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## Symbol of a Failed Strategy: The Sassamon Trial, Political Culture, and the Outbreak of King Philip's War

JAMES DRAKE

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*History is not simply something that happens to people, but something they make—within, of course, the very powerful constraints of the system within which they are operating.*

—Sherry B. Ortner<sup>1</sup>

For more than three hundred years, historians have pointed to the trial of three Indians for the alleged murder of the Indian John Sassamon as the proximate cause of King Philip's War. These scholars have posited that the execution of the Indians for Sassamon's murder triggered a total war among the region's inhabitants in June 1675.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, many researchers have demonstrated that Indians usually received unfair treatment in the colonial courts; if that is true, why did the Sassamon trial, in particular, after years of legal inequality, signify such a threat that Indians throughout the Northeast put their communities at risk in a full-scale war effort?<sup>3</sup> To answer this question, one must understand exactly what the trial symbolized to various Indians, especially to Philip and the Pokanoket (Wampanoag). And to interpret the symbolism of the trial, one must comprehend the situation that various Indians believed they had created for themselves and the Northeast's English inhabitants.

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By 1675, both the “praying Indians” of Massachusetts and many of the “nonpraying Indians” of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and Rhode Island had invested heavily in the English political system as a means of preserving their autonomy.<sup>4</sup> Both praying and nonpraying Indians competed for advantage within the English political system. For nonpraying Indians loyal to the sachem Philip, the execution of three fellow Indians for the alleged murder of Sassamon, a praying Indian, signaled the failure of their political strategy and the success of that of their praying counterparts. A divine omen of war in the form of a lunar eclipse reinforced this signal and helped lead to a violent rebellion among a large portion of the region’s Indian inhabitants.

Since the English had first begun settling in the Northeast, Indians—both individually and as groups—had used the settlers to their advantage in political rivalries with other Indians.<sup>5</sup> In 1620, Squanto used Plymouth to bolster the strength of his Patuxet band, which had previously been decimated by disease, and to carve out a measure of autonomy under the shadow of the powerful Pokanoket, led by Massasoit.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in March 1621, Massasoit perceived an advantage in establishing an alliance with the English at Plymouth Colony, which resulted in the famous treaty.<sup>7</sup> In 1631, a sachem in the Connecticut River valley invited Bostonians to settle in the region, probably in an effort to bolster Algonquian defenses against the Mohawk mourning wars.<sup>8</sup> Beginning with the Pequot War, however, as the English began to form a more powerful presence in the region and to exert greater pressure on native populations, Indians increasingly used the English political and legal system to protect themselves from the English. This strategy allowed the region’s Indian and English inhabitants to exist in relative harmony from the end of the Pequot War of 1637 until 1675. Understanding the proximate causes of King Philip’s War requires an examination of the basis for this thirty-eight-year peace.<sup>9</sup>

Traditionally, explanations of the causes of the war have focused on the cultural differences among the participants. Yet to explain the timing of the war, it is equally important to probe the cultural similarities that the participants had perceived in one another. Such an approach follows the lead of anthropologists such as Renato Rosaldo, who has argued against the fallacy of positing cultures as distinct, nonoverlapping entities and has called for examination of the “borderlands,” or elements shared between cultures. Similarly, historian Richard White has awak-

ened his colleagues to the possibility that a middle ground may often have existed between Indians and whites.<sup>10</sup> Since war is merely the violent extension of diplomacy, the proximate causes of King Philip's War cannot be comprehended without a comparative understanding of English and Indian political culture. In the second half of the seventeenth century, when Indians and English examined the workings of each other's polity, they perceived enough similarities that they could categorize one another into their own existing cultural structures. This is not to say, by any means, that English and Indians shared identical political cultures, or even that the similarities outweighed the differences, but merely that neither would have seemed completely foreign to the other. If anything, the two groups perceived too much similarity between themselves in what functioned as a type of mutual misunderstanding.

English observers in the Northeast consistently described Indian government as "monarchical." Roger Williams noted in his *A Key into the Language of America* (1643) that the Narragansett sachems of Rhode Island "have an absolute Monarchie over the people." In Massachusetts, on the eve of King Philip's War, the missionary Daniel Gookin commented that "[t]heir [Indians within Massachusetts'] government is generally monarchical." John Josselyn also offered the same characterization of Indian government in 1675, stating unambiguously that "[t]heir government is monarchical."<sup>11</sup>

Yet, often, such descriptions of northeastern tribal governments also defined the limits on Indian rulers' powers. Daniel Gookin and Roger Williams believed that the type of "monarchy" under which Indians lived included bonds of mutual obligation. Followers of a particular leader offered their allegiance only so long as they perceived that ruler to be furthering the group's interest. For example, Williams noted that Narragansett leaders would not act in ways "to which the people are averse, and by gentle perswasion cannot be brought." Likewise, Gookin also noticed that "sachems have not their men in such subjection, but that very frequently their men will leave them upon distaste or harsh dealing, and go and live under other sachems that can protect them."<sup>12</sup> When a sachem acted contrary to a group's perceived interest, the sachem risked losing his followers' loyalty to another individual.

Many historians have dismissed seventeenth-century Englishmen's observations that Indians lived in a monarchical

polity as projections of English biases and preconceptions onto native peoples. To be sure, seventeenth-century English settlers came to North America with preconceptions and tried to fit their observations of Indians into their own cultural categories. Yet, if we simply dismiss the views of Englishmen such as Williams and Gookin—two men who probably had as much contact and familiarity with Indian political culture as any writers on the subject—we fail to address the question of why they chose to categorize the Indian polity as monarchical rather than aristocratic or democratic. The Englishmen's choice of the term *monarchy*, rather than other readily available terms, reveals that there were facets of Indian culture that resonated with and overlapped English culture.

Recent historians may have been too quick to dismiss English descriptions as mere cultural projections partly because these historians were, at the same time, projecting their own biases about monarchy onto the early English settlers of the Northeast. Efforts to paint pictures of innocent Indians subject to the atrocities of English invaders have led some Indian historians to draw on preconceptions of monarchy that emphasize its tyrannical aspects. However, a closer examination of English political culture shows that English inhabitants of the seventeenth-century Northeast saw the monarchical bond not purely as one of tyranny but as one of mutual obligation between king and subject.

In a thorough study of eighteenth-century political culture in Massachusetts, historian Richard Bushman writes that “[t]he central monarchical principle was the belief that the king was the protector of his people. Protection and allegiance were reciprocal obligations.” Moreover, “[k]ings did seek to repress the opposition, of course, but resistance was as integral to monarchical political culture as obedience . . . . Protection obligated people to submit; failure to protect dissolved the obligation.”<sup>13</sup>

Although Bushman's study focuses on the period after 1691, evidence demonstrates that English inhabitants of New England held similar conceptions of monarchy and rulership in general in the seventeenth century. In *The Character of a Good Ruler*, historian T.H. Breen argues that, as early as 1620, Puritan political culture emphasized the voluntary and reciprocal relationship between ruler and subject. Breen writes that “[i]n Massachusetts the covenant idea proliferated far beyond what it had been in the mother country. . . . They [Massachusetts Puritans] spoke of secular government, for example, as a voluntary agreement existing between the ruler and his subjects . . . . The essential ingredient in

this contract was free will."<sup>14</sup> The impact of this belief appears in the colony's correspondence with the king. In 1661, the Massachusetts General Court reaffirmed its "dutjes of alleagiance" to the king but maintained their right to "pleade with their prince against all such as shall at any time endeavor the violation of their priviledges." In 1664 and 1665, the Massachusetts General Court sent lengthy letters to the king, which contain not only a great deal of humble flattery but also requests for continued protection and patent privileges.<sup>15</sup> These actions of the Massachusetts General Court do not represent a blind submission to a ruler no matter the cost. Instead, they demonstrate that inhabitants of the colony expected a return on their investment of loyalty in the form of protection of patent privileges; they expected reciprocity on the part of the crown.

