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THE PEQUOT WAR REEXAMINED

Anna R. Monguia

The Pequot Indians of Connecticut are usually remembered only for their so-called "brutality," particularly during the Pequot War of 1637 with the New England colonists. This article, however, originated in the opinion that previous studies of the Pequot have failed to appraise adequately this tribe's ambitions and incentives. By reviewing the anthropological sources along with the colonial records the article draws a different conclusion about Pequot activities and the motivations behind them. Hopefully, the reader will gain a more accurate insight into this Native American people and remember them in a more objective light.

During the colonial era the Pequot were obliged to make some adjustments to maintain an autonomous existence, and they were sustained in these endeavors by vibrant cultural beliefs. It was within the context of these traditions that their strategies for survival were formulated. Therefore, in order to understand the events of the colonial era, knowledge of Pequot culture is required along with a keen perception not only of intra-tribal relations but inter-tribal political activity as well.¹ Colonial history which considers only the conquering race tells less than the complete story.

True Indian history must transcend mere recording of White-Indian relations which emphasizes a static Indian society somehow persisting despite the presence of white-induced change. Native American policies must be seen as they were: creative, self-generating strategies devised to cope with white, as well as Indian, threats. The Native American experience therefore should be recorded as a complex system of Indian-Indian diplomacy in conjunction with White-Indian activities.

At the present time American Indians are often represented in a distorted manner because their history is told by those blind to the dynamics of Indian cultures. This results from not only faulty knowledge of the facts but from myths and pre-judgments acquired through past historians. Prior inaccuracies are compounded by those who infuse

their cultural biases into their writings. William Apes, a native missionary of the Pequot tribe, wrote in 1831 about how his people had been

doubly wronged by the white man—first, driven from their native soil by the sword of the invader, and then darkly slandered by the pen of the historian. The former has treated them like beasts of the forest; the latter has written volumes to justify him in his outrages.²

The documents consulted for the designated period were inevitably those of the New England colonists. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to extract a more representative account of Indian activities despite this nearly extensive reliance on histories elucidating the white perspective.

The cultural history of Native Americans was basically an oral one, supplemented with some pictorial elements. So the essence of the Indian experience must be explored through memoirs, diaries, and anthropological studies for the most part. Only then, through a synthesis of interpretation and speculation, can the historian hope to reconstruct the Indian's past. In the process the historian must attempt to grasp not only the dynamics of Indian societies, but the feeling and spirit of individuals as well.

Accordingly, in order to understand Pequot relations with the Europeans, which ultimately led to their demise, it is imperative to acquire a perspective of their history as a people before these contacts were made. A synopsis of this history will be presented in the following paragraphs.

The Algonquian tribes inhabiting the banks of the Hudson River in 1609 welcomed Henry Hudson into their circular bark lodges. They extended every hospitality to their visitor who later wrote:

The natives were good people, for when they saw I would not remain, they supposed I was afraid of their bows and arrows, and taking the arrows they broke them into pieces and threw them into the fire.³

In 1622 the tribes of the Algonquian language stock along the New England coast made a similar impression on Thomas Morton, an early English settler and later a bitter enemy of the Puritans:

I found two sortes of people, the one Christians, the other Infidels; these I found most full of humanity and more friendly than the other.⁴

The distribution of tribes in New England at the opening of the seventeenth century was the consequence of a series of migrations into the area of four distinct groups of Algonquians. Using the

Merrimac River as the bisecting line at the coast, the southern group composed the most recent arrivals. This group it seems traveled north up the Hudson and eastward into Connecticut and western Massachusetts, driving back or overlaying Algonquian peoples already in residence there.⁵ There has been some debate as to the exact date of the Pequot arrival on the east coast. Colonial historians seem to favor dating the migration in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century as a means of attacking the Pequot claim to the land. The seizure of the tribe's domain is thus defended on the grounds that the land had only recently—and unjustly—been acquired by the Pequot. However, the Pequot title was at least as well-founded as those of the neighboring Indians who were closely affiliated with them in culture and language and may plausibly be classified as a previous wave of the same group, also coming into the area from the southwest.⁶ The only difference in these tribal claims was the length of residence in Connecticut, but as will later be seen even this distinction can be called into dispute.

