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CONNECTICUT

RHODE ISLAND

COUNTRY OF MOHEGANS AND PEQUODS

Hudson R.

Connecticut R.

Windsor

Hartford

Wethersfield

Middletown

Fairfield

Plymouth

Narragansett B.

Providence

Pequot R.

James or Pequot R.

Saybrook

Pequot II

Cap.

Mason's

Regal Fortress

Mystic

Vanansett B.

PLACES Mentioned in the History OF THE PEQUOD WAR

English.	Indian.
Hartford	Sukeag
Windsor	Massacoe
Wethersfield	Pyquaug
Middletown	Mattabesick
New London	Nameaug
New Haven	Quinipiack

RI PEQU

TICUT

PEQUODS

Narransett
Rhode Island
Mystic
Mass

PLYMOUTH

Varagansett B.

<i>English.</i>	<i>Indian.</i>
<i>Hartford</i>	<i>Sukeag</i>
<i>Windsor</i>	<i>Massacoe</i>
<i>Wethersfield</i>	<i>Pyguang</i>
<i>Middletown</i>	<i>Mattabesick</i>
<i>New London</i>	<i>Nameaug</i>
<i>New Haven</i>	<i>Quinpiack</i>

<i>English.</i>	<i>Indian.</i>
<i>Hartford</i>	<i>Sukeag</i>
<i>Windsor</i>	<i>Massacoe</i>
<i>Wethersfield</i>	<i>Pyguang</i>
<i>Middletown</i>	<i>Mattabesick</i>
<i>New London</i>	<i>Nameaug</i>
<i>New Haven</i>	<i>Quinpiack</i>

PLACES
Mentioned in the History
OF THE
PEQUOD WAR

Worlds Apart: Puritan Perceptions of the Native American during the Pequot War

TIMOTHY L. WOOD

When William Bradford wrote in 1633 about Roger Williams's recent departure from Plymouth, the Pilgrim leader remarked, with almost palpable relief, that Williams was "a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts but very unsettled in judgement."¹ Indeed, Bradford's assessment accurately reflected the theological uncertainties of many of the founders of Puritan New England, including Williams and his counterpart John Winthrop. During the 1630s those religious uncertainties motivated them to depart from what they perceived as England's apostate and corrupt ecclesiastical structure. Nevertheless, Puritans such as Winthrop, and their contemporaries like Roger Williams (who was led to very different religious conclusions by a set of virtually identical premises), encountered new challenges to their social and religious worldview in America. Those difficulties surfaced especially in their dealings with the Native Americans, whose culture was totally alien to their own.

By the latter 1630s, as the pace of English expansion quickened and the friction between the native and Puritan cultures intensified, two disparate interpretations of that conflict of cultures emerged. While astute natives recognized their plight as fundamentally a question of survival, the Puritans saw in the colonization of New England an eschatological struggle for the salvation of humanity, with native conversion the ideal outcome of that confrontation of cultures. However, when the natives resisted the Puritans' missionary efforts and the attempts to impose new social and cultural values on their traditional lifestyles, tensions between the two cultures grew. By 1637 those tensions erupted into a conflict known as the Pequot War, in which the English settlers proceeded to conquer by force what could not be won by argument and persuasion. Indeed, that conflict served as a convenient vent for the pressures that mounted as the settlers and Indians struggled to find their places in a rapidly changing world.

Conflicts such as the Pequot War served a definite purpose within the Puritan mentality. Indian aggression, even when provoked by the colonists, met the Puritans' expectation of resistance to their holy experiment, for it seemed absurd to think that Satan would allow the Puritan effort to revitalize the whole of the Protestant world to go uncontested. The idea that the natives held a pivotal role in the future of the colonial endeavor extended logically from the Puritans' preconceived notions concerning their spiritual mission into a hostile and corrupt wilderness. The Indians' state of mind provided the Puritans with a barometer that read the immediate spiritual future of the Bible commonwealth. When natives converted to Christianity, then the colonists could continue to rely on the power of persuasion to accomplish their objectives. But when the Indians resisted assimilation to Puritan ways, clung to their old religion, and advanced their own interests in opposition to English ones, then such defiance might be answered with violence.

In a January 1623 letter to the governor of Plymouth, the Separatist pastor John Robinson expressed his dismay at the settlers' lukewarm attitude towards the Indians'

Map by Samuel Maverick, 1828, to accompany Emma Willard's History of the United States. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9041).

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conversion and Plymouth's willingness to go to war with the natives before making a bona fide effort to win their souls:

Concerning the killing of those poor Indians, of which we heard at first by report, and since by more certain relation. Oh, how happy a thing had it been, if you had converted some before you had killed any! Besides, where blood is once begun to be shed, it is seldom staunch'd of a long time after. You will say they deserved it. I grant it; but upon what provocations and invitements by those heathenish Christians? Besides, you being no magistrates over them were to consider not what they deserved but what you were by necessity constrained to inflict. Necessity of this, especially of killing so many (and many more, it seems, they would, if they could) I see not. . . . It is . . . a thing more glorious, in men's eyes, than pleasing in God's or convenient for Christians, to be a terror to poor barbarous people.²

Ideally, as Robinson emphasized, the Puritan settlers were to conduct themselves properly as ambassadors of Christ and initiate a process of Christianization and westernization that would sweep throughout native society. However, Christian faith and the English lifestyle made little headway into Indian culture. Sometimes cross-cultural misunderstandings frustrated the Englishmen's attempts at converting the natives. At other times the Indians directly rebelled against the settlers' efforts to extinguish their traditional religion and customs. During those times of failure, when through their words and actions the Indians called into question England's right to impose its values on a foreign people, the Puritan colonies stood ready to reassert their mission through force of arms. Thus the Puritans consistently demonstrated, through their often violent reaffirmation of their divine commission to occupy New England, the eschatological assumptions that had led them to America to begin with.

Historian Avi Hu Zakai described the settlement of New England as "a judgmental crisis and apocalyptic migration, marking the ultimate necessity of God's chosen people to depart from a sinful past and corrupt human traditions."³ Whereas Virginia's settlers received the tacit support of the Church of England in their venture, the New England Puritans realized that they had embarked on their own and that England's religious establishment sincerely hoped that their project would fail. Consequently, the Church of England's opposition raised the stakes of the Puritan undertaking considerably. Virginia's failure would simply have been the collapse of a business enterprise, and a second try could have been launched from a friendly and sympathetic mother country. In New England, however, where "religion and profit jump together," as Edward Winslow put it, the failure of colonization would also have been a spiritual defeat of eschatological proportions.⁴ If the Puritan settlers allowed their mission in America to fail, then God would have to accomplish his divine purposes in another way, and the Puritans would have undermined their own role in God's redemptive plan. The tensions inherent in that desperate struggle for the survival of American Puritanism set the stage for future conflict between the English Puritans who migrated to New England to bring about God's model community and the natives whose culture stood in the way of that experiment. Thus the events that led to the Pequot War can be understood in terms of the Puritans' intent and theological ideals in defending their Bible commonwealth against the real and imagined threats of the Indians.



A relative newcomer among the Indians of the Northeast, the Pequot tribe had quickly established a powerful presence in the Connecticut region. Originally the Pequots considered themselves members of the Mahican tribe that occupied the area around the upper Hudson River. At about the same time that the Pilgrims founded Plymouth, the Pequots migrated from what is now New York State into the Connecticut River valley, subduing other indigenous tribes there and forcing them into tributary relationships.

The entry of the Pequots into New England brought about substantial changes in the region by altering the balance of power among the tribes; for example, the comparatively weak Niantic tribe was forced into a division, with its western part subordinated to the Pequots and its eastern part subordinated to the Narragansetts. Even the tribal name of the Pequots testified to the aggressive nature of the Pequot nation; it was an Algonquin word meaning “destroyers of men,” given the tribe by its conquered Indian neighbors.⁵

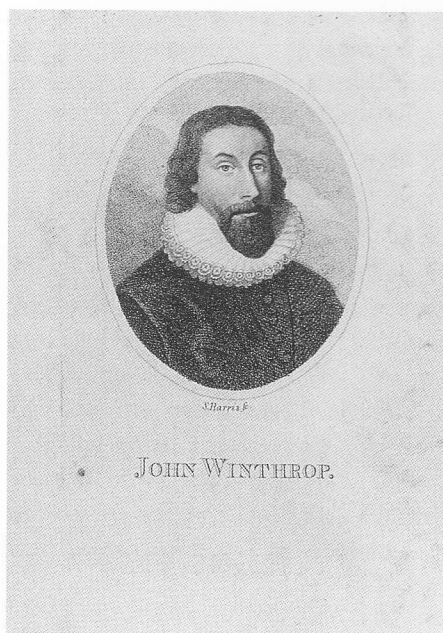
The arrival and subsequent population growth of Europeans in New England further upset the already fragile balance of power among the tribes of the Massachusetts-Rhode Island-Connecticut area. The promise of mutually beneficial trade and struggles for military supremacy created alliances and entanglements between the English and the various Indian nations, thus altering preexisting relationships. Many tribes saw in the Europeans the potential for advantageous defense alliances to shield them from the aggression of other tribes.

When Roger Williams arrived at the head of Narragansett Bay in 1636 after his banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, he found himself squarely within the territory of the Narragansett Indians. Here he forged ties to the Narragansett tribe on behalf of both the Massachusetts Bay and Rhode Island colonies. Although the Pequots were also seeking trade and friendship with the English, their efforts were impeded by the animosity that already existed between the Pequots and Narragansetts, animosity that tended to spill over into English-Indian relations. By attempting to trade with both the Narragansetts and the Pequots, the colonists exacerbated the hostility between the tribes and complicated and strained their own dealings with them, and thus they helped draw the battle lines for future conflict in the region.

