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PURITANS, INDIANS, AND THE CONCEPT
OF RACE

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THE current orthodoxy in historical interpretation of Indian-white relations in early New England is dominated by the "conviction that the New England Puritans followed a remarkable humane, considerate and just policy in their dealings with the Indians." This conviction is supported by a view of Puritan society as "unified, visionary, disciplined and dynamic," and Indian society as "divided, self-satisfied, undisciplined and static." The Puritans did not, in this view, destroy the Indian way of life; instead, the primary causes of the Indians' decline were disease and migration caused by a "desire to escape the challenge of the new era." This orthodox view holds that the few conflicts which did exist between Indians and whites were never along purely racial or cultural lines, and that Puritans "seldom thought of the Indians as a race apart, in the modern sense of the term race."¹

This interpretation, although it appeals to some recent his-

* The author wishes to thank two Yale colleagues, P. Richard Metcalf and Edmund S. Morgan, for the exchange of ideas useful in developing this article.

¹ The most comprehensive presentation of the view sympathetic to Puritan treatment of Indians is Alden Vaughan, New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675 (Boston, 1965). All quotations in this paragraph are from his preface (v-viii) and conclusion (322-398).
tobians who reject the idea of any white moral responsibility for the destruction of the Indian, is culturally biased, if not totally in error. One serious flaw is the acceptance of the views of seventeenth-century whites on the nature and value of Indian society. The Puritans certainly believed that the Indians were "divided, self-satisfied, undisciplined and static." But for historians to believe it as well, and thus to conclude that Puritan expansion did not involve the destruction of anything but "the shackles of the Stone Age," flies in the face of all modern anthropological knowledge of the nature of preindustrial and preliterate tribal societies.

More importantly, the conclusions that "the Puritan did not drive the Indian to despair through repeated injustices," and that "the Puritan did not kill off the Indians in a series of protracted military actions" are demonstrably false. And although it is true, as even the apologists for the Puritans agree, that the Indians did not perceive their dealings with the New England whites as a racial or cultural conflict, the Puritans clearly did—to the extent that no Indians were ever accorded full acceptance. The record of Puritan attitudes, goals, and behavior in every major area of interaction with Indians reveals a continued harshness, brutality, and ethnocentric bias, which, even if not "racial" in the modern sense of the word, had fatal consequences for the Indians as a race.

2 For the approval which met Vaughan's book among historians, see reviews by William Kiess, American Historical Review, lxxi (July, 1966), and E. S. Morgan, Book Week, Sept. 19, 1965. Vaughan, along with Francis P. Prucha, American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: 1790-1834 and Bernard Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian (1973) has emerged as a leader of that school of historians who choose to emphasize the "even-handedness" and "humanitarian" aspects of white policy toward Indians.

3 Vaughan, 326. Even a cursory reading of such standard anthropology texts as Robert Spencer, Jesse Jennings, et al., The Native Americans (1965); or James Deetz, Robert Owen, and Anthony Fisher, The North American Indians (1967) reveals the absurdity of such language. Although in his early chapter on the nature of Indian society, Vaughan recognized that the Puritan view of Indians was one-sided, it is clear that by the time he had reached his conclusions, he had been seduced by the sources, and had become completely "Puritanized."

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According to their oft-repeated statements, the main reason the Puritans came to New England was to convert the Indians to Christianity. Their charter stated that the most important purpose of their colonization was "to incite the natives . . . to the knowledge and obedience of the onlie true God and Saviour of mankinde. . . ." However, more than a decade passed after their arrival before the Puritans made their first limited official effort to reach the Indians with their gospel. On June 6, 1644, the Massachusetts General Court ordered:

... all such of the Indians as have subjected themselves to our government ... to meete at such severall places of appoyntmentt as shall be most convenient on the Lord's Day, where they may attend such instruction as shall bee given them by those whose hearts God shall stirr upp to that worke.6

Two years later, the Court put teeth in this enactment by ordering the death penalty for any "whether Christian or pagan," who would "blaspheme his holy name, denying the true God, or his creation or government of the world, or shall curse God, or reproach the holy religion of God,"7 although granting at the same time that "faith" should be not wrought by the sword, but by the word. During the same session the General Court forbade the Indians the practice of their own religion or the use of their medicine man on threat of fine:

It is ordered by this court, that no Indian shall at any time pawwaw or perform ... worship to their false Gods or to the devill, if any shall transgress this law, the pawwaw to pay 5, the procurer and every assistant ... 20 shillings.

Finally, the General Court reemphasized that the "one end in planting these parts was to propagate the true religion unto


6 Shurtleff, Records of the Governor and Company ...

7 Shurtleff, ii, 170-171.
the Indians," and established the first provision for choosing two ministers to work among the Indians.  

In 1651, the Reverend John Eliot, with this authorization, founded Natick, the first and most successful of the "Praying Indian" towns. Not until 1660, however, did the Puritans judge the number of Indian visible saints in Natick to be sufficient to form a church. Also by 1651, Thomas Mayhew, a Congregational preacher on Martha's Vineyard, had converted more than twenty Indians. Following his death, his father, Thomas Mayhew Senior, though not an ordained minister, took up his son's work. He ultimately established two congregations and ten Indian preachers on the small islands of Chappaquiddick and Nantucket.  