The southern cultural group consisted of various tribes and confederacies. Among the most important were the Narragansett, Wampanoag, Massachuset, Nipmuck, Mohegan-Pequot, Niantic, Wappinger, and the Mahican.⁷ The area of New England they inhabited was characterized by two phases of Algonquian culture, an earlier archaic one being overtopped by another revealing certain traces of conformity with an Iroquoian culture.⁸ It is therefore assumed that the southern New England people occupied their lands prior to the Iroquoian migration toward the Hudson around 1400.

The Indians, then, were living on the Atlantic coast at least two centuries before European intrusion. In fact, a number of Indian historians insist that Native American peoples find their roots on this continent.

Indian nations have their own tales and histories of origins, migrations and the rise and fall of kingdoms (no less debatable than Biblical stories). Among Indian people there are stories of continental origins, as well as stories about Oriental migrants who were assimilated into Indian society.⁹

Also, American Indian societies then were far from static in nature at the time of first contact with the European intruders. These conclusions on Pequot origins were drawn from linguistic, archaeological, and mythological findings since historic data on this period is almost non-existent.

Because of this scarcity of sources it is important to note the relevant and perhaps more reliable oral migration legend of the native

peoples of the area. In 1925 Lemuel Fielding, a Mohegan-Pequot, related a legend passed along from father to son for a century and a half. It asserts

that the people came eastward over a desert then traversed 'the great fresh water,' and finally driven by the attacks of the Mohawk, crossed to the eastern side of the Connecticut, where they made their homes.¹⁰

Other members of the tribe living at the time also possessed knowledge of the migration from the "west." This legend may be a corroboration of the general eastern Algonquian migration belief which finds its expression in the "Walum Olum" of the Delaware.¹¹ If the migration legends are thus linked, it may have been that the Mohegan-Pequot nation was a local development which expanded extensively so that in the eyes of its neighbors it practically amounted to encroachment.¹²

In light of these alternatives concerning Pequot origins in the area, the validity of the theory often posed by colonial historians that the Pequot had arrived in Connecticut shortly before the English is questionable. Simply by studying the genealogy of Uncas, a Mohegan-Pequot sachem, it is deduced that this tribe came to Connecticut no later than the early part of the sixteenth century.¹³ Uncas, who died an old man in 1683, is given the birth date of 1606 since he was about twenty at the time of his marriage in 1626. Then allowing thirty years for each generation, the birth of Nuck-guut-do-waus, his great-great-grandfather (who it seems led the tribe into Connecticut) is speculated to have been in 1486.¹⁴ Thus the migration into the area is dated at least in the early 1500's. These explanations of Pequot origins counteract the prevalent theory which is employed as a rationalization of the Puritan usurping of Pequot territory: that is, the argument that colonial expansionist activities cannot be condemned since the Pequot were recent usurpers and therefore not the legitimate owners themselves.¹⁵

Even the interpretation of the name "Pequot" has been used to justify colonial atrocities. The name was supposedly given them by the other tribes of New England. The interpretation given by some white historians is that it springs from the Algonquian word "Paquatauog" meaning "destroyers of men" and is based on their "savage" natures.¹⁶ In all fairness to the Pequot it should be noted that this interpretation is in direct contrast to the usual practice of naming tribes in reference to their geographical locations. It is convenient

for historians to propagate the former derivation since this meaning would imply that the tribe deserved the onerous treatment of the Europeans.

At the opening of the seventeenth century the New England Indian population was approximately 34,000, the densest population areas being Rhode Island, Connecticut, and eastern Massachusetts.¹⁷ However, in 1616-1617 the first devastating repercussion of the European newcomers took countless lives through plagues. The New England natives were then to witness the lands of stricken tribes claimed by another race. The Pokanaketts of the Plymouth area were actually exterminated by disease and their country left devoid of inhabitants.¹⁸ The natives were soon to discover, however, that the desolate territory would not quench the land hunger of the whites.

