

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation. Edited by Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0h59b278>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 15(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Calloway, Colin G.

Publication Date

1991-06-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

mindedness, and federal government policies at their worst, all with a humorous twist.

Peyer has assembled some important contributions to literature in this collection of short fiction. The reader experiences a diversity of styles and approaches—LaFlesche's romanticized stories, Eastman's magical life-and-death intrigue, McNickle's scathing satire. This book marks a transition, a merging of spoken literature with the written word, a most worthy assemblage of stories.

Mary J. Monette

Turtle Mountain Community College

The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation. Edited by Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. 268 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

In May 1637, an English Puritan army, accompanied by a contingent of Indian allies, surrounded and burned the main fort of the Pequot Indians in southern Connecticut, cutting down all who attempted to escape the conflagration. Most of the Pequot warriors were absent at the time of the assault, and the English killed between three hundred and seven hundred Pequot men, women, and children. The power of the tribe was broken forever, the people were dispersed, and the way was opened for English expansion up the Connecticut River. For centuries after the massacre and diaspora, the Pequot seemed to hover on the edge of extinction; in 1940, only one family remained on a tiny, two-hundred-acre reservation.

However, like many East Coast tribes that suffered early devastation and dispossession, the Pequot survived. Few in number, usually poverty-stricken, and accorded only grudging acknowledgment as Indians by their non-Indian neighbors, such groups managed to maintain the core of their cultures and to preserve their identities over centuries of hard times. And, like many other eastern "remnant" groups in recent years, the Pequot have reasserted their rights and identity and embarked on a program of rebuilding their nation. In the 1970s, the western or Mashantucket Pequot wrote a tribal constitution and elected an energetic

and capable leadership. They secured assistance from the Native American Rights Fund and the Indian Rights Association and, like the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy of Maine, brought suit against the state government for the return of lands taken in contravention of the 1790 Indian Trade and Non-Intercourse Act, which declared illegal any transfers of Indian land carried out without federal approval. (Connecticut had auctioned off the bulk of the Pequot Reservation in 1855.) The tribe won an out-of-court settlement; in October 1983, Public Law 98-134, the "Connecticut Indian Land Claims Settlement Act," awarded them federal recognition, a \$900,000 trust fund, and twenty acres from the state of Connecticut. The Mashantucket Pequot have since built four housing complexes, a health facility, and a fire station; they have established a restaurant and a gravel industry, and they run a successful high-stakes bingo operation. They have attracted tribal members back to the reservation and increased the land base to 1,638 acres through purchases with trust funds. With the possible exception of the Indians of Maine, they have achieved "the greatest socioeconomic turnaround of any Native American community in the Northeast" (p. xviii).

Consciously building a bright future on their tragic past, the tribe has funded a major archeological undertaking, the Mashantucket Pequot Ethnohistory Project. They have plans for a tribal museum, and in October 1987 they sponsored a conference that both commemorated the 350th anniversary of the Pequot War and reconstructed the tribe's subsequent history of endurance and renaissance. This volume of essays is the product of that conference.

The book is divided into four parts. In part 1, Alvin Josephy draws on his personal experiences as a life-long resident of Connecticut to comment on persistent and damaging assumptions about "real Indians," and he calls for a change in attitude about New England's Indian population. In part 2, three authors survey southern New England prehistory and early Pequot history. Dena Dincauze provides a general survey of change and adaptation in southern New England prehistory, although it is questionable whether her use of terms such as *Developed Settlers* instead of *Late Archaic* adds clarity by eliminating technical jargon. William Starna looks at the Pequot way of life in the early seventeenth century before war and disease devastated the tribe, although lack of evidence obliges him to discuss southern New

England Indians in general. The late Lynn Ceci then considers wampum as a strategic resource in the area and suggests that control of wampum supplies gave the Pequot War an important economic motivation.

Part 3, "Pequot Survival," is the core of the book and was a major theme of the conference. Five authors assess Pequot attempts to maintain their identity over the centuries following the massacre of 1637. Laurence Hauptman examines the war and its legacy, arguing that the Pequot have gone about the business of redeeming their nation with a worldview shaped by the tragedy. Neal Salisbury considers networks of economic interdependence that produced an uneasy balance between colonists and Indians in the forty years after the war, and he points out the important role played by the Mohawk. Archeologist Kevin McBride describes the investigations being carried out on sites around the reservation and traces changes in the community's subsistence and settlement patterns, from the mid-1660s, when the reservation was established, to 1900. Jack Campisi, who drafted the Mashantucket Pequot Federal Acknowledgment Petition, relates the tribe's relations with the state of Connecticut from 1637 to 1975. Finally, William Simmons offers selections of Pequot folklore that illustrate continuity and suggest persistent cultural roots of Pequot identity.

In part 4, Jack Campisi's valuable essay leads the reader through the maze of the federal recognition process and discusses the major efforts of the New England tribes to achieve justice and establish government-to-government relationships with the United States. Robert L. Bee reviews changes in the Indian policy of the state of Connecticut over the last two decades. James D. Wherry, who previously worked for the Houlton Band of Maliseet in Maine and is now tribal planner for the Mashantucket Pequot, wraps up the volume with an afterword that reviews the projects, progress, and prospects of the tribe today.

This volume helps to modify popular notions about Indians and Indian Country. Located halfway between Boston and New York City, the Pequot have confronted special problems and challenges in maintaining their land base and their tribal identity. Their history of adaptation to life in one of the most populous corridors of the country and their recent successful revival demonstrate that one does not have to live in the West nor to live in poverty to be an Indian.

Because of the nature of the evidence, it is not surprising that some of the early chapters are deficient in Pequot-specific information. Because the book has multiple authors, it is not surprising that there are some minor inconsistencies (regarding the exact size of the Mashantucket Reservation, for example) and some repetitions. A collection of conference papers—even by such a distinguished team—is no substitute for a thorough ethnohistorical monograph. Nevertheless, *The Pequots in Southern New England* is a welcome addition to a growing list of books that are beginning to unravel the fascinating yet long-neglected histories of eastern Indian tribes. Scholars and general readers alike should appreciate this work as offering an important corrective to stereotypical views about eastern Indians and their tragic demise. The Mashantucket Pequot tribe not only is alive and well and living in Connecticut but offers a success story that other small tribes can hope to emulate.

Colin G. Calloway
University of Wyoming