May 26, 1637

Massacre at Mystic

On the moonlit night of May 26, 1637, Puritans from Mass-Massachusetts Bay Colony attacked a large Pequot village at a place called Missituck, located near the Mystic River in Connecticut. The assault began on May 25 with an all-day march through solidly held Pequot territory. As dusk approached, the seventy English, seventy Mohegans, and five hundred Narragansetts warriors led by Major John Mason and Captain John Underhill reached the outskirts of the Mystic settlement, where they decided to rest for a few hours. By 2 A.M. on the morning of the twenty-sixth, the English were poised to put an end to the war that had been raging between them and the Pequot for more than a year.

With the aid of clear skies and a brightly lit moon they began their final assault. Mason and Underhill divided their forces into northern and southern contingents and attacked through the two entrances to the village. According to their own accounts, Mason led his men through the northeast gate when he "heard a Dog bark, and an Indian crying *Owanux! Owanux!* Which is Englishmen! Englishmen!" After removing piles of tree branches that

blocked their approach, Captain Underhill led his men through the other entrance with "our swords in our right hand, our carbines and muskets in our left hand." The Pequots, initially startled by the attack, quickly regrouped and pelted the invaders with arrows. Two Englishmen were killed and twenty others wounded. Some were shot "through the shoulder, some in the face, some in the legs."

Instead of engaging the Englishmen, many of the Pequots, especially women and children, stayed huddled in their wigwams. Frustrated that his enemy refused to fight by traditional European rules of engagement, Mason decided to burn the village. He lit a torch, setting fire to the wigwams. At the same time, Captain Underhill "set fire on the south end with a train of powder. The fires of both meeting in the center of the fort, blazed most terribly, and burnt all in the space of half an hour." Dozens of men, women, and children were burned alive. Mason observed that the Pequots were "most dreadfully amazed . . . indeed, such a dreadful Terror did the Almighty let fall upon their Spirits, that they would fly from us and run into the very Flames, where many of them perished." Another Englishman who saw the slaughter wrote: "The fire burnt their very bowstrings . . . down fell men, women and children . . . great and doleful was the bloody sight." After setting the fires, Mason ordered his men to "fall off and surround the Fort." From this vantage point, they slaughtered anyone trying to flee the flames. The carnage was so frightening that Uncas, a Mohegan sachem (chief) allied with the English, cried, "No more! You kill too many!"

The light of a late spring morning brought into full focus the carnage that had been perpetrated the previous night. The Pequot were reeling from the most gruesome act of ethnic cleansing perpetrated by European colonizers on American soil. Fort Mystic

lay in smoldering ruins. Dwellings that once housed Pequot families were reduced to hot piles of ash, and the once formidable wooden palisade that surrounded Mystic was burning. Hundreds of Pequots were either dead or dying—mostly women, children, and elderly members of the tribe. The stench of burning human flesh filled the morning air. "It was a fearful sight to see them," observed William Bradford, who came to America on the *Mayflower* in 1620 and served as governor of Plymouth Colony, "thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave the praise therof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them, thus to enclose their enemies in their hands and give them so speedy a victory over so proud and insulting an enemy."

Major Mason considered his actions that day to be righteous, and he went to his grave believing that the violence at Mystic pleased the English God in true Puritan form. "Sometimes," he wrote, "the scripture declareth that women and children must perish with their parents . . . We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings." Mason, like most of the English commentators of the era, framed the conflict in terms of savagery and civilization; the "civilized" Protestants of the English empire were asserting their natural authority over "savage," pagan, and dark-skinned Indians. As the last fires at Mystic burned out, news of the tragedy spread throughout New England. A new and terrible era had begun.

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The battle at Mystic had its roots in the initial contact in the early seventeenth century between English settlers and native peoples living in New England. The Pilgrims, who arrived in 1620, had

the good fortune of encountering Squanto, a Wampanoag who helped the Pilgrims adjust to their new world. Within a few years, however, relations between the Pilgrims and local tribes soured. No matter how friendly the initial contact, it could not alter the English view of natives as untrustworthy savages. Indians, preached Anglican bishop John Jewell, were "a wild and naked people" who lived "without any civil government, offering up men's bodies in sacrifice, drinking men's blood . . . sacrificing boys and girls to certain familiar devils." Over the next few years the settlers stole native crops and acquired their land. In 1622, a militia captain killed eight friendly Indians, impaling the head of the sachem on top of the fort at Plymouth as a clear signal of their power. The Indians had a word for the white settlers: *wotowquenange*, which meant stabbers or cutthroats.