In the Connecticut River area, the encounter between Pequot and European was to culminate in war—a war which would result in the Pequot people being labelled “savages” with its most barbarous connotations. In order to present a just history of the tribe it is necessary to examine the exact nature of this “savagery” and of aboriginal warfare. The facts reveal that when placed within the context of American Indian societal values, the Pequot nation bears a stronger resemblance to that description offered by William Wood (his *New England's Prospect* of 1634 is one of the earliest accounts of the Indians of this area):

The Pequot be a stately warlike people, of whom I never heard any misdemeanour; but that they were just and equall in their dealings; not treacherous either to their Country-men, or English . . .¹⁹

The question of savagery in warfare will be confronted since this aspect of Pequot culture is crucial to a clear perspective of the real causes of their demise. It would be misleading to imply that the Indian nations existed without bloodshed, but it is a graver error to put their conflicts on the same plane with European warfare. The Indians of the Connecticut region and European nations in the seventeenth century were constantly shifting alliances, just as is true of nations today. Alliances were explicit contracts between independent tribes, usually for the purpose of contending with the threat of attack from a common enemy. The presence of fortified villages in the seventeenth century and earlier are evidence that violent conflicts did take place. But there is no account of all-out wars of extermination as was common in the “old world.” Roger Williams writes of native conflicts:

Their Warres are farre lesse bloody and devouring . . . seldome twenty slaine in a pitch field. . . .

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 follows upon the wounded, they soon retire and save the wounded. . . .²⁰

Wars, then, were not waged on a large scale; neither were they carried on continuously throughout the year. Warring Indian nations had to pause to plant the crops and harvest; native peoples lacked the resources for carrying on intensive warfare for long periods. In addition, the victors were not accustomed to the complete obliteration of the conquered tribe, but would often incorporate their members into their society as a tributary group, if not adopt them outright.

The arrival of the Europeans introduced a new concept of war, a war of annihilation. Tribes were coming to the realization that such destructive warfare would have to be adopted in order to survive. The adoption of this type of warfare was precipitated by the motive for war introduced by Europeans—economic gains, as opposed to economic survival. Those New England tribes which joined with the English in the extermination of the Pequot were caught up in “the covetous desire . . . to commerce with our nation and wee with them.”²¹ The Narragansett, for example, certainly knew of the gains to be reaped through trade with the Europeans. Being the most numerous and powerful tribe in the area, it was not long before they entered into a commercial alliance with the British. William Wood writes of them:

Since the English came, they have employed most of their time in catching of Beavers, Otters . . . which they bring downe into the Bay, returning back loaded with English commodities of which they make a double profit, by selling them to more remote Indians, who are ignorant of what cheape rates they obtaine them, in comparison of what they make them pay.²²

The Narragansett, then, recognized an advantage to good relations with the English. The economic motive quite possibly was the paramount factor which led to their taking up arms against the Pequot. Speculation would point to either an attempt to monopolize the entire New England trade or simply to assure their present lucrative status. Likewise the Mohegans, a small group of break-away Pequots, surely comprehended the nature of a strong commercial bond. Naturally, then, Pequot people in control of the Connecticut River were also very early caught up in trade with the new arrivals.

Previous to and independent of the European fur trade, the furbearers were of great value to

the Algonquians, as meeting needs in food, clothing, and trade. But the fur trade of the seventeenth century brought about important commercial alliances and cultural reverberations in native warfare which were events critical to the history of the Pequot.

Land Tenure System

Another aspect of New England aboriginal society which should be examined is the land tenure system. The destruction of the Pequot was partly rationalized on the pretext that "the Natives in New England they inclose noe land neither have any settled habitation . . . soe have noe other but a naturall right to those countries."²³ But, in the conception of the Pequot inhabitants, they had every right to the land and their life style disproved the English contention that "so is it lawful now to take a land none useth and make use of it."²⁴ The general misconception that the "new world" when originally viewed by Europeans was a primeval forest with sparse open spaces and fields, is contravened by the tribal land customs, especially those of the southern half of New England.²⁵ Both the writings of Thomas Morton and William Wood make reference to the Indian practice of burning the undergrowth in order to keep the fields and woodlands open. This was done for agricultural purposes. In the natives' economy, hunting and fishing were subsidiary to agriculture, and for this reason the New England tribes very seldom sold their cultivated fields.²⁶ The Indians were far from nomadic. Each Indian nation held title to and resided within territory bounded by natural features, recognized by all and passed on in a traditional manner.