Seventeenth-century Rhode Islanders ostensibly gained even more than did the English inhabitants of Massachusetts through their relationship with the king. When the king granted Rhode Island a royal charter in 1663, he promised the colony's inhabitants his protection. Individuals who had been banished from other colonies regained rights to travel and conduct business in the English colonies. The king also forbade the other colonies from invading Rhode Island, allowing its inhabitants, in their words, to "hold forth a lively experiment that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained, and that among our English subjects, with a full liberty in religious concernments."<sup>16</sup> Rhode Island, like Massachusetts, offered allegiance to the king with the expectation of protection in return.

English monarchical culture contains parallels with what has been described for the Algonquians of the Northeast as an "ethos of reciprocity."<sup>17</sup> Both Indians and English in the Northeast emphasized, although perhaps to varying degrees, the voluntary nature of allegiance to a ruler and the right to withdraw such loyalty when the leader did not fulfill perceived obligations. The most active Puritan missionary in Massachusetts, John Eliot, wrote a treatise in which he explained that he would teach Indians "to imbrace such Government, both Civil and Ecclesiastical, as the Lord hath commanded in the holy Scriptures." Eliot's interpretation of the scriptures, which his sermons to Indians surely must have reflected, included the notion that subjects must submit to a ruler voluntarily. He argued that "all men are commanded to chuse unto themselves rulers" who are "liable to Political observation." Their decisions are binding only so far as they are made

with the "consent and submission of the party or parties concerned."<sup>18</sup> The Puritan arrangements described by Eliot were not entirely foreign to the Indians, whose leaders in the past had depended on a reciprocal arrangement of mutual obligations. Indeed, the Puritan notion of covenant emphasized the voluntary nature of civil society. Thus, Indians and English, rather than representing two fundamentally opposed groups with distinct, nonoverlapping cultures, had common ground on which to meet and negotiate.

Another similarity between Indian and English political cultures in the Northeast was the size and self-perception of their respective communities. Puritans living in Massachusetts or Plymouth did not think of themselves first and foremost as citizens of their colony or even subjects of the king; rather, they drew their identity from their local village and guarded against the authority of the colony's central government. The Puritan migration to America stemmed in large part from the Stuart monarchy's effort to expand central control between 1625 and 1640 over local institutions in England such as the military. The settlers departed England determined to preserve their local identities against the meddling of the crown. "Seen in this light," according to one historian, "New England was not a single, monolithic 'fragment' separating off from the mother country. It was a body of loosely joined fragments, and some of the disputes that developed in the New World grew out of differences that existed in the Old."<sup>19</sup> Like the English settlers, the Indian inhabitants of southern New England also identified themselves primarily with small units that historians and anthropologists have referred to variously as "bands," "villages," and "communities." The larger and more familiar tribal entities such as Narragansett, Wampanoag, and Pequot were ephemeral, loosely knit federations or alliances analogous to the English colonies.<sup>20</sup>

Because of these similarities, many Indians perceived a compatibility between their own political culture and that of the English, which allowed them to accommodate English culture without sacrificing Indian autonomy. Contact between Indians and English consisted of much more than the creation of a foreign "other." Indeed, the story of Indian-white relations in the Northeast, regardless of whether the participants had good or bad intentions, is in part that of a search for compatibility and accommodation on the part of both Indians and English. Indians such as Philip and the Pokanoket, as well as the various groups of praying

Indians, faced threats to their land in English population growth and encroachment; yet the perceived area of compatibility between English political culture and their own allowed Indians to form a semiseparate "parapolitical" entity within the English polity to protect their own sovereignty.<sup>21</sup>

Seventeenth-century Indians did not try to preserve themselves as a monolithic entity; rather, small groups of Indians competed with each other for advantage within the constraints of the English presence. Archaeological evidence shows that, in the seventeenth century, Indian communities in the Northeast became increasingly individualistic, while group identity along ethnic lines became more pronounced and the sociopolitical situation went through tremendous flux. At different sites in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, archaeologists have discovered a common pattern. Seventeenth-century Indian burial sites scattered throughout what is now New England reveal that Indians maintained and expressed their social order during a period of great change through the ritualized use of symbols of status and wealth. The distribution of material goods in graves tells us volumes about the sociopolitical world of these Indians. Two of the most striking features revealed by burial grounds are the hierarchical structure of Indian communities and their emphasis on achieved status.

Archaeologists have found that Indians interred a large number of nonutilitarian European artifacts with bodies during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Indians distributed these goods unequally among the individual interments, marking hierarchical status differentiation within Indian societies. The ritualized burial of artifacts with individuals served to validate and legitimize their position within the community during a period of political flux and restructuring. Moreover, in burying goods with individuals of high status rather than passing them on to subsequent generations, the Indian community signified that status was earned as much as it was inherited. Based on this data, archaeologists agree that, under the strains induced by European colonization, Indian leaders faced challenges to their authority, which increased the importance of achieved status relative to ascribed status. This achieved status came to be reaffirmed and marked through mortuary ritual.

Indian burial sites challenge the traditional stereotype of the egalitarian, communalistic Indian society by offering evidence of a hierarchically ordered, increasingly individualistic world, where



leaders competed for and earned the loyalty of their communities, ultimately marking their status with material goods. In areas where the English posed an immediate expansionist threat, a leader's apparent ability to control the tide of English expansion and to protect the group's autonomy within such expansion became an avenue toward achieving and maintaining a privileged position within the community.<sup>22</sup>

Beginning in the 1640s, Indian leaders increasingly followed English rules to further their own and their group's cause, even going so far as to submit directly to a colony or the king of England. After the Massachusetts, Connecticut, Plymouth, and New Haven colonies agreed to a military alliance in 1643, known as the United Colonies of New England, the major sachems of the Narragansett in Rhode Island sought a way to preserve their independence and to protect themselves. Probably having observed Rhode Island's success in appealing to a distant royal authority for protection, the Narragansett leadership followed suit. In 1644, they decided "freely, voluntarily, and most humbly to submit, subject, and give over ourselves, peoples, lands, rights, inheritances, and possessions . . . unto the protection, care and government of that worthy and royal Prince, Charles, King of Great Britain and Ireland." The written act of submission made clear what the Narragansett hoped to gain; it stated that allegiance depended "*upon condition of His Majesties' royal protection,*" including against "any of the natives in these parts." More importantly, however, they realized that submission to the king legally protected them from other subjects of the king living in the colonies: "*Nor can we yield over ourselves unto any, that are subjects themselves in any case.*"<sup>23</sup> The sachems understood that encapsulating themselves within the larger political structure of the English empire lent them advantages in their local struggles with various parties of English and other Indians.

Subsequent records suggest that the Narragansett had submitted to the king with the utmost sincerity. Yet the Narragansett did not see such action as conflicting with their own tribal autonomy. In 1669, Rhode Island authorities brought the eastern Niantic sachem Ninecraft before them to answer accusations that he had been plotting against the English. In response to this claim, Ninecraft stated (through an interpreter) that he

wondered there should bee any such report raised, considering his owne innocency, and that ever since himselfe heard the words by the Commissioners, spoken as from King

Charles his mouth, and hath since laid it vp in his heart that the King did looke vpon himselfe and Sucquansh and the Indians as his subjects, together with the English; and said hee vnderstood that the English of this Colony were to help them, if any should bee too mighty for them, and they to doe the like to the English if any should invade or make war vpon the Colony.<sup>24</sup>

Whether or not Ninecraft had plotted against the English, clearly he believed that he could use royal authority to his advantage. Similarly, when several colonists tried to extract tribute from some Naragansett sachems, the sachems refused, "telling them they would pay King Charles and none else."<sup>25</sup> Such examples suggest that Indians shrewdly understood how to protect themselves by using the English political system.