A violent killing brought those tensions into stark relief in 1634, when a Pequot war band murdered Captain John Stone, a disreputable English seaman and merchant, together with his crew while the Englishmen were engaged in some questionable business along the Connecticut River. Because of Captain Stone's reputation, few Puritans mourned his death at the time. Stone's shady dealings and criminal exploits had become notorious in Massachusetts: his detractors spread rumors of his engaging in cannibalism during his sea voyages; his drunkenness was legendary; he had even hatched a plot to stab the governor of Plymouth.⁶ While being detained in Boston in 1632 to await the resolution of piracy and theft charges against him, he was caught by a shocked intruder in the act of adultery with one Mrs. Barcroft. “Thus did God destroy him that proudly threatened to ruin us,” remarked one relieved Puritan on hearing of Stone's death.⁷

The earthly cause of Stone's murder probably lay in an incident between the Pequots and the Dutch.⁸ Seeking to maintain their trade monopoly in the Connecticut River valley, in 1633 the Pequots attacked and killed a band of rival Indians, most likely Narragansetts, who were en route to a Dutch trading post. Outraged at this interference with their commerce, the Dutch seized the Pequots' sachem the next time he appeared for trade and held him for ransom. The Pequots paid the sum demanded, only to receive their leader's dead body in return. In retribution, the aggrieved Indians murdered the crew of the next European ship they encountered—but unfortunately for the Pequots, they had avenged themselves not upon the Dutch but upon the Englishman John Stone and his crew.

After the murder, the New England colonies at first allowed their demands for justice to be tempered by both their desire to avoid an incident with the Pequots and Stone's unsavory reputation. Reinforcing this attitude was the Pequot claim that Stone had actually kidnapped two of their fellow tribesmen. Initially the Bay Colony accepted the



Despite their differences, Roger Williams and Massachusetts governor John Winthrop held each other in high esteem. Engraving from Book of Indians of North America, by Samuel Drake (Boston, 1837). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9044).

Pequots' offer of restitution through payments of wampum, together with a vague promise to turn over those involved in the murder at some future time. By 1635, however, Stone's death emerged as a major issue in Pequot-Puritan relations. The Puritans increasingly accepted claims by Indians aligned against the Pequots that the Pequots had murdered the captain in his bed during the course of a malicious robbery. Massachusetts authorities eventually demanded the immediate surrender of those men responsible for the murder.

The off-again, on-again diplomacy sent mixed signals to the Pequot leadership. Since Massachusetts proved unwilling to offer the tribe any real concessions—such as a military alliance—in exchange for the extradition, the Pequots delayed handing over the killers and making the full payment promised. In July 1636 the situation became further complicated when Indians from a small village allied to the Narragansetts murdered another English sailor, Captain John Oldham, on Block Island. In the light of Oldham's death, John Winthrop and the magistrates of the Bay Colony began preparations for war against the Narragansetts that same month, and they warned Roger Williams, whom they believed to be in potential danger, “to look to himself” in case of armed conflict.⁹ However, by returning Oldham's children and personal effects within two weeks of the incident, the Narragansetts quickly convinced Williams—and he, in turn, convinced Winthrop and the Massachusetts authorities—of the Narragansetts' innocence. With the guilty Block Island Indians having lost the support of the Narragansett coalition, rival tribes claimed that the killers had taken refuge with the Pequots.

The Indians' hopes that they could wait out the worst of the Englishmen's wrath soon shattered. The mid-1630s ushered in a period of considerable social stress in the development of the Bay Colony. It was in 1636 that Roger Williams was banished because of the challenge he mounted to the fundamental philosophy of church-state cohesion on which Massachusetts-style Puritanism depended. The controversy that would result in the expulsion of Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomians had already appeared on the horizon by that year, and it would reach its zenith in the year following. During that time of internal crisis, when the very survival of the Puritans' wilderness errand seemed in jeopardy, the leaders of the Bible commonwealth felt compelled to respond to threats to their holy experiment with speed and force, whether they came from “heretics” or “heathens.”¹⁰

In August 1636 Massachusetts governor Henry Vane commissioned John Endicott to assemble a force of ninety men to complete a two-part mission: first they were to seek out the Block Island tribe from which Oldham's killers originated and impose Puritan justice upon it; then they were to confront the Pequots and demand the surrender of the fugitives from both the Oldham and Stone murders, as well as collect the remainder of the reparations due. Endicott set about the task with enthusiasm. Upon encountering the Block Island tribe responsible for killing Oldham, the Massachusetts soldiers spent the next two days destroying every Indian, house, barn, and field they came upon. Disappointed because most of the natives escaped the sword, Endicott killed the tribe's pet dogs and departed from Block Island in search of the Pequots.

As Endicott's force approached Pequot territory, the natives initially reacted “cheerfully” to the colonists' arrival, but when the soldiers refused to answer inquiries about their reason for coming, the Indians grew fearful. Captain John Underhill later recalled that the natives raised a chorus of “doleful and woful cries” throughout the entire night after the Massachusetts men arrived at their village.¹¹ In a last-ditch effort to avoid conflict, the Indians utilized every excuse and pretext for delay available to them. Denying responsibility for the murders, they promised to extend their search for the guilty parties and asked Endicott to wait and speak to their leaders when they returned from a trip

to Long Island. Endicott remained totally unconvinced by what the villagers told him. When he observed some of them securing their possessions and retreating from the village, he assumed they were planning an ambush, and he "chose to beat up the drum and bid them battle."¹²

Once again Endicott and his men acted most efficiently, ravaging the Pequot village in much the same way that they had destroyed the Indian village on Block Island. With this incident, striking out against an entire Indian population, the colonial governments of New England started down a slippery slope toward outright warfare, for such severe action openly invited equally severe retaliation. Immediately after Endicott's departure the Pequots began a series of raids on the colonists' isolated settlements in the Connecticut River valley. Throughout late 1636 and early 1637 the Pequots especially targeted the frontier outpost of Fort Saybrook. While keeping the fort manned and operating, its commander, Lieutenant Lion Gardiner, barely escaped being killed, roasted alive, or otherwise tortured on a number of occasions, but others at the garrison and in the surrounding communities were not so fortunate.

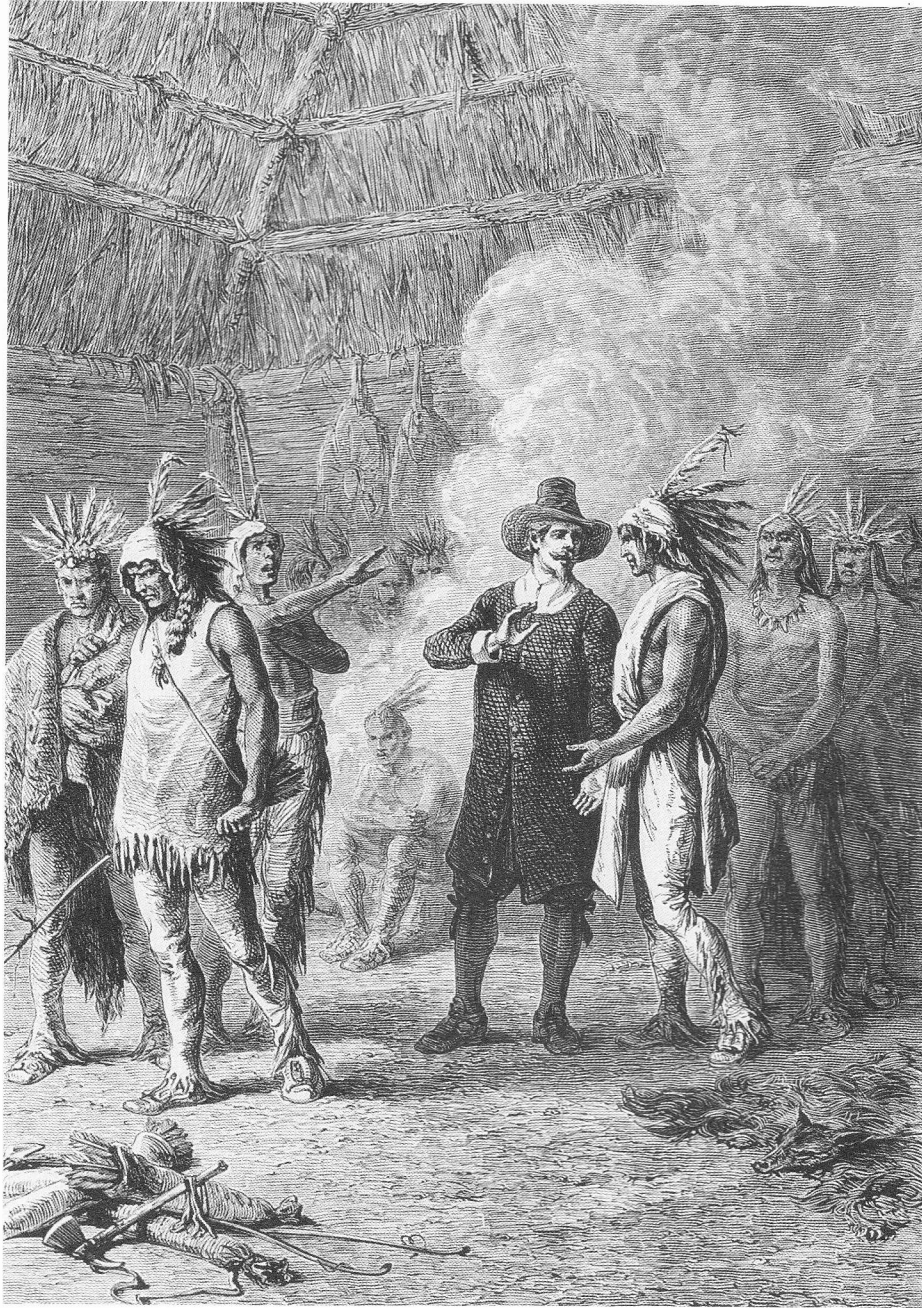
By 1637 the authorities in Boston considered the conflict a war, rather than merely a police action undertaken against a group of criminal natives and their accomplices. While the Puritans applied all of their diplomatic resources to the task of gaining allies among the Pequots' Indian neighbors, the Pequots similarly sent representatives to the surrounding tribes, especially the powerful Narragansett coalition, in an effort to enlist their support against the colonists. Arguing that the English aggression foreshadowed the Puritans' future intentions towards all of the Indians, the Pequots urged the Narragansetts to engage in a guerrilla campaign against the English "by firing their Houses, and killing their Cattel, and lying in wait for them as they went about their ordinary Occasions."¹³ It was only by the intense counterdiplomacy of Roger Williams, who spent much of the late 1630s as Winthrop's advocate on the front lines of Indian-settler conflict, that the Narragansetts were swayed to the Puritan cause. Years later, in a 1670 letter to John Mason, Williams recalled those tense days of negotiations:

Upon letters received from the Governor and Council at Boston, requesting me to use my utmost and speediest endeavors to break and hinder the league labored for by the Pequods . . . against the English, . . . the Lord helped me immediately to put my life into my hand, and, scarce acquainting my wife, to ship myself, all alone, in a poor canoe, and to cut through a stormy wind, with great seas, every minute in hazard of life, to the Sachem's house.