The transfer of property title was accomplished by three means: abandonment, purchase (by Whites), and conquest.²⁷ It has been previously noted how land changed hands in the Plymouth area with the demise of the Pokanokets. In regards to purchase it is important to note that the English purchases in Connecticut showed a break with previous dealings with the Indians, there being no record of land deeds until 1633. The purpose behind the change in policy was to invalidate the Dutch purchase on the lower Connecticut River by basing their claim on a contractual agreement with the "rightful" owners.²⁸ Furthermore, the compensation for Indian territory obviously never reflected the worth of the acquisition. In contracting treaties with the Europeans the tribes would never disown their lands totally. When a tribe sold territory, a right to use the land, not its

permanent possession, was obtained by the new tenant. If land was granted to settlers for farming, the tribe retained the privilege to hunt, fish or collect wild products on it.²⁹ Therefore, even though he no longer possessed a legal title, most of the New England native's uses for the land were still available to him. Sometimes even the right to plant was retained.

The right of conquest is the method of transferring property most pertinent to this study of the Pequot, who it is speculated applied it through rapid expansion in the local area. Conquest, as a medium for the acquisition or loss of territory was clearly recognized in native theory during historic times and before contact.³⁰ It must be re-emphasized here, that "conquest" in Indian terms has distinct connotations from the European concept. The claim to the land the Pequots possessed was, then, a valid one among the native peoples. The subordinate tribes inhabiting the area were required to pay tribute and expected to consult Pequot leadership in matters of inter-group relations, such as alliance, war, trade and land cession.³¹ It was illegal for the subject sagamores or individual clans to engage in land sales with another on their own initiative. Unauthorized land negotiations were interpreted as a serious violation of tribal custom, demanding repudiation of the contract.

The English, in their initial penetration into the fertile Connecticut River region, violated at least two traditions of native society. They applied the rule of *vacuum domicilium* (unutilized occupation) where it was obviously not applicable, and secondly they purchased land from dislocated River tribes which were under the domination of the Pequots and which, therefore, had no legal jurisdiction according to native tradition. The domain of the Pequot had been established at least a century before the encroachment on Connecticut land by the English. These people were utilizing the region in a thorough and systematic manner. The tribal expanse consisted of a number of villages, with adjacent lands set aside for agriculture, hunting and fishing. The immense territories for hunting were as definitely a sector of tribal lands as the village sites. The boundaries of the hunting lands were strictly defined, being divided into areas designated to certain families. "Common hunting grounds" where members of any tribe might enter and hunt at will were non-existent. Unauthorized hunting or even passage across tribal territory could be labelled as trespass and often was met with force. The long chronicle of inter-tribal wars in the Northeast is replete with

incidents in which hunters from one tribe are found on the lands of another and are attacked by warriors of that tribe.³²

The life style of the New England Indians called for some movement within the tribal lands. The food sources of these peoples dictated that they maintain several households which they would visit according to season. The principal food from late summer until fall was garden products, followed by the hunting season which lasted until the snow prevented it. The caches of acorns, beans, corn, dried meat and fish provided subsistence through the winter months in their secluded forest dwellings. The coming of spring saw the removal to the fishing areas and time-honored villages for planting. As will later be seen, it was the undermining of this method of subsistence which worked to the advantage of the English war design.

Native Political Organization

With the territorial base now well defined, it is appropriate to give some attention to the political concept to which it gave root. The governmental powers of the majority of New England tribes lay with the head chief or sachem and in one or more bodies of advisers. The office of sachem was in general hereditary, with the subordinate sachems in a large domain given the title of sagamores. Roger Williams writes of native government:

The Sachims, although they have an absolute Monarchie over the people; yet they will not conclude of ought that concernes all, either Lawes, or Subsidies or warres, unto which the people are averse, and by gentle perswasion cannot be brought.³³

Native political organization, then, was not the rigid monarchical type that Europeans oftentimes described. It was a government which found its basis in the concept of consensus; a general gathering being held when an issue which affected the entire tribe was to be confronted. At this time all were assured a chance to voice their opinions; the head sachem, sagamores, "war captains" (prestigious military men), elders, and the young men. Given this political set-up, it is apparent that those sagamores with whom the English first made contact were without question violating traditional native governing principles. The illegitimate transactions by individual sagamores or groups of sagamores no doubt brought much consternation to the Pequot tribe.