An examination of Massachusetts linguistics from the period just after King Philip's War also suggests that Indians did not perceive submission to an English colony as a complete break from traditional political behavior. Wills written by Pokanoket people in the last quarter of the seventeenth century demonstrate how natives probably conceived of English colonies. To refer to Plymouth colony, these Indians borrowed the English word Plymouth but used a Massachusetts term for "colony." The Massachusetts word for colony, *nanauwunnumoonkan*, is related to the Massachusetts verbs meaning "to protect" and "to look after." That Indians could use a Massachusetts word, instead of borrowing the English term colony, suggests that the Northeast's Indians saw similarities between their own political structures and those of the English. Moreover, the relationship between *nanauwunnumoonkan* and the verb *to protect* means that the Indians viewed a colony, like a sachemship, as a type of protectorate.<sup>26</sup> Another indication of overlap between Indian and English culture in the Northeast is that, in the surviving Massachusetts texts, the Indian authors used the same term, *ketahsoot*, to describe both native and English rulers. These writers applied this same title both to the king of England and to their own sachems.<sup>27</sup> Presumably, they believed they could utilize English rulers to their benefit—to gain protection in exchange for allegiance—much as they could their own sachems.

Ninecraft and the various Rhode Island Indians were not alone in using the English political system to protect their autonomy from threatened English encroachment.<sup>28</sup> At roughly the same time that the relatively powerful Narragansett people submitted

to royal authority, fragments of devastated Indian groups in eastern Massachusetts also began to accede to nominal colonial rule. In June 1643 and in March 1644, different groups of Indians residing in Massachusetts submitted to the colony. On both occasions, the records state that the sachems of these groups came voluntarily, without persuasion. Once the Indians had arrived, the colonial government appears to have prepared a formulaic statement of loyalty, for on separate occasions the statement was worded identically. The Indians agreed "to bee governed & protected by them [Massachusetts], according to their just lawes & order, so farr as wee shalbee made capable of understanding them." Unlike the Indians living in Rhode Island, the Indians in Massachusetts also agreed to "bee willing from time to time to bee instructed in the knowledg & worship of God." This final act paved the way for the missionary efforts that would follow.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Indian submissions in the Massachusetts records appear formulaic, the records also suggest that the Indians had real incentives, aside from coercion, to offer fidelity to the English. The general court recognized these Indian motives and understood Massachusetts' need to live up to its promise to protect those Indians who had submitted. In May 1644, the court considered "what dangerous consequence it might be unto us if we should altogether neglect them, & leave them to the cruelty and bluddymindednes of the Naragansets, these two sachims haveing sent unto us for ayde, if we faile them we breake our covenant wth them." Clearly the court realized an obligation toward those Indians who had submitted; it also recognized that the Indians' continued fidelity depended on the colony's living up to its promise of protection. Should Massachusetts neglect its duties to provide protection, it would cause "the Indians that have put themselves under our iurisdiction, & consequently protection, to fly of from us, & to fall to our enemies, & set themselues against us." To prevent Indians from rescinding their allegiance to Massachusetts, the colony provided armed men to help them build a palisade.<sup>30</sup>

The groups that submitted to Massachusetts, most of which would eventually comprise the so-called praying Indians of the colony, were fragments of larger groups that had suffered the most under English colonization and probably succumbed most easily to English influence.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, their apparent adoption of Christianity represents more than merely a process of acculturation in which they become more English and less Indian;

nor were they even completely dominated by the English. In their correspondence with London officials, missionaries such as John Eliot usually emphasized their successes at “civilizing” and converting Indians; yet one should not accept such characterizations at face value, since they were usually directed toward officials on whom the missionaries depended for funding. Other evidence, moreover, suggests that the Indians closest to the English utilized their relationship to protect and preserve a distinctively Indian identity in a way unavailable to the majority of Indians in the Northeast.<sup>32</sup>

Because the praying Indians consisted of fragments of precontact groups that had been devastated by English colonization, these Indians worked within more powerful constraints than did groups much less affected, such as the Narragansett.<sup>33</sup> Disease and the pressures of colonization had caused much suffering among the groups that would form praying communities. At the same time, the accumulated experience of these Indians, who had known the most intimate contact with the English, offered them avenues of resistance and cultural revitalization. From this perspective, literacy, in particular, became an asset in a competition with other Indians working within the framework of English colonization.

A sound knowledge of English and the ability to use the written word—attributes of 30 percent of the praying Indians in their largest community at Natick—empowered Indians in their relations with the English and with other Indians.<sup>34</sup> In his *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), Roger Williams reported that, when asked how the English knew that souls went to heaven or hell, an Indian replied that the English “hath books and writings, and one which God himselfe made, concerning mens soules, and therefore may well know more than wee that have none, but take all upon trust from our forefathers.”<sup>35</sup> That Indians were mystified by literacy or held it in awe became apparent in 1640 when a group of Indians broke into a schoolhouse in Watertown, Massachusetts, and stole sixteen Greek and Latin books.<sup>36</sup> Thus, when groups of Indians became literate and gained access to English and the written word, Indian communities underwent an internal transformation and redistribution of power. Such skills offered Indian people a way to understand and perhaps even to appear to control the English. The apparent ability to control the English often translated into greater achieved status for those who were literate, but it posed a threat to nonliterate Indians in leadership positions.

Although many Indians displayed an eagerness to become literate, their desire did not stem from a wish to become more like

the English *per se*; rather, they sought, in the words of the anthropologist Kathleen Bragdon, "a source of community strength which helped to preserve their distinctiveness as Indians."<sup>37</sup> Whereas the English saw the establishment of praying towns as a program to civilize and convert natives, the Indians saw in them an opportunity to encapsulate themselves within the expanding realm of English settlement. Archaeological evidence bolsters this view that English and Indians saw the effects of missionary conversion programs quite differently.

In the 1980s, archaeologist Elise Brenner studied the impact of missionary efforts on the material culture of Indians at Natick. Brenner sought, among other objectives, to uncover the extent to which the Indians conformed to one of the primary ambitions of the English missionaries: to get the Indians to live more "sedentarily" in a "civilized" fashion. To this end, a group of archaeologists systematically examined the area where the Indians at Natick had supposedly lived in the English manner. Because these archaeologists found no material remains at this location (had the Indians lived as the missionaries desired, there should have been many), Brenner concluded that the Indians, in all probability, continued to live in their more "traditional" ways rather than conforming to Puritan norms.<sup>38</sup>

Not only did the Natick site lack material remains that would indicate a sedentary lifestyle, but burial sites excavated earlier show patterns similar to those at burial grounds used by non-praying Indians. Like the nonpraying burial grounds in what were the colonies of Rhode Island and Plymouth, the praying town cemetery challenged Puritan dogma by associating material objects with the dead. Moreover, the goods contained in the grave sites for Natick were the same type as those buried in the graves of nonmissionized Indians and differed from those supplied by missionaries for use in a sedentary life. The Indians at Natick maintained contact with nonmissionized Indians and continued to perform non-Christian burial rituals, as did other Indians.<sup>39</sup> Thus the praying Indians, although undoubtedly culturally different from nonpraying Indians, had taken a trajectory of cultural change different from that suggested by the English. This trajectory included persisting patterns of migration to take advantage of seasonal means of subsistence.

