

This Land Is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving. By David J. Silverman. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, Inc., 2019. 514 pages. \$32.00 cloth; \$20.00 paper; \$22.40 electronic.

With the approaching 400th anniversary of the Pilgrim's landing at Plymouth Rock, David J. Silverman, professor of history at George Washington University and author of three previous books on Native Americans of the Northeast, focuses his attention on the popular misconceptions surrounding this event. The author effectively builds on his previous research on the Wampanoags and Narragansetts and he has undertaken exhaustive research into published and unpublished journals, correspondence, and diaries in manuscript collections throughout southern New England. Silverman's book should have appeal to the general reader as well as to scholars, since it is filled with insights about Thanksgiving, American cultural values, and how and why we commemorate this most important national holiday. He states, "If the public continues to insist on associating Pilgrim-Wampanoag relations with Thanksgiving, the least we can do is try to get the story right" (8).

On Thanksgiving Day in 1970, speaking at Plymouth Rock, Native American activist Frank James referred to the holiday as "the National Day of Mourning," reacting to the national myth that had largely developed from the Civil War era onward. It had ignored Indian-white conflict; praised "good Indians" such as Squanto (Tisquantum), and Massasoit (Ousamequin) for helping the colonists survive; lauded the Pilgrims as forerunners of American democratic principles; and portrayed the Indians as a vanishing race who left America as a "gift" for non-Indians.

Silverman brings out, however, that by the first years of the seventeenth century, English conflicts with the Wampanoags had already arisen. In 1603, Martin Pring, fearing the Native peoples he encountered, let loose the mastiffs on them. In 1614, Captain Thomas Hunt captured two dozen Wampanoags and sold them into slavery. Indeed, what followed right through 1619 were raids on Indian communities, kidnappings, and further enslavement. Despite these horrible encounters, the Wampanoags saw the Plymouth Colony as its potential ally, one that could supply them with European firepower against their enemies the Narragansetts. Weakened by a disastrous epidemic, Sachem Ousamequin signed a treaty of alliance with the Pilgrims in 1621. What followed was the first Thanksgiving, one that Silverman nicely describes as being drawn from the English Puritan practice of ending fast days. The author brings out that the menu at the feast reflected the full range of the Wampanoag diet, one that surprisingly included eels.

After Miles Standish's assassination of two Wampanoag plotters in 1623, Silverman points out that a half century of peace followed, "a real accomplishment" (205). Colonial officials propped up Ousamequin with weaponry and trade items, and, in return, the sachem allowed them to share land or ceded or sold land to them outright. However, as Silverman describes, the Wampanoags nevertheless faced the increasing pressures of rapid European settlement. War was avoided when local agreements were fashioned that, among other things, allowed the English to graze their cattle as long as the local sachem received a piece of beef from every cow slaughtered,

or other accords that allowed the Wampanoags to collect shellfish and drift whales and gather wood on lands previously ceded to the colonists.

Silverman then recounts the origins of King Philip's War. After holding secret talks with officials of Rhode Island, Moosam (Wamsutta or Alexander), Ousamequin's oldest son, was arrested and was to die in custody under mysterious circumstances, possibly as a result of being poisoned. With continued colonial encroachments and restrictions in trade, Pometacom (Metacomet or Philip), Ousamequin's other son, continued his brother's resistance and made a rapprochement with Ninigret, the Narragansett sachem. In 1675, Plymouth colony executed three Wampanoags for killing Sissamon, a Harvard-educated Wampanoag preacher and scribe. Colonial officials at the trial attempted to implicate Pometacom. King Philip's War soon followed with Pometacom's Taunton River Wampanoags allied to the Narragansett and the Nipmucs against the English colonists, although the author rightly brings out that the Cape Cod and Island Wampanoags, "Praying Indians," avoided joining this multi-tribal alliance. Although much of Silverman's account on the war is well known, he adds new material about Pometacom's failed efforts to secure an alliance with the Mohawks after they established a refugee presence along the New York-Massachusetts border.

In the war, the English colonists killed some 3,000 Indians and enslaved 2,000 more. They shipped Indian males over the age of fourteen as slaves to work sugar plantations in the Caribbean, or sent them to Gibraltar to work as forced laborers. The colonists seized more of Wampanoag territory and sold it off to pay veterans of the war; the rest was sold to land speculators. The defeated Pometacom was quartered and his rotting head was put on display in public for twenty years.

Silverman's work is well written, well researched, and highly recommended. However, the author makes an exaggerated claim, namely that his book "traces Wampanoag history after the Thanksgiving feast and King Philip's War up to the present day" (19), yet no more than 20 percent of the book focuses on the 350 years after the war's conclusion. He does bring out, however, that the Wampanoag communities continued to lose land under the guise of Euro-American law and that their extreme poverty led to foreclosures and debt peonage. They had to pay off their debts by military service, signing whale contracts that exploited their labor, and at times even had to indenture their children to work in white households. Silverman brings out that epidemics and Wampanoag involvement in the colonial wars caused a sharp population decline, and, as historian Daniel Mandell has aptly written, resulted in Wampanoag women marrying African American men.

As early as 1752, the Mashpees brought their fight to King George II, his Privy Council, and the Board of Trade, and won a decision that allowed them for the next twenty-five years to be recognized as a self-governing district. In the 1830s, Pequot clergyman William Apes (Apess) continued to articulate Wampanoag concerns in his writings. Drawing from the writings of anthropologist Jack Campisi, Silverman traces Wampanoag political and legal resistance and the threats to their land base after Massachusetts made them citizens in 1869–1870 and established the towns of Aquinnah (Gay Head) and Mashpee. Although Silverman describes Red Power activism that influenced Frank James, he skips over Wampanoag tribal leaders, such as

the Widdiss family at Gay Head and the Peters family at Mashpee, whose determined efforts in seeking federal recognition, finally achieved in 1987 and 2002, played major roles in changing the narrative about Thanksgiving.

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