Three days and nights my business forced me to lodge and mix with the bloody Pequod ambassadors, whose hands and arms, methought, wreaked with the blood of my countrymen, murdered and massacred by them on Connecticut river, and from whom I could not but nightly look for their bloody knives at my own throat also.

[Then] God wondrously preserved me, and helped me to break to pieces the Pequods' negotiation and design, and to make, and promote and finish, by many travels and charges, the English league with the Narragansetts and Mohegans against the Pequods.¹⁴

The next logical step for the English was to strike a quick, powerful blow against the enemy, one that would exploit their own superior armament while offsetting the Pequots' numerical advantage. After a series of skirmishes pitting Connecticut forces and their Indian allies against Pequots, the opportunity finally arrived in May 1637. Under the command of Captain John Mason, a band of Massachusetts and Connecticut soldiers, together with Narragansett and Eastern Niantic allies, launched a surprise attack on the Mystic River fortress of the Pequots. Having arrived undetected, Mason breached the walls of the fort, but finding himself outnumbered, he set fire to the village and ordered his troops back outside the walls. He then arranged his men in two concentric circles around the fort and waited. As the Pequots escaped from the flaming fortress, Mason's forces killed them one by one. Between four hundred and seven hun-



Acting at the behest of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Roger Williams negotiated with "the bloody Pequot ambassadors" during the war. Engraving, n.d. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 817).

dred Indian men, women, and children were killed in the Fort Mystic raid within the space of thirty minutes.¹⁵ Only two Englishmen lost their lives.

The massacre at Fort Mystic crushed the Pequot resistance. The war officially came to an end on 21 September 1638 with the signing of the Treaty of Hartford. That document directed that the remainder of the Pequot tribe be divided up and assimilated among the colonists' Indian allies, who were to pay the colonists annual tribute for each of the Pequots they received. By order of the Massachusetts government, the Pequot name and tribal organization were to be abolished. Additionally, the former Pequot territories were to be turned over to the Puritans as the spoils of war, with the stipulation that neighboring tribes "not meddle with them but by our leave."¹⁶ For opposing the will of the English establishment, the Pequots were to suffer the end of their existence as a distinct people.

While the course of the Pequot War seems fairly clear, several questions remain concerning the cross-cultural misunderstandings and fears that provoked such an outbreak of violence on the New England frontier. Warfare so intense and ruthless seems fundamentally opposed to the ideals of Christianity that the New Englanders wished to embody, as well as to the traditional Western concept of the just war. If the English treatment of hostile natives during the Pequot War is to be understood, it is necessary to examine the conflict's significance from the Puritan point of view. To have deliberately engaged in a war of aggression and blood lust would have been a clear violation of Puritan principles. However, if through demonization of the Pequots the conflict could be seen as an act of salvation or deliverance from a threat to God's holy order in New England, then the war could be regarded by its Puritan participants as consistent with their largely apocalyptic worldview.

The cultural and religious differences encountered by both the Indians and the settlers in New England created an environment ripe for misunderstandings. Although Native American culture sometimes inspired admiration in European observers who contemplated its "naturalness so pure and simple," more often—and especially for the Puritans—Indian society epitomized human corruption.¹⁷ One religious misconception that contributed to this view, thus helping to precipitate much of the Puritan-Indian conflict in New England in the decades before Winthrop's death in 1649, arose from the natives' belief that every person and social group possessed, as historian Richard Slotkin put it, a "special and unique divinity."¹⁸ Each tribe enjoyed considerable latitude in developing its own religious beliefs and practices, since each individual and group interacted differently with the spirit world.

As a result of this belief, Native Americans extended a reciprocity to the religious practices of other groups. As Indians journeyed throughout New England, the travelers would often temporarily accept the religion and patron spirits of a host village along with that village's hospitality. By so doing, the guests both showed respect for their hosts and submitted themselves to the protection of the spirits who operated within that locale. But that courtesy misled the English Christians, as Slotkin explained:

For the English . . . the act of worship was worth only as much as the intrinsic value of the deity worshipped; and since there was but one true god, their own, they regarded the paying of respect to Indian gods as apostasy, and Indian respect to Jehovah as a sign of imminent conversion. Conversion itself, they made clear, would mean for the Indian an utter casting off of the old god and the life pattern of the tribe. To be truly saved, the Indian would have to purge himself of his Indianness; he must become totally English in style of life as well as Christian in spirit.¹⁹

The Puritans saw native conversion as the ideal outcome of their cultural confrontation with the Indians. Engraving from Samuel Drake's Book of Indians of North America. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9035).



While the natives considered the God of the English as one member of an extensive metaphysical community, the Puritans could not similarly integrate Indian spirituality into their own religious worldview. These religious incompatibilities opened the way for confusion in regard to the real intent of natives who appeared to be embracing Christianity.

Compounding that problem of conversion was the close parallel the English saw between native spirituality and its apparent counterparts in Christianity—Satanism and witchcraft. The Puritans considered any worship directed to any deity other than the Judeo-Christian Jehovah to be, by definition, Devil worship. Consequently, those natives who engaged in non-Christian worship could readily be seen by the Puritans as instruments of Satan, dispatched to destroy God's people. For instance, Puritans almost unfailingly identified veneration of the deity Hobbamock with Devil worship. The tribes of New England often associated Hobbamock with magical powers of healing, and Indian shamans, or powwows, devoted much of their time to contacting him through dreams and visions. After establishing spiritual contact, shamans invoked the strength of Hobbamock in their efforts to combat sickness and disease. But Puritans interpreted the mystical powers of Hobbamock far differently: the Plymouth governor and magistrate Edward Winslow, for example, bluntly stated that "as far as we conceive . . . [the god Hobbamock] is the devil."²⁰

Winslow saw the Indians as a group that had fallen directly under the dominion and deception of Satan. Through the rituals devoted to Hobbamock—rituals that were, to the Puritans, black magic and witchcraft—the Devil interacted with and guided the affairs of the natives; and it was through these rituals, remarked Winslow, that Satan "maketh covenant with them."²¹ Indeed, nothing stirred the Puritan mind like the concept of the covenant. Regarding witchcraft, the English variant of Satanism, Perry Miller noted that "the special heinousness of this crime was the fact that it, like regeneration, took the form of a covenant."²² Through the use of that philosophical and legal device, the Puritans identified the Indians as the Devil's chosen people, just as surely as the Puritan settlers were the chosen people of God. Under English law, covenants bound various parties to perform certain obligations in return for specific consideration. In the supernatural realm, people entered into covenants with the forces of good and evil, covenants just as strictly enforced as if they had been drawn in one of His Majesty's courts. Through their adherence to God's covenant, the Puritans assumed the rights and responsibilities of God's chosen society in the New World. Conversely, groups that worshiped, obeyed, and devoted themselves to gods other than the Christian God, the only source of good, clearly entered into league with Satan's kingdom and represented evil.

In his book *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, the third-generation Puritan minister Cotton Mather paraphrased the Spanish Jesuit Joseph Acosta's report on demonic happenings among the Mexican Indians:

. . . their Idol Vitzlipultzi governed that mighty nation. He commanded them to leave their Country, promising to make them Lords over all the Provinces possessed by Six other Nations of Indians, and give them a Land abounding with all precious things. They went forth, carrying their Idol with them, in a Coffe of Reeds, supported by Four of their Principal Priests; with whom he still Discoursed, in secret, Revealing to them the Successes, and Accidents of their way. He advised them, when to March, and where to Stay, and without his Commandment they moved not. The first thing they did, wherever they came, was to Erect a Tabernacle, for their False God; which they set always in the midst of their camp, and there placed the Ark upon an Altar. When they, Tired with pains, talked of proceeding no further in their Journey, than a certain pleasant Stage, whereto they were arrived, this Devil in one night horribly kill'd them that had started this Talk, by pulling out their Hearts. And so they passed on, till they came to Mexico.²³

Roger Williams similarly interpreted the Pequots' battle plans during the war as a recourse to witchcraft. In a 1636 letter to Winthrop, Williams warned that "the Pequots

hear of your preparations, . . . and comfort themselves in this, that a witch amongst them will sink the pinnaces, . . . but I hope their dreams (through the mercy of the Lord) shall vanish, and the devil and his lying sorcerers shall be confounded.”²⁴ Rather than accepting native culture itself as a frame of reference, Williams and the Puritans commonly insisted on interpreting Indian customs within the context of their own Christian theology.