Such successes were to be rare. In the first place, most Indians saw little benefit in the white man's culture, society, or religion. The Sachems of the major tribes opposed the Puritan missionary work. Uncas, the consistent Mohegan ally of the Puritans in the Indian wars, forbade white missionaries, including John Eliot, to contaminate his tribe with their preaching. King Philip (Metacom), Sachem of the Wampanoags, is reported to have told John Eliot that he cared no more for the white man's gospel than he did for the button on Eliot's coat. Indian captives who were instructed in the white man's ways were eager to return to their own culture at the earliest opportunity.  

8 Shurtleff, II, 177-178.  
12 See Alden T. Vaughan, The New England Frontier ... (Boston, 1965), 256-258; Cotton Mather, The Life and Death (London, 1691), 95; Philip D. Carleton, "The Indian Captivity" in American Literature, XV, 173; J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer, 214-215 (London, n.d.). On the other hand, John Williams, The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion (New Haven, 1802), 72, describes a white captive boy who refused to leave the Indians with his Uncle, an English Colonel, who finally took the boy by force. For details of the captivity phenomenon, see James Axtell, "The Scholastic Theory of the
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But even if the Indians had desired to accept the new ways, the rigorous Puritan requirements for proof of visible sainthood worked against gaining a large number of converts. Indians who desired to convert were confronted with the Puritans' strict and complicated requirements for baptism, or entry into the church, and had to undergo extensive training. They then had to demonstrate, by knowledge and publicly presented personal experiences, that they had become visible saints, worthy to join the Puritans at the Lord's supper. In addition, an Indian convert had to break with his people and culture, not only because the Puritans demanded it, but because the unconverted Indians distrusted his motives and actions. Once the break was made, the convert could thus expect the enmity and suspicion of his own people.

At the same time, fulfillment of requirements and baptism did not guarantee the Indian convert full acceptance into the Puritan church and society. The Indians first had to be instructed in Puritan ways, culture, and religion. However, the Puritans' existence as a society was based on their image of themselves as elect. They were not, in contrast to the Jesuits or Anglicans, primarily interested in converting outsiders. Even in England and Holland, the Puritans had emphasized their exclusiveness to protect them from the sinfulness of others. Once in control in New England, they established even more stringent requirements for membership which made their church increasingly an exclusive society for saints and their children instead of an agency for bringing Christ to the fallen. Their efforts lay with those already converted and were only incidentally directed at outsiders. When these new require-

15 Albert Peel, Editor, The Second Part of a Register, 1, 86 (London, 1915), in Morgan, Visible Saints... (Ithaca, New York, 1963), 14.
ments were superimposed on the already elitist English Puritan concept of covenanted churches, the result was that most of the *white* population of Massachusetts could not qualify for full church membership.\(^{16}\) For the Indians, the barriers were insurmountable.

An orthodox modern historical evaluation of the Puritans’ efforts toward their “principal end” describes how the original Indian church at Natick, after the death in 1716 of its Indian preacher, Daniel Tollowampait, became an English church with the remaining Indians as fellow members. In other Indian towns and churches, the years brought similar change. English settlers moved in.... After a decade or two, few Indians remained.... An English church was gathered, the town was organized, an English pastor called, and the Praying Indians who were still residents were accepted as fellow members. The story had many chapters since that first preaching meeting around Waban’s Wigwam in 1646, and the picture of an English-Indian congregation, seated together, praying together, singing together is in keeping with the spirit of Eliot’s fifty-eight year ministry.\(^ {17}\)

This scene, if real, would have warmed John Eliot’s heart. It would represent the triumph of New England Puritanism; savage no longer, the Christianized Indians had conformed to the role demanded of them, and were fully accepted by the Puritans into their congregations and society. Such was not the case.

In 1798, the Reverend Stephen Badger wrote a more accurate, contemporary version of the realities of Indian conversion. Badger was the shepherd of the Natick flock for almost a half century until his retirement in 1799. He wrote of the Indians’ drinking and “eternal travelling around the country in a begging and destitute state.” He described the inroads made by war and disease between 1754 and 1760. In 1759 alone disease carried off whole families, with twenty Indians dying within three months. According to Badger, the number of In-

\(^{16}\) Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 174-175.

dian church members had fallen to two or three by 1798. He further described the low social state of the Indians, who were buried separately from the burying ground shared by whites and blacks. Concerning the Indians' acceptance into the social and religious life of the white community, Badger explained that separate burials were far from being the only instance of their being kept detached and separate from the whites. This disconnection is extended much farther, and to matter of much greater magnitude. There has not been ... any civil coalition between them by any act of incorporating authority; and when any voluntary association has taken place, it has been of short duration. This may be said as to any religious connection. Immediately previous to my settling in this place [1753] a church was gathered, which consisted partly of Indian members and partly of English; and though some additions were soon after made of Indian professors, yet, from the causes, that have already been mentioned, a decrease gradually took place and has been continuing to the present time.\footnote{18}

The terrified survivors of the Wamesit Praying Indians, who fled New England following the white massacre of their women and children in 1675 during King Philip's War, left a note which is a memorial to the failure of the Puritans to accept the Christian Indians either as fellow Puritans or as fully human beings.