Although both praying and nonpraying Indians followed strategies that they felt offered the greatest opportunity for ethnic preservation, the paths they chose altered their respective relationships with English colonists. This change, in turn, heightened

tensions among Indians. Increased tension appears most strikingly, among various Indians and colonists, in the contest for control of land. Both missionized and nonmissionized Indians followed distinct paths in their efforts to protect their land base from English encroachment. The Pokanoket, under the sachem Philip, increasingly took their land grievances to Plymouth colony courts. Bounded by water or by other tribes on all sides, the Pokanoket could not migrate to escape the pressures of colonization. Within this framework, they adapted to the English legal system to defend their land rights. The court records of Plymouth colony demonstrate a dramatic rise in the number of disputes over fraudulent sales, trespassing, and boundaries between the 1640s and 1670s.<sup>40</sup> Although colonial courts may not have treated Indians as well as their English counterparts, Indians did enjoy some success before the bench.

With allies such as John Eliot, however, the missionized Indians could circumvent the limited avenues available to their Pokanoket counterparts. Indeed, the incentives to join a praying community included, perhaps most importantly, the protection of land. The missionary Daniel Gookin made this incentive explicit when he outlined some key reasons for establishing praying towns:

First, to prevent differences and contention among the English and Indians in future times about the propriety of land. Secondly, to secure unto them and their posterity places of habitation; this being a provision in all those grants, that they shall not sell or alienate any part of those lands unto any Englishman, without the general court's consent: for the Indians being poor, as well as improvident, are very prone to sell their land to the English, and thereby leave themselves destitute.<sup>41</sup>

Although putting themselves under the influence of missionaries may have constituted a sacrifice, the praying Indians strengthened their land claims by doing so.

An example of both the Pokanoket and the Indians at Natick holding land claims illustrates that the praying Indians had more power to protect their land than did their nonmissionized counterparts. As the population of Natick grew in the 1640s and 1650s, it required more high-quality land to supply the Indian inhabitants with a sufficient land base. The only adjacent section of land with fertile soil lay along the Charles River. But the Massachusetts

General Court had already granted legal right to this land to the town of Dedham. Not letting that stop him, John Eliot petitioned on behalf of the Indians for the expansion of Indian land at Natick, and he won. Eliot appealed to a higher law than did the leaders of Dedham. He argued that the Lord's work of converting Indians depended on Natick's acquiring neighboring land from English towns. To this end, he requested in 1651 that the

honord Court would please to treat wth the othr townes bordering vpon them, that as they yeild vp much to the Lords vse on the one side, so theire neighbours would be helpfull to them by yeilding vp somewhat to them on the other. & thus beging the good blessing of heaven on all your holy counsels & labours, & beging of you, your prayres for me.<sup>42</sup>

Responding to Eliot's request, the general court rescinded Dedham's title to the land and granted the Natick Indians an additional two thousand acres of prime land along the Charles River. In compensation, the court granted Dedham two thousand acres in the Connecticut River valley at what would become Deerfield.<sup>43</sup> Eliot had succeeded in strengthening the position of the praying Indians at Natick by appealing to morality and God's desire to convert Indians to Christianity. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Dedham, relying solely on their legal title to the land, lost a bitter dispute with the general court of their own colony.<sup>44</sup> In this contest between Dedham and Eliot, Eliot was not the only winner. The Indians at Natick reaped perhaps the greatest gains, successfully protecting themselves from rapid English encroachment.

This victory for the Natick Indians did not represent a victory for all Indians living within the colony of Massachusetts. Those English inhabitants of Dedham who lost land to Natick often sought title in another part of Dedham's grant. Beginning in 1660, Dedham's leaders began to allow individuals to settle a part of Dedham's grant known as Wollomonuppoag in compensation for their loss at Natick. For example, in December 1662, town leaders offered a parcel of land at Wollomonuppoag "vnto Anthon Fisher Juner to take vp satisfaction for his Fathers devident and his owne that was takin away by Naticke."<sup>45</sup> Movement of English settlers into Wollomonuppoag sparked tensions with Indians who used this land. In November 1667, the town council fielded a "[c]omplaint being made that the Indians . . . emprue more Land and Timber at Wollomonuppoag much to the damage of the Towne."<sup>46</sup> Responding to this complaint and the many similar

ones that followed it, the town began a concerted strategy of consolidating its claims to the Wollomonuppoag area and excluding Indians from its use.

The Indians in question were none other than the Pokanoket loyal to King Philip. The town sent a request to Philip to remove all Indians from the area. The currency-poor Philip shrewdly realized that he might receive payment in return for a release of Indian claims to the area and offered to sell the land in 1669. Thus, Philip capitalized on a difficult situation; in selling the land, he acquired currency that could be used to purchase trade goods.<sup>47</sup>

Although Philip might have perceived the deal he made with Dedham as the most equitable he could hope for, its success appears miniscule in relation to that enjoyed by the Indians of Natick in their relations with Dedham. While Philip made the most of Dedham's desires and the English system of land ownership by extracting what he perceived to be a fair price, his situation limited his actions to those allowed by the English legal system.<sup>48</sup> This strategy contrasted strikingly with that of the Natick Indians, who, fifteen years earlier, through the morality arguments of John Eliot, had acquired land legally owned by Dedham. Whereas the Natick Indians did not have to give up any material resources for their increased land holdings, Philip had to sell land in exchange for needed currency to buy trade goods.

In the fluid sociopolitical Indian communities of the 1660s, where leaders constantly had to demonstrate their leadership ability in order to legitimize their status, the Pokanoket's respect for Philip's ability to control the English must have been tinged with doubt by his relative inability to take advantage of the English system in the way their brethren at Natick had done in the 1650s. Just as the Narragansett, beginning in the 1640s, had used the king of England to protect themselves from the various colonies, the praying Indians of Massachusetts had manipulated the missionary aims of Massachusetts to preserve a land base. Philip and the Pokanoket, in contrast, struggled in their relations with the English. Although they had experienced some success before the courts in preventing Plymouth from taking their land, they felt relentless pressure from the English. This pressure would prove too much for the Pokanoket to withstand; in the first half of the 1670s, they, in comparison to many neighboring Indian groups, appeared more than ever to lack control of the English.

Philip's troubles began in April 1671, when Plymouth colony summoned him to answer accusations that he had been plotting



an uprising against the English. Whether Philip had, in fact, conspired against the English or this claim merely displayed Plymouth's paranoia in dealing with Indians is impossible to tell. Philip would later claim to have complied with Plymouth's demands "that thereby Jelosity might be removed."<sup>49</sup> Whatever the case, Plymouth forced Philip to acknowledge a plot, apologize, pay a fine, and surrender his arms.<sup>50</sup>

Five months later, in September 1671, Plymouth summoned Philip again, this time for having "broken his couenant made with our collonie." Apparently, Philip had surrendered his arms with the understanding that the colony would return them shortly, whereas Plymouth officials believed they had confiscated them permanently. During this second appearance before the general court of Plymouth, the court also accused Philip of having "entertained, harboured, and abetted diuers Indians, not of his owne men, which were vagabonds, our professed enimies."<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not the accusation was true, in the eyes of Plymouth officials Philip had not lived up to his reciprocal obligation of loyalty. Nine years earlier, in 1662, Philip had sworn allegiance to Plymouth and the king of England, following a political strategy similar to that of the Narragansett and the praying Indians. He apparently had done so in return for Plymouth's assistance in mediating a dispute between him and some rival Narragansett people. The court had ruled in Philip's favor, and his strategy of submitting to the colony in return for political assistance had succeeded.<sup>52</sup> However, in 1671, Philip faced the court under different circumstances. He and the Pokanoket faced stronger English encroachment than ever before, and they must have felt some doubt about their ability to handle it, given that praying Indians had experienced greater relative success in recent years and seemed, perhaps through the power of literacy, to have a greater capacity to control the English.