With this background of Pequot culture it is now possible to proceed with the analysis of the motivating forces and creative responses which

functioned during the calamitous years from 1634 to 1637. The earliest Pequot sachem alluded to in colonial records is Nuck-guut-do-waus; the sachemship was passed along from father to son through Woipequund, Woopigwooit, Tatobem, and finally Sassacus. The sachems were sometimes referred to as "Pekoath" meaning Great Pequot. Sassacus was the sachem with whom the English were to contend.³⁴ At the time of the English-Pequot war, Sassacus was in power with more than two dozen sagamores under him. The population of the tribe was about 3,000. Sherburne F. Cook estimates the number of warriors at around 750.³⁵ The Pequot prior to European contact were in a powerful position, claiming most of Connecticut and Long Island in their confederacy. Early accounts claim that the Pequots prospered in the production of the Indian money "wampampeage."

Pequot control of the Connecticut River no doubt gave them a much coveted position in pre-contact fur trade, for the furs abounded here, as the Europeans were soon to discover. It is for this reason that the natives of Connecticut were among the first to suffer the harsh blow of the materialistic colonists. Ironically, the Pequot were unfortunate in possessing one of the most fertile and commercially valuable areas "by the Long River," which is the English translation of the Algonquian phrase, "Conne tic ut."³⁶ Once the newcomers worked their way into the native trading system the position of middleman became paramount to the tribes since commodities such as guns were becoming essential to national survival. Extremely complex intertribal arrangements were operating, some tribes functioning as fur-producers, others as middlemen who transported furs, levied tolls on travelers, bargained, and allowed some share of the profit to the producer.³⁷

It was in 1633 that the Pequot allowed the New Netherland Dutch to set up a trading post in their territory. But the coveted Pequot position was already being undermined. As early as 1631

a sagamore named Waghinacut, probably a Podunk, came to Massachusetts for the purpose of inducing the English to . . . settle in his country on the great river Connecticut; offered, to provide them with corn, and beaver; boasted of the fertility of the land.³⁸

Governor Winthrop of Boston refused the offer and afterwards found "that Waghinacut was a very treacherous man, and was at war with a far greater sachem named Pekoath."³⁹ However, the following year the English colonists decided to investigate the Indian proposition. Plymouth

sent an expedition to explore the region and it reported vast potentialities. The Pequot considered it a trespass when in 1633 Plymouth sent a party up the Connecticut past the Dutch fort and set up a trading post near the present site of Windsor. William Holmes, the commander of the expedition, purchased land from Sequassen of the Suckiage tribe and Nattawanut of the Matianuck or Windsor Indians. Both were subordinate sagamores to the Pequot who had no legal right to sell the land.⁴⁰ The English motive for such action was to set up the Pequot as "robbers and intruders."⁴¹ By questioning the Pequot title to the land, they could attack the Dutch claim to Connecticut. The subchiefs who negotiated with the English were probably seeking a direct share in the trade which their Pequot overlords were monopolizing.

The Pequot people soon saw their domain become a European battleground, the site of an aggressive competition between the newcomers, Dutch and English, and between different English colonies. Governor Winthrop condemned the violence in the area for it "has brought us all and the gospel under the common reproach of cutting one another's throats for beaver."⁴² The Pequot people were soon to fall victim to the rash dealings of the traders. In 1634 the Pequot found it necessary to mete out just retribution to an incorrigible Englishman, one Captain Stone who had

surprised two [Pequot] men, and bound them, to make by force to show him the way up the river, and he with two others, coming on shore the [Pequots] killed them, to deliver their own men; and some of them, going afterwards to the bark, it was suddenly blown up.⁴³

It was during this outbreak of hostilities that the Pequot became further enmeshed in violent commercial rivalry when enemy tribes came into their territory to trade with the Dutch. The enemy traders were put to death, even though the terms of the 1633 Pequot treaty with the Dutch stated that "the enemies of one or the other nation shall not molest each other on the purchased tract."⁴⁴ The Pequot may have taken the terms literally and so thought it was not a violation if the enemy was dealt with on the return trip through Pequot domain. Possibly a group of dissident Pequot were responsible. Whatever the reason, the Pequot were unprepared for the harsh reprisal by the Dutch, who assassinated Woopigwooit and several of his men.⁴⁵ The murder of a sachem needless to say was one of the most outrageous crimes in Indian

society, being one of the few punished by execution. In retaliation for the murder of their respected sachem the Pequots counterplotted a war against the Dutch traders.

