Pequots' offer of restitution through payments of wampum, together with a vague promise to turn over those involved in the murder at some future time. By 1635, however, Stone's death emerged as a major issue in Pequot-Puritan relations. The Puritans increasingly accepted claims by Indians aligned against the Pequots that the Pequots had murdered the captain in his bed during the course of a malicious robbery. Massachusetts authorities eventually demanded the immediate surrender of those men responsible for the murder.

The off-again, on-again diplomacy sent mixed signals to the Pequot leadership. Since Massachusetts proved unwilling to offer the tribe any real concessions—such as a military alliance—in exchange for the extradition, the Pequots delayed handing over the killers and making the full payment promised. In July 1636 the situation became further complicated when Indians from a small village allied to the Narragansetts murdered another English sailor, Captain John Oldham, on Block Island. In the light of Oldham's death, John Winthrop and the magistrates of the Bay Colony began preparations for war against the Narragansetts that same month, and they warned Roger Williams, whom they believed to be in potential danger, "to look to himself" in case of armed conflict.[9] However, by returning Oldham's children and personal effects within two weeks of the incident, the Narragansetts quickly convinced Williams—and he, in turn, convinced Winthrop and the Massachusetts authorities—of the Narragansetts' innocence. With the guilty Block Island Indians having lost the support of the Narragansett coalition, rival tribes claimed that the killers had taken refuge with the Pequots.

The Indians' hopes that they could wait out the worst of the Englishmen's wrath soon shattered. The mid-1630s ushered in a period of considerable social stress in the development of the Bay Colony. It was in 1636 that Roger Williams was banished because of the challenge he mounted to the fundamental philosophy of church-state cohesion on which Massachusetts-style Puritanism depended. The controversy that would result in the expulsion of Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomians had already appeared on the horizon by that year, and it would reach its zenith in the year following. During that time of internal crisis, when the very survival of the Puritans' wilderness errand seemed in jeopardy, the leaders of the Bible commonwealth felt compelled to respond to threats to their holy experiment with speed and force, whether they came from "heretics" or "heathens."[10]

In August 1636 Massachusetts governor Henry Vane commissioned John Endicott to assemble a force of ninety men to complete a two-part mission: first they were to seek out the Block Island tribe from which Oldham's killers originated and impose Puritan justice upon it; then they were to confront the Pequots and demand the surrender of the fugitives from both the Oldham and Stone murders, as well as collect the remainder of the reparations due. Endicott set about the task with enthusiasm. Upon encountering the Block Island tribe responsible for killing Oldham, the Massachusetts soldiers spent the next two days destroying every Indian, house, barn, and field they came upon. Disappointed because most of the natives escaped the sword, Endicott killed the tribe's pet dogs and departed from Block Island in search of the Pequots.

As Endicott's force approached Pequot territory, the natives initially reacted "cheerefully" to the colonists' arrival, but when the soldiers refused to answer inquiries about their reason for coming, the Indians grew fearful. Captain John Underhill later recalled that the natives raised a chorus of "doleful and woful cries" throughout the entire night after the Massachusetts men arrived at their village.[11] In a last-ditch effort to avoid conflict, the Indians utilized every excuse and pretext for delay available to them. Denying responsibility for the murders, they promised to extend their search for the guilty parties and asked Endicott to wait and speak to their leaders when they returned from a trip

to Long Island. Endicott remained totally unconvinced by what the villagers told him. When he observed some of them securing their possessions and retreating from the village, he assumed they were planning an ambush, and he "chose to beat up the drum and bid them battle."[12]

Once again Endicott and his men acted most efficiently, ravaging the Pequot village in much the same way that they had destroyed the Indian village on Block Island. With this incident, striking out against an entire Indian population, the colonial governments of New England started down a slippery slope toward outright warfare, for such severe action openly invited equally severe retaliation. Immediately after Endicott's departure the Pequots began a series of raids on the colonists' isolated settlements in the Connecticut River valley. Throughout late 1636 and early 1637 the Pequots especially targeted the frontier outpost of Fort Saybrook. While keeping the fort manned and operating, its commander, Lieutenant Lion Gardiner, barely escaped being killed, roasted alive, or otherwise tortured on a number of occasions, but others at the garrison and in the surrounding communities were not so fortunate.