To Mr. Thomas Henchman, of Chelmsford.... We cannot come home again, we go towards the French... the reason is, we went away... from the English, for when there was any harm done in Chelmsford, they laid it to us and said we did it... there is no safety for us, because many English be not good, and may be they come to us and kill us, as in the other case. We are not sorry for what we leave behind, but we are sorry the English have driven us from our praying to God and from our teacher. We did begin to understand a little of praying to God.\footnote{19}

\footnote{18} Stephen Badger, “Response to a query from the Scots Commissioners,” Feb., 1797 in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, v. 33-44 (Boston, 1798); William Bigelow, History of the Town of Natick, Massachusetts (Boston, 1830), 59-60.

\footnote{19} Gookin, 483.
The active resistance to conversion by large segments of the Indian population, combined with the Puritan belief that Indians were a fallen race led to an increasing conviction that Indians were an irredeemable race apart, regardless of the apparent Christianity of a few individuals. By 1674, after twenty years of effort, there were only an estimated 1,100 Christian Indians distributed among the fourteen mainland Indian towns in the Bay colony, with bona fide churches only at Natick and Hassawesitt.

The Puritans' approach to land acquisition demonstrates even more clearly the degree of their ethnocentric bias and their failure to treat Indians on an equal basis even when the Indians were willing to deal on the Puritans' own terms. The New Englanders had proclaimed their "right" to take up Indian lands even before leaving old England. This right was implicit in the Puritans' royal charter, which granted authority for "planting, ruling, order, and governing of New England in America, and to their successors and assignees forever."

John Winthrop cited the Bible, when he declared,

God hath given to the sonnes of men a double right to the earth; theire is a naturall right, and a civill right. The first was naturall when men held the earth in common every man sowing and feeding where he pleased: then as men and their cattel encreased they appropriated certain parcell of grownde by inclosing and peculiar manuerance and this in time gatte them a Civil Right.

In Winthrop's eyes, the Indians of New England had no civil right to their land, since

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20 Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, Book III, 190 (London, 1703).


23 John Winthrop, "Reasons to be Considered" in Morgan, The Founding of Massachusetts, 176-178.
They inclose noe land, neither have any settled habytation, nor any tame cattle to improve the Land by and soe have noe other but a Naturall Right to those Countries, so as if we leave them sufficient for their use, we may lawfully take the rest, their being more than enough for them, and us...We shall...come in with the good leave of the natives who find benefight already by our Neighborhood.24

This Puritan philosophy of land ownership and use was enshrined by law in 1633 when the General Court of Massachusetts ordered that "what lands any of the Indians have possessed and improved, by subduing the same they have a just right unto according to that in Genesis." Implicit was the assumption that any land not so "subdued" could not rightfully be claimed by the Indians, or kept from the whites.25

In light of the Puritan determination to take what Indian lands they needed, legal safeguards, such as the 1633 law, actually worked against the Indians' interests on a massive scale. Nor did actions such as the stipulation in the 1634 Massachusetts Body of Liberties which called for granting Indians titles to lands, and which prohibited the dispossession of the Indians, have any lasting effect against the encroachment of white settlers and speculators.26 Continued encroachment of their land became the Indians' main grievance and the prime cause of violence between Indians and whites.27

The Indians' desperation over their tenuous social situation and decreasing land base led to resistance and periodic violence. Three incidents of extreme violence—at Wessagusset [Weymouth] in 1622, the Pequot War in 1637, and King Philip's War in 1675—further illustrated the increasingly oppressive Puritan attitude toward the Indians and the deterioration of whatever predisposition to benevolence and justice previously existed.

24 Winthrop, 178.
25 Earl Edward Muntz, Race Contact (New York, 1927), 46.
27 Baylie, Errors of the Time, 60, quoted in Peter Oliver, The Puritan Commonwealth (Boston, 1856), 231; Peter Oliver, 137.
At Wessagusset in 1621, a group of ne'er-do-well Englishmen led by one Thomas Weston settled with no proper allowance for the winter months. When their food supplies ran low they robbed the local Indians. In spite of repeated complaints from the Indians, the Plymouth authorities, although exasperated with Weston and contemptuous of his group, took no action to stop the depredations by the Wessagusset whites. On the contrary, in what was to become a recurring pattern, Plymouth officials interpreted the Indians' just complaints as an implicit threat to the Plymouth colony. Decreeing unilaterally that "there was no dealing with the Indians above board," the leaders of Plymouth felt justified in sending Myles Standish in March 1623 to "catch them unaware." Standish and his men carried out their instructions. They murdered several of the complaining Indians without warning, hanged one, and ran down and killed several others.

The Wessagusset incident established the standard English response to any Indian resistance or complaint. No Indian dared raise his hand or even his voice against a white, even in defense of his life, family, or property. No matter if his opponent were an exile or outcast from white society, even the suspicion of opposition called for violent Puritan retribution.


29 Increase Mather, *A Relation of the Troubles* (Boston, 1677), 12-19.

30 Mather, 12-16.

31 Mather, 16-17; Edward Winslow, *Good News From New England...* (London, 1624), 331-344. Winslow asserted that "because...it is impossible to deal with them in open defiance, but to take them in such traps as they lay for others, therefore (Standish)...pretended to trade...This sudden and unexpected execution...of God upon their guilty consciences, hath so terrified and amazed them as, in like manner they forsook their houses running to and from like man distracted, being in swamps and other desert places, and so brought diseases amongst themselves where very many are dead."