Shortly after these hostile incidents the Pequot chose to shift their commercial alliance to the English, since the war with the Dutch had interrupted their former trade. The Pequot recognized that a strong trade alliance would be necessary to preserve their national security in the face of encroaching peoples, both native and European. The Pequot were also at war with their traditional enemies, the powerful Narragansetts. So at this point the English seemed to be the best choice for an alliance. A native ambassador was sent to Boston to set up legitimate trade relations, and the ensuing reconciliation took the form of the Treaty of 1634. Its terms allowed the English to establish settlements through purchase; and provided compensation of beaver and otter skins and wampum by the Pequots for the death of Stone. In return for these concessions the Pequots felt they would be able to maintain their powerful middleman position through commerce with the vessel the English agreed to send.⁴⁶ Unfortunately for the Pequots, however, the planting of English towns along the Connecticut River was the only article of the treaty that was fulfilled. By 1636 the Pequot had to make way for establishment of the Puritan villages at Wethersfield, Windsor and Hartford, containing some eight hundred settlers.⁴⁷

It was only a matter of time before such vigorous settlement in the Pequot domain erupted in turbulence. Another Englishman, "Mad Jack" Oldham "upon a quarrel between him and the Indians, was cut off . . . at Block Island."⁴⁸ The Pequot were to feel the harsh repercussions of this killing even though Block Island Indians were tributaries of the Narragansett. The Pequot too late realized that the English were capable of an even more devastating vindictiveness than the Dutch. A punitive expedition, sent on the assumption that the Pequot were harboring the guilty parties, arrived in their midst in September 1636. The Pequots, fearing maltreatment from the English who approached in several vessels, cried out from the shores, "What cheer, Englishmen? Are you angry? Will you kill us? What cheer?"⁴⁹ The tribe hoped they would be able to reason with the force and avoid violence, but the English put off their questions. The fleet paused overnight in Pequot Harbor and the Indian inhabitants, as might be expected, had a

very uneasy night, keeping large fires lit in fear that the English would land.

Early the next day the Pequot sent an ambassador to try to reason with the military force, which responded with these provocatively unreasonable demands: the surrender of the murderers of Stone and Oldham and another one thousand fathoms of wampum; if these could not be met they must surrender twenty children of their principal men as hostages. The ambassador was justly astonished at such a proposal, but agreed to arrange an audience with Sassacus or another powerful leader, Mononotto. Unfortunately, the leaders were away at the time and the English, impatient at the delay, went ashore. The Pequot, realizing that the English expedition was bent on destruction, hurriedly conveyed their women and children to places of safety and buried as many of their possessions as possible.

As the Pequots expected, the soldiers "beat up the drum and bid them battle" and "spent the day burning and spoiling the country."⁵⁰ Taking cover, the Pequot offered as much resistance as they could but were unable to halt the troops in the demolishing of their villages and crops and looting their storage caches. The English were able to come away with only "one man wounded in the leg; but certain numbers of [Pequot] slain, and many wounded."⁵¹ It being harvest time for the natives, the destructive action on the part of the intruders was immediately assessed as a serious threat to their existence.

The Pequot realized the English nation must be stopped if they were to preserve their independence and their land base. Thus they planned to lay siege to the Connecticut fortification at Saybrook. "Finding [English] bullets to outreach their arrows" they were unsuccessful in this effort even though the fort was garrisoned by only twenty men. Their best recourse was to make scattered attacks on outlying settlements. The Pequot also realized that they could not win the war without aid of allies, so they set about soliciting the support of the Niantics and some of the Mohigans. Indicative of the fact that the Pequots did not underestimate the seriousness of the English threat, was their attempt to settle differences even with their old enemies, the Narragansett. Very resourceful persuasions were posed by the Pequot ambassadors: "if the Narragansett did assist the English to subdue them," Nathaniel Morton wrote, "that did make way for their own overthrow."⁵² The policies adopted by the Pequot, it seems, were more practical and visionary than those of their

kinsmen. The Narragansett joined forces with the English, and as prophesized met their demise at the hands of their former allies during King Phillip's War in 1675.