By 1637 the authorities in Boston considered the conflict a war, rather than merely a police action undertaken against a group of criminal natives and their accomplices. While the Puritans applied all of their diplomatic resources to the task of gaining allies among the Pequots' Indian neighbors, the Pequots similarly sent representatives to the surrounding tribes, especially the powerful Narragansett coalition, in an effort to enlist their support against the colonists. Arguing that the English aggression foreshadowed the Puritans' future intentions towards all of the Indians, the Pequots urged the Narragansetts to engage in a guerrilla campaign against the English "by firing their Houses, and killing their Cattel, and lying in wait for them as they went about their ordinary Occasions."[13] It was only by the intense counterdiplomacy of Roger Williams, who spent much of the late 1630s as Winthrop's advocate on the front lines of Indian-settler conflict, that the Narragansetts were swayed to the Puritan cause. Years later, in a 1670 letter to John Mason, Williams recalled those tense days of negotiations:

> Upon letters received from the Governor and Council at Boston, requesting me to use my utmost and speediest endeavors to break and hinder the league labored for by the Pequods . . . against the English, . . . the Lord helped me immediately to put my life into my hand, and, scarce acquainting my wife, to ship myself, all alone, in a poor canoe, and to cut through a stormy wind, with great seas, every minute in hazard of life, to the Sachem's house.
>
> Three days and nights my business forced me to lodge and mix with the bloody Pequod ambassadors, whose hands and arms, methought, wreaked with the blood of my countrymen, murdered and massacred by them on Connecticut river, and from whom I could not but nightly look for their bloody knives at my own throat also.
>
> [Then] God wondrously preserved me, and helped me to break to pieces the Pequods' negotiation and design, and to make, and promote and finish, by many travels and charges, the English league with the Narragansetts and Mohegans against the Pequods.[14]

The next logical step for the English was to strike a quick, powerful blow against the enemy, one that would exploit their own superior armament while offsetting the Pequots' numerical advantage. After a series of skirmishes pitting Connecticut forces and their Indian allies against Pequots, the opportunity finally arrived in May 1637. Under the command of Captain John Mason, a band of Massachusetts and Connecticut soldiers, together with Narragansett and Eastern Niantic allies, launched a surprise attack on the Mystic River fortress of the Pequots. Having arrived undetected, Mason breached the walls of the fort, but finding himself outnumbered, he set fire to the village and ordered his troops back outside the walls. He then arranged his men in two concentric circles around the fort and waited. As the Pequots escaped from the flaming fortress, Mason's forces killed them one by one. Between four hundred and seven hun-

*Acting at the behest of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Roger Williams negotiated with "the bloody Pequod ambassadors" during the war. Engraving, n.d. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 817).*

dred Indian men, women, and children were killed in the Fort Mystic raid within the space of thirty minutes.[15] Only two Englishmen lost their lives.

The massacre at Fort Mystic crushed the Pequot resistance. The war officially came to an end on 21 September 1638 with the signing of the Treaty of Hartford. That document directed that the remainder of the Pequot tribe be divided up and assimilated among the colonists' Indian allies, who were to pay the colonists annual tribute for each of the Pequots they received. By order of the Massachusetts government, the Pequot name and tribal organization were to be abolished. Additionally, the former Pequot territories were to be turned over to the Puritans as the spoils of war, with the stipulation that neighboring tribes "not meddle with them but by our leave."[16] For opposing the will of the English establishment, the Pequots were to suffer the end of their existence as a distinct people.

While the course of the Pequot War seems fairly clear, several questions remain concerning the cross-cultural misunderstandings and fears that provoked such an outbreak of violence on the New England frontier. Warfare so intense and ruthless seems fundamentally opposed to the ideals of Christianity that the New Englanders wished to embody, as well as to the traditional Western concept of the just war. If the English treatment of hostile natives during the Pequot War is to be understood, it is necessary to examine the conflict's significance from the Puritan point of view. To have deliberately engaged in a war of aggression and blood lust would have been a clear violation of Puritan principles. However, if through demonization of the Pequots the conflict could be seen as an act of salvation or deliverance from a threat to God's holy order in New England, then the war could be regarded by its Puritan participants as consistent with their largely apocalyptic worldview.

The cultural and religious differences encountered by both the Indians and the settlers in New England created an environment ripe for misunderstandings. Although Native American culture sometimes inspired admiration in European observers who contemplated its "naturalness so pure and simple," more often—and especially for the Puritans—Indian society epitomized human corruption.[17] One religious misconception that contributed to this view, thus helping to precipitate much of the Puritan-Indian conflict in New England in the decades before Winthrop's death in 1649, arose from the natives' belief that every person and social group possessed, as historian Richard Slotkin put it, a "special and unique divinity."[18] Each tribe enjoyed considerable latitude in developing its own religious beliefs and practices, since each individual and group interacted differently with the spirit world.