In this difficult situation, Philip tried to continue the strategy that Indians throughout the region had followed with varying degrees of success for the last fifty years: He reinforced his band's reciprocal bonds with Plymouth in an effort both to obtain assistance in his rivalries with other Indians and to play the various English colonies off one another. To this end, he agreed to a document acknowledging once again the Pokanoket as "subjects to his majesty the Kinge of England, &c, and the gouernment of New Plymouth, and to theire lawes."<sup>53</sup> Facing the Plymouth court under these adverse circumstances, Philip decided—perhaps

under some pressure—that an oath of fidelity warranted a final chance. After all, he could turn to neither Rhode Island nor Massachusetts, since they favored the Narragansett and praying Indians, respectively—rival groups of the Pokanoket. Moreover, the relative success that the Narragansett and the praying Indians had experienced by encapsulating themselves within the English political system posed a threat to Philip's leadership status; he may have appeared incapable of controlling the English. Reaffirming his loyalty to Plymouth appeared to him to be the best option.

By the mid-1670s, various groups of Indians in the Northeast continued to compete for advantage in their dealings with each other and the English settlers. Over the past fifty years, their culture—especially notions of political reciprocity—had shaped their actions toward the English and had led them to find parallels between their own and English political culture. Just as a sachem incurred obligations by virtue of his or her position of leadership within an Indian community, so, too, did the colonial courts and the king of England assume responsibilities when they accepted Indians and English as their subjects. By submitting to various forms of English rule, Indians had invested in colonial governments, expecting protection and assistance in return. Indian leaders, in particular, depended on a return on this investment—and preferably one more sizable than that received by a rival group following a similar strategy—for the maintenance of their leadership positions in their communities. In the fluid sociopolitical world of Indians in the seventeenth century, Indian leaders had to earn the respect of their followers with their actions. An Indian leader who submitted to the English and received nothing in return risked losing the respect of his community and thus his privileged status. For King Philip, the execution of three Pokanoket for the alleged murder of John Sassamon in 1675 meant that a previously successful strategy of political encapsulation had outworn its usefulness and that he was leading his people down the wrong path.

John Sassamon was a literate, Christian Indian who had close ties to Philip, but these ties would become weaker as the year 1675 approached. In 1662, Sassamon served as the witness when Philip offered his oath of fidelity to Plymouth.<sup>54</sup> It appears that Philip relied on Sassamon, because of his literacy, as some sort of interpreter or liaison between himself and the English. Sassamon, however, also had strong ties to the praying Indians at Natick and

was himself a preacher. Thus he, at various times in his life, would bridge three cultural divides: between the missionized Indians and the English; between the Pokanoket and the English; and between the Pokanoket and the missionized Indians. Because various groups of Indians competed for advantage in their relations with the English, Sassamon's relations involved a conflict of interest. Accordingly, the Pokanoket became highly suspicious of him. In 1675, they reportedly said that Sassamon "was a bad man that king Philip got him to write his will and he made the writing for a gret part of the land to be his but read as if it had bine as Philip wold, but it Came to be knone and then he rund away from him."<sup>55</sup> Whether or not Sassamon tried to acquire Philip's land claims fraudulently will probably never be known with certainty. Nevertheless, Sassamon's literacy, perhaps used to Philip's advantage in the past, increasingly posed a threat to the Pokanoket, especially because he used it in his role as a preacher to spread Christianity and to increase the population of missionized Indians.

At the end of 1674, Sassamon approached Plymouth officials and reportedly implicated Philip in a plot against all the English in the Northeast.<sup>56</sup> Plymouth paid little attention to this warning, perhaps because rumors of Indian uprisings circulated frequently during the seventeenth century. Only after the war did English contemporaries suggest that this was a critical mistake. When Sassamon left Plymouth, he expressed fear that Philip might try to have him killed for exposing his plans. At this point, Sassamon disappears from the written record; a month or two later, some Indians reported him missing. A search eventually uncovered Sassamon's body under the ice at Assowamsett Pond near Middleborough, Plymouth. After Sassamon's burial, an Indian named Patuckson stepped forward and claimed that he had seen three Pokanoket loyal to Philip—Tobias, Wampapaquan, and Mattashunnamo—murder Sassamon and then try to conceal his body and make it appear as if he had drowned. Based on Patuckson's testimony, Plymouth ordered the three Indians under Philip to appear before the court in June 1675.

Perhaps in an effort to appear impartial to Philip, Plymouth allowed the jury of twelve Englishmen to consult with and seek the advice of six of the "most indifferentest, grauest, and sage Indians."<sup>57</sup> (Although the record does not say so explicitly, it is highly probable that only literate, Christian Indians qualified as "sage.") Upon deliberation, the jury, as well as the Indians in-

volved, unanimously agreed on a guilty verdict and ordered the alleged murderers executed. On 8 June 1675, the colony hanged Tobias and Mattashunnamo. One month later, it had Wampapaquan shot.

Why did this trial, among all of the indignities suffered by Indians at the hands of English colonists over the preceding half-century, spawn a total war? The answer lies largely in the rivalries among Indians at the time, for the trial was as much the playing-out of intra-Indian tensions in the theatre of Plymouth's court as it was a contest between English and Indians. The execution of Philip's Indians symbolized the relative success of the praying Indians' strategy of encapsulation within the English political system—including the adoption of literacy and certain elements of Christianity—and the failure of the nonmissionized Indians' variant thereof. After the trial and on the eve of the outbreak of war, Philip explained that the Christianization of Indians posed a direct threat to his power. He and his entourage demanded that no more Indians be "[c]aled or forsed to be Christian indians. thay saied that such wer in everi thing more mischivous, only disemblers, and then the English made them not subject to ther [Indian] kings, and by ther lying to rong their kings."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in September 1674, Daniel Gookin encountered, approximately seventy miles west of Boston, at the fledgling praying-Indian community of Wabquissit, an "agent for Uncas, sachem of Mohegan, who challenged right to, and dominion over, this people of Wabquissit. And said he, Uncas is not well pleased, that the English should pass over Mohegan river, to call his Indians to pray to God."<sup>59</sup> Gookin realized that the spread of missionized Indians posed a tremendous threat to traditional Indian leaders. He noted that sachems such as Uncas were usually receptive to Christianity "until at length the sachems did discern, that religion would not consist with a mere receiving of the word; and that practical religion will throw down their heathenish idols, and the sachem's tyrannical monarchy." Indeed, Gookin even attributed the slow spread of Christianity among some Indians in part to "the averseness of their sachems."<sup>60</sup>

In the fluid sociopolitical situation of the seventeenth-century Northeast, incidents that revealed a leader's weakness directly threatened his status. In the past, certain incidents had suggested that Philip, in comparison to the praying Indians, lacked ability to control the English. This was the case when the Natick Indians acquired land at Dedham for free, while Philip sold his tribe's

share of this land. When the Natick Indians acquired Dedham land, they did so with the aid of Massachusetts, the colony to which they had submitted themselves for protection. Because Plymouth made no jurisdictional claims to the land in question, Philip could not and did not seek that colony's assistance. However, the Sassamon trial differed dramatically, in that it involved Plymouth, the colony to which Philip had submitted for protection. The trial for Sassamon's alleged murder occurred within Plymouth's court; it involved Indians whom, Philip believed, the colony had promised to protect; and it depended on evidence submitted by rival Christian Indians with strong ties to Massachusetts. For Philip, the trial of Sassamon signified that the Pokanoket could not depend on any English colony in North America for protection. On the eve of the war, he lamented to John Easton that "all English agreed against them [the Pokanoket]."<sup>61</sup> The colony of Plymouth had not fulfilled its reciprocal political relationship with the Pokanoket. The world that Philip believed he had created had disintegrated.