Convinced from the beginning that it faced a satanically motivated campaign for its destruction, New England stood prepared to defend itself by military force. On 5 July 1632 John Winthrop recorded the following in his journal:

At Watertown there was . . . a great combat between a mouse and a snake; and, after a long fight, the mouse prevailed and killed the snake. The pastor of Boston, Mr. Wilson, a very sincere, holy man, hearing of it, gave this interpretation: That the snake was the devil; the mouse was a poor contemptible people, which God had brought hither, which should overcome Satan here, and dispossess him of his kingdom.²⁵

For Winthrop, the New England experiment meant more than the establishment of an island of correct theology and godly government in the midst of a sea of sin. Massachusetts also represented the church triumphant, the earthly body of Christ rolling back the forces of evil in the name of God’s kingdom. To the Puritans, all players in that foreordained drama accepted their parts willingly. The Puritans freely embraced the role of the struggling mouse, and they assumed that when the natives rejected Christianity in favor of their traditional spirituality, they just as consciously undertook the role of the serpent.

Indeed, the success of the early English colonies created a self-fulfilling prophecy in respect to Puritan predestinarianism. During the decade that preceded the European settlement of New England, a mysterious plague had ravaged the Indian community, vastly reducing the native population of the area that would soon be colonized. That event, along with other Indian misfortunes, was taken as a clear sign by the colonists, an unmistakable indication that God had willed “wasting the naturall Inhabitants with deaths stroke” to allow the settlement of New England by his chosen people.²⁶

It was clear to most Puritans why God wanted to eliminate the Indians from New England. Even from a purely social perspective, the Indian represented a perilous variable in the region’s settlement. The Puritan worldview had its genesis in a culture of clear and well-defined social relationships.²⁷ Existing totally apart from conventional European social definitions, the Native American easily assumed the position of the “other” within the Puritan mind, a position unrelated to the norms and ethics of the mother country.²⁸ “We conceive that you look at the Pequots and all other Indians as a common enemy, who . . . if he prevail, will surely pursue his advantage, to the rooting out of the whole nation,” Winthrop casually wrote to Plymouth governor William Bradford on 20 May 1637, at the height of the Pequot War.²⁹ Although several tribes allied themselves with the English during the war, thus embracing the “right” cause, that did not alter the general rule: all natives were to be considered potential enemies of God and the Bible commonwealth until they explicitly declared themselves otherwise.

The Puritans also recognized and respected other codes of conduct besides Christianity in their dealings with the Indians. An examination of the Puritans’ application of the traditional Western doctrine of just war, especially as it pertained to the issues of *jus ad bello* (just reasons for going to war) and *jus in bello* (just conduct in war), reveals much about how the Puritans viewed the Indians, and about the acceptable parameters of Puritan religious warfare.

For the Puritans, the Pequot tribe's past record of aggression served as the primary *ad bello* justification for entering the conflict. For centuries most Western military theorists condoned as morally acceptable a war fought in defense of a nation's territory or people. Winthrop himself noted in his journal that upon "first injury" the wronged party had the prerogative under the theory of just war to "right himself either by force or fraud." Later on, Winthrop expressed his concern that if, by going to war, "we should kill any of them [the Indians], or lose any of our own, and it should be found after to have been a false report, we might provoke God's displeasure, and blemish our wisdom and integrity before the heathen."³⁰ However, the intertribal nature of the Pequot War seems to testify to the fear that the Pequots inspired in neighboring tribes. During the course of the conflict, the Pequots never successfully enlisted the aid of any of the region's other major tribes; instead, the Narragansetts, the Eastern Niantics, and even the Pequots' cousin tribe the Mohegans chose to ally themselves with the colonists rather than with their fellow natives, suggesting that the surrounding tribes considered the Pequots as the more serious threat. Apart from the Stone and Oldham murders, the Puritan claims that the Pequots had engaged in exceptionally aggressive behavior were supported by the size and diversity of the coalition aligned against them.

The issue of land acquisition also needs to be considered as another possible Puritan motive for making war on the Pequots. Traditional just-war theory in fact prohibited engaging in war solely to expand territorial holdings. There can be no doubt that greed for land played a role in the Pequot War, but the Puritans made a distinction between starting a war in order to gain land and claiming territory as the spoils of a war that was initiated for other reasons. In general, the Puritans were scrupulously respectful of property ownership. Although the Massachusetts Bay Company acquired its land in America simply by right of the king's decree in its royal charter in 1629, the colonists did not often treat the matter of land ownership in such an imperious, heavy-handed manner. In the years before the Pequot War, they conducted almost all transfers of property, both among themselves and with the Indians, by means of direct purchase (fee simple). Indeed, many Indians valued their trade with the English and eagerly exchanged land for items produced by European technology. Colonists who cheated or stole from the natives were severely punished. A notable example of that awareness of property rights can be found in the case of Thomas Morton, a man notorious for his hostility to Puritan ways, when he seized native property by force. Having considered the matter, the Massachusetts Court of Assistants ordered that

Thomas Morton of Mount Wolliston, shall presently be sett into the bilbowes, and after sent prisoner into England . . . ; that all his goods shalbe seized upon to defray the charge of his transportation, payment of his debts, and to give satisfaction to the Indians for a cannoe hee unjustly tooke from them; and that his house, after the goods are taken out, shalbe burnt down to the ground in the sight of the Indians, for their satisfaction, for many wrongs hee hath done them from tyme to tyme.³¹

Roger Williams also specifically denounced unjust English claims to Indian land and condemned many of those who made such claims. Williams found the general English claim to Indian lands fraudulent in two respects. First, any claim that England might make to land in the New World on the basis of initial discovery was spurious, since James I was in fact not the Christian monarch who initially discovered North America. Second, Charles I illegitimately used England's nominal Christianity as a justification for dispossessing a pagan people of their lands. Indeed, Williams felt that even to refer to Europe as Christendom was blasphemous; the thin veneer of Christianity that the West laid claim to was not Christianity at all, and it gave Europeans no special rights over so-called heathen peoples.³² Although the promise of acquiring Pequot land was no doubt an enticing side effect of the war, the Puritans did not practice a policy of blatant land theft in New England. The causes of the Pequot War lay elsewhere.

An examination of the conduct of the war reveals serious *in bello* violations by the colonists.³³ If the Fort Mystic massacre had been committed upon a Christian and “civilized” enemy, most westerners would have considered it a war crime, even in a seventeenth-century theater of war. The deep religious and cultural gulf that separated Englishman from native offers the best explanation for the brutal conduct of the war in regard to *in bello* issues. In the heat of crisis, the Puritans viewed the Pequots increasingly as demons and less and less as fellow human beings. Once the natives were sufficiently demonized, the use of drastic violence no longer seemed immoral or excessive, for it was directed less against native men, women, and children than against the forces of Satan. Captain Mason later declared that God had demonstrated His displeasure with the Pequots by “burning them up in the Fire of his Wrath, and dunging the Ground with their Flesh.”³⁴ Responding to criticism of that brutality—for not everyone concurred in the extreme demonization of the Indians—Mason’s subordinate officer, Captain Underhill, cited the Bible for justification:

Why should you be so furious (as some have said) should not Christians have more mercy and compassion? But I would referre you to Davids warre, when a people is growne to such a height of bloud, and sinne against God and man and all confederates in the action, there hee hath no respect to persons, but harrowes them, and sawes them, and puts them to the sword, and the most terriblest death that may bee: sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents. . . . We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings.³⁵

Attack on a Pequot fort during the war. Wood engraving by J. W. Barber, 1830. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2035).

In stark contrast to such views were the reactions of the colonists’ Indian allies who exclaimed after the battle, “It is naught, it is naught [bad or wicked] because it is too furious and slays too many men.”³⁶ Roger Williams later observed that among the Indians,



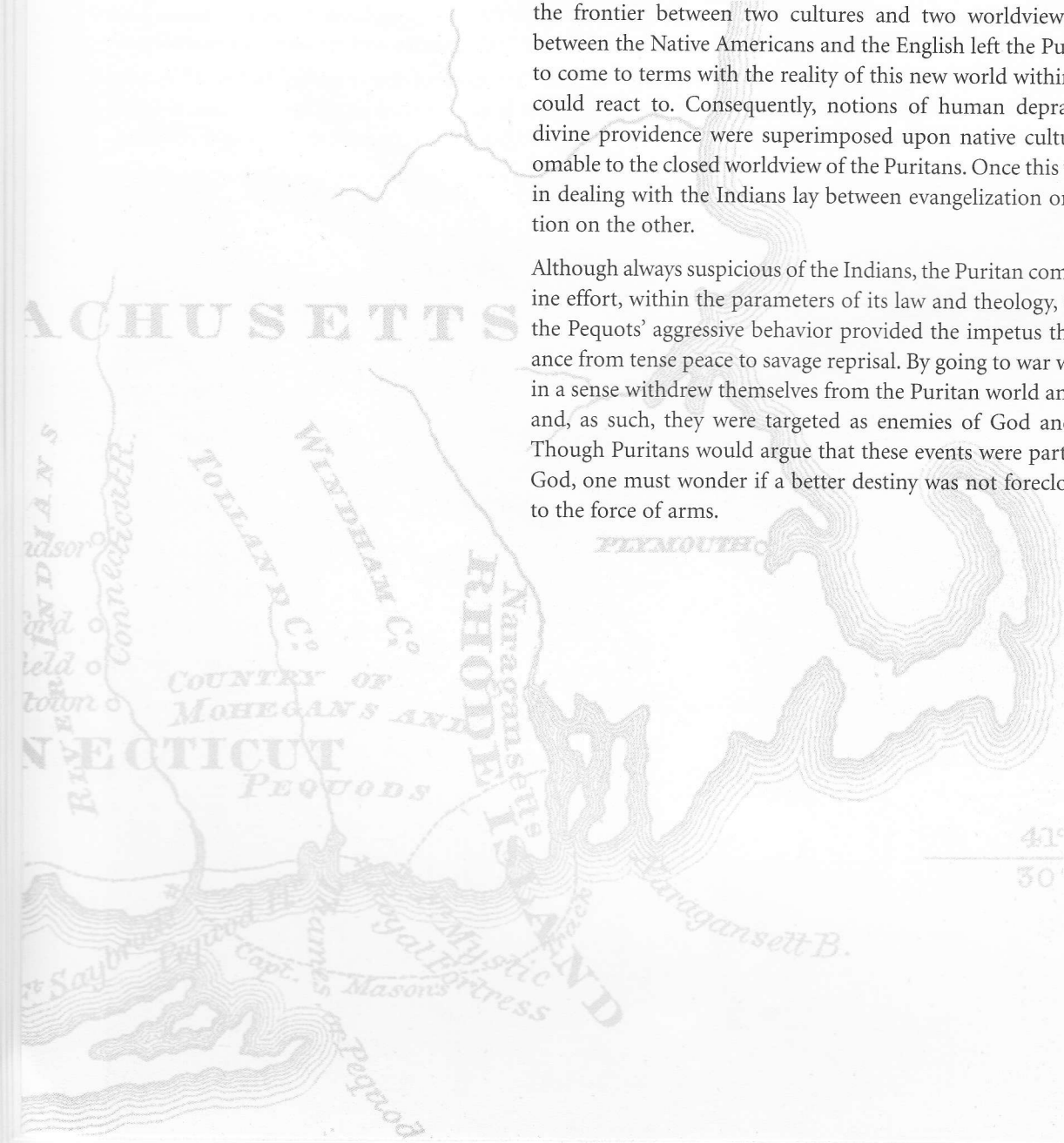
Warres are farre lesse bloody and devouring then the cruell Warres of Europe; and seldome twenty slaine in a picht field: partly because when they fight in a wood every Tree is a Bucklar.