As a result of this belief, Native Americans extended a reciprocity to the religious practices of other groups. As Indians journeyed throughout New England, the travelers would often temporarily accept the religion and patron spirits of a host village along with that village's hospitality. By so doing, the guests both showed respect for their hosts and submitted themselves to the protection of the spirits who operated within that locale. But that courtesy misled the English Christians, as Slotkin explained:

> For the English . . . the act of worship was worth only as much as the intrinsic value of the deity worshipped; and since there was but one true god, their own, they regarded the paying of respect to Indian gods as apostasy, and Indian respect to Jehovah as a sign of imminent conversion. Conversion itself, they made clear, would mean for the Indian an utter casting off of the old god and the life pattern of the tribe. To be truly saved, the Indian would have to purge himself of his Indianness; he must become totally English in style of life as well as Christian in spirit.[19]

*The Puritans saw native conversion as the ideal outcome of their cultural confrontation with the Indians. Engraving from Samuel Drake's* Book of Indians of North America. *RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9035).*

While the natives considered the God of the English as one member of an extensive metaphysical community, the Puritans could not similarly integrate Indian spirituality into their own religious worldview. These religious incompatibilities opened the way for confusion in regard to the real intent of natives who appeared to be embracing Christianity.

Compounding that problem of conversion was the close parallel the English saw between native spirituality and its apparent counterparts in Christianity—Satanism and witchcraft. The Puritans considered any worship directed to any deity other than the Judeo-Christian Jehovah to be, by definition, Devil worship. Consequently, those natives who engaged in non-Christian worship could readily be seen by the Puritans as instruments of Satan, dispatched to destroy God's people. For instance, Puritans almost unfailingly identified veneration of the deity Hobbamock with Devil worship. The tribes of New England often associated Hobbamock with magical powers of healing, and Indian shamans, or powwows, devoted much of their time to contacting him through dreams and visions. After establishing spiritual contact, shamans invoked the strength of Hobbamock in their efforts to combat sickness and disease. But Puritans interpreted the mystical powers of Hobbamock far differently: the Plymouth governor and magistrate Edward Winslow, for example, bluntly stated that "as far as we conceive . . . [the god Hobbamock] is the devil."[20]

Winslow saw the Indians as a group that had fallen directly under the dominion and deception of Satan. Through the rituals devoted to Hobbamock—rituals that were, to the Puritans, black magic and witchcraft—the Devil interacted with and guided the affairs of the natives; and it was through these rituals, remarked Winslow, that Satan "maketh covenant with them."[21] Indeed, nothing stirred the Puritan mind like the concept of the covenant. Regarding witchcraft, the English variant of Satanism, Perry Miller noted that "the special heinousness of this crime was the fact that it, like regeneration, took the form of a covenant."[22] Through the use of that philosophical and legal device, the Puritans identified the Indians as the Devil's chosen people, just as surely as the Puritan settlers were the chosen people of God. Under English law, covenants bound various parties to perform certain obligations in return for specific consideration. In the supernatural realm, people entered into covenants with the forces of good and evil, covenants just as strictly enforced as if they had been drawn in one of His Majesty's courts. Through their adherence to God's covenant, the Puritans assumed the rights and responsibilities of God's chosen society in the New World. Conversely, groups that worshiped, obeyed, and devoted themselves to gods other than the Christian God, the only source of good, clearly entered into league with Satan's kingdom and represented evil.

In his book *The Wonders of the Invisible World,* the third-generation Puritan minister Cotton Mather paraphrased the Spanish Jesuit Joseph Acosta's report on demonic happenings among the Mexican Indians:

> . . . their Idol Vitzlipultzli governed that mighty nation. He commanded them to leave their Country, promising to make them Lords over all the Provinces possessed by Six other Nations of Indians, and give them a Land abounding with all precious things. They went forth, carrying their Idol with them, in a Coffer of Reeds, supported by Four of their Principal Priests; with whom he still Discoursed, in secret, Revealing to them the Successes, and Accidents of their way. He advised them, when to March, and where to Stay, and without his Commandment they moved not. The first thing they did, wherever they came, was to Erect a Tabernacle, for their False God; which they set always in the midst of their camp, and there placed the Ark upon an Altar. When they, Tired with pains, talked of proceeding no further in their Journey, than a certain pleasant Stage, whereto they were arrived, this Devil in one night horribly kill'd them that had started this Talk, by pulling out their Hearts. And so they passed on, till they came to Mexico.[23]