Both sides were already deeply suspicious of each other by the time Jonathan Winthrop and the six hundred Puritan settlers arrived on the shores of Massachusetts in June 1630. Unlike the mostly male crews of fortune seekers and laborers that landed in Virginia more than a decade earlier, the Puritans who founded the Plymouth Colony came as families—husbands, wives, children, and servants—seeking to locate permanently. They came to America determined to create a "Citty on the Hill," a utopia where individuals would work in common struggle to serve God's will. Winthrop wanted to escape a decadent England, with its Catholic queen, beggars, horse thieves, and "wandering ghosts in the shape of men." The Puritan mission was to tame the wilderness so their commonwealth would "shine like a beacon" back to immoral England.

The Puritan families wanted land and access to all of the bounties that the New World had to offer—a goal that put them in competition with the Indians for local natural resources. Most

Puritans viewed Indians as dangerous, temporary obstacles to permanent English settlement in New England, not potential partners in the development of a new society. "The principall ende of this plantacion," their charter stated, was to "wynn and incite the natives of [the] country, to the knowledg and obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of mankinde, and the Christian fayth."

The Puritans came to America prepared to use force to achieve their ends. The Massachusetts Charter instructed settlers "to encounter, expulse, repel, and resist by force of arms" any effort to destroy the settlement. The settlers who arrived in Massachusetts aboard the *Arabella* were told to "neglect not walls, and bulwarks, and fortifications for your own defence." They brought with them five artillery pieces, skilled artisans who could make weapons, and a handful of professional soldiers. Shortly after arriving they set up a militia company. All males between the ages of sixteen and sixty were expected to serve.

Within the first three years as many as three thousand English had settled in the colony. By 1638, the population had swelled to eleven thousand. As the colony grew, the Puritans laid claim to land owned by the Indians. As God's "chosen people," the Puritans felt entitled to the land occupied by native tribes, often using Scripture to justify the outright seizure of territory. The new land was an untamed wilderness and their job was to subdue it for the glory of their God. The Puritans also offered secular justifications for taking possession of the land. Winthrop created a legal concept called *vacuum domicilium*, which proposed that Indians had defendable rights only to lands that were under cultivation. "As for the Natives in New England, they inclose noe Land, neither have any setled habytation, nor any tame Cattle to improve the Land by," Winthrop reasoned. If they left Indians land "sufficient for

their use, we may lawfully take the rest, there being more than enough for them and us."

The Puritans' most powerful weapons in seizing Indian land were neither laws nor guns, but microbes. Over the centuries, Europeans had been exposed to and, through a process of evolution, developed immunity to a host of viruses. Indians, isolated on a distant continent, had never been exposed to the deadly microbes and therefore had no immunity. Smallpox was the biggest killer, but syphilis and various respiratory diseases added to the death toll. Tens of thousands of Indians died in the first year after the arrival of the English. By some estimates, disease killed 75 percent of the tribes in southern New England in less than two years. An Englishman wrote that the Indians had "died on heapes, as they lay in their houses, and the living that were able to shift for themselves wouyle runne away and let them dy, and let there Carkases ly above the ground without buriall."

As more Puritans disembarked in America, their settlements expanded farther west and south, eventually bringing them into contact with the Pequot. There were roughly thirteen thousand Pequots occupying the two thousand square miles of territory between the Niantic River in Connecticut and the Wecapaug River in Rhode Island. Little is known about the Pequot before their contact with Europeans. One historian described them as the "most numerous, the most warlike, the fiercest and the bravest of all aboriginal clans of Connecticut." Like other native tribes in southern New England, they depended on farming, hunting, and fishing for survival. The main difference between them and other nearby tribes, such as the Narragansett, Nipmuc, and Mattabesic, was that the Pequot built fortified villages. By 1637 they had constructed two large fortified hilltop villages—at Weinshauks and Mystic. In addition to these forts, they built smaller villages

nearby containing as many as thirty wigwams, which were surrounded by a few hundred acres of cultivated land.