When they fight in a plaine, they fight with leaping and dancing, that seldome an Arrow hits, and when a man is wounded, unlesse he that shot followes upon the wounded, they soone retire and save the wounded.³⁷

During the Pequot War the just-war principles of proportionality (refraining from excessive force) and discrimination (distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants) often became the first casualties. Locked in a battle with a "pagan" and "uncivilized" enemy in the wilderness of New England, the settlers refused to deny themselves any advantage; with the survival of their wilderness Zion at stake, they took it upon themselves to become a new Israelite nation, permitted to slaughter freely for a "righteous" cause in the pattern of the religious wars of the Old Testament. If restraint had to be purchased with the loss or subjugation of the holy experiment, it was a price that few at the time were willing to pay.

The Pequot War was a tragic event that involved not only a geographic frontier but also the frontier between two cultures and two worldviews. The radical dissimilarities between the Native Americans and the English left the Puritan mind desperately trying to come to terms with the reality of this new world within categories it recognized and could react to. Consequently, notions of human depravity, diabolic influence, and divine providence were superimposed upon native culture in order to make it fathomable to the closed worldview of the Puritans. Once this was done, the Puritans' choice in dealing with the Indians lay between evangelization on the one hand and annihilation on the other.

Although always suspicious of the Indians, the Puritan community initially made a genuine effort, within the parameters of its law and theology, to treat them fairly. However, the Pequots' aggressive behavior provided the impetus that tipped the precarious balance from tense peace to savage reprisal. By going to war with the colonists, the Pequots in a sense withdrew themselves from the Puritan world and became simply the "other"; and, as such, they were targeted as enemies of God and dispatched without mercy. Though Puritans would argue that these events were part of a destiny foreordained by God, one must wonder if a better destiny was not foreclosed by an overeager recourse to the force of arms.



Notes

1. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 257.
2. *Ibid.*, 374-75.
3. Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.
4. Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 174.
5. Alden T. Vaughan and Francis J. Bremer, eds., *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 202.
6. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 269.
7. Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 72-74.
8. *Ibid.*, 58-76.
9. John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal*, "History of New England," 1630-1649, ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 1:185.
10. Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1965), 137-38.
11. John Underhill, *Newes From America; or a New and Experimental Discoverie of New England* (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1971), 9.
12. *Ibid.*, 14.
13. Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 131.
14. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 6:338-39.
15. John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War: Especially of the Memorable Taking of their Fort at Mistick in Connecticut in 1637* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1966), 10; Underhill, *Newes From America*, 39.
16. Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal*, 1:238.
17. Arthur J. Slavin, "The American Principle: From More to Locke," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), 148.
18. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 54.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 137.
21. *Ibid.*, 138.
22. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1953), 193.
23. George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1914), 245.
24. *Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 6:6.
25. *Winthrop's Journal*, 1:83-84.
26. Cave, *The Pequot War*, 15-16.
27. Harold E. Selesky, "Colonial America," in *The Laws of War*, ed. Michael Howard (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 66.
28. Cave, *The Pequot War*, 18-19.
29. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 394.
30. *Winthrop's Journal*, 1:265-66, 2:76.
31. Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 99.
32. W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 39-40.
33. Historian Francis Jennings remarked that "armed conquest in New England was a special, though not unique, variant of seventeenth-century war . . . [in which] the English . . . held the simple view that the natives were outside the law of moral obligation. On this assumption they fought by means that would have been thought dishonorable, even in that day, in a war between civilized peoples." However, Jennings dismissed the conflict's genuine religious dimensions, focusing instead on the settlers' bid for "illicit power," couched in the subterfuge of "great moral rectitude." Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), v-ix, 202-27.
34. Mason, *Pequot War*, 14.
35. Underhill, *Newes From America*, 40.
36. Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 84.
37. *Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 1:204.

A KEY into the
LANGUAGE
O F
AMERICA:
O R,

An help to the *Language* of the *Natives*
in that part of **AMERICA**, called
NEW-ENGLAND.

Together, with briefe *Observations* of the Cu-
stomes, Manners and Worships, &c. of the
aforesaid *Natives*, in Peace and Warre,
in Life and Death.

On all which are added Spirituall *Observations*,
Generall and Particular by the *Author*, of
chiefe and speciall ute (upon all occasions) to
all the *English* Inhabiting those parts;
yet pleasant and profitable to
the view of all men :

BY **ROGER WILLIAMS**
of Providence in *New-England*.

LONDON,
Printed by Gregory Dexter, 1643.

Roger Williams's *Key*: Ethnography or Mythology?

JENNIFER REID

In 1643, following a number of years spent living among the Narragansett, Roger Williams published an annotated dictionary of their language. *A Key into the Language of America* presented a portrait of this northeastern people that stood in marked contrast to the more negative images of Native Americans often depicted by contemporary Puritan New Englanders. Generations of subsequent scholars have generally regarded the *Key* as one of the earliest accurate ethnographies of a North American indigenous people; yet this status is problematic. Although Williams's personal experience may well have brought him to a more authentic understanding of the native community than that possessed by many of his contemporaries, the dictionary itself does not necessarily constitute an index of such an appreciation. The work appears to have been inspired by the European imagination, as its pages reveal a Narragansett figure who is hauntingly familiar. The *Key*'s Native American is overwhelmingly a reflection of the European "Noble Savage,"¹ who was born in the Mediterranean and brought to maturity by colonial Europe. For this reason, the ethnographic value of the *Key* requires some reconsideration.

Although much of Roger Williams's writing has been the object of sustained scrutiny by historians,² it appears that the work for which he is perhaps best known, *A Key into the Language of America*, has generally escaped critical interpretation. Williams has fairly consistently been regarded as an exceptional and sympathetic chronicler of Native American culture. He has been described, for instance, as a man who "spent his life freely in the cause of humanity,"³ as one who "could treat native culture with respect [and] was the only Englishman of his generation who could do so."⁴ The *Key* has by and large won the respect of historians and ethnographers alike, precisely because it has been regarded as a fair and circumspect record of seventeenth-century Narragansett culture. It has been said to constitute a valuable tool for coming to understand this culture,⁵ and it has been called "the first English language ethnography of an American Indian people."⁶

But Clark Gilpin has drawn attention to a possible weakness in these assessments, noting that a "principal theme" of the *Key* was the creation of a "distinction between civilization and Christianity. . . . The Indian became in this instance a rhetorical device against whom the English, resistant to religious and moral truth, might be contrasted." This is a critical point for beginning a realistic assessment of the *Key*, yet Gilpin has not pursued it. Despite the inconsistency to which he refers, he nonetheless asserts that "the principle that the only crucial distinction between men lay in the matter of spiritual regeneration seems to have directed [Williams's] fair and circumspect dealings with the Indians."⁷

Unquestionably the *Key* presents a portrait of the Native American that stands in stark opposition to many seventeenth-century Puritan images of a being who was clearly less

than human. A basic question that must be considered in any assessment of the ethnographic value of the dictionary is whether either image—that of Williams or that of many of his contemporaries—constituted an accurate reflection of the native peoples they purported to represent. With respect to this question, it may be argued that both were fundamentally grounded in a body of established European and English preconceptions concerning non-Europeans that had developed well before the Puritans crossed the Atlantic, and from which they seem to have chosen selectively.