Roger Williams similarly interpreted the Pequots' battle plans during the war as a recourse to witchcraft. In a 1636 letter to Winthrop, Williams warned that "the Pequots

hear of your preparations, . . . and comfort themselves in this, that a witch amongst them will sink the pinnaces, . . . but I hope their dreams (through the mercy of the Lord) shall vanish, and the devil and his lying sorcerers shall be confounded."[24] Rather than accepting native culture itself as a frame of reference, Williams and the Puritans commonly insisted on interpreting Indian customs within the context of their own Christian theology.

Convinced from the beginning that it faced a satanically motivated campaign for its destruction, New England stood prepared to defend itself by military force. On 5 July 1632 John Winthrop recorded the following in his journal:

> At Watertown there was . . . a great combat between a mouse and a snake; and, after a long fight, the mouse prevailed and killed the snake. The pastor of Boston, Mr. Wilson, a very sincere, holy man, hearing of it, gave this interpretation: That the snake was the devil; the mouse was a poor contemptible people, which God had brought hither, which should overcome Satan here, and dispossess him of his kingdom.[25]

For Winthrop, the New England experiment meant more than the establishment of an island of correct theology and godly government in the midst of a sea of sin. Massachusetts also represented the church triumphant, the earthly body of Christ rolling back the forces of evil in the name of God's kingdom. To the Puritans, all players in that foreordained drama accepted their parts willingly. The Puritans freely embraced the role of the struggling mouse, and they assumed that when the natives rejected Christianity in favor of their traditional spirituality, they just as consciously undertook the role of the serpent.

Indeed, the success of the early English colonies created a self-fulfilling prophecy in respect to Puritan predestinarianism. During the decade that preceded the European settlement of New England, a mysterious plague had ravaged the Indian community, vastly reducing the native population of the area that would soon be colonized. That event, along with other Indian misfortunes, was taken as a clear sign by the colonists, an unmistakable indication that God had willed "wasting the naturall Inhabitants with deaths stroke" to allow the settlement of New England by his chosen people.[26]

It was clear to most Puritans why God wanted to eliminate the Indians from New England. Even from a purely social perspective, the Indian represented a perilous variable in the region's settlement. The Puritan worldview had its genesis in a culture of clear and well-defined social relationships.[27] Existing totally apart from conventional European social definitions, the Native American easily assumed the position of the "other" within the Puritan mind, a position unrelated to the norms and ethics of the mother country.[28] "We conceive that you look at the Pequots and all other Indians as a common enemy, who . . . if he prevail, will surely pursue his advantage, to the rooting out of the whole nation," Winthrop casually wrote to Plymouth governor William Bradford on 20 May 1637, at the height of the Pequot War.[29] Although several tribes allied themselves with the English during the war, thus embracing the "right" cause, that did not alter the general rule: all natives were to be considered potential enemies of God and the Bible commonwealth until they explicitly declared themselves otherwise.

The Puritans also recognized and respected other codes of conduct besides Christianity in their dealings with the Indians. An examination of the Puritans' application of the traditional Western doctrine of just war, especially as it pertained to the issues of *jus ad bello* (just reasons for going to war) and *jus in bello* (just conduct in war), reveals much about how the Puritans viewed the Indians, and about the acceptable parameters of Puritan religious warfare.

For the Puritans, the Pequot tribe's past record of aggression served as the primary *ad bello* justification for entering the conflict. For centuries most Western military theorists condoned as morally acceptable a war fought in defense of a nation's territory or people. Winthrop himself noted in his journal that upon "first injury" the wronged party had the prerogative under the theory of just war to "right himself either by force or fraud." Later on, Winthrop expressed his concern that if, by going to war, "we should kill any of them [the Indians], or lose any of our own, and it should be found after to have been a false report, we might provoke God's displeasure, and blemish our wisdom and integrity before the heathen."[50] However, the intertribal nature of the Pequot War seems to testify to the fear that the Pequots inspired in neighboring tribes. During the course of the conflict, the Pequots never successfully enlisted the aid of any of the region's other major tribes; instead, the Narragansetts, the Eastern Niantics, and even the Pequots' cousin tribe the Mohegans chose to ally themselves with the colonists rather than with their fellow natives, suggesting that the surrounding tribes considered the Pequots as the more serious threat. Apart from the Stone and Oldham murders, the Puritan claims that the Pequots had engaged in exceptionally aggressive behavior were supported by the size and diversity of the coalition aligned against them.