After the trial, in a discussion with John Easton of Rhode Island, who sought to avert war, Philip and a group of Pokanoket indicated how sincerely they had invested in the English political system and how willing they were to let it work the way they believed it should. Easton wrote of the conversation in which he told the Pokanoket that

they having submitted to our king to protect them others dared not otherwise to molest them, so they expressed they tooke that to be well, that we had litell Case to doute but that to us under the king they wold have yelded to our determenations in what ani should have Cumplained to us against them.<sup>62</sup>

Unfortunately for many Indians, communication with the king came only through the channels offered by local colonies. And in June 1675, Indians perceived these colonies, with the exception of the relatively weak Rhode Island, to be in alliance against nonmissionized Indians. At this time, the Pokanoket knew that they had to draw on other resources besides political encapsulation to protect their autonomy.

However, the Sassamon trial alone probably did not cause the Pokanoket to take the violent actions that they did starting in June 1675. Although the trial served the necessary function of steering the Pokanoket away from a policy of playing English colonies off

one another through reciprocal relations of allegiance and protection, it did not suggest what action they should take in its place. For this, it seems that the Pokanoket drew on traditional beliefs to guide their actions. An anthropologist who has collected the folklore of Algonquian tribes in the Northeast has suggested that, "[i]f the Indians had written their history of King Philip's War, they might have emphasized the importance of shamanistic divination in the formulation of strategy."<sup>63</sup> This is especially true given that the Sassamon trial had brought the Pokanoket to a crossroads and made them realize the need for a change of course.

On 26 June 1675, the Pokanoket witnessed a sign that strengthened their determination to use violent means to sever relations with the English. Less than one week after the first and highly tentative skirmishes between Pokanoket Indians and Plymouth colonists at Swansea, a total lunar eclipse manifested itself throughout the region. Colonial almanacs had forecast this event, but whether the region's Indians knew about it in advance will probably never be known.<sup>64</sup> Regardless of whether they knew it was coming and timed their attacks to coincide with it, or if it surprised them and reaffirmed their desire to wage war, the eclipse almost certainly altered the Northeast's political landscape.

On two separate occasions in the first half of the seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries had the opportunity to record the meaning of lunar eclipses to central Algonquian-speaking peoples. For the Montagnais, eclipses represented the son of the sun and moon who "comes now and then upon earth; when he walks about in their country, many people die."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, a French missionary wrote of the Huron that

[t]hey consider Eclipses as omens of mortality, of war, or of sickness; but this augury does not always precede the evil that it predicts. Sometimes it follows it, for the Savages who saw the Eclipse of the Moon that appeared this year, 1642, said that they were no longer astonished at the massacre of their people by the Hiroquois during the winter. They had before them the token and the sign of it, but a little too late to put them on their guard.<sup>66</sup>

It cannot be known for certain that the speakers of eastern Algonquian languages in southern New England attributed the same meaning to eclipses as did the Montagnais and the Huron. Nevertheless, that some Algonquian-speaking groups associated

eclipses with war indicates that the 26 June eclipse probably did more than simply coincide with the outbreak of King Philip's War. Indeed, it obliges us to ask whether the Sassamon trial alone sufficiently explains the proximate cause of the war; even if the eclipse did not necessarily and proximately cause the war, it almost certainly intensified the conflict once it began, given the constant Puritan search for omens of divine providence or disfavor.<sup>67</sup> Once the Sassamon trial indicated the destruction of the political world that the Indians believed they had created, the eclipse likely either revealed to them that they should use violent means to create a new one, or it heightened the Puritan reaction against this Indian violence.

The Indians who waged war against the English and their missionized Indian allies clearly broke the political bonds that previously had linked them to the colonies as encapsulated, parapolitical entities. In the eyes of these Indians, the failure of the political bonds to preserve their group's autonomy justified their severance. They saw political submission as something easily revocable when the relationship lacked reciprocity. From an English perspective, however, this uprising of Indians, who had previously sworn loyalty to various colonies and to the king, constituted treason. William Harris of Rhode Island argued that "to take vp armes against ye king, in his dominions, at home: or abroad; is high treason, And Philip did take vp Armes against ye kings authority; & slew his Subjects vpon premeditated resolution."<sup>68</sup> Harris was not the only one to see the uprising as traitorous. When Benjamin Church and the Indians under his command finally killed Philip near the close of the war, Church reportedly ordered "that forasmuch as he had caused many an Englishman's body to be unburied, and to rot above ground, that not one of his bones should be buried. And calling his old Indian executioner, bid him behead and quarter him."<sup>69</sup> This treatment of Philip's body followed the very particular punishment for treason outlined by English law.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, colonists did not treat Indians in this way during the Pequot War, before they had sworn allegiance to the crown, further suggesting that they truly treated Philip as a traitor.<sup>71</sup> For the English settlers in the Northeast, the Indian uprising of 1675 constituted a civil rebellion and an effort to destroy a political structure that had been agreed upon by all of the parties involved.

From the more etic perspective of a historian, the outbreak of war also represented a shift to a period when Indians and English

focused on the nonoverlapping elements of their political cultures as various groups began to take sides. Despite their ability to find areas of commonality during the period between 1637 and 1675, tremendous cultural differences separated Indians from English settlers. For Indians, kinship became important in shaping political and military alliances, while a shared history and loyalty to a single king all but guaranteed that the English settlers would temporarily put aside their differences and unite against most Indians.

This essay has offered a fresh examination of the proximate causes of King Philip's War. While authors as diverse as Increase Mather, Douglas E. Leach, and Francis Jennings correctly focused on the Sassamon trial as an event that helped to trigger the war, their interpretations failed to place that event into its proper context. Most importantly, they did not offer an adequate explanation of how this trial appeared to the Native Americans who started the war. Only with an understanding of the political linkages and rivalries among the various Indians and English settlers in the Northeast does the trial for the alleged murder of John Sassamon become comprehensible as the cause of a total war.

Recent linguistic and archaeological research, combined with a reexamination of documentary evidence, raises the rivalries and linkages among the various English and Indians in the Northeast into stark relief. Between the Pequot War and 1675, both the praying and nonpraying Indians of the Northeast invested in what they believed to be relationships of mutual obligation with the English. They did so with the understanding that these obligations would provide them protection from the English and assist them in their rivalries with other Indians. The execution of three nonpraying Pokanoket for the alleged murder of the praying Indian John Sassamon signified the failure of this strategy. And a lunar eclipse later in the month led the Pokanoket to initiate a violent movement to recreate the political landscape of the Northeast.

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## NOTES

1. Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (January 1984): 159.

2. The literature on King Philip's War is voluminous, and a thorough discussion of it is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this essay breaks from past treatments of the conflict in that it seeks to discern why, from an Indian perspective, the Sassamon trial warranted a total war. In the last comprehensive, scholarly account of the war, Douglas E. Leach argued that the conflict was "virtually inevitable" because "two mutually incompatible ways of life confronted each other, and one of the two would have to prevail." Within this framework, however, Leach pays little attention to how Indians viewed the Sassamon trial. More recently, Francis Jennings has also failed to explore adequately the Native American role in starting the war. Instead, he attributes the trial and the outbreak of the conflict to a Puritan plot, and his Indians demonstrate little or no historical agency. Douglas E. Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 1; and Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1975).

3. Among the works showing unequal treatment of Indians in the English legal system are Yasuhide Kawashima, *Puritan Justice and the Indian: White Man's Law in Massachusetts, 1630-1763* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Lyle Koehler, "Red-White Power Relations and Justice in the Courts of Seventeenth-Century New England," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 3:4 (1979): 1-31; and James Ronda, "Red and White at the Bench: Indians and the Law in Plymouth Colony, 1620-1691," *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 25 (1977): 361-73. While these works are admirable in showing, from a social scientific point of view, that Indians received unequal treatment in New England courts, they do not demonstrate that Indians knew they were treated unfairly.