The Pequot were dealt the decisive blow when their stronghold at Mystic Fort was stealthily attacked by the Puritans and their Indian allies (110 colonists, 200 Narragansett, and 70 Mohegan).⁵³ The attack on some 700 Pequot men, women and children, "themselves fast asleep for the most part, bred in them such a terror, that they brake forth into a most doleful cry."⁵⁴ The people which historians label "bellicose savages" were eliminated almost to the last person while only two English were killed, one accidentally by another Englishman. The extent of Pequot "barbarities" toward the English has no doubt been exaggerated, for with "sixteen Guns with Powder and Shot," the threat they posed surely was not that deadly.⁵⁵ And native war tactics as described by Captain Underhill were no great menace:

Pequeats, Narragansets, and Mohigeners charging a few arrows together after such a manner, as I dare boldly affirm, they might fight seven years and not kill seven men . . . This fight is more for pastime, than to conquer and subdue enemies.⁵⁶

This encounter at Mystic Fort was so devastating that only 300 Pequot warriors remained to continue the struggle for survival. This is indicative of the fact that the Pequot found themselves victims of a militarily superior nation bent on pursuing a war of annihilation. An illustration of this is that the English escaped and a Pequot arrow "through Mercy touched not one of them."⁵⁷ In fact, accounts relate that a rear guard of a dozen soldiers was sufficient to repulse all the vengeance of this large number of Pequot warriors. Since the odds were substantially tilted in favor of the whites militarily, they obviously were in a position to be more merciful than the statistics show them to have been. Considering the ratio of the casualties on both sides it is questionable as to who was indeed the "savage." Rather than indulging in "savagery" the Pequots were engaged in a defensive struggle for tribal existence.

Most of the Pequot remnants, homeless and grieving, were easily found and destroyed or sold into slavery. Subject tribes, which according to most historians should have been overjoyed at the chance to throw off the yoke of Pequot oppression, described their overlords:

The Pequots were good Men, their Friends, and they would Fight for them, and protect them . . .⁵⁸

The Pequot and their allies even though an unequal match for the invaders, made courageous efforts to hold them off, but in the end were usually forced to flee for their lives. With the English constantly stealing their corn, destroying homes and implements, the Pequot found their world being undermined.

The Pequot resistance inflicted minimal casualties to Puritans who were "completely armed, with corselets, muskets, bandoleers, rests, and swords,"⁵⁹ In fact the force of the native arrows could be repulsed by neck-cloths, and in one case even a piece of cheese was sufficient. On the run with women and children and needing to dig for clams for sustenance, they left behind an easy trail for the predators. The few survivors found themselves divided between the colonists and Indian allies or shipped off to Bermuda as slaves, their tribal identity outlawed.

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that the Pequot people have been inadequately appraised by historians. The designation of the Pequots as "a cruel and barbarous Nation of Indians" was a rationalization contemporary authors employed to exonerate the English of the genocidal attack on an Indian people. Historians have perpetuated this myth for almost three and a half centuries. Research reveals that the so-called "cruel and barbarous" action of the Pequots for a period of three years, between 1634 and 1637, convinced the English that their entire culture was "barbarian." Such a label, even when used to describe Pequot behavior for these three years, is unwarranted. Taking into account the tribe's cultural traditions and the overt violations by the Europeans, it can be seen that there was ample reason for Pequot hostility toward the white man. The Pequot constructed policies intended to preserve their tribal heritage and their physical survival. The question arises if historians have erred in their descriptions of the Pequots, supposedly one of the "most cruel" tribes, then one must wonder about the reliability of those accounts of other tribes that attribute white wrath to Indian cruelty.