The issue of land acquisition also needs to be considered as another possible Puritan motive for making war on the Pequots. Traditional just-war theory in fact prohibited engaging in war solely to expand territorial holdings. There can be no doubt that greed for land played a role in the Pequot War, but the Puritans made a distinction between starting a war in order to gain land and claiming territory as the spoils of a war that was initiated for other reasons. In general, the Puritans were scrupulously respectful of property ownership. Although the Massachusetts Bay Company acquired its land in America simply by right of the king's decree in its royal charter in 1629, the colonists did not often treat the matter of land ownership in such an imperious, heavy-handed manner. In the years before the Pequot War, they conducted almost all transfers of property, both among themselves and with the Indians, by means of direct purchase (fee simple). Indeed, many Indians valued their trade with the English and eagerly exchanged land for items produced by European technology. Colonists who cheated or stole from the natives were severely punished. A notable example of that awareness of property rights can be found in the case of Thomas Morton, a man notorious for his hostility to Puritan ways, when he seized native property by force. Having considered the matter, the Massachusetts Court of Assistants ordered that

> Thomas Morton of Mount Wolliston, shall presently be sett into the bilbowes, and after sent prisoner into England . . . ; that all his goods shalbe seazed upon to defray the charge of his transportation, payment of his debts, and to give satisfaction to the Indians for a cannoe hee unjustly tooke from them; and that his house, after the goods are taken out, shalbe burnt down to the ground in the sight of the Indians, for their satisfaction, for many wrongs hee hath done them from tyme to tyme.[51]

Roger Williams also specifically denounced unjust English claims to Indian land and condemned many of those who made such claims. Williams found the general English claim to Indian lands fraudulent in two respects. First, any claim that England might make to land in the New World on the basis of initial discovery was spurious, since James I was in fact not the Christian monarch who initially discovered North America. Second, Charles I illegitimately used England's nominal Christianity as a justification for dispossessing a pagan people of their lands. Indeed, Williams felt that even to refer to Europe as Christendom was blasphemous; the thin veneer of Christianity that the West laid claim to was not Christianity at all, and it gave Europeans no special rights over so-called heathen peoples.[52] Although the promise of acquiring Pequot land was no doubt an enticing side effect of the war, the Puritans did not practice a policy of blatant land theft in New England. The causes of the Pequot War lay elsewhere.

An examination of the conduct of the war reveals serious *in bello* violations by the colonists.[17] If the Fort Mystic massacre had been committed upon a Christian and "civilized" enemy, most westerners would have considered it a war crime, even in a seventeenth-century theater of war. The deep religious and cultural gulf that separated Englishman from native offers the best explanation for the brutal conduct of the war in regard to *in bello* issues. In the heat of crisis, the Puritans viewed the Pequots increasingly as demons and less and less as fellow human beings. Once the natives were sufficiently demonized, the use of drastic violence no longer seemed immoral or excessive, for it was directed less against native men, women, and children than against the forces of Satan. Captain Mason later declared that God had demonstrated His displeasure with the Pequots by "burning them up in the Fire of his Wrath, and dunging the Ground with their Flesh."[14] Responding to criticism of that brutality—for not everyone concurred in the extreme demonization of the Indians—Mason's subordinate officer, Captain Underhill, cited the Bible for justification:

> Why should you be so furious (as some have said) should not Christians have more mercy and compassion? But I would referre you to Davids warre, when a people is growne to such a height of bloud, and sinne against God and man and all confederates in the action, there hee hath no respect to persons, but harrowes them, and sawes them, and puts them to the sword, and the most terriblest death that may bee: sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents. . . . We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings.[15]

In stark contrast to such views were the reactions of the colonists' Indian allies who exclaimed after the battle, "It is naught, it is naught [bad or wicked] because it is too furious and slays too many men."[16] Roger Williams later observed that among the Indians,

*Attack on a Pequot fort during the war. Wood engraving by J. W. Barber, 1830, RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2035).*

> Warres are farre lesse bloudy and devouring then the cruell Warres of Europe; and seldome twenty slaine in a picht field: partly because when they fight in a wood every Tree is a Bucklar.
>
> When they fight in a plaine, they fight with leaping and dancing, that seldome an Arrow hits, and when a man is wounded, unlesse he that shot followes upon the wounded, they soone retire and save the wounded.[37]