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The Pequot War of 1637 was also triggered by the actions of English renegades and exiles. The Pequots, an aggressive and independent tribe of Eastern Connecticut, resisted Puritan trade and encroachment.\(^33\) Captain John Stone, a violent and dangerous exile from Plymouth, was slain in 1634 by Indians on the River Thames after he had kidnapped two of the local Indians to serve as river pilots.\(^34\) When the Pequots sent a mission to Boston to explain, the Bay Puritans demanded that they deliver Stone’s killers, and that they allow the Puritans to settle in their area and to trade with them, such trade being “the chief thing we aimed at.”\(^35\)

In 1636, another Puritan renegade and exile, John Oldham, was killed by Indians off Block Island.\(^36\) Oldham’s reputation strongly suggests that his dealings with the Indians had been unfair and violent. Yet the Puritans chose to seek blood revenge. John Endecott of Boston was commissioned in charge of Puritan forces and instructed to “put to death the inhabitants of Block Island, but to spare the women and children and to bring them away, and take possession of the island.”\(^37\) Endecott succeeded in burning the Block Island Indian village and cornfields, and then, without provocation, invaded the mainland Pequot territory.\(^38\) Although Endecott did not bring the fleeing Pequots to battle, the violation of their treaty and terri-

\(^{33}\) Peter Oliver, *The Puritan Commonwealth* (Boston, 1856), 107; William Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indian* (Boston, 1677), 120. The internal dynamics of the Pequots’ policy toward whites are discussed in detail in P. Richard Metcalf, “Inside the Hoop: A Study of Native American politics,” Ph.d. dissertation (Yale, 1975), Chapter 2.

\(^{34}\) William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (New York, 1970), 268-269; Increase Mather, *A Relation of the Troubles* (Boston, 1677), 24, reports that the slayers were not proved to be Pequots.

\(^{35}\) Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 291-292 tells of renegade Stone’s unsuccessful attempt to steal a ship from the Dutch governor and of his abortive plan to stab Governor Prince of Plymouth.

\(^{36}\) Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 148-150, tells how Oldham, a violent, knife-wielding ruffian, was exiled from Plymouth and put bodily on a ship by musketeers, who each gave a “thump on the breech” with their musket butts to send him off.


\(^{38}\) Captain John Underhill, “News From America,” in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd Series, vi, 3-11 (Boston, 1836).
tory and the killing of one Pequot brought on major hostilities.\textsuperscript{39} When the desperate Pequots tried to create a unified Indian coalition against the whites by seeking peace with the Narragansetts, Governor Bradford reported:

The Pequots sought to make peace with the Narragansetts... [the Pequots argued]... that the English were strangers... overspread their country and would deprive them thereof in time, if they were suffered to grow and increase. And if the Narragansetts did assist the English... they did but make way for their own overthrow... The Narragansetts were once wavering... But again, when they considered how much wrong they had received from the Pequots, revenge was so sweet unto them as it prevailed above all the rest, so as they resolved to join with the English against them and did.\textsuperscript{40}

The leaders of Plymouth and Connecticut colonies, and the Connecticut militia commander at Fort Saybrook voiced their disapproval of Endecott's unwarranted expedition into the Pequot territory, and Winthrop himself felt that the Massachusetts Bay colony had provoked hostilities.\textsuperscript{41} Despite such protests, the Puritans handled the Pequot problem with savage thoroughness. In May, 1637, John Mason was sent by the Connecticut Colony against the Pequots with ninety men and some friendly Mohegans. Joined by other white soldiers and Narragansett Indians, his force, in a surprise attack on the Pequot

\textsuperscript{39} Lyon Gardiner, "Relation of the Pequot Wars" in Appendix to \textit{The History of the Wars of New England with the Eastern Indians} (Cincinnati, 1859), Reprinted from the Boston Edition of 1720, p. 13, Captain Endecott "Demand the Pequot Sachem... burnt some wigwams and some corn, and my men carried 21 Indians and they hurt some of the Indians. An Indian Sachem of the Bay killed a Pequot and thus began the war between the Indians and us in these parts." Alden Vaughan, "Pequots and Puritans: The Causes of the War of 1637," \textit{William and Mary Quarterly}, 3rd Series xxi, 256-269, is written from Vaughan's typical Anglo-centrist and apologetic viewpoint. Vaughan apparently did not consider the previous criminal records of Stone or Oldham to be germane in corroborating the complaints of the Indians, whom he deems to be "murderers," "assassins," and "instigators."

\textsuperscript{40} Bradford, \textit{Of Plymouth Plantation}, 294-295: John Mason, \textit{A Brief History of the Pequot War} (Boston, 1736), iv.