Highly organized with a powerful grand sachem and tribal council, the Pequot managed to establish military dominance over the other tribes in New England. In an effort to monopolize trade with early Dutch explorers, the Pequot subjugated nearby tribes. By the 1630s, the Pequot were the dominant political and military force in the area. Not only had they established extensive trading networks throughout the region, but they also occupied some of the region's most fertile soil.

Just as the English were planning to expand into Pequot territory, the tribe was decimated by disease. By 1634, the tribe that had numbered thirteen thousand a few years earlier now had only three thousand. John White, a planter in New England, wrote that "the Contagion hath scarce left alive one person of an hundred." Whole Indian tribes were decimated—too sick to hunt, fetch wood for fire, or take care of one another. Their bodies were full of bursting pox boils; "their skin cleaving by reason thereof to the mats they lie on. When they turn them, a whole side will flay off at once, and they will be all of a gore blood, most fearful to behold." The Puritans believed that the epidemics were gifts from God. "If God were not pleased with our inheriting these parts," Puritan Jonathan Winthrop wondered, "why did he drive out the natives before us? And why doth he still make room for us, by diminishing them as we increase?"

The once powerful Pequot found themselves under assault from all directions. Not only were they reeling from disease, they faced new economic competition. The Pequot occupied land that was rich in wampum—small sea shells drilled and strung together into beads. Until the arrival of the Europeans, wampum had served as a medium of exchange and communication for many

tribes. They used it to create the insignia of sachems, command the service of shamans, console the bereaved, celebrate marriages, end blood feuds, and seal treaties. The Dutch, and later the English, however, recognized the economic value of wampum and started using it as a form of currency. Initially, the Pequot benefited from a lucrative trading system that involved exchanging wampum and furs for European manufactured goods. Eventually, however, the English decided to make their own wampum. Using steel drills, they produced large quantities of wampum, driving down its value and undermining the source of the Pequot's economic power.

The Pequot were divided over how to respond to the new economic threat posed by the English. The sachem Sassacus, deeply distrustful of the English, called for building an alliance with the Dutch to try to repel the English. The sub-sachem Uncas, who had married Sassacus's daughter, opposed these efforts. Believing it was futile to resist the more numerous and well-armed English, he advocated cooperation. (Uncas would be forever remembered as the fictionalized character in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.) The debate between these two powerful men ripped the tribe apart at a critical moment. After a series of heated debates, the tribal council sided with Sassacus and forced Uncas to leave the village. An angry Uncas formed a separate tribe, the Mohegan, and joined forces with the English in an effort to destroy his former tribe. Decimated by disease and torn apart by rival factions, the Pequot had never been more vulnerable.

The English moved quickly to take advantage of the opportunity. The immediate cause of the horrific attack on Mystic was revenge for the deaths of two Englishmen. In 1634, Captain John Stone, an English merchant, and his crew were found dead on their ship on the Connecticut River. Stone fell far short of the

God-fearing ideal for an Englishman of the times. He was a notorious drunk, cheat, and liar. At the time of his death he was in trouble for stealing a ship full of Dutch trade goods from the Dutch governor of New York after a night of hard drinking. (Stone got the governor drunk as a diversionary tactic.) Informants from the Narragansett told colonial authorities that the Pequot ruthlessly murdered Stone and his men in their sleep. The Pequot told a different story. They claimed that Stone had taken two Indians captive. When Stone refused to release them, they took the ship by force. "This was related with such confidence and gravity," Winthrop said, "as having no means to contradict it, we inclined to believe it."

Although they believed the Pequot version of events, colonial authorities faced a dilemma. They could not let the murder of Englishmen go unpunished, but they were not exactly heartbroken by the death of the unscrupulous Captain Stone. Nevertheless, they needed to punish somebody. It was important, the English believed, to set an example: God's people needed to deal sternly with the savages. In 1634 the English demanded that the Pequot provide them with more beaver pelts and wampum strands, as well as swift delivery of the "murderers" of Captain Stone. The Pequot opted for large land cessions to meet the economic obligations of the treaty (ceding most of Connecticut to the English), but they would not deliver Stone's "murderers" to colonial authorities.