4. I use the terms *praying Indian* and *nonpraying Indian* fairly loosely to differentiate between two groups: those Indians who were under the influence of English missionaries and usually congregated around towns established with the purpose of converting Indians to Christianity such as Natick, Massachusetts; and those Indians who eschewed the missionary influence of the English. The latter group includes a variety of broad tribal categories such as Narragansett, Pokanoket, and Mohegan.

5. Eric Johnson has done an admirable job of demonstrating how Indians used English alliances. Eric Spencer Johnson, "'Some by Flatteries and Others

by Threatenings': Political Strategies among Native Americans of Seventeenth-Century Southern New England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1993).

6. Neal Salisbury, "Squanto: Last of the Patuxets," in *Survival and Struggle in Colonial America*, ed. David Sweet and Gary B. Nash (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 241–43.

7. Neal Salisbury has been correct to point out that this treaty favored the English. Nevertheless, the English at this time were in no position to impose it on Massasoit against his will, and Massasoit perceived advantage in the agreement that he understood through the ritual exchange of gifts and speeches. Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 114–15.

8. Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pyncheon Papers*, vol. 1, *Letters of John Pyncheon, 1654–1700* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), xxii.

9. Francis Jennings refers to this period as a "cold war." To be sure, this period witnessed frequent tensions among Indians and English, but these episodes were arguably no worse than those in the United States between North and South in the antebellum era. Seen in this light, what stands out for the period between the Pequot War and King Philip's War is the degree of accommodation among the region's diverse groups. Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1975), 231.

10. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1993); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

11. Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (London: Gregory Dexter, 1643), 134; Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England . . .* (Boston: 1674), reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, vol. 1 (1806): 141–229, quotation from p. 154; John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New England* (London: 1675), reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d. ser., vol. 3 (1833): 211–354, quotation from p. 308.

12. Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 134; Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 154.

13. Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 14, 37.

14. T.H. Breen, *The Character of a Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630–1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 47.

15. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 5 vols. (hereafter Massachusetts Colonial Records [Boston: 1853–54]): 4:25, 26, 129–33, 168–73.

16. Quoted in Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 70.

17. Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 10. Salisbury notes that, for Indians in the Northeast, "the principle of reciprocity . . . underlay the relationship between leader and follower," 43.

18. John Eliot, *The Christian Commonwealth: Or, the Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ* (1660; reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., vol. 9 [1846]), 127–64; quotations from pp. 135, 146, and 155. Although Eliot was censured for writing this tract, his views on consent were perhaps not that exceptional. The colony's governor, John Winthrop, declared, "No common weale can be founded but by free consent." Winthrop quoted in Breen, *Character of a Good Ruler*, 48. It should be noted that Eliot, whether or not his views are representative of other English settlers, did provide one of the most significant avenues by which Indians learned about English monarchical culture.

19. Breen, "Persistent Localism: English Social Change and the Shaping of New England Institutions," in *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America*, ed. T.H. Breen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 16. This paragraph draws largely off of Breen's argument, as well as the arguments of Philip Gura. See Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620–1660* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984).

20. Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 19, 41–49; Peter Thomas, "Cultural Change on the Southern New England Frontier, 1630–1665," in *Cultures in Contact: The European Impact on Native Cultural Institutions in Eastern North America, A.D. 1000–1800*, ed. William Fitzhugh (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985): 131–62; and Johnson, "Some by Flatteries," 30.

21. The term *parapolitical* is used by F.G. Bailey to describe political structures "which are partly regulated by, and partly independent of, larger encapsulating political structures; and which, so to speak, fight battles with these larger structures in a way which for them seldom ends in victory, rarely in dramatic defeat, but usually in a long drawn stalemate and defeat by attrition." F.G. Bailey, "Parapolitical Systems," in *Local-Level Politics: Structural and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Marc J. Swartz (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 281. Bailey's notion of semi-independent political entities encapsulated within a larger polity has been fruitfully used by Loretta Fowler. See Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851–1978* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 6, 350 n10.

22. The preceding paragraphs owe a heavy debt to the fine work done by archaeologists over the last fifteen years: Elise M. Brenner, "Strategies for Autonomy: An Analysis of Ethnic Mobility in 17th-century New England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1984); Brenner, "Sociopolitical Implications of Mortuary Ritual Remains in Seventeenth-Century Native Southern New England," in *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, ed. Mark P. Leone and Parker B. Potter, Jr. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 147–82; Constance A. Crosby, "From Myth to History, or Why King Philip's Ghost Walks Abroad," in *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, ed. Mark P. Leone and Parker B. Potter, Jr. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 183–209; Susan G. Gibson, ed., *Burr's Hill: A 17th Century Wampanoag Burial Ground in Warren, Rhode Island* (Providence, RI: Haffenreffer

Museum of Anthropology, 1980); Michael S. Nassaney, "An Epistemological Enquiry into some Archaeological and Historical Interpretations of 17th-century Native American Relations," in *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, ed. Stephen Shennan (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 76–93; Paul Alden Robinson, "The Struggle Within: The Indian Debate in Seventeenth-Century Narragansett Country" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990); Paul A. Robinson, Marc A. Kelley, and Patricia E. Rubertone, "Preliminary Biocultural Interpretations from a Seventeenth-Century Narragansett Indian Cemetery in Rhode Island," in *Cultures in Contact*, ed. William Fitzhugh, 107–130; and William S. Simmons, *Cautantowwit's House: An Indian Burial Ground on the Island of Conanicut in Narragansett Bay* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1970). Although the above works are concerned primarily with burial sites, archaeologist Peter Thomas has arrived at similar conclusions about a growing individualistic ethic among the Northeast's Indians through the analysis of midden deposits and documentary evidence. See Peter Allen Thomas, "Cultural Change on the Southern New England Frontier, 1630–1665," in *Cultures in Contact*, ed. William Fitzhugh, 131–62; and Peter Allen Thomas, "In the Maelstrom of Change: The Indian Trade and Cultural Process in the Middle Connecticut River Valley, 1635–1665" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1979).

23. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation, in New England*, 10 vols. (hereafter *Rhode Island Records* [Providence, 1856–1865]), 1:134, 135, emphasis in original.

24. *Rhode Island Records*, 2:270. The eastern Niantics were closely related to the Narragansett.

25. E.B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York*, vol. 3 (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, Printers, 1853), 182.

26. For wills using variations of *nanauwunnumoonkan*, see Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988), 30, 34, 38. For the relationship between the noun for *colony* and the verbs *to protect* and *to look after*, see p. 657. Personal communication between author and Kathleen J. Bragdon, 30 September 1994.

27. Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings*, 631.

28. For a thorough explication of the political connections between the various English colonies and the Mohegan, Narragansett, and Pequot, see Johnson, "Some by Flatteries," passim.

29. *Massachusetts Colonial Records*, 2:40, 55. Indians continued to submit to Massachusetts into the 1650s. See 2:73 and 3:299.

30. *Ibid.*, 2:72.

31. Salisbury, "Red Puritans."

32. Jean Maria O'Brien, "Community Dynamics in the Indian-English Town of Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1990).

33. Salisbury, "Red Puritans." The formation of the praying Indian communities is analogous to the ethnogenesis of the Catawba from fragments of pre-existing groups in North Carolina. See James Merrell, *The Indians' New World*:

*Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (New York: Norton, 1989).

34. Kathleen Joan Bragdon, "'Another Tongue Brought In': An Ethnohistorical Study of Native Writings in Massachusetts" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1981), 61.