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village at Mystic, deliberately burned the lodges of the Indians. In "a little more than One Hour, Five or Six Hundred of these Barbarians were dismissed from a world that was Burdened with them; not more than Seven or Eight persons escaping...."42 The male survivors were either killed, farmed out as slaves to the Mohegan and Narragansett tribes, or sold into slavery in the Caribbean. Those Pequot women and children who survived were allotted to the Indian tribes or to various Puritans as servants or slaves.43 The Puritans saw the fate of the Pequots, not as due to white attitudes or actions, but rather as an "act of God." Major Mason boasted that "thus the Lord was pleased to smite our enemies in the hinder parts and to give us their land afor and inheritance."44 John Underhill, another of the Puritan captains, explained the Puritans' murder of Indian women and children:

It may be demanded, why should you be so furious?...But I would refer you to David's war. When a people is grown to such a height of blood, and sin against God and man...sometimes the scriptures declareth Women and Children must perish with their parents...we had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings.45

Underhill, after helping to destroy the Pequots at their Mystic Fort in 1637, had allowed his Mohegan allies to attack the survivors, and scoffed "they might fight seven years and not kill seven men. They came not near one another. This fight is more for pastime, than to conquer enemies."46 What Underhill could not realize was that the Indian mode of warfare, while satisfying the ceremonial and competitive purposes of war, insured the survival of the majority of participants, and

42 Cotton Mather, "Arma Virosq;..." in Magnalia Christi Americana (London, 1702), vii, 43; Major John Mason, A Brief History of the Pequot War (Boston, 1736), 1, 1-15.
43 John Mason, A Brief History of the Pequot War (Boston, 1736), 15; Alden T. Vaughan, New England Frontier:... (Boston, 1965), 148, 150.
44 Major John Mason, A Brief History of the Pequot War, 15.
45 John Underhill, "News from New England" in Charles Orr, History of the Pequot War (Cleveland, 1897), 81.
46 Underhill, 82-84.
especially of enemy women and children, many of whom, red or white, were fully adopted into the victorious tribe to replace those who had fallen.\(^{47}\) The Indians felt that an enemy sometimes deserved to be killed, but was always a man and an equal. The Puritans' attitude was diametrically opposite. The slaughter and enslavement of women and children in the 1637 Pequot Village inferno did not bother the Puritan conscience. John Underhill boasted that the Puritans' Indian allies, while noting the efficiency of the Englishmen's war methods, lamented that "it is too furious and slays too many men."\(^{48}\)

The greatest Puritan-Indian conflict, King Philip's War of 1675, ended a half century of Puritan encroachment and oppression, and left the Indians of Massachusetts broken and segregated. In this climactic conflict, the violent pattern of Puritan treatment of the Indians was repeated and intensified, with numerous recorded incidents of atrocities against Christian Indians. The desperate and hopeless frustration of the Wampanoag people and their Sachem, King Philip [Matacom] over Puritan encroachment on the lands and rights of the tribe was the underlying cause of King Philip's war. After hearing rumors of Indian dissatisfactions, the Plymouth authorities in 1671 forced Philip to meet with them at Taunton and demanded all of his weapons and a treaty. In the Taunton agreement the cowed Philip "confessed his breach of Covenant . . . surrendered some of his arms, engaging for the rest in due time."\(^{49}\) Not content, the Commissioners of the United Colonies forced Matacom again to meet with them at Plymouth in September, 1671. They again subjected him to a series of "confessions," and forced him to pay a 100-pound fine and subject himself to Plymouth authority.\(^{50}\)

\(^{47}\) For firsthand relations of adoption of captives, see Mrs. James Johnson, A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1907), 67-68, 71, 76, 78; James Seaver, A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison (Rochester, New York, 1856), 36-68.

\(^{48}\) History of the Pequot War, Charles Orr, Editor, 60-62.


\(^{50}\) Nathaniel Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, Editors, Records of the Colony of New Plymouth (Boston, 1855-1861), v, 77-79, 392.
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In January, 1674, John Sassamon, a sometime Christian Indian, and advisor to Philip, was found dead under the ice of a pond in circumstances indicating murder. Sassamon was an opportunistic and mistrusted individual who had moved back and forth between the Puritan and Indian worlds. Before his death he had allegedly mentioned a possible Indian plot against the Plymouth Puritans, and his death was taken to be part of the plot.\(^{51}\) It did not take the Puritans long to sentence three Indians to death for Sassamon’s murder, based solely on the testimony of one Indian and the “fact” that the body bled profusely, when approached by one of the accused.\(^{52}\) Even Roger Williams, who at age of seventy-seven fought as a captain against Philip’s forces, protested to John Winthrop, Jr. in 1675: “Sir, many wish that Plymouth had left the Indians alone, at least not put to death the three Indians upon one Indian’s testimony, a thing which Philip fears.”\(^{53}\)

The execution on trumped-up charges of the three Wampanoag Indians was so obviously unjust as to put Philip himself in fear of being falsely implicated and executed. Soon some of his frustrated people attacked the village of Swansea after one of their number had been killed by a white youth.\(^{54}\) Typically, the United Colonies, with no proved justification, launched a surprise attack, not on Philip’s forces, but on their own treaty allies, the Narragansetts, who had been prophetically warned by the Pequots in 1637 that the Puritans would eventually wipe them out.\(^{55}\)

\(^{51}\) Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England* . . . (London, 1676), Reprinted (Boston, 1863), Samuel Drake, Editor, 42; John Easton, *A Relacion of the Indian Warre 1675*. (Hand copied by H. M. Dexter, 1675), Bienecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 1-3.