From the Mediterranean world, Europe inherited two modes of human relationship with non-Europeans that were distinct from one another and yet intimately related. The first, a product of actual contact with non-Europeans, regarded the world as defined by the opposition of Europe to Asia. This mode of relationship was articulated within the languages of politics, economics, military strength, and—at certain times—missionization. The second mode, which resided in the realm of the imagination, was to a certain degree the product of the Mediterranean ideal of loving one's neighbor (even though that neighbor might often be one's enemy). This way of thinking ultimately gave rise to a mythology concerning non-Europeans that was quite distinct from perceived experience. Europeans were consequently possessed of two absolute and irreconcilable forms of consciousness that governed their interaction with the non-European world. One, inherently "expansionist," regarded historical contact with non-Europeans as directly related to contemporary and future political and social realities; the other, virtually disregarding history, saw the European human as a superior being descended from a mythic world that preceded documented history. It was the second of these postures that fostered a mythology which both exalted the intrinsic virtue of the "primitive" human being and asserted that Europeans had once inhabited Paradise.⁸

With the advent of fifteenth-century exploration, the distinction between these two forms of consciousness began to blur.⁹ As the known geographical world expanded, the imaginative world of a lost Paradise found new vitality, for the discovery of new lands seemed to offer the possibility of actually rediscovering the mythic past (this was, after all, what Columbus believed he had accomplished in October 1492).¹⁰ The nobility of the primitive human had existed as an idea in the minds of Mediterranean peoples, but with the opening of the Atlantic world the idea acquired a tangible referent in the form of the native North American. Here were human communities apparently free of the turmoil that characterized European society—egalitarian communities in which human beings went about unclothed (a sign of their innocence), exhibiting "candour," "natural friendliness," and "gentleness."¹¹

As the English embarked upon their earliest attempts to exploit the resources of the New World, this positive image of the Native Americans was embraced by many who hoped that America's people would readily support English mercantile interests; as Gary Nash has noted, "it was only a friendly Indian who could be a trading Indian." But the Elizabethan experience of Ireland and the Netherlands, as well as Spanish reports from the New World, had clearly demonstrated that the attempt to dominate indigenous peoples often met with resistance.¹² The Virginia massacre of 1622, in which 350 colonists were killed, certainly served to locate this phenomenon in America,¹³ but the English had been anticipating and preparing for such resistance for a generation. Richard Hakluyt and George Peckham had informed their contemporaries in the 1580s that Native Americans were generally gentle and childlike, yet both advocated the use of force to overcome any resistance by these indigenous peoples.¹⁴ And when questions arose concerning the English right to appropriate the land of these peoples, men like Robert Gray justified such appropriation on the grounds that they were essentially inhuman, or "worse than beasts."¹⁵



With the discovery and exploration of the New World, the European myth of the Noble Savage acquired a tangible referent: the American Indian. Engraving, n.d. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9045).

The view of Native Americans as resistant to colonization, potentially violent, and quite possibly inhuman merged with popular nineteenth-century Protestant theology, as well as with a Puritan agenda in New England, to produce a common myth of the Puritan Indian. The agenda had been articulated by John Winthrop aboard the *Arbella* in 1630 when he reminded his fellow colonials that they had crossed the Atlantic in order to establish “a place of Cohabitation . . . under a due forme of Government both civil and ecclesiastical.”¹⁶ Alongside this desire for transplantation, the Puritans carried with them a theological notion of their importance as God’s elect. During this period English Protestants commonly linked their experience of the world with that of ancient Israel,¹⁷ and it appears that the Puritans paid more serious attention to these links than many. The reflections of many Puritans on their new home in America breathed new life into the idea that native peoples were intractable savages who could justly be denied lawful ownership of the land. Consequently the native community of New England came to be seen by most as a “heathen people” who, as one writer claimed, “at sundry times plotted mischievous devices against this part of the English Israel.”¹⁸ Within the genre of the captivity narrative, as Richard Slotkin has demonstrated, Native Americans often became the instruments of God’s “chastisement” of his chosen people during periods of spiritual regression; at times they even came to be identified with Satan himself.¹⁹

The myth of Puritan society as a new Israel had grave implications for the indigenous population of New England. First, it presupposed the English colonists’ divine right to

possession of the territory on which they chose to settle;²⁰ but more critically, perhaps, it cultivated an attitude of contempt toward those who inhabited that land. For the Puritans, the myth provided not only a justification for their appropriation of land but also a sense of cosmic meaning with which they could confront their fears in regard to Native Americans.²¹ With warfare between natives and whites prevalent during the first century of contact, fears of captivity, torture, and death at the hands of aboriginal peoples loomed large in the Puritan consciousness. The mythic association of the native population with demonic forces allowed the colonists not only to wage war against the native community that they feared but even to justify the possibility of that community's virtual annihilation.²² At the very least, by contributing to the image of the less-than-human Indian, it resulted in a view of Native Americans that was very far from accurate. This view was often present even when conversion, rather than annihilation, was the professed goal. In his account of the life of John Eliot, for instance, Cotton Mather expressed his amazement at the magnitude of the task his subject had set for himself: "This was the miserable People, which our Eliot propounded unto himself, to teach and to save! And he had a double work incumbent on him; he was to make Men of them, e'er he could hope to see them Saints; they must be civilized e'er they could be Christianized."²³

Seventeenth-century Puritan literature was replete with images of inhuman "savages." Roger Williams's *Key*, on the other hand, was free of many prevailing Puritan myths, and this fact has prompted historians to characterize it as a comparatively fair depiction of native culture. Indeed, if we could be sure Williams was describing the Narragansett community about which he claimed to write, we might well be satisfied with historical interpretations of the work. However, it can be argued that the *Key* consistently represented a people quite foreign to the Narragansett, and thus its ethnographic value is, at the very least, rendered questionable. The dictionary is so entangled in a web of Old World mythology that it is difficult to assess the extent to which Williams was writing of a New World culture. To be sure, Williams seems to have avoided the common English anxieties about native intractability that contributed to the mythology of the inhuman savage; but he did not function apart from the much older conception of the nobility of primitive existence. I would suggest that the interpretation and use of the *Key* as an ethnography has overshadowed its more obvious character as a particular Puritan's discursive elevation of the European myth of the Noble Savage.

Within a century of Columbus's 1492 voyage, the figure (and the world) of the native North American had contributed to the development in Europe of an incarnation of the age-old search for Paradise. Concrete "primitives"—who had, prior to the fifteenth century, resided only within mythical memory—were discovered simultaneously with the New World, and together these gave birth to the possibility of transforming an imagined past into images of a utopian future, one that might recapture the untainted spirit of the time that preceded European culture. By the seventeenth century these projections had become widespread and relatively similar in structure. They expressed, as Henri Baudet has observed, a never-slackening desire for a better life, for a happier human condition, and for "a more righteous society." The quest for utopia "was serious in its search for an earthly Paradise. . . . It was a criticism of our society in particular and of our culture in general." The utopian images that emerged served to reinforce an idealistic respect for Native American society, which was seen as an antithesis to that of the Europeans, and thus they propagated the myth of the Noble Savage.²⁴

Roger Williams was possessed of a utopian vision that was firmly imbedded in his own interpretation of the Bible, and it may have been this vision that impelled him to document a predominantly European myth, regardless of what his experience of the Narragansett had been. Williams had been influenced by a theological mode of interpretation, called typology, that sought to harmonize the Old and New Testaments in order to demonstrate prefigurations of Jesus' life. Whereas Williams's contemporaries made use of this form of theological interpretation to illuminate the unique status of their theocracy as a Christian society in the cosmic lineage of ancient Israel, Williams's typology functioned in an opposing manner. Williams believed that the coming of Christ had signaled a disruption in the link between church and state in the biblical Israel, and consequently the nation had been divested of its privileged status, becoming a nation much like any other. Typologically, it was the ancient Hebrew community, rather than the temple, that had been a prefiguration of the church.²⁵

Williams concluded that government in New England could not function adequately as long as its leadership insisted upon deriving guidance in civil matters from ancient Israel. The two Testaments corresponded only in mystical terms, he believed, and thus the recorded exploits of the biblical Israelites were insignificant.²⁶ Although Moses had, in effect, occupied a privileged position in leading a religious state ordained by God, Christ had vested spiritual power in his church and had subsequently disallowed its propagation by civil force.²⁷ Therefore the elect could include only saved individuals and not, as many Puritans believed, entire communities; and Williams condemned the spiritual ignorance of thinking otherwise.²⁸ He repeatedly declared that civil authority could not claim an ecclesiastical prerogative because "enforced settled maintenance is not suitable to the Gospel."²⁹

Williams's understanding of the Bible coincided with his typical seventeenth-century propensity for millenarian projection. He foresaw a definitive point in the future when the spiritual character of God's elect would manifest itself within the political structure of a church, but for the time being such a relationship was not possible.³⁰

The Massachusetts Bay theocracy was not a direct heir to the Hebrew covenant, Williams insisted, and it was in support of this assertion that he may have produced the *Key*—a work intended as an introduction to native language and culture, but which in essence posed the possibility that there existed another community that more closely resembled ancient Israel than Puritan New England did.³¹ To be sure, the community he chose for the juxtaposition had a New England referent; but as he presented it, it was overwhelmingly mythological in character. Ultimately Williams's dictionary may best be regarded as a product of his utopian vision, for it provides a discursive portrait of a paradisiacal world populated with a people unspoiled by European vices—a sort of "Noble Narragansett."

And noble they were. The simplicity of the Noble Savage had traditionally found expression in such traits as "candour," "natural friendliness," and "gentleness,"³² and Williams clearly identified these as Narragansett traits. "As one answered me," he wrote of "candour," "when I had discoursed about many points of God, of the creation, of the soule, of the danger of losing it, and the saving of it, he assented; but when I spake of the rising againe of the body, he cried out, I shall never believe this."³³ Williams referred repeatedly to the "friendliness" of the natives, who were "remarkably free and courteous, to invite all Strangers in,"³⁴ and to their "gentleness," which he considered excessive in respect to the rearing of children.³⁵

Williams's Narragansetts were not only as simplistic as the Noble Savage; they also conformed to the religious temper of American Indians as it was popularly imagined in



Roger Williams was sheltered by Indians after his banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Engraving by A. H. Wray, n.d. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 772).