Since neither European nor Indian would make the concessions necessary for cultural assimilation, one of the peoples had to be pushed aside. The Native Americans could not understand the presumptuous nature of the white man. Thus, Roger Williams was often asked: "Why come the Englishman hither? and measuring others by themselves."⁶⁰ Neither could the In-

dians fathom the white man's savagery in warfare, "but cried Mach it, mach it; that is, It is naught, it is naught, because it is furious, and slays too many men."⁶¹ After a short coexistence with the English and participation in a trade relationship, the Pequot became aware that the colonists were an aggressive nation whose coercive methods could not be tolerated. However, the responsive steps they took brought upon them a kind of revenge which they were unable to fend off. The revenge of the white man was coupled with the covetousness of other Indians who had not come to realize that alignments with the whites did not gain acceptance of their culture and race by them. What certain factions of Indians saw as a solution to their immediate problems was to be the cause of their eventual downfall. The Pequot nation should be given credit for recognizing the true threat of the Europeans and for the effort they put forth to defend their lands. This tribe was among the first to realize that there could be no alignment with a people, summed up most accurately by Fidelia Fielding in the early 1900's. She wrote in her native Mohegan-Pequot language:

White men think [they] know all things. Half [the things they are] saying not are so. Poor white men. Many want all this earth . . . Good man is not frequent. Looking [for him, you] cannot find him. These people can help someone, but don't help anyone because they are stingy, only! I am sorry for these people because not ever can they help it.⁶²

NOTES

1. See P. Richard Metcalf, "Who Should Rule at Home? Native American Politics and Indian-White Relations," *The Journal of American History*, (December, 1974), pp. 651-665 for a discussion of Pequot intra-tribal politics, in particular the role of factionalism. Metcalf concludes that the break-away Pequots led by Uncas were the primary impetus behind the Pequot war thereby minimizing white influence.
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3. Virginia I. Armstrong: *I Have Spoken*, (Chicago, 1971), p. 1.
4. Thomas Morton: *New English Cannan*, (Amsterdam, 1637), p. 123.
5. Roland B. Dixon: "The Early Migrations of the Indians East of the Mississippi," *Proceedings of American Antiquarian Society*, v. 24, (April 1914), p. 73.
6. Dixon: "Early Migrations," pp. 73-74.
7. Charles Willoughby: *Antiquities of the New England Indians*, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, (1935), p. 277.
8. Frank G. Speck: "Native Tribes and Dialects of Connecticut: A Mohegan-Pequot Diary," *Bureau of American Ethnology 43rd Annual Report*, 1925/26, p. 223.

9. William Meyer ('yonv'ut'sisla): *Native Americans: the New Indian Resistance*, (New York, 1971), p. 13.
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11. Speck: "Native Tribes," p. 219.
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13. Charles C. Hoadly: "Pedigree of Uncas," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, (1856), v. 10, no. 3, pp. 227-228.
14. Carroll A. Means: "Mohegan-Pequot Relationships, as indicated by the Events Leading to the Pequot Massacre," *Archaeological Society of Connecticut, Bulletin*, (1947).
15. See Alden T. Vaughan: *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians* (Boston, 1965), p. 55.
16. Speck: "Native Tribes," p. 218.
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19. William Wood: *New Englands Prospect*, (London, 1634), p. 61.
20. Roger Williams: *Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, (New York, 1963), p. 204.
21. T. Morton: *New English Canaan*, p. 127.
22. Wood: *New Englands Prospect*, p. 62.
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25. Willoughby: *Antiquities*, p. 282.
26. Alden T. Vaughan: *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*. (Boston, 1965), p. 109.
27. Anthony F.C. Wallace: "Political Organization and Land Tenure Among the Northeastern Indians, 1600-1830," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, (1957), v. XLII, p. 319.
28. Francis Jennings, "Virgin Land and Savage People," *American Quarterly*, (Oct. 1971), v. XXIII, no. 4, p. 531.
29. Karl H. Schlesier, "The Indians of the United States: An Essay on Cultural Resistance," *Wichita State University Bulletin*, (1969), v. XLV, no. 4, p. 9.
30. Wallace: "Political Organization," p. 319.
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32. Wallace: "Political Organization," p. 318.
33. Williams: *Complete Writings*, p. 164.
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48. N. Morton: *New Englands Memorial*, p. 125.
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50. John Underhill: "News from America," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, (1836), v. 25-26, pp. 10-11.
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54. Underhill: "News," p. 23.
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62. Speck: "Native Tribes," p. 247.