\(^{52}\) Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War*, 50; Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, vii, 46.


\(^{55}\) Easton, 48-51. Hubbard justified the unannounced attack on the Puritan treaty allies, the Narragansetts, by saying that the Indians had “broken every
This Puritan attack repeated the history of the Wessagusset massacre and the destruction of the Pequot fort. The unprepared Narragansets were decimated and their village of five hundred lodges burned. William Hubbard reported "The enemy lost so many of their principal fighting men, their provisions also . . . that it was . . . their total ruin afterwards. . . . The Indians lost seven hundred fighting men that day, plus three hundred that died of their wounds. The number of old men, women and children were unknown." 56 Hubbard described the pitiful state of the remnants of the erstwhile Narragansett Indian "allies" of the Puritans:

Concerning the Narragansets . . . Mr. Thomas Staton, and his son Robert, who have a long time lived amongst them, do affirm that to their knowledge, the Narragansett Sachems before the late troubles, had two thousand fighting men under them, and nine hundred arms, yet are they this day so broken and scattered, that there is none of them left in that side of the country . . . some few not exceeding seventy in number. . . . 57

In June, 1675, in a last-minute effort to avoid war, Philip and his advisors had met with the Quaker Lieutenant Governor of Rhode Island, John Easton, who reported:

They said . . . the English ronged them. . . . They said that all English agreed against them, and so by Arbitration they had had much Rong; mani Miles Square of Land so taken . . . if 20 of their onest Indians testified that an Englishman had done them rong, it was nothing, and if but one of there worst Indians testified . . . against any Indian or their King, when it pleased the English it was sufficient. Another Grievance was, when their King sold Land, the English would say, it was more than they agreed to . . . sum of their Kings had dun rong to sell so much . . . their Kings were forwarned not to part with Land, for nothing in Comparison with the value thereof. Now . . . the English . . . would make another

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57 Hubbard, 6.
King that would give or sell them these lands; that now they had no Hopes left to keep any land. . . . English catell and horses still increased . . . they could not keep their corn from being spoiled . . . the English were so eager to sell the Indians lickers. . . .

Easton replied to Philip that he had no more time to discuss the Indians' grievances or to allay Philip's fears, an inexplicable attitude since Philip and his grievances were the primary threat to peace.

When the war started, all of the New England Indians, including Christians, suffered in a grim pageant of rejection, suffering, and death. On August 4, 1675, Captain Samuel Mosely, one of the most violent of the Indian haters, on the basis of later disproved allegations against the Indians of Marlborough, fastened ropes around the necks of fifteen Christian Indian men and marched them to Boston, where they were threatened by a lynch mob. In another incident, the same Captain Mosely, together with his men, allowed an Indian woman to be torn to pieces by their dogs after she had been questioned. In August, 1675, several Christian Indian women and children were murdered in cold blood by a Puritan military party. The victims included the children of Thomas Speen, one of the original Indian owners of Natick.

During King Philip's War, the old Praying Indian towns of Chelmsford, Marlborough, Grafton, Hopkinton, Natick, and Punkapog remained faithful to the Puritan cause, and the white men stationed there reported them quiet and loyal. Here was the ultimate test of the reality of the Puritan ideals of conversion and civilization of the Indians. The question was whether the Puritans would accept those Indians whom they acknowledged to be civilized, Christian, and loyal, if not

58 John Easton, A Relation of the Indian Warre, 4-10.
60 Daniel Gookin, 451-455.
as intimate members of their churches and society, at least as friends and allies.

One of the first official answers to this question was an order of a council held at Boston, August 30, 1675, that "for security of the English and Indians in unity with us . . . It shall be lawful for any person, whether English or Indian, that shall find any Indian travelling in any of our towns or woods . . . to command them under guard and examination, or to kill or destroy them." In spite of the inclusion of Indians among those to be protected, this order in effect gave to every white person the police power of life, death, and summary execution over every Indian.

In October, following the burning of a barn in Dedham which was blamed by land-hungry local whites on the Indians, the General Court ordered the removal of the Natick and other Praying Indians to a concentration camp on barren Deer Island. Although the court finally ordered that the Deer Island captives be given food, during the first half year of their confinement, they suffered near starvation.

Captain Daniel Gookin, a former magistrate and a missionary worker with John Eliot, related some of the atrocities committed on Christian Indians. The most notorious was the murder of unsuspecting Wamesit Indian families by a Chelmsford lynch posse. The point illustrated by the Wamesit murders was not merely that they had been perpetrated by English riffians with a blood hatred of all Indians; the significant fact was that English juries, far from the immediate stress and emotion of war, with few exceptions, refused to find whites guilty

62 Gookin, 455-461.
63 Gookin, 473-474: The relocated Indians had tried desperately to meet all of the Puritans' requirements. They had become "civilized," Christianized and had attempted to own and farm their plots at the Praying towns in complete conformity with the Puritans' demands. When the crises came, like America's Japanese-Americans in World War II, they found that in spite of their proved loyalty, white racism and local white land hunger made their color alone an insurmountable barrier.
65 Gookin, 473-482.
66 Gookin, 474-482.
of the most brutal and obvious crimes.\textsuperscript{67} Cotton Mather confessed:

During the late unhappy War between the English and the Indians . . . an Evil Spirit possessed too many of our English, whereby they suffer'd themselves to be unreasonable Exasperated against all Indians.\textsuperscript{68}

In February, 1676, the Massachusetts General Court exposed the anti-Indian emotion which was operating at the highest levels of Puritan government while debating on the fate of the Christian Indians at Deer Island. Gookin related:

\ldots some would have them all destroyed others sent out of the country, but some others were of moderation, alleging that those Indians and their ancestors had a covenant with the English about thirty years ago. . . \textsuperscript{69}

Following the war, the Massachusetts Indians were disarmed and confined to specific towns, under strict surveillance.\textsuperscript{70} The Puritan attitude toward the Indians became, if anything, more severe. Starting in 1694, in King William’s War, the Massachusetts General Court offered bounties for the killing of hostile Indians, with scalps accepted as the best and most convenient proof.\textsuperscript{71} These bounties were continued on a year-to-year basis for the first half of the eighteenth century, with a sliding scale which offered only 10 pounds for the scalps of women and small boys and 100 pounds for youths and adult males.\textsuperscript{72} The popular attitude is perhaps best shown by the lionization of Hannah Dustin, a Haverhill, Massachusetts housewife who escaped from a group of Indian captors. Once free, Mrs. Dustin returned to the camp of the sleeping Indians,

\textsuperscript{67} Gookin, 474-482.
\textsuperscript{68} Cotton Mather, \textit{Magnalia Christi Americana} (London, 1702), vi, 57.
\textsuperscript{69} Daniel Gookin, 497.
\textsuperscript{70} Gookin, 497.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay} (Boston, 1869), i, 594-595.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{The Acts and Resolves . . .} (Boston, 1869), i, 530, 558, 594; ii, 258-259; iii, 1145; Nicholas Noyes, \textit{New England’s Duty and Interest} (Boston, 1698); appendix in Roy Harvey Pearce, \textit{Savagism and Civilization} (Baltimore, 1967).
and, with the help of her two fellow escapees, another woman and a young boy, scalped twelve of the Indians, two of them women.\textsuperscript{73} An important fact to note is that the whites never scalped the French, who accompanied the Indians on their depredations into New England. Skinning was reserved for animals and Indians.\textsuperscript{74}

Only one group of Indians managed to meet the Puritan standards of civilization and Christianity and yet maintain its tribal power. These were the Indians of Martha’s Vineyard. But their survival only serves to underscore the record of the Puritans in dealing with other Indians who did not enjoy the tactical advantages of those on Martha’s Vineyard. The isolation of the Vineyard made it difficult for the classic Puritan process of gradual encroachment, ultimate violent confrontation, and take-over to occur. Most importantly the Indians of the Vineyard had many guns, knew how to use them, and, luckily for them, were the only group of Massachusetts Indians who refused to give up their weapons and thereby refused to throw themselves on the Christian mercy of the Puritans. Cotton Mather told how some of the English,

Exasperated against all Indians . . . could hardly be . . . moderated by Mr. Mayhew, and others in Government with him as to be restrained from rising to assay the disarming of the Indians . . . But they were unwilling to deliver their Arms, unless the English would propose some mean for their Safety and Livelihood. . . . Having this answer, the Government . . . improved them as a Guard, furnishing them with suitable Ammunition and found them . . . faithful.\textsuperscript{75}

The greatest error made by King Philip or the Praying In-

\textsuperscript{73} Herbert Sylvester, \textit{Indian Wars of New England}, II, 485-489 (Boston, 1910); Robert P. Caverly, \textit{Heroism of Hannah Dustin} (Boston, 1874), 19-21.

\textsuperscript{74} Samuel Penhallow, \textit{The History of the Wars of New England . . .} (Cincinnati, 1859), 102, 129 tells of whites scalping groups of Indians in 1724. The French priest killed with the Indians, Father Role, a “bloody incendiary,” was apparently not scalped; a bounty of 100 pounds per Indian scalp was offered to volunteers for enlistment, 125.

\textsuperscript{75} Mather, \textit{Magnalia Christi Americana}, vi, 57.
THE CONCEPT OF RACE

dians in dealing with the New England Puritans was in giving up their guns and trusting to Puritan justice.

The most pointed evidence for the Puritans' failure to see Indians in the same light as they saw white men was their treatment of Indian captives. Historians have shown that Englishmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were capable of massacring other whites and forcing them into servitude.  Many contemporary English writers described the Irish in terms almost identical to those used toward the American Indians.

The Wild Irish inhabiting many and large Provinces are barbarous and most filthy in their diet. . . . They wander naked, and lodge in the same house with their beasts. . . . The men lie upon the women's laps until they kill their lice. . . . They expose to full view, not only the noble, but also the most shameful parts. . . . They have no tables but set their meate upon a bundle of grass. . . . They sleep under the Canopy of heaven . . . or in a cabin made of trees . . . these wild Irish are not unlike wild beasts. . . .