Europe prior to the eighteenth century. Non-Europeans were certainly viewed as pagans, and their ignorance of the Gospel as immoral; yet coincidental to this attitude was a belief in the Native Americans' aptitude for conversion.³⁶ There is no doubt that Williams regarded Narragansett religion as diabolical. In his discussion of "Priests and Conjurers," for instance, he described these figures as individuals who "doe bewitch the people, and not onely take their Money, but doe most certainly (by the help of the Divell) worke great Cures."³⁷ He was so repulsed by these and other religious expressions of the Narragansett that he was unable to view them firsthand: "I confesse to have most of these their customes by their owne Relation," he admitted, "for after once being in their Houses and beholding what their Worship was, I durst never bee an eye witsesse, Spectatour, or looker on, lest I should have been partaker of Sathans Inventions and Worships."³⁸ Yet it was also his conviction that the Narragansett were predisposed to acceptance of Christianity both by nature and by inclination. He believed that at a fundamental level they were naturally possessed of qualities resembling Christian virtue: "I have acknowledged amongst them, an heart sensible of kindnesses," he wrote; "... hence the Lord Jesus exhorts his followers to do good for evill."³⁹

But his belief in the Narragansett's natural disposition toward Christianity went further than simply acknowledging the presence of natural decency. Upon consideration of the native custom of designating all noteworthy humans or animals as gods, for instance, he concluded that "A strong conviction naturall in the soule of man, that God is; filling all things . . . and that they only are blessed who have that Jehovah their portion."⁴⁰ By some imaginative leap Williams was thus able to claim that the Narragansett possessed a faith

in the sort of deity with which he was familiar. More important, perhaps, he also believed that they were consciously inclined toward conversion because they had a desire to know of the Christian God. As Williams reported fairly early in the *Key*, "I did speak of the *True and living only Wise God* . . . that at parting many burst forth, *Oh when will you come again, to bring us some more newes of this God?*"⁴¹

Though the land where these virtuous people dwelled was distant from Eden, it yet retained a memory of the world where the first Mediterranean man was given "every plant yielding seed . . . and every tree with seed in its fruit" (Genesis 1:29):

*Yeeres thousands since, God gave command
(As we in Scripture find)
That Earth and Trees and Plants should bring
Forth fruits each in his kind.

The wilderness remembers this,
The wild and howling land
Answers the toying labour of
The wildest Indians hand.*⁴²

Williams clearly regarded the Narragansett themselves as existing in some form of Paradise, and quite possibly reflecting the biblical Adam and Eve. In dress, for example, the relationship was obvious: "Their hinder parts and all the foreparts from top to toe, (except their secret parts, covered with a little Apron, after the patterne of their and our first Parents) I say all else open and naked."⁴³

In a more general way, the *Key*'s Narragansett were in many respects a replication of the ancient Hebrews. They were said to "constantly *annoint* their *heads* as the *Jewes* did,"⁴⁴ to "give *Dowries* for their wives, as the *Jewes* did,"⁴⁵ and to separate women from their fathers and husbands during menstruation.⁴⁶ Williams's discussion of the word *sequittoi* followed a similar pattern, linking Narragansett rituals of mourning with those of the Israelites. This term was defined as "*He is in black*; That is, He hath some dead in his house . . . upon the death of the sicke, the father, or husband, and all his neighbours . . . weare black *Faces*, and lay on soote very thicke."⁴⁷ The dictionary also claimed that the relationship between the Narragansett and ancient Hebrews pertained not only to external practices but to highly spiritual matters as well. For instance, "When they have a bad Dreame, which they conceive to be a threatening from God, they fall to prayer at all times of the night . . . : So *Davids* zealous heart to the true and living God: *At midnight will I rise &c. I prevented the dawning of the day.*"⁴⁸

This was indeed an innately moral people who illuminated the spiritual weakness Williams perceived in Puritan society. At its most basic level, however, the noble culture of the Narragansett was firmly rooted in Mediterranean conceptions and misconceptions. To the European who imagined him, the Noble Savage was inherently simple and good, and in the literature that described him, as Henri Baudet has pointed out, these qualities were often made more striking by "comparison with other peoples, 'wicked savages' . . . whose way of life provided a sorry contrast to this ideal state of affairs."⁴⁹ Concerned with criticizing his fellow Puritans, Williams in a sense cast them into the role of the "other peoples." Yet if there remained any question as to the nobility of the Narragansett, Williams sought to dispel it through another comparison, this one to savages who were obviously wicked. Having declared that the Narragansett brain "in quick apprehensions and accurate judgements . . . [God] hath not made . . . inferiour to Europeans," Williams immediately noted that "The Mauquauogs, or Man-eaters, that live two or three [hundred] miles West of us, make a delicious monstrous dish of the head and braines of their enemies."⁵⁰



Although the Noble Narragansett was ostensibly a very different figure from the inhuman Indian described in mainstream seventeenth-century Puritan literature, in actuality the two were not so very dissimilar, for both clearly owed more to the European imagination than to the Puritan experience of New England.⁵¹ The two figures critically differ, however, in their respective impact upon subsequent historiography, and in this regard Williams's Narragansett has unquestionably proven the more influential.⁵² Overtly negative images of indigenous peoples—the “abject creatures” of Cotton Mather’s “Magnalia Christi Americana,” for instance⁵³—have been fairly safely dismissed by historians as inaccurate. On the other hand, images of the Native American as a figure who at once recalls a lost past—a paradisiacal condition of innocence—and anticipates a utopian future have been insidiously attractive, and these are the images of the *Key*. To be sure, Williams’s discussions of such matters as the Narragansett system of counting, oratory, and government⁵⁴ may well be accurate; but then again, perhaps they are not. The problem is that there cannot be any certainty in this regard because the *Key* was recognizably and substantially influenced by European myths and aspirations.

While the ethnographic value of the work need not be entirely dismissed, reference to Williams’s dictionary should, at the very least, take earnest account of its mythological character. Rather than constituting an objective portrait of Narragansett culture, the *Key* is a testament to the imaginative power inherent in the figure of the Noble Savage, and it is for this, perhaps, that it can be best appreciated.

A KEY into the
 LANGUAGE
 OF
 AMERICA:
 OR,
 An help to the *Language* of the Natives
 in that part of AMERICA, called
 NEW-ENGLAND.

Notes

1. I am aware that "Noble Savage" is considered by many to be a nineteenth-century term that cannot properly be applied to earlier forms of mythological thought. However, the term and the concept have been usefully applied in studies of still earlier periods of history than this one; see, for example, Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boaz, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (New York: Octagon Books, 1935), esp. chap. 11, "The Noble Savage in Antiquity." I would also note that inasmuch as English writers such as John Dryden used the term at least as early as 1669, the existence of the Noble Savage, in thought and language, certainly predates its nineteenth-century popularity. Cf. H. C. Porter, *The Inconstant Savage: England and the North American Indian 1500-1660* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 540.
2. During the first half of this century, for instance, Williams's concern for religious freedom was generally hailed as an example of early democratic thinking. After midcentury, however, historians like Perry Miller began to reinterpret his writing, suggesting that far from being religiously indifferent, Williams had been strongly motivated by theological concerns. See Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, vol. 1 (Providence: Brown University Press, 1947), 66; Samuel H. Brockunier, "The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams," in *Roger Williams and the Massachusetts Magistrates*, ed. Theodore P. Greene (Lexington, Mass. D. C. Heath, 1964), 62; and Perry Miller, *Roger Williams* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 28.
3. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 1:74. See also Brockunier, "The Irrepressible Democrat," 42.
4. Miller, *Roger Williams*, 52.
5. Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1965), 26.
6. William S. Simmons, "Narragansetts," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 15, *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 197.
7. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 123, 125.
8. Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1965), 5-11.
9. *Ibid.*, 23.
10. *Ibid.*, 26. For Columbus's perceptions of the New World, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), 22.
- According to the sixteenth-century New World missionary-historian Bartolomé de Las Casas, for instance, Columbus claimed that "the Caniba are nothing else than the people of the great Khan."
11. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, 36.
12. Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 38, 40.
13. Porter, *Inconstant Savage*, 458.
14. Gary B. Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 58-60.
15. Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, 41.
16. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *The Puritans*, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 1:197.
17. Edmund Morgan attributed this practice to the political and social climate of Elizabethan England. See his *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967).
18. Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England* (Boston, 1676), 1. For other references to Puritan identification with the Israelites, as well as the Puritans' understanding of themselves as a covenanted people in the image of ancient Israel, see Increase Mather's sermon "The Times of Man Are in the Hands of God" and his *Renewal of Covenant the Great Duty Incumbent on Decaying or Distressed Churches, 1677*; both are quoted in Emory Elliott, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 116, 123.
19. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 99. On the identification with the devil, Mary Rowlandson's narrative of 1682 (in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln [New York, 1913], 134ff.) is a classic example: "Oh the roaring and singing, and danceing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell." Cf. Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*, 109.
20. According to Solomon Stoddard, the land "was a vacuum domicilium. . . . The Indians made no use of it, but for Hunting. . . . And had it continued in their hands, it would have been of little value. It is our dwelling on it, and our Improvements, that have made it to be of Worth" ("An Answer to Some Cases of Conscience," 1722, in Miller and Johnson, *Puritans*, 2:457).
21. See, for instance, Samuel Penhallow, *The History of the Wars of New England with the Eastern Indians* (Boston, 1726), ii: "Yet to humble and prove us . . . the Righteous God hath left a sufficient Number of the fierce and barbarous Savages on our borders, to be pricks in our Eyes and thornes in our sides."
22. See, for instance, W. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England* (Boston, 1677), 88: "For though a great number . . . are implacable and embittered against us in their Spirits . . . a Remnant may be reserved, and afterward called forth, by the power of the Gospel."
23. Cotton Mather, "Magnalia Christi Americana, Book III," in and Johnson, *Puritans*, 2:505.
24. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, 33.
25. Morgan, *Roger Williams*, 90-93.
26. Williams wrote in his "The Bloody Tenent of Persecution" (1644): "The people of Israel were all the seed or offspring of one man, Abraham. . . . But now, few nations of the world but are a mixed seed. . . . Only the spiritual Israel and seed of God, the newborn, are but one; Christ is the seed, and they only that are Christ's are only Abraham's seed and heirs." Cf. Miller, *Roger Williams*, 151.
27. Morgan, *Roger Williams*, 93.
28. Miller, *Roger Williams*, 153.
29. *Ibid.*, 150. See also *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, ed. Perry Miller (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 4:28-29: "First that the People (the original of all free Power and Government) are not invested with Power from Christ Jesus. . . . Secondly, that the Pattern of the National Church of Israel, was a None-such, unimitable by any Civil State, in all or any of the Nations of the World beside."
30. Gilpin, *Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*, 9, 59.
31. See Jack L. Davis, "Roger Williams among the Narragansett Indians," *New England Quarterly* 43 (1970): 594.
32. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, 36.
33. Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, ed. John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 135.
34. *Ibid.*, 97. See also p. 104: "If any stranger come in, they presently give him to eate of what they have; many a time, and at all times of the night (as I have fallen in travell upon their houses) when nothing hath been ready, have themselves and their wives, risen to prepare me some refreshing."