During the Pequot War the just-war principles of proportionality (refraining from excessive force) and discrimination (distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants) often became the first casualties. Locked in a battle with a "pagan" and "uncivilized" enemy in the wilderness of New England, the settlers refused to deny themselves any advantage; with the survival of their wilderness Zion at stake, they took it upon themselves to become a new Israelite nation, permitted to slaughter freely for a "righteous" cause in the pattern of the religious wars of the Old Testament. If restraint had to be purchased with the loss or subjugation of the holy experiment, it was a price that few at the time were willing to pay.

The Pequot War was a tragic event that involved not only a geographic frontier but also the frontier between two cultures and two worldviews. The radical dissimilarities between the Native Americans and the English left the Puritan mind desperately trying to come to terms with the reality of this new world within categories it recognized and could react to. Consequently, notions of human depravity, diabolic influence, and divine providence were superimposed upon native culture in order to make it fathomable to the closed worldview of the Puritans. Once this was done, the Puritans' choice in dealing with the Indians lay between evangelization on the one hand and annihilation on the other.

Although always suspicious of the Indians, the Puritan community initially made a genuine effort, within the parameters of its law and theology, to treat them fairly. However, the Pequots' aggressive behavior provided the impetus that tipped the precarious balance from tense peace to savage reprisal. By going to war with the colonists, the Pequots in a sense withdrew themselves from the Puritan world and became simply the "other"; and, as such, they were targeted as enemies of God and dispatched without mercy. Though Puritans would argue that these events were part of a destiny foreordained by God, one must wonder if a better destiny was not foreclosed by an overeager recourse to the force of arms.

## Notes

1. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 257.
2. Ibid., 374-75.
3. Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.
4. Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 174.
5. Alden T. Vaughan and Francis J. Bremer, eds., *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 202.
6. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 269.
7. Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 72-74.
8. Ibid., 58-76.
9. John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal, "History of New England," 1630-1649*, ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 1:185.
10. Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1965), 137-38.
11. John Underhill, *Newes From America; or a New and Experimental Discoverie of New England* (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1971), 9.
12. Ibid., 14.
13. Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 131.
14. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 6:338-39.
15. John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War: Especially of the Memorable Taking of their Fort at Mistick in Connecticut in 1637* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1966), 10; Underhill, *Newes From America*, 39.
16. Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal*, 1:238.
17. Arthur J. Slavin, "The American Principle: From More to Locke," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), 148.
18. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 54.
19. Ibid.
20. Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 137.
21. Ibid., 138.
22. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1953), 193.
23. George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1914), 245.
24. *Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 6:6.
25. *Winthrop's Journal*, 1:83-84.
26. Cave, *The Pequot War*, 15-16.
27. Harold E. Selesky, "Colonial America," in *The Laws of War*, ed. Michael Howard (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 66.
28. Cave, *The Pequot War*, 18-19.
29. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 394.
30. *Winthrop's Journal*, 1:265-66, 2:76.
31. Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 99.
32. W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 39-40.
33. Historian Francis Jennings remarked that "armed conquest in New England was a special, though not unique, variant of seventeenth-century war . . . [in which] the English . . . held the simple view that the natives were outside the law of moral obligation. On this assumption they fought by means that would have been thought dishonorable, even in that day, in a war between civilized peoples." However, Jennings dismissed the conflict's genuine religious dimensions, focusing instead on the settlers' bid for "illicit power," couched in the subterfuge of "great moral rectitude." Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), v-ix, 202-27.
34. Mason, *Pequot War*, 14.
35. Underhill, *Newes From America*, 40.
36. Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 84.
37. *Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 1:204.

# A KEY into the LANGUAGE OF AMERICA:

OR,

An help to the *Language* of the *Natives* in that part of AMERICA, called *NEW-ENGLAND.*

Together, with briefe *Observations* of the Customes, Manners and Worships, *&c.* of the aforesaid *Natives*, in Peace and Warre, in Life and Death.

On all which are added Spirituall *Observations*, Generall and Particular by the *Author*, of chiefe and speciall use (upon all occasions,) to all the *English* Inhabiting those parts; yet pleasant and profitable to the view of all men:

BY ROGER WILLIAMS
of *Providence* in *New-England.*

*LONDON,*
Printed by *Gregory Dexter*, 1643.