In the New World, however, there appeared definite and sustained differences between the Puritans' treatment of whites and nonwhites, which would indicate in Puritan Society the beginnings of an attitude similar to what today would be termed racism.  In spite of the English hatred of Papist Irish and Scots, the slaves taken in battle such as Cromwell's victories at Worcester and Dunbar, were never treated as slaves


77 Fynes Moryson, An Itinerary . . . (London, 1703), Book 3, 161-165; Mather in Magnalia Christi Americana, III, 1, gives a description of the Indians similar in both letter and spirit with Moryson's description of the wild Irish.

78 Pierre L. Van den Berghe, Race and Racism (New York, 1967), 9, 11, 24, defines "racism" as any act or belief that organic genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups defined as races . . . without racism physical characteristics are devoid of social significance.
in the same sense as were Indians and blacks, either in England or in the colonies.

In Barbados in 1656, Governor Henry Hawley and the Council resolved that “The Negroes and Indians that came here to be sold, should serve for life, unless a contract was made before to the contrary.” In the early 1650’s an observer in Barbados wrote: “It is the Custom for a Christian white Servant to serve four years and then enjoy his freedom . . . the Negroes and Indians . . . they and the generation are slaves to perpetuity.”79

Use of the term “Christian” was intended to distinguish whites who had a limited term of servitude from the enslaved nonwhites.80 While it is undeniably true that the English continued to look upon the Irish as second-rate whites, nevertheless their identity as whites saved them from being enslaved for life.81 The Scottish prisoners from Worcester and Dunbar, who had been sent to Barbados, were more in the category of indentured servants than slaves, as were those who had been sent to New England, of whom, John Cotton said in 1651 in a letter to Oliver Cromwell:

The Scots, whom God delivered to you at Dunbarre . . . They have not been sold for slaves to perpetuall servitude, but for 6 or 7 years, as we do our owne; and he that bought the most of them . . . requiring three dayes in the weeks to work for him . . . and four days for themselves, as promiseth, as soon as they can repay him the money he layed out for them, he will get them at liberty.82

The contrasting attitude of the Puritans toward nonwhite prisoners is indicated by the 1638 voyage of William Pierce,


80 “A Brief description of the Island of Barbados” Vincent T. Harlow, Editor, Colonising Expeditions for the West Indies and Guiana 1623-1667, issued by the Hakluyt Soc. 2d Ser. 56, 44-45 (1925); in Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black, 65.

81 Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black, 63; Morgan, The Puritan Family, 100.

82 W. H. Whitmore and W. S. Appleton, Editors, Hutchinson Papers, 1, 264 (Albany, 1865); in Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black, 88.
Captain of the Salem ship *Desire*, who brought the first Negro slaves from Providence Island, in the Caribbean, and in turn took back into Caribbean slavery Indian captives from the Pequot War. As early as 1636, the first New England Indian had been sentenced to "be a slave for life to work, unless we see further cause." The slavery imposed upon nonwhites fulfilled the conditions of subjugation described by Henry Swinburne in 1590:

The slave is in greatest subjugation, for a slave is that person which is in servitude or bondage to another, even against nature. . . . Even his children . . . are infected with the Leprosie of his father's bondage.

By 1650 Indians and Negroes in Barbados were commonly serving as bond slaves for their lifetime and the lifetime of their descendants. William Hubbard told of the fate of the Indian survivors of the Pequot War: "Those who were not so desperate or sullen to sell their lives for nothing but yielded in time the male Children were sent to the Bermudas. Of the females, some were distributed to the English towns . . . some among other Indians. . . ."

In 1641 the "Massachusetts Body of Liberties" justified the

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enslavement of "Captives taken in just warres."88 But the Puritans imposed such war-justified slavery only on nonwhites. In August, 1675, the Council of Plymouth ordered the sale of a company of Indians, "being men, women, and children, in number one hundred and twelve . . . in the country's behalf."89

Evidence in a 1687 entry from Plymouth shows that the New England fathers knew how to spell out the sentence of perpetual slavery in the case of nonwhites:

Know all ye men by these presents that I Joseph Bartlett of Plymouth in the Colony of Plymouth in New England for and in consideration of a certain youth named Nedd and three pounds money received and already paid unto me by Ephriam Morton . . . a certain Negro Youth being a perpetual slave whose name is Tony.90

Against such actions, the lonely voice of the aging Apostle John Eliot was heard in protest:

To the Honorable the Governor and Council sitting at Boston . . .

The most widely accepted current definition of racism is bias, based solely on biologic characteristics, primarily skin color. Those who adhere to this definition have argued that it is therefore inaccurate to ascribe racism to American attitudes toward other peoples in earlier centuries, since the basis for these attitudes involved cultural factors other than purely biologic. The collective sigh of relief breathed by historians when it has thus been argued that our Puritan forebears were not "racists" is premature. It is clear that Puritan attitudes toward Indians were complex, and that the strong current of

90 Records of the Town of Plymouth (Plymouth, 1892), II, 150-151.
91 The Apostle Eliot's Remonstrance in George Moore, History of Slavery in Massachusetts, 36, from Plymouth Colony Records, x, 451-452.
antagonism which was fundamental in those attitudes involved more than race. Nevertheless, racial characteristics proved to be the one insurmountable barrier. No matter how hard the Puritan tried to transform the Indian or how completely the Indian conformed, the cause was ultimately hopeless because the Indian could never become white.