Notes continued

35. Ibid., 116. He wrote: "I once came into a *house*, and requested some *water* to drinke; the *father* bid his *sonne* . . . to fetch some water: the *boy* refused, and would not stir; I told the *father* that I would correct my *child*, if he should so disobey me. . . . and the *father* confessed the benefit of *correction*, and the evill of their too indulgent *affections*."
36. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, 37.
37. Williams, *Key*, 245.
38. Ibid., 192.
39. Ibid., 97-98. Teunissen and Hinz point out that this comment indicates Williams's desire to demonstrate "that the natural virtue of the Indian is very close . . . to the Christian virtues." See p. 288.
40. Ibid., 191.
41. Ibid., 108.
42. Ibid., 172.
43. Ibid., 185. Cf. Genesis 3:7. Baudet notes that "nakedness" is generally a characteristic of the Noble Savage. *Paradise on Earth*, 36. Narragansett women also appear from the *Key* to have been blessed with "ease of childbirth," a quality reminiscent of Eve prior to the fall from grace. See *Key*, 121.
44. Williams, *Key*, 86.
45. Ibid. Cf. Genesis 30:20.
46. Williams, *Key*, 86. See Leviticus 12:2.
47. Williams, *Key*, 247. See note, p. 314. Williams is alluding here to Jos 7:6: "And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."
48. Williams, *Key*, 107. The editors point out Williams's loose paraphrasing of Psalm 119:62 and 147. See note, p. 289.
49. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, 36. See also p. 28: "Columbus' first letter contains a lyrical account of the childlike goodness of the Indians of La Spanola. . . . They shine forth in even greater splendour when compared with some other Caribbean peoples. . . . The people of Canibe, for instance, have tails, dog-like heads, and only one eye; they are cannibals who are unbelievably savage."
50. Williams, *Key*, 130. These "Man-eaters" are nowhere else mentioned in the *Key*.
51. Hayden White has argued that ancient Greek and Hebrew notions of "wildness" were consolidated in medieval Europe to produce two enduring conceptions of "wild men." He writes: "By the end of the Middle Ages, the Wild Man has become endowed with two distinct personalities, each consonant with one of the possible attitudes [archaism and primitivism] men might assume with respect to society and nature. If one looked upon nature as a horrible world of struggle . . . and society as a condition which . . . was still preferable to the natural state, then he would continue to view the Wild Man as the antitype of the desirable humanity. . . . If, on the other hand, one took his vision of nature from the countryside . . . and saw society, with all its struggle, as a fall away from natural perfection, then he might be inclined to populate the nature with wild men whose function was to serve as antitypes of social existence." White suggests that it was the latter "primitivist" attitude alone that engendered the Noble Savage. See Hayden White, "The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea," in Dudley and Novak, *Wild Man Within*, 27-29.
52. Both nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians have made extensive use of ethnographic material contained in the *Key*. See, for example, George Washington Greene, *A Short History of Rhode Island* (Providence: J. A. & R. A. Reid, 1877), esp. chaps. 1 and 3; Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, vol.1, 1636-1700 (Providence: Preston & Rounds, 1899), esp. chap. 3; and Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 47-48, 91, 113.
53. Cotton Mather, "Magnalia Christi Americana," in Miller and Johnson, *Puritans*, 2:504.
54. Williams, *Key*, 110-13, 134-37, 201-4.

FROM THE COLLECTIONS
Zachariah Allen Reclaims the *Key*
for Rhode Island

RICK STATTLER

*Rick Statler is the manuscripts curator of the
Rhode Island Historical Society.*

Having recently left the practice of law for a second career as a textile manufacturer, Zachariah Allen spent much of 1825 researching the latest textile-production methods in Europe. From February to July of that year, Allen—a founder of the Rhode Island Historical Society—kept a journal of his travels. While visiting Oxford University, he recorded an important event in an undated entry:

The Bodleian library, as I was informed by the librarian, the Rev'd Dr. Bliss, contains upwards of seventy thousand volumes, besides a most valuable collection of manuscripts. It is indeed interesting to view the almost countless ranges of books distributed upon the shelves comprising all the stores of knowledge collected from every quarter of the world.

The librarian politely complied with my request to see a book written by Roger Williams, one of the most distinguished of the early settlers of New England, descriptive of the manners and customs of the Indian nations among whom he found shelter from the persecutions of his fellow countrymen. Never having been able to obtain a sight of this work in the United States, I enjoyed much pleasure in a hasty perusal of it. It contains the most perfect account of the domestic habits of our native Indians in New England, as they existed previous to the introduction of the vices of civilization, of any work upon the same subject I have ever seen. I availed myself of the kind offer of the librarian to have it copied in manuscript, and left with him directions for forwarding it when transcribed.

When he received the Bodleian's transcription, he donated it to the Rhode Island Historical Society. It was the first known copy of the *Key* in Rhode Island. Two years later it was published as volume 1 of the *Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society*. Recently displayed in the Society's "Here Today, Here Tomorrow" exhibition at the Aldrich House, the transcription

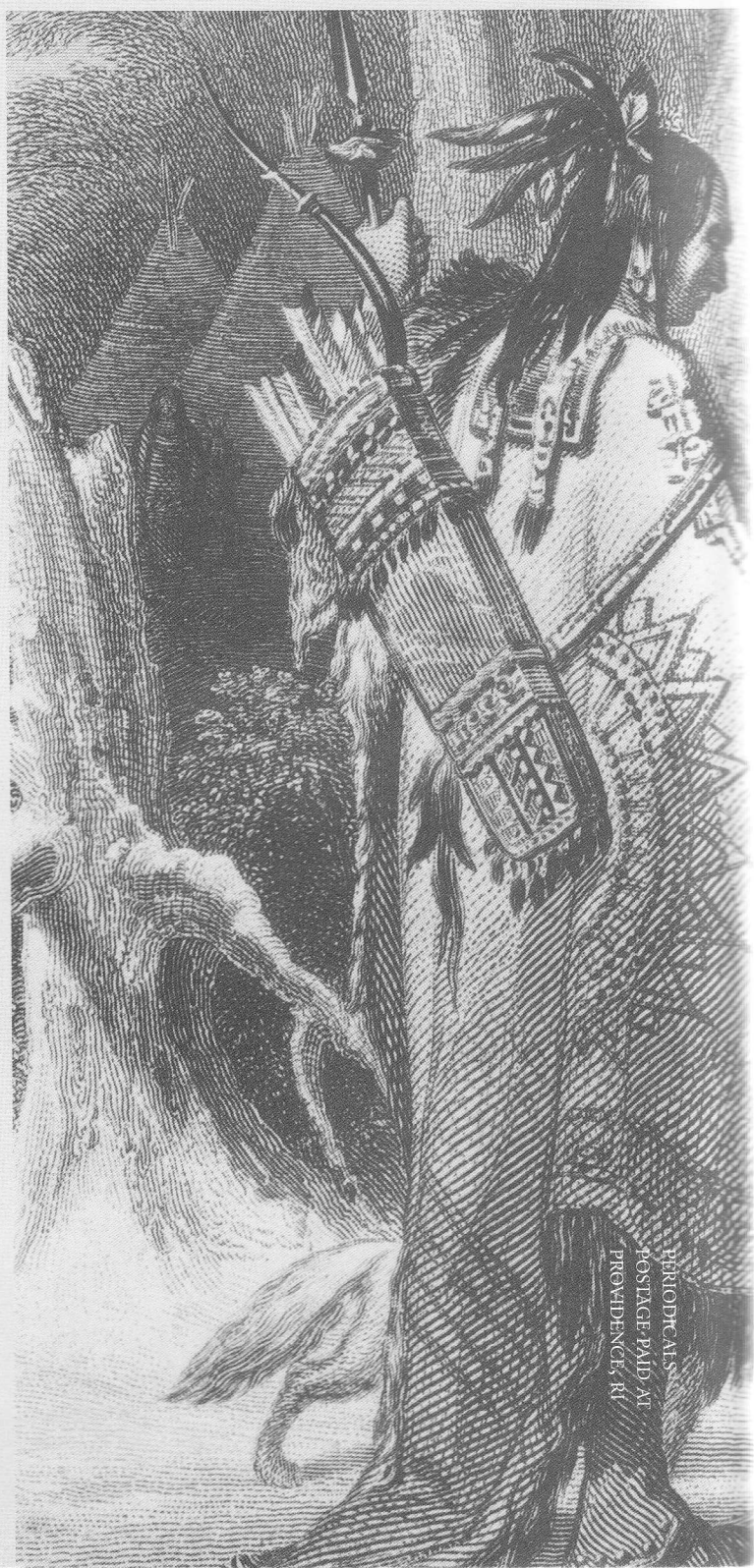


Preceding page: Zachariah Allen (1795-1882).
Engraving published by Van Slyck & Co., Boston,
circa 1859. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5082).

remains in the RIHS Manuscripts Division's Roger Williams Collection as an important artifact of our institution's early history.

The Manuscripts Division has a photocopy of Allen's journal in its Zachariah Allen Papers (Series VI, Box 7); the original is in the possession of the Factory Mutual Engineering Corporation of Norwood, Massachusetts. The entry quoted above is on pages 57-58 of the first volume. Allen published his journal, in heavily revised form, under the title *The Practical Tourist, or Sketches of the State of the Useful Arts, and of Society, Scenery, &c, &c, in Great-Britain, France and Holland* (Providence: A. S. Beckwith, 1832). His examination of the *Key* is briefly described in volume 1, page 96, of that edition.

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Roger Williams Sheltered by the Narragansetts.
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