In the summer of 1636, Massachusetts authorities were tired of waiting. On July 4, they commissioned Jonathan Winthrop to deliver a final ultimatum to the Pequot: turn over those responsible for Stone's death to the proper authorities or suffer the wrath of English military forces. If they failed to comply, the English would "revenge the bolld of our countrymen as occasion shall

serve." The ultimatum became moot when, on July 20, the mutilated body of John Oldham, another English merchant trading in Pequot country, was found aboard his ransacked ship. John Underhill, later a participant in the slaughter at Mystic, wrote that it was the "Block Islanders" who "pretended to seek trade with John Oldham, and once aboard his ship killed him, and stole all of his goods." The tragic irony, however, is that the "Block Islanders" were not even Pequot—they were a subtribe of the Narragansett. Such details did not bother the English.

The English commissioned Captain John Endicott to seek revenge for the murders of Stone and Underhill. In August 1636 he set sail from Boston with about ninety men. Endicott was the epitome of all things Puritan: his long yet trimmed beard, his curled mustache, his square face, and his deep-set eyes bestowed upon him an aura of sober piety. A leader in New England since his arrival at Salem in 1628, Endicott was an imposing figure of authority. As former governor, and in 1636 the assistant governor to Jonathan Winthrop, he had spent his years in the colony making sure that the Puritan ideals became reality. Now his goal was to punish the Indians. For his first campaign he added to his black robes and broad white collar the body armor of an English military captain and set out to settle the score with the Block Islanders.

Unfortunately for Endicott, the Block Islanders anticipated his attack. Just before dusk on August 22, 1636, Endicott's small army landed in three ships on the coast of Block Island. According to Underhill, "fifty or sixty able fighting men, men straight as arrows, very tall, and of active bodies . . . their arrows notched" waited for the landing party. After unleashing a heavy barrage of arrows, the natives disappeared into the darkness. His troops spent the next

two days "burning and spoyling the Iland." But when the attack was over, only one Indian and a number of the tribe's dogs lay dead. Dismayed by the lack of bloodshed, Endicott and his men fled to Connecticut in search of Pequot to punish. Once again, the Indians slipped away, although the English managed to kill one man, destroy a few wigwams, and steal some corn. Afterward, Endicott decided to allow his men a few days of rest at nearby Fort Saybrook. The residents were not thrilled to see him, realizing the Indians would later punish them for providing refuge. "You come here to raise these wasps around my ears, and then you will take wing and flee away," cried the fort commander.

After four restless days at Fort Saybrook, Endicott and his men sailed to the Pequot River. Pequot and Western Niantic were apparently unaware of Endicott's mission, despite his previous skirmishes. According to Underhill, "The Indians spying us came running in multitudes along the water side crying, 'what cheer, Englishmen, what cheer, what do you come for?' to Pequot river." The next day a Pequot elder boarded one of the ships and asked the English for the purpose of their visit. An officer explained that "the governors of the Bay sent us to demand the heads of those persons that had slain Captain Norton and Captain Stone and the rest of their company." A few hours later, Endicott attacked the village, but once again, the Indians had already fled into the woods. "Thus," an officer said, "we spent the day burning and spoiling the country." Endicott then returned to Boston.

Just as the Fort Saybrook commander had feared, the "wasps" began to sting. By April 1637, eight months after the Endicott expedition, the Pequot had killed thirty colonists in Connecticut—about 5 percent of the English population. They took numerous female captives, burned storehouses, and slaughtered livestock.

Many of the victims were tortured and dismembered. At Saybrook, the natives seized a captain, "tied him to a stake, flayed his skin off, put hot embers between the flesh and skin, cut off his fingers and toes, and made hatbands of them."

The Puritans then declared war against the Pequot, mobilized their fighting units, and prepared for battle. Both sides engaged in a desperate struggle to win over the Narragansett, who could tip the balance of power in the region. The Pequot tried to convince them that, despite their past differences, they now shared a common goal of removing the British from the continent. For their part, the Puritans sent Roger Williams, a dissident preacher banished to Rhode Island, on a dangerous mission to meet the Narragansett tribe's chief. He sailed from Providence "all alone, in a poor canoe, and . . . through a stormy wind, with great seas." It was worth the effort: The Narragansett agreed to sever all ties with the Pequot and to aid the British. In return, the Puritans promised "perpetual peace."

The English raised an army of ninety men under Major John Mason, a veteran of European wars whom one contemporary described as "full of Martial Bravery and Vigour." In the spring of 1637, Mason set out for Saybrook to meet up with the Massachusetts militia and nearly six hundred Indian allies—five hundred Narragansetts and roughly seventy Mohegans. He was instructed "not to do this work of the Lord's revenge slackly." He wanted to send a clear signal that he planned to impose harsh punishment on the local Indians. He decided to set an example. On the journey to Mystic, Mason's Mohegan allies discovered a lone Pequot male. They took him prisoner and then tortured him. He was drawn and quartered, and as he lay dismembered, Captain Underhill (who joined Mason upon his arrival at Saybrook) delivered the final blow: a musket shot to the head.

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The battle at Mystic lasted less than an hour but it cast a long shadow over future relations between Indians and English settlers. For the first time, the English Puritans realized they held the power to dominate the people they saw as godless savages, showing little reluctance in using overwhelming force to achieve their ends. Almost overnight, the balance of power in America shifted from the unorganized natives to the English colonists. The destruction of the Pequot removed a major obstacle to Puritan expansion and English settlement in America. It also destroyed any hope, in the words of one historian, that Indians and whites "could live with themselves, each other, and the land." In areas where the balance of power between natives and Europeans was more evenly distributed, the two sides were forced to develop a shared culture. This was the pattern that developed, for example, in the Great Lakes region, where neither the French nor the Indians had enough power to enforce their will on the other. But the pattern of brutal repression established in New England became the model for how whites would treat natives across the country. The Pequot War set up the tragic irony of American history: a nation founded on the highest ideals of individual liberty and freedom was built on slaughter and destruction of epic proportions.

After the destruction of Mystic, the Pequot were on the run and in hiding. Nearly two hundred surrendered to the Narragansett, hoping for better treatment than they would receive from the English. Over the next few months, the Englishmen used their superior firepower to massacre many of the remaining Pequot, eventually wiping out two-thirds of the tribe. Following orders to "utterly root them out," the Puritans beheaded the sachems they

had captured and committed numerous other atrocities. A witness described how the English tortured one prisoner: "They tied one of his legs to a post, and twenty men, with a rope tied to the other, pulled him in pieces." The English beheaded one Pequot sachem who refused to cooperate. As a warning, they placed his head in a tree. (The site near Guilford Harbor is still known as Sachem Head.) The brutality was calculated not just to subdue the Pequot but to send a signal to other Indian tribes.

But the English still sought one final Pequot prize. They were determined to find the sachem Sassacus, who was traveling with about 400 of his followers. Major Mason followed in pursuit with about 160 men, including Uncas and his scouts, finally catching up with Sassacus in a village near Fairfield, Connecticut. After negotiating for the release of 200 women and children, Sassacus managed to slip away. Traveling west with about 80 warriors, he turned to his old enemies, the Mohawk, for help. He hoped to plead his case to the tribal council, but he and his warriors were killed before they had a chance. The Mohawk cut off Sassacus's head and sent it to the English as a token of friendship.

The war between the English and the Pequot came to an official end in September 1638 when the remaining tribal leaders signed the Treaty of Hartford, which revoked legal recognition of the Pequot nation. The Puritan authorities went so far as to forbid the use of the Pequot name. According to Major Mason, the step was necessary "to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." The New Englanders then sold many of their Pequot captives into slavery to spend the rest of their days working in the sugar plantations of Barbados. The Pequot tribe, or so it seemed by the fall of 1638, was destroyed, and peace was restored to New England. But New England's troubles, and the story of the Pequot people, were far from over.

The Pequot War set in motion a process of destruction that would culminate with one of the bloodiest wars in American history: King Philip's War. This war, an extension of the Pequot War, ended all violent resistance by Indians to English colonization in New England. With the Pequot vanquished, the Puritans continued their expansion in North America south and west, their numbers growing to nearly fifty thousand by 1675. As they expanded their influence they clashed with other tribes, including some who had sided with the English in the Pequot War. That year, Metacom, a Wampanoag sachem known to the English as King Philip, spelled out his tribe's grievances with the Puritans in a meeting with the well-intentioned John Easton, the governor of Rhode Island. Fortunately for historians, Easton took detailed notes of the meeting.

Metacom was the grandson of Massasoit, the sachem of the Wampanoag who aided the settlers at Plymouth and who fought with them against other tribes. Massasoit believed that natives and English could coexist, but over time Metacom realized the English wanted domination, not cooperation. He watched the condition of his people deteriorate as they suffered one humiliation after another. The Wampanoag "had bine the first in doing good to the English and the English the first in doing rong," Easton quoted Metacom as saying.

Metacom complained that the English used phony contracts to grab large areas of land. In some cases, the chiefs "being given to drunknes, the English made them drunk and then cheted them in bargens." In other cases, they simply allowed cows and pigs to roam over the land, destroying traditional Indian hunting lands. The Wampanoag had assumed that "when the English [bought] land of them that they wold have kept ther Catell upone there owne land." Metacom also objected to Puritan missionary efforts

to convert Indians to Christianity by setting up "praying towns" where natives would adopt an English way of life and pray to the Puritan god. The most famous missionary of this time was John Eliot, a plump man who first preached the Christian message to the Indians in 1646—in their own Algonquian language. Eliot took on the task of translating and publishing the Bible in the Algonquian language. He also wrote a tract titled *Indian Dialogs*—a step-by-step primer on how to get one's fellow tribesmen to reject their Indian identities and become "civilized." Most New England tribes resisted the missionary work. Less than 10 percent of the total Indian population of New England moved to praying towns, and only a few dozen natives were baptized.

The incident that brought the two parties back to the brink of war occurred when three of Metacom's followers were accused, tried, and convicted—and then summarily executed—for the mysterious murder of a "Praying Indian" named John Sassamon. In January 1675 Sassamon was found dead, his neck broken, beneath the ice of a local pond. Sassamon was no ordinary Indian. When his parents died of smallpox, he was raised by adoptive English parents and fought for the English in the Pequot War. He learned English from John Eliot and he later helped establish the praying town at Natick. Sassamon made such a strong impression that Eliot sent him to Harvard. When he returned he served briefly as King Philip's scribe and interpreter until the sachem discovered that he was using his translating skills to gain land for himself. Sassamon fled, living briefly in a praying town before taking a plot of land near Assawompset Pond. Massachusetts leaders immediately assumed that he died at the hands of Indians doing the bidding of the increasingly insubordinate and uncontrollable Metacom.

After presenting his long list of grievances, Philip refused Easton's invitation to lay down his arms. A few days later Wampanoag

warriors looted the town of Swansea in Connecticut. King Philip's War had begun. Over the next few weeks, Philip's forces set English towns on fire all along the Massachusetts and Connecticut frontier. By the summer, the other tribes in New England—primarily the Narragansett, Pocomtuck, and Pocasset—joined the Wampanoag effort in a final effort to preserve their culture and push the Puritans into the sea. By the winter of 1676, Indian warriors had attacked and burned the towns of Lancaster, Medfield, Weymouth, and Groton. The colonies were left reeling. Believing that Indian successes were a punishment from God, Puritans across New England engaged in a ritual of fasting, prayer, and days of humiliation, seeking forgiveness. By spring, it seemed as if Metacom would soon march into the heart of Boston.

The English directed their first successful offensive of the war not against the Wampanoag but the Narragansett—their former allies in the Pequot War. Under the leadership of Josiah Winslow, governor of Plymouth, the Puritan army planned to launch a Mystic-like raid on the Narragansett. In a scene strikingly familiar, the English surrounded the Narragansett's fortified village located on a small island in the "Great Swamp" just east of the Chipuxet River on December 19, 1675. They attacked before dusk, just as the Indians were eating. They forced their way through a gap in the fortress, torched wigwams and shot fleeing natives. Others were trapped in the inferno. "[T]hey and their food fried together," one English observer remarked. By the time it was over, more than three hundred Narragansett warriors and an equal number of women and children lay dead, but the English also paid a heavy price. More than eighty soldiers were killed or wounded.

The English brutality enraged other tribes. In February and March Indian armies attacked the town of Medfield, just twenty miles outside Boston. Over the next few months, fighting raged

up and down the coast, from Maine to the upper Connecticut coast. Indians managed to raid Providence, Rhode Island, burning to the ground the home of that state's founder and former governor, Roger Williams, now in his seventies. In Lancaster, thirty miles west of Boston, Indians massacred all of the residents and took the wife of a local preacher captive; she lived to write an account of her ordeal, describing how Indians overran their cabins, dragged her friends outside, including a woman and a child, and hacked them to death. "Thus were we butchered by these merciless heathen, standing amazed, with the blood running down to our heels. . . . Oh the doleful sight."

It was only a matter of time, however, before the English quelled the rebellion and solidified their control over New England. On the night of August 12, 1676, the English and their Indian allies hunted down Metacom in his home village in Rhode Island. While he slept, a small company of soldiers surrounded his hut and opened fire. Metacom was shot and killed as he tried to retreat. The English captain who described his prize as "a doleful, great, naked, dirty, beast" ordered the body decapitated and quartered, the various pieces hung from trees. His head was returned to Plymouth where, during Thanksgiving celebrations in 1676, it was paraded through the towns as evidence of God's renewed favor for his chosen people.

King Philip's War devastated New England—nearly 5 percent of its European population died. Most of the inland Puritan towns lay in ruins. It would take forty years for the English to recover. But nearly 30 percent of the Indians of the region perished in the conflict. King Philip's War represented the last gasp of the Indian tribes of coastal New England. Puritan domination of New England was now complete. There would be no assimilation of Indian culture.

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The Puritan victory over the Indians, which started with the raid at Mystic and ended with King Philip's War, set the pattern for European and Indian relations for the next two centuries. The war became part of the mythology of the American frontier as it advanced west: the triumph of light over darkness, civilization over savagery. By demonizing the Indians, and viewing the conflict as between the devil and God, the Puritans provided the nation with language it could use to justify wholesale destruction of native cultures. "The Devil decoyed those miserable savages [to New England] in hopes that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ would never come here to destroy or disturb His *absolute empire* over them," observed Congregational minister and author Cotton Mather in 1702. The settlers, Edward Johnson proclaimed in 1654, had turned "this Wilderness" into "a mart" that attracted traders from throughout Europe. "Thus," he declared, "hath the Lord been pleased to turn one of the most hideous, boundless, and unknown Wildernesses in the world in an instant . . . to a well-ordered Commonwealth."

This image of transforming wilderness into civilization would emerge as a central ingredient in the notion of Manifest Destiny, repeated thousands of times as the settlers made their way across the continent. King Philip's War became, in the words of the historian Richard Slotkin, "an archetype of all the wars which followed." For the next two centuries, Americans drew sharp distinctions between themselves and native peoples, dismissing Indians as backward, uncivilized savages who needed to be conquered. From the Great Lakes to the Mississippi Delta, and eventually to the Pacific Ocean and beyond, all Native American

people—as individuals, as families, as nations—confronted waves of immigrants who sought to divest them of land rights and eradicate their cultural heritage.

The pattern set in motion in the seventeenth century culminated nearly two hundred years later in May 1830, when Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which forcibly transferred the tribes in six southern states to territory west of the Mississippi. "It gives me great pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation with the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation," declared President Andrew Jackson. In reality, the policy was anything but "benevolent." Over the next decade, the government forced more than seventy thousand Indians to abandon their homes to make room for white settlers, sending them on a harsh journey—the Trail of Tears—to unoccupied territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. "It is impossible to conceive the frightful sufferings that attend these forced migrations," observed Alexis de Tocqueville. "They are undertaken by a people already exhausted and reduced; and the countries to which the new-comers betake themselves are inhabited by other tribes, which receive them with jealous hostility. Hunger is in the rear, war awaits them, and misery besets them on all sides." The government promised they could occupy the new land for "as long as grass shall grow and rivers run." As was often the case, the government broke that promise when it was no longer convenient and forced them to move again in 1906.

While the Native American experience has been one of tragedy, it has also been a story of cultural renewal and triumph. In 1666, the English gave the Pequot a three-thousand-acre parcel of unspoiled woodland called Mashantucket. Through a vicious

cycle of poverty, emigration, and loss of territory, no more than fifty Pequots were still on the reservation by 1921. Until the early seventies, three women, Elizabeth George and her half sisters, Martha Langevin and Alice Brend, lived on the 213.9-acre tract and served as leaders of the tribe. After the death of Elizabeth George in 1973, the Mashantucket Pequot reorganized under the leadership of her grandson, Richard Hayward, who worked to bring people back to the reservation, to recover stolen land, and to gain federal recognition.

Determined to keep the tribe alive, he and other tribal leaders petitioned the government for federal recognition in 1983, a move that conferred legal status, rights, and privileges and exempted them from many state and federal laws. On October 18, 1983, President Reagan signed a bill extending federal recognition to what was now known as the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe of Connecticut. The bill also returned to the tribe an additional fourteen hundred acres of land that had been illegally seized. Appropriately, the *New York Times* headline read: "Pequot Indians Prevail in Battle Begun in 1637."

Ironically, the Pequot used the sovereign status implied in their treaty, which the victorious Puritans had forced them to sign, in order to circumvent the Puritan traditions—and laws—that restricted gambling in Connecticut. On July 5, 1986, the Pequot opened their first bingo operation, which quickly expanded into six profitable casinos, the world's largest bingo facility, three resort hotels, theaters, salons/spas, gift shops, and golf courses. By 2004, Foxwoods Resort Casino was making an estimated $1.3 billion annually and was widely acknowledged as the world's most profitable gambling operation. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in the year 2000, the Pequot population had risen to 590 individuals—most of whom have returned to the reservation or

nearby areas. As of 1992, the Mashantucket Pequot were the wealthiest Native American tribe in the country.

The massacre unleashed by Major Mason on Fort Mystic that spring night in 1637—the "utter destruction" of which he so gleefully wrote—was never completed. The destruction of the Pequot and other native civilizations in North America cleared the way for the towns and villages that would soon emerge as the backbone of America's democratic experiment. The Pequot experience reminds us of our nation's tragic and violent origins. But it also highlights the redemptive quality of American democracy: its ability to adapt, to change, and, occasionally, to right past wrongs. In the end, the Pequot used democratic values and the legal institutions created to support them to reestablish their ancient claim to the land stolen from them by generations of European settlers. As one observer noted: "After a 350-year truce, the Mashantucket may actually have won the Pequot War."

For Further Reading

For an excellent general history of the period, see Gary Nash's very readable and provocative *Red, White & Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (1992). Anyone interested in pursuing further reading on the subject of the Pequot War or Pequot cultural reinvention must start with the collection of essays edited by Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry titled *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation* (1990). Alfred A. Cave's *The Pequot War* (1996) is the most recent book-length treatment of the war. Ian K. Steele's *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (1994) offers the reader a very concise outline of events, from Captain Stone to the Treaty of Hartford, and even continues on with King Philip's War in the 1670s. Also useful are Neal Salisbury's *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Euro-*

peans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643 (1982) and Alden T. Vaughan's article "Pequots and Puritans: The Causes of the War of 1637," in Alden T. Vaughan and Francis J. Bremer, eds., *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture* (1977). Richard Drinnon's *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating & Empire-Building* (1980) contains an excellent biographical sketch of John Endicott.

There are numerous primary sources pertaining to the Pequot War. Some have been published and modernized for easier reading. Major John Mason's *A Brief History of the Pequot War,* John Underhill's *News from America,* and William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* have all been widely reproduced in the last few decades. Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda edited the last published edition of John Eliot's Indian dialogues, simply titled *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction* (1980). Many of the historians who have dealt with the Pequot War have also written on the subject of King Philip's War. The most in-depth analysis of King Philip's War comes from Jill Lepore, author of *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (1998).