35. Williams, *Key into the Language*, 129. Quotation also cited in Bragdon, "'Another Tongue,'" 61.

36. Bragdon, "Vernacular Literacy and Massachusetts World View, 1650–1750" in *Algonkians of New England: Past and Present*, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University, 1991), 26.

37. Bragdon, "'Another Tongue,'" 64.

38. Brenner, "Strategies for Autonomy," 123–76.

39. Brenner, 230–31.

40. Laurie Lee Weinstein has compiled quantitative data confirming an increased presence of Pokanoket in Plymouth courts defending land claims. See Weinstein, "Indian vs. Colonist: Competition for Land in Seventeenth-Century Plymouth Colony" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Methodist University, 1983), 188–213. On average, the colonial courts experienced about a five-fold increase in the number of Indian claims between 1640 and 1670.

41. Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 179.

42. Massachusetts State Archives, 30:21.

43. Ibid.

44. See also Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636–1736* (New York: Norton, 1970), 83–84.

45. Don Gleason Hill, ed., *The Early Records of the Town of Dedham, Massachusetts, 1659–1673*, vol. 4 (Dedham, MA: 1894), 58.

46. Ibid, 147.

47. Ibid, 154, 173, 176. Philip required the currency to purchase the cloth, metal, and glass goods that they used for both ritual and utilitarian purposes. Purchasing these goods became increasingly difficult for Indians as wampum lost its value among the English after 1662 and the supply of furs diminished. Neal Salisbury, "Social Relationships on a Moving Frontier: Natives and Settlers in Southern New England, 1638–1675," *Man in the Northeast* 33 (1987): 91, 93; and Peter A. Thomas, "Cultural Change on the Southern New England Frontier, 1630–1665," in *Cultures in Contact*, ed. William Fitzhugh, 107–129.

48. In his dissertation, Eric Johnson posits that Indian sachems might have sold land to enhance their own power by limiting the mobility of their subjects. Johnson, "'Some by Flatteries,'" 261. This may have been the case in Plymouth, since several Indians petitioned Governor Prince in 1667 complaining that their sachem had sold their land without their consent. "Indians of Dartmouth petition to Thomas Prince, August 9, 1667," Winslow Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

49. John Easton, "A Relacion of the Indyan Warre [1675]," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675–1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 9.

50. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, 12 vols. (hereafter *Plymouth Colony Records* [Boston, 1855–1861]), 5:63–64.

51. *Ibid.*, 78.

52. *Ibid.*, 4:24–26.

53. *Ibid.*, 5:79.

54. *Ibid.*, 4:24–26.

55. Easton, "Relacion of the Indyan Warre," 7. It is entirely possible that Philip requested Sassamon's help in formulating a will to preserve his heirs' rights to the land in English eyes. The first Indian wills appeared in the late 1660s, mostly among missionized Indians. Even by 1675, however, Indian wills were probably a very rare phenomenon. The earliest known surviving example of an Indian will is dated 1679. For more on Indian wills, see Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, *passim*.

56. What follows is a brief outline of the circumstances surrounding the death of John Sassamon and the resulting trial. I have drawn the narrative from the Plymouth Colony's court records and various contemporary accounts of the war. These include *Plymouth Colony Records*, 5:159, 167–68; Easton, "A Relacion of the Indyan Warre"; William Hubbard, *The History of the Indian Wars in New England from the First Settlement to the Termination of the War with King Philip in 1677* [1677], ed. Samuel G. Drake (1865; Bowie, MD: Heritage Books Inc., 1990); Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New-England* (London: 1676); and Nathaniel Saltonstall, *The Present State of New England with Respect to the Indian War* (London: 1675), reprinted in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675–1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 75–98. Inconsistencies exist among these various accounts, and none of them offers an Indian perspective of events. Therefore, I have tried to limit my account to what can be inferred with near certainty by comparing the various narratives. I agree with Douglas E. Leach, who argued that "it is now impossible to tell whether the accused were actually guilty of the crime." See Douglas E. Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 32. Although we may never know the exact circumstances of Sassamon's death and the resulting trial, my interpretation does not rely on any presumptions about his death or the guilt or innocence of the accused. For more on the historiography of the event and the difficulty of reconstructing it, see James P. and Jeanne Ronda, "The Death of John Sassamon: An Exploration in Writing New England Indian History," *American Indian Quarterly* 1 (Summer 1974): 91–102. The Rondas offer a fine synthesis of accounts of Sassamon's death and the trial, to which I am heavily indebted; it helped me to sort out a confusing array of often-contradictory material.

57. *Plymouth Colony Records*, 5:168.

58. Easton, "Relacion of the Indyan Warre," 10.

59. Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 191.

60. *Ibid.*, 209, 210.

61. Easton, "Relacion of the Indyan Warre," 9.

62. *Ibid.*, 10. Like the Pokanoket, the Narragansett—another group of nonmissionized Indians—seemed willing to look to the king for assistance,

even after the Sassamon trial. After the war had begun, Easton explained that he saw "no way lically but if a sesation from arems might be procured untill it might be knone what terems King Charels wold propound, for we have gret Case to think the naroganset kings wold trust our king and that thay wold have accepted him to be umpire." Easton, "Relacion of the Indyan Warre," 16.

63. William S. Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620–1984* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), 51.

64. John Foster, *An Almanack of Celestial Motions for the Year of the Christian Era, 1675 . . .* (Cambridge, MA: 1675). Contemporary accounts of the war also mention this event, but they make relatively little of it. Hubbard elaborates on it the most when he describes how it frightened some members of a militia marching from Boston toward Plymouth: "Some Melancholy Fancies would not be perswaded, but that the Eclipse falling out at that Instant of Time was ominous, conceiving also that in the Centre of the Moon they discerned an unusual black Spot, not a little resembling the Scalp of an *Indian*: As some others not long before, imagined they saw the form of an *Indian Bow*, accounting that likewise ominous." Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, vol. 1, p. 67. Hubbard's account perhaps offers the greatest insight as to what the average English settler made of the eclipse. Most of the comprehensive written accounts of the war had elite clergy as their authors, which may explain why these works minimize the effects of the eclipse. A recent work on Puritan beliefs suggests the importance of signs such as eclipses to the Puritan belief system but also argues that elite clergy tried to discourage such ideas. See David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), *passim*.

As to whether the Indians knew of the eclipse before it occurred, a Jesuit missionary among the Oneida reported that these Indians could not predict eclipses as of 1674. However, given the Pokanoket and praying Indians' close contact with English settlers and the latter group's access to written documents, it is not entirely unlikely that they might have suspected it was coming. See Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610–1791*, 73 vols. (Cleveland: 1896–1901), 58:181–83.

65. *Ibid*, 6:225.

66. *Ibid*, 22:295

67. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*.

68. William Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports on King Philip's War: The Second William Harris Letter of August, 1676*, ed. Douglas E. Leach (Providence, RI: 1963), 20.

69. Thomas Church, *The Entertaining History of Philip's War* [1716], in *The History of Philip's War*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (Exeter: 1829), 125. Thomas Church was Benjamin's son and compiled this work from his father's diary after his death. A piece published in London just after the war also referred to the beheading and quartering of Philip: Richard Hutchinson, *The Warr in New-England Visibly Ended* (London: 1677), 2.

70. Edw. Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England. Concerning High Treason, and Other Pleas of the Crown, and Criminal Causes*, 5th ed. (London: 1671), 1–12, 211.

71. This statement is based on the contemporary accounts of the Pequot War. See Lion Gardiner, "Relation of the Pequot Warres," reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., vol. 4 (1834): 197–260; John Mason, "A Brief History of the Pequot War," reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 2d ser., vol. 8 (1826): 120–53; and John Underhill, "News from America," reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., vol. 6 (1837): 1–28. Also, to the best of my knowledge, there is no record of colonists quartering and beheading Indians during Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia.