

*The
Pequot
War*

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Introduction



The Pequot War of 1636–37 paved the way for the establishment of English hegemony in southern New England. For that reason, historians have generally agreed that it “is one of the most important events in early American history.”¹ Over the past quarter of a century, this war has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion and controversy. But despite the wealth of insights into various aspects of the Puritan quarrel with the Pequots contained in the writings of Alden Vaughan, Francis Jennings, Neal Salisbury, and others, we still lack a detailed narrative history of the events leading up to the conflict and of its course and aftermath.² There is no modern work to which a reader may turn for an accurate and complete account of the interaction of Puritans and Pequots in the crucial years between 1634 and 1637. This book attempts to meet the need for a full-scale study of New England’s first Anglo-Indian war. The author hopes to resolve some of the more controversial questions about this crucial episode by reassessing the events that led to conflict in the light of present-day knowledge of the cultural values and attitudes of Pequots as well as Puritans.

Most of the basic facts about the war itself are not at issue. It is a matter of record that the English assaulted the Pequots after the failure of efforts to persuade them to apprehend and surrender to Puritan justice those Indians believed to be responsible for the deaths of Captain John Stone and other Englishmen. The record also reveals that immediately before the outbreak of hostilities English negotiators pressed new

demands upon the Pequot sachems, specifically, that they pay a substantial indemnity and send Pequot children to Boston to serve as hostages to guarantee future good behavior. Puritan chroniclers freely admitted that their military offensive against the Pequot Indians was highly punitive, deliberately intended to inflict the maximum number of casualties. Pequot resistance was broken by a surprise attack on a fortified village near the Mystic River. The commanders at that engagement wrote detailed descriptions of the deliberate slaughter of Pequot noncombatants, many of them burned alive when their homes were put to the torch by English troops. They related that they spared neither women nor children but ordered their men to shoot or impale those survivors who escaped the flames. One recalled that dead and dying Indians in the fields surrounding Fort Mystic were “so thick in some places that you could hardly pass along.” Their accounts of the mopping-up operations following the Mystic massacre speak of the summary execution of prisoners of war and of the enslavement of their surviving women and children. The more fortunate captives were given to Mohegan and Narragansett sachems who had assisted the Puritans in their war against the Pequots. The less fortunate were sold to Caribbean slave traders. At the war’s end, the victorious English terminated Pequot sovereignty and outlawed use of the tribal name.³

The facts enumerated above are well documented, but the causes of the war and the reasons for the Puritans’ brutal treatment of noncombatants as well as warriors remain obscure and controversial. The historiography of the Pequot War is often more polemical than substantive. Puritan apologists justified their savagery by demonizing the victims. Contemporary chroniclers and later historians sympathetic to the Puritans painted a portrait of the Pequots as a “cruel, barbarous and bloody” people. That portrait reflected a long-standing stereotype of the New World “savage” as irrational, unpredictable, malicious, treacherous, and inhumane. Drawing upon a body of lore from the previous century that described Native American religious practices as a form of satanism, Puritan writers declared that the Pequots were “the Devil’s instruments” and charged them with masterminding a plot to exterminate all Christians in New England. The Puritans and their later apologists asserted that the English colonists had no choice but to strike first. They also argued that, given the savagery of their adversary, they were under no obligation to respect the rules of civilized warfare. In his chronicle of the

war, Captain John Underhill proclaimed that God himself demanded that the Pequots suffer “the most terriblest death that may be” in punishment for their sins. “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.” Despite their distrust of the good captain’s presumed antinomianism in other matters, his fellow Puritans enthusiastically echoed Underhill’s defense of righteous violence.⁴

As we shall see, the Puritan explanations of the war will not stand close scrutiny. Their allegation that the Pequots threatened the security of Puritan New England cannot be confirmed. A close reexamination of the Puritans’ own testimony suggests that it was without any foundation whatsoever. In their justifications of the war, Puritan writers advanced interpretations of Pequot character and intentions based on prejudice and supposition rather than hard evidence. Nonetheless, with very few exceptions, writers for three centuries uncritically echoed Puritan fantasies about Pequot malevolence. The eighteenth-century Connecticut poet Timothy Dwight, in “Greenfield Hill,” described the Pequots as “murderous fiends” inspired by “vindictive rage.” In commemoration of their victims, Dwight wrote:

*First, hapless Stone! they bade thy bosom bleed,
A guiltless offering at th’infernal shrine:
Then, gallant Norton! the hard fate was thine,
By ruffians butcher’d, and denied a grave:
Thee, generous Oldham! next the doom malign
Arrested; nor could all thy courage save;
Forsaken, plunder’d, cleft, and buried in the wave.⁵*

reminding
Pequots as
victims

In the next century, the historian Francis Parkman declared that the Pequots were “far worse than wolves or rattlesnakes.”⁶ John Gorham Palfrey maintained that the massacre at Mystic taught all the Indians “a salutary lesson” and thereby freed New England of “savage violence” for forty years.⁷ John Fiske, invoking the precepts of Social Darwinism in his analysis of the issues at stake, urged his readers not to fault the Puritans for their “savage fierceness” against the Pequots, as “the world is so made that it is only in this way that the higher races have been able to preserve themselves and carry on their progressive work.”⁸

Although Fiske's vision of racial conflict was shared by many nineteenth-century commentators on Indian wars, not all writers were willing to commend Puritan conduct in the Pequot War. Thomas Hutchinson, in his *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (1783), had suggested that Puritan reprisals against Pequot noncombatants were both excessive and dishonorable.⁹ Richard Hildreth in 1849 carried the criticism of the Puritans a bit further by expressing reservations about their claim that the Pequots threatened English security.¹⁰ In a more radical reversal of the usual stereotypes, William Apess, a Methodist minister of Pequot ancestry, declared that all of New England's Indians, including the Pequots, had acted "like men acquainted with the principles of integrity and good faith . . . while the English, with perfidious craft, were preparing to imitate savages in their revenge and cruelty." His claim that the Pequots were not the savages portrayed in history and myth for the most part fell on deaf ears.¹¹

Twentieth-century writers have generally been reluctant to accept earlier rationalizations for racial massacre. Most accounts of the Pequot War published during the past century have faulted the Puritans for their "wholesale slaughter and enslavement" of Indian adversaries.¹² But until quite recently most writers have also accepted the premise that, in their war against the Pequots, the Puritans were acting in self-defense. Criticism of their conduct was thus usually limited to suggestions that they were overly harsh in their dealings with hostile Indians. In most accounts of New England's Indian wars, the Pequots, not the Puritans, were portrayed as the aggressors. Alden Vaughan's *New England Frontier* (1965) provided the most comprehensive restatement of the traditional interpretation of the Pequot War. Vaughan declared that "the Pequot tribe had incurred by its forced intrusion into New England the enmity of its Indian neighbors and it had won a notorious reputation for brutality." He concluded that the Pequot War was not a racial conflict but rather a salutary example of Anglo-Indian cooperation in resisting aggression. Although he granted that Puritan conduct toward the Pequots was hardly above reproach, Vaughan found that the burden of responsibility for the conflict rested with the Pequots.¹³

During the past two decades, the assumption of Pequot culpability has been challenged by revisionist scholars who have found the war's origins not in Pequot malevolence but in Puritan greed, prejudice, and bigotry. The revisionists are not entirely agreed in their explanations of the

reasons for the Puritan assault on the Pequots. Some have advanced an economic interpretation of the conflict. Francis Jennings, in *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (1975), argues that annexation of Pequot land, control of Connecticut trade, access to the rich wampum resources of Long Island Sound, and the outflanking of other ambitious English claimants to those sources of wealth were the real motives behind the Massachusetts Bay Colony's assault on the Pequots. Jennings portrays Puritan Indian killings as cold-blooded expressions of self-interest. He conjectures that the "decisive" factor in precipitating the Pequot War was the quarrel between the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the Connecticut settlers over control of "colonizing in New England." Both the Bay Colony and the Connecticut towns hoped to win title to the Pequot country by right of conquest. The Pequots, Jennings believes, were caught in the middle of an English power struggle over the spoils of colonization.¹⁴ Though some revisionists find this aspect of Jennings's thesis overly speculative, a number agree with his emphasis on material considerations. Richard Drinnon declares that "the Pequots were early victims of a process that Marxists would later call 'primitive accumulation.'" ¹⁵ The popular historian Alvin Josephy, drawing on the work of the anthropologist Lynn Ceci, maintains that wresting control of wampum-producing areas from the Pequots was the basic objective of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's offensive. Wampum, Josephy reminds us, served as money in the English colonies in the 1630s, and Pequot domination of the wampum mints of eastern Long Island Sound thus had serious economic implications for Puritan New England.¹⁶ William Cronon concurs, noting that "exacting a regular military tribute in wampum proved a safer and more reliable source of supply than trading guns for it."¹⁷

Some scholars, however, have cautioned against seeking to explain the Pequot War in purely economic terms. Neal Salisbury, in *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (1982), writes of the English desire to control trade and annex Pequot land but argues that the war also served to provide a means of reestablishing unity within the contentious Puritan community by reminding the English of their divine mission to smite Canaanites and drive them from the promised land. "The (re)discovery that God had a purpose in mind for the settlers and that that purpose could be happily reconciled with their desire to spread out and expropriate Indians lands,"

Salisbury writes, "marked a significant adjustment of tensions within the New England Puritan movement between individual and communal goals."¹⁸ Gary Nash strikes a similar note: "The Puritan leaders talked morbidly about God's anger at seeing his chosen people subvert the City on a Hill. In this sense, the Puritan determination to destroy the Pequots and the violence manifested at Mystic Fort can be partially understood in terms of the self doubt and guilt that Puritans could expiate only by exterminating so many of 'Satan's Agents.' Dead Pequots were offered to God as atonement for Puritan failings."¹⁹

Larzer Ziff sees in the slaughter of Pequots a means of resolving tensions and frustrations generated by the Antinomian Controversy. The Pequot War, in his analysis, "provided the militia with an unambiguous outlet for [their] sense of righteousness."²⁰ Anne Kibbey, a feminist scholar, finds the meaning of both the Pequot War and the Antinomian Crisis in the sanctioning of righteous violence. "The events of 1637," Kibbey writes, "established the legitimacy of genocidal war against non-white peoples and the sanctity of prejudicial attitudes towards women, granting theological sanction to the rhetoric of threat in Puritan men's speech." Kibbey concludes that both the Pequot War and the silencing of Anne Hutchinson and her followers were part of "a struggle to institute a particular kind of social order by defining acceptable forms of prejudicial violence and beliefs."²¹ The Pequot War, in Kibbey's analysis, is to be understood as an expression of the patriarchal need to justify violence as a means of control.

Other writers have stressed the primacy of the irrational factors driving English Indian policy. Karen Kupperman finds the key to the English penchant for "preemptive strikes" such as the Pequot War in the "rage and hostility" prompted by feelings of both guilt and vulnerability in their dealings with Native Americans.²² Richard Slotkin regards the Pequot War as an outgrowth and expression of Puritan fears of "the power of darkness in the wilderness." In his very provocative study of the contemporary war chronicles, Slotkin finds that "the wilderness was seen as a Calvinist universe in microcosm and also as an analogy of the human mind. Both were dark, with hidden possibilities for good and evil. Through the darkness the Indians flitted, like the secret Enemy of Christ or like the evil thoughts that plague the mind on the edge of consciousness. Like the devil, Indians struck where the defenses of good were the weakest and, having done their deed, retreated into hiding.

Often they carried off good men and pure virgins into hellish captivity and sexual temptation, as an evil thought will carry a good man forever out of the light." The Pequot War was thus the expression of a mind-set that "presumed no common ground between the groups" and "transferred the sphere of contention to a deeper psychological plane and brought unconscious fears and desires more overtly into play."²³

The work of revisionist historians critical of Puritan Indian policy, combined with a growing sensitivity to past injustices committed against Native Americans, has led to a partial transformation of the Pequot image. Pequots are now often celebrated rather than excoriated for their resistance to English expansionism.²⁴ Even Alden Vaughan, their severest modern critic, confesses in the second edition of *New England Frontier* (1979) that "I am less certain than I was fifteen years ago that the Pequots deserve the burden of the blame." Most recently, Vaughan, in a 1995 revision of an article on the causes of the Pequot War first published thirty years earlier, concluded that while the Pequots must bear some share of the blame for the conflict, having provoked Puritan reprisals through their refusal to extradite Indians guilty of murdering Englishmen, they were clearly not "solely or even primarily responsible. . . . The Bay colony's gross escalation of violence and of excessive demand for prisoners and reparations made all-out war unavoidable; until then, negotiation was at least conceivable."²⁵ Nonetheless, belief that the Pequots were somehow unlike other Indian groups in New England and that their presence in Connecticut did somehow endanger the fledgling English colonies persists. Such misconceptions still find expression in the writings of historians who generally reject the overall anti-Indian bias that motivated the savage portrayals of Pequots penned by earlier writers. To cite some conspicuous examples, the author of a well-regarded textbook on American Indian history published in 1980 describes the Pequots as "a threat to the security of New England."²⁶ A major study of New England Puritanism published in 1989 reminds readers of a long-standing belief that the Pequot name "was the Algonquian word for 'destroyers of men'" and suggests that "the historiographic pendulum has swung too far" in exonerating Pequots and blaming Puritans.²⁷ A writer in the *New England Quarterly* in 1991 declares categorically that the Pequots were planning "to destroy European settlement."²⁸

In the pages that follow, I will seek to demonstrate that the documentary evidence and ethnohistorical data available to us not only do not

support the Puritans' more extreme allegations that Pequots plotted the extermination of all Christians in New England but also discredit the commonly accepted assumption that the Pequots were obstacles to English expansion in the Connecticut River valley. Instead, the record indicates that they actively sought European trading partners and that their aggressive actions were aimed primarily at Indian trade rivals, not English colonists. There is no evidence that the Pequots were guilty of any acts of violence against English settlers in Connecticut prior to John Endecott's initiation of hostilities. The Pequots neither desired nor anticipated war with the Puritans. The origins of the Pequot War are to be found in the actions of the Massachusetts Bay Colony which, for reasons not yet fully explained, pressed demands that the Pequots clearly could not honorably accept and then resorted to violence in an effort to force Pequot compliance.

I believe that the key to understanding the English provocation of the Pequot War in 1637 lies in recapturing, as best we can, their sense of the meaning and implication of the specific events that transpired in the years immediately preceding hostilities. With that in mind, I have read and reread all of the primary sources of the Pequot War period: letters, journals, legal records, historical narratives. As I have reflected on these Puritan accounts of their conflicts with the Pequots, I have often been reminded of Roy Harvey Pearce's characterization of the idea of savagism as "one of those unattractive 'isms' which taught our forebears how to make up their minds and also how to act." "For the Puritan," as Pearce has noted, "history was everywhere cosmically and eternally meaningful. A Satanic principle was part of that meaningfulness; and New England Indians somehow embodied that principle. . . . God had meant the savage Indians' lands for the civilized English, and, moreover, had meant the savage state as a sign of Satan's power and savage warfare as a sign of earthly struggle and sin."²⁹ From my own reading of the Puritan texts I am persuaded that Pearce's explication of the Puritan view of the Indian as agent of the "Satanic principle" in history provides us with an eminently sound point of departure for our efforts to understand the context within which the leaders of the Puritan colonies conducted their dealings with the Pequots. Unlike many eminent students of the "New England mind," Pearce realized that the meanings that Puritans attached to their encounters with Indians were of vital importance in the ongoing formulation of their conception of their "errand into the wilderness." Later

scholars have supplemented Pearce's work in important ways and probed dimensions of the problem he left untouched. In response to their work, Pearce has commented that, were he to rewrite *Savagism and Civilization*, he would place greater emphasis upon both material factors and "psychological needs." But Pearce's original insight about the central role the concept of savagery played in shaping Puritan perceptions of their Indian neighbors remains valid.³⁰

Mindful of Pearce's admonition, I have endeavored to weigh and balance material, ideological, and psychological considerations in assessing Puritan explanations of their action against the Pequots. My conclusions concerning the origins of the Pequot War depart somewhat from the main thrust of much recent revisionism. The difference is one of emphasis. I do not believe that accounts of the war's origins that point primarily or exclusively to English greed, to the desire to annex land and seize fur, slaves, and wampum, provide us with an adequate explanation of Puritan behavior. Although revisionist scholars have done much to demythologize the Pequot War, they have often placed too much weight on economic motivations and have accordingly ignored or slighted the ideological assumptions that drove Indian policy and determined reactions to immediate events. One cannot, of course, separate ideology from its specific context of interests and power relationships, and any interpretation of causation that simply addresses one segment of the equation runs the risk of falling into reductionism. Moreover, the relationship between ideology and self-interest is often a rather subtle one. Though ideology in the abstract serves to grant "legitimacy to the interests of hegemonic groups," in practice the ideas, prejudices, symbols, images, and myths that compose it do not necessarily need to be activated by some particular immediate economic objective in order to color and distort perceptions of events.³¹

For that reason, we must pay close attention to Puritan expectations about the behavior of "savages" and to their conception of the Indians' place in a sacred history shaped by divine providence. It is ironic that, while historians of the early contact period generally accept the ethnohistorians' warning that one must comprehend and weigh the cultural values of Native Americans in order to understand their reaction to the European presence, they sometimes understate the extent to which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans were driven by beliefs and assumptions rather unlike our own. Quite simply, the Pequot War must

be placed in the context of Puritan assumptions about intercultural encounters in the wilderness. Though our present-day understanding of the culture of New England's Algonquian peoples lends no support to the Puritan portrayals of the Pequots as murderous savages determined to exterminate all Christians, or of other Indian groups as potential collaborators in that scheme, we must remember that seventeenth-century English conceptions of Indian character, and of historical processes, led to very different interpretations of Indian behavior. We must also remember that, then as now, prejudices were often highly resistant to modification by experience and that misconceptions rather than realities often drive historical events. When prejudices are part of a hegemonic ideology, and are woven into a complex of beliefs that rationalize and sustain claims to power and justify expropriation of resources, they prove particularly intractable. Such was the case with Puritan ideas about savagery.

Puritan commitment to certain notions about savages and their role in history led to serious misinterpretations of both past Pequot actions and future Pequot intentions. Puritan provocation of the Pequot War was consistent with the basic assumptions that drove their Indian policy. As Sacvan Bercovitch has noted, Puritan documents dealing with Indians "show the astonishing capacity of myth not only to obscure but to invert reality. What they tell us, in effect, is that there are two parties in the new world, God's and the Devil's; and that God's party is white, Puritan and entrusted with a world-redeeming errand, while Satan's party is dark-skinned, heathen and doomed."³² It was of little consequence that the ordinary events that marked the day-to-day interactions of Englishmen and Algonquians in the early years of colonization failed to conform to that dramatic scenario. As Breitwieser remarks, "Puritan representation was particularly adept at subduing fact with category."³³ The absence of tangible evidence of Indian malevolence did not remove belief in its reality. In the Puritans' vision of the New World as a spiritual battleground between the Elect and the Forces of Darkness, the survival of the New World Zion required decisive action to nip in the bud the Indian conspiracies whose existence, though intangible, was necessary to fulfill Puritan ideological expectations. Thus, based on nothing more substantial than rumors of dubious origin, Puritans came to see the Pequots as conspirators who threatened their survival. The tensions generated by the Antinomian Controversy and the greed of opportunists

covetous of Pequot land, peltry, and wampum, so heavily stressed by recent revisionist historians, probably contributed to the determination to humble the Pequots. But neither, in my judgment, was the "cause" of the war. Both must be placed within an ideological context that legitimized, indeed required, the use of violence to protect Christians through the intimidation of savages. New England's Puritans did not anticipate permanent peaceful coexistence with the indigenous inhabitants. In their earliest reflections on their conflicts with Indians, Puritan intellectuals saw war as God's means of punishing heathens. They later came to believe that it also enabled the Almighty to chastise wayward Saints and test the mettle of his own people. But, from the beginning, they regarded armed confrontations with savage peoples in league with Satan as predictable, necessary events.

In understanding the origins of the Pequot War, it must be borne in mind that Puritan ideology embraced images and stereotypes of Indians and their motives and behavior that led easily to misreadings of the meaning of events, misreadings that, I will argue, tragically cast the Pequots in an unwarranted role of aggressor. In reviewing Puritan explanations of their attack on the Pequots, one is struck by their repeated insistence that they acted defensively to counter a satanic plot to destroy Christ's church in the wilderness. It is tempting to dismiss such pronouncements as wartime propaganda or sanctimonious prattle. But, as I will seek to demonstrate in the first chapter of this study, the Puritan view of Indian character and, by extension, their misgivings about Pequot intentions were the outgrowth of beliefs that not only were not formulated on the spot to justify the Pequot War but, in their broad outlines, long predated the founding of the Puritan colonies. The New England Puritans' concept of savagery as a manifestation of the Devil in history and their suspicion that the history of God's people in the wilderness would be marked by recurrent conflicts with the Devil's minions had deep roots.

What of the role of economic self-interest in precipitating the Pequot War? Although the conflict cannot be explained in purely economic terms, it does not follow that the Puritan leaders were unmindful of the material advantages that would accrue to them after a successful campaign against Sassacus and his people. The records indicate that the magistrates were keenly interested in land, wampum, and Indian slaves, and they profited greatly from the Pequot War. Greed alone did not

inspire the attack on the Pequots, but it was hardly absent and it was certainly not a deterrent. Human conflicts are driven by complex and mixed motives, and New England's Puritans were hardly exceptions to the rule. Their misinterpretations of Pequot actions and intentions, stemming from deep-seated prejudices and preconceptions about "savages," led to concerns about security that prompted and justified a war that also expressed and advanced their desire to subdue the American wilderness and profit from its exploitation. Ideology and self-interest went hand in hand. The former legitimized the latter, as holy war opened the way to territorial acquisition and personal self-aggrandizement. The Pequots were victims not only of their adversaries' preconceptions and fears but also of their ambition.

The greatest challenge facing the historian of the Pequot War is not the interpretation of English motives and intentions. The written records permit a reasonably full reconstruction of the Puritan side of the story. The Pequots' perspective is far more difficult to recapture. They left no written records. Most, if not all, of their leaders perished in the war or were executed by the English or their Indian allies shortly thereafter. Most of our information about the Pequots comes from Puritan sources. But that does not mean that we are left completely in the dark about their role in this conflict. A critical reading and comparison of various Puritan texts discredit much Puritan mythology about Pequot motives and behavior. Moreover, insights gained from the work of the past generation of ethnohistorians provide a new basis for critical analysis of source materials. Recent findings regarding the languages, culture, customs, values, and behavior of New England's Algonquian peoples generally and of the Pequots in particular place the Anglo-Pequot conflict in a new perspective. Although some aspects of our reconstruction of their history remain conjectural, we nonetheless have ample evidence to correct the inaccuracies and misrepresentations that have marred past accounts of their early encounters with the Puritans. Through a reexamination of the English sources relating to the Pequot War, combined with some of the newer insights of ethnohistory, we can now correct many of the misconceptions that have led to misunderstanding of this crucial episode in Puritan New England's formative years.

show: what has historians said? what are he (hate?)
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 Pequot

1

Preconceptions and Misperceptions

Hakluyt



We begin our story of the Pequot War not by recounting events but by describing a state of mind, for Puritan preconceptions about the indigenous inhabitants of New England shaped their assessments of Pequot motives and intentions. Some of those preconceptions antedated the Puritan movement, lingering remnants of old rumors about monsters, wild men, and savages. Early European accounts of the New World, eagerly read by learned Englishmen, were filled with tales of encounters with people so fierce and brutal that, as Peter Martyr declared, "there is no man able to behowld them, but he shall feele his bowelles grate with a certen horroure." The impact of those stories on the English imagination is well illustrated by the writings of the mid-sixteenth-century Anglican bishop John Jewell, who declared the Americans 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."¹

Though later English voyages to the New World removed some of those misconceptions, the idea that Native Americans were satanists persisted.² To cite a few examples from Richard Hakluyt's massive compendia of travel reports, Sir Francis Drake was convinced that the Indians whom he observed cavorting around a fire on a South American beach in 1577 were endeavoring to summon the devil to sink his ship. He gave thanks to God for thwarting their satanic efforts. The chronicler of Martin Frobisher's third voyage in 1578 claimed that the natives of

Newfoundland "made us to understand, lying groveling with their faces upon the ground, and making a noise downeward, that they worship the devill under them." The report of John Davis's second voyage in search of the Northwest Passage in 1586 related an encounter with a race of "idolaters" and "witches" who employed "many kinds of enchantments." The narrator suggested that their diabolical incantations failed only because of God's special protection of Christians. Sir George Peckham, summarizing reports from Newfoundland, wrote that the inhabitants of the coast were continually at war with "a cruell kinde of people, whose food is mans flesh, and have teeth like dogges, and doe pursue them with ravenous mindes to eate their flesh, and devoure them." Peckham also believed that in the interior lurked devil worshipers who practiced human sacrifice and immolated their own progeny. He urged English occupation of North America on the grounds that "by this meanes many of their poore innocent children shall be preserved from the bloody knife of the sacrificer, a most horrible and detestable custom in the sight of God and man." The chroniclers of Raleigh's ill-fated Roanoke venture (1584-87) at first believed that they had found a "people most gentle, loving and faithful, voide of all guile and treason . . . such as live after the manner of the golden age." But they later concluded that many of the Indians were devil worshipers whose efforts to use witchcraft against the English had prompted God to punish "their witches" by sending a plague that had decimated the offending villages.³

The founding of a permanent English colony in Virginia in 1607 was attended by a resurgence of reports of Indian satanism. Captain John Smith, whose reports were later studied with particular care by New England's Puritans, described the indigenous inhabitants of America as devil worshipers who groveled before idols shaped "with such deformity as may well suit with such a god." Smith mistakenly assumed that Indians participating in a puberty ceremony were sacrificing their own children to the devil. His overall assessment of Indian character was harsh. Though he granted that they possessed a certain quickness of wit and an innate shrewdness, Native Americans, in Smith's view, were basically cruel and irrational. Easily angered and extremely vengeful, they were also, he warned, unpredictable, mercurial, treacherous, and malicious and must therefore never be trusted. Although aid from Powhatan and his people had rescued many of the hapless Jamestown settlers from

starvation, Smith explained away their generosity by claiming that the Almighty had intervened to soften their hearts, as charity was alien to savage nature. The security of the English colonies in North America, Smith warned, could not be based on goodwill but must instead be maintained by force. Colonists, he admonished, must inspire in the Indians a "greate fear" or perish at their hands. Smith's imperative was endorsed by the Reverend Alexander Whitaker, missionary to Virginia's Indians, who warned that no progress could be made in delivering Virginia from the devil unless the Indians first "stoode in fear of us." The founders of Puritan New England, as we shall see, made that maxim a guiding principle of their Indian policy.⁴

As the Jamestown settlers struggled with their fears of a satanic presence in the wilderness, Englishmen at home perused a popular survey of world geography written by George Abbot, future archbishop of Canterbury, that claimed that the natives of the Americas were worshipers of "vile spirits" and regularly engaged in incest, sodomy, witchcraft, and cannibalism. Striking the same note, Sir Walter Raleigh in his *History of the World*, written in the Tower of London in the early 1600s, asserted that, some centuries before, the Americans had been "brought by the devil under his fearful servitude." The belief that the New World was the devil's domain was commonly accepted in early seventeenth-century England. Placing that belief in the context of sacred history, the eminent theologian Joseph Mede declared that, shortly after the advent of Christianity, Satan induced the ancestors of North America's Indians to migrate with him to America, "where they might be hid, and not be disturbed in the idolatrous and abominable, or rather diabolical, service he expected from those his followers." Though Mede hoped for the conversion of the Indians, he thought it more likely that they would join the legions of Gog and Magog predestined to assail God's people in the final days.⁵

The founders of Puritan New England carried that notion across the Atlantic and assumed that as Christians they enjoyed a measure of divine favor denied to godless savages. Their colonies at Plymouth and at Massachusetts Bay were planted on land largely depopulated by the pandemic of 1617-19. Neither understanding how disease is transmitted nor comprehending the Indians' lack of immunity to microorganisms of European origin, the Saints, as one of their early chroniclers noted, gave thanks for "this wonderous work of the great Jehovah" in "wasting the

naturall Inhabitants with deaths stroke" in order to make room in the wilderness for God's own people.⁶

Since the New World literature available to them described Indians as cruel savages given to diabolical practices, it is not surprising that the founders of Puritan New England were skeptical about the possibility of peaceful coexistence. From their writings we learn that many of the early settlers of New England were troubled by premonitions of violent death at the hands of "savage and brutish men." William Bradford recalled that the Pilgrims, sighting land off Cape Cod in 1620, gazed with foreboding upon "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men." He added this reflection: "It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians . . . were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. . . . What could now sustain them but the spirit of God and His grace?" Edward Johnson, the chronicler of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, recorded that as the Puritans boarding the *Arbella* in 1630 bade farewell to their friends and loved ones in England they were reminded by one well-wisher that, "after two, three, or foure moneths spent with daily expectation of swallowing Waves and cruell Pirates, you are to be Landed amongst barbarous Indians famous for nothing but cruelty." Commenting on morale among the colonists during the first decade, Johnson declared that "their lonesome condition . . . very grievous to some . . . was much aggravated by continuall feare of the Indians approach, whose cruelties were much spoken of."⁷

The Pilgrims in Holland, prior to their embarkation for the New World, had exchanged Indian atrocity stories. Bradford, echoing Peter Martyr, recorded that "the very hearing of these things could not but move the bowels of men to grate within them and make the weak to quake and tremble." As the Separatist leaders pondered the question of relocation of their congregation to North America, some who opposed the move grimly predicted that those who survived the hardships of the Atlantic crossing and the risks of "famine and nakedness . . . sore sickness and grievous diseases" in a distant and inhospitable wilderness would die in agony as captives of savages, "who are cruel, barbarous, and most treacherous . . . most furious in their rage, and merciless where they overcome." In meetinghouse and by fireside the members of the

Pilgrim congregation reflected upon the dangers of life in a land inhabited by a brutal people whose chief "delight" was to "torment men in the most bloody manner that may be, flaying some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting off the members and joints of others by piecemeal and broiling on the coals," and finally devouring "collops of their flesh in their sight whilst they live, with other cruelties horrible to be related."⁸

The Indians of New England did not visit those horrors upon the first colonists but rather extended aid indispensable to their survival. But experience did not alter the Puritans' assessment of Indian character. While promotional tracts published to encourage immigration to the New World often described Native Americans as "gentle and loving," English colonists in the early contact period were far more inclined to see them as sinister and menacing. William Bradford, for example, believed that, shortly after his party had landed on Cape Cod in the late fall of 1620, the "savages" had assembled in a "dark and dismal swamp" and for three days and three nights had labored, through fearful conjurations, to raise the devil. It was only after the failure of their hellish invocations that the Indians decided, reluctantly, to go "to the English and make friendship."⁹ Bradford's colleague Edward Winslow, in a tract published in London in 1624, maintained that, had the Almighty not intervened to fill "the hearts of the savages with astonishment and fear of us," the fledgling colony would have soon perished, the victim of their "many plots and treacheries."¹⁰

Before we deal with the specific ways in which the Puritans' preconceptions about Indian character led to misperceptions of both their culture and their behavior, the persistence of savage stereotypes in the face of evidence that might well have led to a more realistic and humane view of Native Americans requires some explanation, as it is central to an understanding of the origins of the Pequot War. At one level, characterization of Indians as savages devoid of virtues such as pity and compassion confirmed Christian Europe's sense of moral superiority and justified not only occupation and dispossession but also the violence and cruelty toward indigenous peoples that often accompanied the founding of colonies. It clearly occupies a crucial place among the ideas that were part of the hegemonic ideology of early modern capitalism and colonialism. But in addition to its obvious usefulness as a rationale for

empire building, the idea of savagery also possessed a powerful psychic appeal. Images of primitive peoples living in a state of lawlessness, unfettered by the restraints that bound civilized men, aroused strong emotions. While to some Christians the savage appeared primarily as an errant human being to be lifted up and given the blessings of civility in this life and salvation in the world to come, to most he inspired more fear than compassion, for he represented the dark side of man's nature—lawless, cruel, rapacious, and licentious.¹¹ Puritans, in common with other Englishmen, defined themselves in part by contrast with others who represented the antitheses of the values they affirmed and embodied. Catholics and those who covertly aided and abetted their "Papistic schemes" symbolized, in the Puritan mind, the degradation of Christianity; the natives of America, whom they commonly described as "the worst of the heathens," evoked fears of the total negation of civilized values. The Native American was cast, in a radical sense, into the role of the Other, the living example of what civilized men had transcended and of all that Christians must resist in their encounters with the wilderness and its denizens. The idea of savagery in opposition to civilization was thus an essential part of the English colonizers' sense of identity.

The preservation and extension of civil and Christian values on alien soil defined the English understanding of their colonial mission. The dangers Indians posed to that undertaking were primarily spiritual and stemmed from their presumed role as the devil's agents in the New World wilderness. Bernard Sheehan has noted the widespread belief that "proximity to savagism" placed Christians "in danger of losing their souls and their civility." English Puritans and Anglicans reacted to reports from the New World in much the same way. In 1622, in a treatise on the importance of establishing schools in the colonies, the Puritan sympathizer John Brinsley noted widespread concern that association with Indians would lead to a "falling away from God to Sathan" as Christian colonists removed from the constraints of civilization became "utterly savage." The Anglican cleric Richard Eburne advocated settlement in Newfoundland on the grounds that the sparsity of native inhabitants there greatly reduced the danger "of corruption of language or blood."¹² The idea that Indians were a potential source of corruption was sometimes justified through appeals to biblical authority. Some New England Puritans, in their efforts to locate Indians within the grand historical scheme they believed to be embodied in the Old and New

Testaments, gave credence to speculation, originating with Anglican promoters of the Jamestown venture, that Indians were descendants of Ham, the son of Noah who, according to the Book of Genesis, had provoked the wrath of the Almighty by looking upon the nakedness of his drunken father. Driven into exile and condemned to wander the earth under God's curse, Ham and his progeny were said to have degenerated into devil worshipers.¹³ John White of the Massachusetts Bay Company believed that he had found in Indian creation myths and in some of their "Legal Observations" evidence of their origin in the world described in the Old Testament and their subsequent degeneration.¹⁴

For the most part, English Puritan reactions to the Indian as the Other—as the antithesis of the civilized Christian—were neither original nor unique. But certain aspects of Puritan belief gave the concept of a conflict of savagery and Christian civilization in the North American wilderness a particular force and resonance. As Andrew Delbanco suggests, in the absence of the opposition and persecution they had faced in England, New England's Puritans felt impelled to create "new enemies . . . Indians, Antinomians, eventually Quakers and 'witches.'"¹⁵ The inner logic of Puritan ideology required that the Saints be beleaguered and besieged in this world, and Indians could play the role of foes of God's own people quite admirably. Puritan divines taught that, as successors to the Israelites in God's special favor, the faithful could also expect to be the special objects of the devil's blandishments and of God's frequent testing and chastisement. A fundamental element in the Puritans' founding myth was the belief that the wilderness was a place of darkness and peril to the soul, inhabited by savages and devils, ideally suited for testing both the faith and the mettle of the righteous. An early eighteenth-century New England preacher captured the essence of that myth when, in celebration of the courage and faith of founders of the Plymouth Colony, he declared: "But O how horrid and dismal do these new-found regions appear! On the shores and rivers, nothing but sights of wretched, naked and barbarous nations, adorers of devils—the earth covered with hideous thickets that require infinite toils to subdue—a rigorous winter for a third of the year—not a house to live in—not a Christian to see—none but the heathen of a strange and hard language to speak with—not a friend within three thousand miles to help in any emergency—and a vast and dangerous ocean to pass over to this."¹⁶

Puritan divines worried that the proximity of the wilderness, which

they conceptualized more in spiritual and moral than in strictly geographical terms, placed Christians in constant danger of reversion to savagery through the embracing of such presumed "Indian vices" as sloth, self-indulgence, deceit, blasphemy, devil worship, and concupiscence. With regard to the latter, the Plymouth Colony's outrage at the trader Thomas Morton's alleged cohabitation with Indian women was the first but hardly the last indication of Puritan fear of Indian sexuality.¹⁷ Later Puritan portrayals of Native Americans sometimes falsely assumed that they were sexually unrestrained and could therefore be expected to rape captives. As we will note later in this study, John Underhill, in interrogating some young girls who had been held captive by the Pequots in 1637, was quite preoccupied with their sexual experiences and rejoiced that, although they had been solicited to "uncleanness" by their dusky captors, the girls had called upon God and thereby preserved their chastity. Although later New England captivity narratives would offer no support for the image of the Indian as sexually abandoned, the preoccupation with forbidden interracial sexuality persisted. Writing in 1706, Cotton Mather acknowledged that English expectations of Indian sexual misconduct had been unfounded but attributed the protection of the chastity of captives to "a wonderful restraint from God upon the Brutish Salvages."¹⁸ The Indian in Puritan eyes thus remained licentious by nature, his good conduct explained away as a special "providence" of God. Once again, experience had little impact on the Puritan conception of savagery. To Cotton Mather, as to other Puritans, the idea itself transcended the mundane, factual record. The concept of savagery was essential to their definition of their "errand into the wilderness." They were therefore insensitive to ambiguities and contradictions in the pattern of intercultural interaction that did not fit their design.

The sense of danger we find in early Puritan accounts of their dealings with the indigenous inhabitants of New England persisted long after the founding of the Puritan colonies, for it was rooted in anxieties that emanated not so much from objective observation or actual experience as from subjective fears of the subversive potential of intimate contact with the Other. Although that fear of corruption, of loss of virtue, drove much of the Euro-American response to the presumed savagery of the New World's peoples, there were other reactions that are not so easily categorized. Some of the very qualities in portrayals of savage life that

defenders of Christian civilization deplored and resolved to extirpate could also inspire envy and longing, followed, of course, by guilt. Descriptions of savagery thus aroused some very contradictory reactions, for there were many who found the idea of liberation from the restraints of civilized life not altogether unattractive. While English spokesmen for colonial expansion publicly trembled at the prospect that tolerance of Indian ways could lead to emulation of Indian savagery and thence to loss of civilization and of salvation, contemplation of the liberty and the indulgence savage peoples presumably enjoyed sometimes prompted other feelings as well. If one of those feelings was envy, another was rage. An early example is Robert Gray's warning to the Jamestown colony against toleration of New World "Canaanites." Gray insisted that, if the Indians proved resistant to English efforts to civilize and Christianize them, they must be exterminated. In their natural state they were, Gray declared, "odious" in the eyes of God. He reminded the colonists that "Saul had his kingdom rent from him [and] his posterity because he spared Agog, that idolatrous king of the Amelichite, whom God would not have spared; so acceptable a service it is to destroy idolaters, whom God hateth." Gray's contemporary William Symonds also called for the slaughter of unregenerate savages, declaring that God "putteth away all the ungodly of the earth like drosse. . . . It is God's ordinance to bring a curse upon them and to kill them as the children of Israel did Balaam." Though New England's Puritans agreed with critics who questioned Gray's and Symonds's premise that heathenism alone justified extermination, they were, as we shall see, quite willing to cast themselves in the role of instruments of "God's wrath" when persuaded that Indian iniquity threatened the security of God's people in the wilderness.¹⁹ Images of Indian savagery were reinforced by complex, sometimes contradictory, motives and emotions. To see the Indian in other terms would have threatened the foundations of an intricate but potentially vulnerable ideological structure.

Let us turn now to specific Puritan perceptions of Native American culture. Edward Winslow's tract "Good Newes from New England" (1624) contains the first detailed English description of the religious practices of the New England indigenous peoples. It is a document that tells us far more about Puritan preconceptions than Indian customs, but as those preconceptions were to play a vital role in shaping later Indian

policy, Winslow's account deserves close attention. Winslow repeated Smith's erroneous interpretation of Algonquian initiation rites and claimed that the Indians often murdered their own children in satanic rituals. He was unable to interpret accurately the information provided by his Indian informants and tried to make some sense out of Algonquian mythology by using Judeo-Christian categories to classify Indian gods. Thus, told about a creator-God named Kietan, Winslow assumed that he was Jehovah. Learning to his distress that the Indians only infrequently called upon Kietan, an austere and distant figure, but more often appealed to a lesser deity named Hobbomoch, who sometimes appeared to them incarnated as a snake, Winslow decided that they had forsaken worship of the Creator to follow an evil and satanic spirit. Indeed, Winslow was persuaded that Hobbomoch was probably the devil himself. When he was permitted to witness a shaman's healing ceremony, Winslow's fears were confirmed. After describing the frenzied dancing, shrill musical invocations, and the "priest's" trance, Winslow informed his readers that the shaman cured patients through the power of the devil himself, who sat on the shaman's shoulder throughout the ceremony, manifested as an eagle or a serpent but visible only to his disciples. After further inquiries, Winslow also learned of a class of Indian warriors who allegedly through alliance with the devil attained exceptional prowess and near invulnerability in battle. A satanic presence, Winslow warned, permeated Native American life.²⁰

Closer association with their Indian neighbors did not bring the New England Puritans greater understanding of Native American spirituality. Ten years after the publication of Winslow's garbled and distorted observations, William Wood, in *New England's Prospect*, repeated Winslow's claim that Indian "powwows" invoked the devil and used diabolical power to heal the sick. After attending a healing ceremony, Wood reported:

The manner of their action in their conjuration is thus: the parties that are sick or lame being brought before them, the powwow sitting down, the rest of the Indians giving attentive audience to his imprecations and invocations, and after the violent expression of many a hideous bellowing and groaning, he makes a stop, and then all the auditors with one voice utter a short canto. Which done, the powwow still proceeds in his invocations, sometimes roaring like a bear, other times groaning like a dying horse, foaming at the mouth

like a chased boar, smiting on his naked breast and thighs with such violence as if he were mad. Thus will he continue sometimes half a day, spending his lungs, sweating out his fat, and tormenting his body in this diabolical worship.

Wood believed that, with the devil's aid, the powwow could effect remarkable cures. An Englishman, "a reliable gentleman," had told him of a medicine man who, in his presence, extracted "the stump of small tree . . . past the cure of his ordinary surgery" from the foot of a lame man by wrapping the foot in a beaver cloth and then rapping on the cloth. Wood also gave credence to rumors that the sachem-shaman Passaconaway possessed such diabolical power that he could "make the water burn, the rocks move, the trees dance, metamorphise himself into a flaming man," produce a live snake out of a dead snakeskin, and in the winter create green leaves from ashes.²¹

Belief that Indian religious practitioners were in league with the devil and that the native inhabitants of New England were the devil's slaves persisted throughout the seventeenth century. Echoing Edward Winslow, Thomas Mayhew, missionary to the Indians of Martha's Vineyard in 1652, declared that the "Devil . . . with his angels had his Kingdom among them" and that Indian "pawwaws" sought "to pacify the Devil through their sacrifice and get deliverance from their evil." The Reverend William Hubbard, writing in 1680, declared Indian religion unworthy of discussion, as it consisted only of "what was diabolical." Several years later, an English visitor, John Josselyn, reported that the Infernal One "scares them with his Apparitions and panick Terrours, by reason whereof they live in a wretched consternation, worshipping the Devil for fear." In 1702 Cotton Mather wrote that "the devil decoyed those miserable savages hither, in hopes that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ would never come to destroy or disturb his absolute empire over them."²²

Roger Williams's partial acceptance of the Puritan stereotype of Native American religion as satanism is particularly telling. A pathbreaking advocate of freedom of conscience, of separation of church and state, and of respect for Indian land rights, views unacceptable to the Puritan ruling oligarchy, Williams was exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636. Fleeing in the dead of winter to escape deportation to England, he settled among the Narragansett Indians of Rhode Island. Williams's sympathy and affection for his Indian neighbors and associates, extraor-

dinary for a seventeenth-century New England Puritan, has often been noted.²³ Making his living as an Indian trader, Williams published in London in 1643 the *Key into the Language of America*, the most perceptive of the Puritan accounts of Native American life and culture. It contains, as we shall note, some important insights. But Williams confessed that he did not inquire too closely into Indian religious rituals, for "after once being in their Houses and beholding what their Worship was, I durst never be an eye witness, Spectatour or looker on, least I should have been a partaker of Sathans Inventions and Worships, contrary to Ephes. 5.14." Indian priests, Williams declared, were "no other than our English witches."²⁴

Williams's characterization of the shaman as a witch was the result of a misapplication of Judeo-Christian concepts to the understanding of Native American spirituality. Shamanic rituals were not diabolical, as Williams assumed, but were generally benevolent in purpose, for the shaman's calling was to comprehend and utilize, for the good of both the individual and the group, the remarkable forces that Algonquians, like other Native Americans, believed permeated the world. Preoccupation with satanism blinded seventeenth-century English observers to the true nature of shamanic practice. As John A. Grim notes, "The shaman's ritual assures the flow of . . . vital energy into the community. The dramatic actions, the emotional chants, the terrifying masks, and the elaborate dances all bring about contact with a spiritual energy that sustains society." Impressed by the shaman's "capacity for evocation rather than domination" of natural forces, Grim and other recent scholars have found "profound beauty" in this ancient manifestation of spirituality.²⁵

Operating in a culture which held that an array of animate, inanimate, visible, and invisible entities possessed both souls and power, the shaman was a singularly potent figure. But the power that he possessed can be described as "supernatural," "divine," or "satanic" only by invoking and misapplying European categories. Those categories had little meaning in the New England Algonquian mental world of the early seventeenth century, wherein the "supernatural" was immanent and material, not transcendent and otherworldly, and coexisted on the same plane of reality as the mundane. Indeed, to call the shaman a "priest," as Williams and other Puritan observers sometimes did, is only slightly more accurate than to call him a "witch." He could also be described as a savant, a

fortune-teller, or a physician, for shamanism embraced all of those functions. The powers that the shaman received from the spirit world were used in a variety of ways for the benefit of the community. Shamanic practice essentially involved the invocation and manipulation of the spirits and forces whose goodwill was essential to health and prosperity. Shamans were sometimes called upon to use their occult knowledge to ward off evil spirits, a process often misinterpreted as "devil worship" by European observers.

The shaman played a vital role in the life of the Algonquian village. Puritan observers erred in equating him with the marginalized and presumably malicious individuals whom the English and other Europeans stigmatized and persecuted as witches. Fundamental to the European conception of the danger witchcraft posed to the community was *maleficium*, the use of diabolical power to injure or kill. English witches were said to inflict horrendous physical and mental torments on their victims.²⁶ But while Puritan writers throughout the seventeenth century echoed Williams's facile equation of Indian shamanism with English witchcraft, their specific descriptions of Algonquian sorcery in the early years of contact did not support that comparison, as they usually portrayed the shaman as a healer. The shaman's offense, in their eyes, was that he healed with the devil's aid.

In fact, the shaman's power did not come from an evil spirit but was gained through association with the spirit world. That power, being morally neutral, could potentially be abused by the mercenary and the vicious. Even so, the early New England Puritan sources contain no reports comparable to the accounts of a pervasive fear of shamanic malevolence found in some descriptions of the Iroquois and of other Native American cultures. The claim of a mid-seventeenth-century Puritan missionary, echoed by a recent historian, that Algonquian converts to Christianity sought protection from the malevolence of Indian witches is not supported in either the earlier source materials or the later legal records.²⁷ Increase Mather's assertion, during the Salem witchcraft hysteria of 1692, that Indian medicine men "in their heathenism, by the hands of Evil angels, murdered their neighbors," represents a belated and rather unsuccessful effort to revise the Puritans' own understanding of shamanic practice, which prior to that time was almost always defined as the use of diabolical power in healing. There was even less foundation to

Supernatural
shaman
Mishnah

Cotton Mather's assertion in 1699 that the Salem witchcraft outbreak had "some of its Original among the Indians."²⁸ Both statements, however, tell us much about underlying assumptions regarding Indian character.

The fundamental error in Puritan accounts of Algonquian religious practice lies in the assumption that the shaman's power, whether employed for good or ill, originated in a pact with the devil. Shamanic power was not inherently evil. The other-than-human beings from whom it originally emanated could not be described accurately as satanic. The native New Englanders, as Roger Williams noted, believed in a variety of gods (at least thirty-seven) and also attributed power to the sun, the moon, certain animals, and to a giant named Wetucks. Williams had great difficulty comprehending and classifying those beings.²⁹ Contrary to English expectation, the Indians did not conceive of supernatural beings in rigidly dualistic terms. The spirits with whom they shared the world were seldom regarded as purely good or purely evil. Winslow had noted to his bewilderment that even their creator-God Kietan was sometimes capable of malevolent behavior. Only by stretching the analogy and disregarding details can any of the Algonquian deities be equated with the Christian devil.

Seventeenth-century English Puritans, as David Hall has noted, possessed an "understanding of the world [that] was magical in presuming that the forces flowing through it were not bounded by ordinary rules of cause and effect."³⁰ Superficially, Christian and Algonquian religious beliefs appear to reflect some common assumptions. As one authority notes, "both groups" affirmed that "supernatural power affects everyday experience. Regardless of whether blessings or hardships came their way, individuals in both religions attributed their daily lot to the will of divine beings who directed events according to higher purposes."³¹ But this commonality is misleading, because Indian spirituality was not grounded in belief in either the divine providence of an all-powerful creator or the presence in the world of a malevolent fallen angel. This is not to deny that the Indians of New England, as elsewhere, told tales about demons. The point is that their religious practices, contrary to Puritan misperceptions, were not based on the invocation of evil forces. As Hultkrantz observes, "for the Indian the notion of the evil spirit pertains to the world of mythology and not that of practical religion." Native Americans believed that they were able to tap into a sacred power essential to their well-being through the performance of rituals given to

them by potent other-than-human beings. As Dowd has noted, "ceremonies, old and new, gave Indian villages access to spirit forces that influenced the growth of crops, while others affected the abundance of game. The people's survival depended on the cooperation of spirit forces that inhabited other quarters of the universe. Their most essential relations with other orders—with plants, animals and the other sex—necessitated appeals to sacred power through proper ritual. Disregard for ritual meant . . . earthly disaster and punishment."³² Despite the importance of ritual, the shamanic practice at the heart of New England Algonquian religious life remained highly individualistic, emphasizing "personal choice and personal innovations" unfettered by either inherited doctrine or "uniform liturgical rules."³³

Despite his aversion to Native American religious practices, Roger Williams, unlike most other Puritan commentators, found much to commend in Indian character. Writing from exile among the Narragansetts, Williams praised their "kindnesses. . . . It is a strange truth that a man shall generally finde more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these *Barbarians*, than amongst thousands that call themselves *Christians*. . . . I have knowne them leave their House and Mat to lodge a Friend or stranger / when Jewes and Christians oft have sent Christ Jesus to the Manger. . . . There are no beggars amongst them, nor fatherlesse children unprovided for." Native Americans, Williams reported, were not only kindly and generous but "in quick apprehensions and accurate judgements (to say no more) the most high and sovereign God and Creator, hath not made them inferiour to *Europeans*. . . . Boast not proud *English*, of thy birth & blood / Thy brother *Indian* is of birth as good." Through God's grace, Williams warned, some Englishmen might yet "see, Heaven ope to *Indians* wild, but shut to thee."³⁴

Williams, as we have noted, was unable to understand or appreciate the true nature of Indian religiosity. But he did realize that many of their beliefs and practices did not really fit the "devil worshiper" paradigm. He was particularly struck by the Indians' enlightened and humane moral code and by evidence of their belief in the punishment of the wicked in the afterlife. Attempting to unravel his Indian informants' rather confusing comments, Williams concluded that they believed that "good men and women" went after death to the southwest, where they lived in the house of the creator-God himself, but "Murtherers thieves and Lyers their Soules (say they) wander restlesse abroad." (Williams probably

projected the Christian concept of the afterlife into his interpretation of Narragansett lore, as the idea of spending eternity in the presence of the Creator is not a characteristic Native American belief.) Modifying the usual equation of shamanic healing practices with devil worship, Williams reported that the shaman, as he "conjures out the sicknesse," appealed to vital forces within the individual, for "they conceive that there are many Gods or divine Powers within the body of a man: In his pulse, his heart, his Lungs, &c."³⁵

Williams identified the fundamental concept underlying both Algonquian spirituality and its shamanic expressions, the concept of *manitou*, but failed to comprehend its nature. "There is a generall Custome amongst them," he wrote, "at the apprehension of any Excellency in Men, Women, Birds, Beasts, Fish, &c., to cry out *Manittoo*, that is, it is a God, and thus if they see one man excel others in Wisdome, Valour, strength, Activity, &c. they cry out Mannitoo: A God." He concluded that Indian use of the term *manitou* reflected their intuitive knowledge of the Christian God, the "source of all Excellencies."³⁶ But Williams's understanding of the term was faulty. Like other English commentators, he could not grasp Native American conceptions of the natural world and thus did not realize that their religious conceptions made no sharp separation between the natural and the supernatural. The dualistic assumptions so basic to the Christian tradition posed a serious obstacle to understanding the Indian world view. The anthropologist Ruth Benedict has explained *manitou* as a property emanating from the "existence of a wonderful power, a voltage with which the universe is believed to be charged."³⁷ Contrary to the assumptions of Williams and other Puritan observers, the Indians of New England did not conceive of that power as an emanation coming to them directly from either the Creator or the devil. It was rather a force possessed by many other-than-human beings: gods, spirits, some animals. Humans might acquire *manitou*. Shamans and witches owed their potency to their possession of it. But *manitou* might also inhere in objects that Europeans regarded as inanimate: certain trees or stones, for example. Items of human manufacture, believed to have originally been the gift of other-than-human beings (wampum, for example), might also possess *manitou* and thus convey power.³⁸

Williams's identification of *manitou* with "excellencies" flowing from the goodness of God and the more commonplace Puritan identification

of shamanic power as satanic thus both missed the mark. *Manitou* was morally neutral and could be used for good or evil. In one sense of the term, it was not supernatural at all, for in the Algonquian world view there was no clear dividing line between the immanent and the transcendent. However, the power *manitou* connoted was exceptional and inspired that sense of awe and fear associated with European concepts of the holy. The analogy should not be carried too far, of course, as *manitou* permeated the material world and can probably best be regarded as a tangible force subject to human manipulation.³⁹

Puritan piety and Algonquian spirituality both affirmed the power of the holy but conceived of that power in very dissimilar ways. Although in a very general sense the Indian belief in taboos, whose observance was intended to avoid offending potent spirits or disrupting certain intricately balanced forces, might be roughly equated to the Christian fear of the divine retribution visited upon sinners, the concepts of divine providence and original sin were completely alien to the Indian sense of man's relationship to creation. The ideas of infant damnation and eternal punishment of the unregenerate were incomprehensible to Algonquians. The Puritan conviction that divine revelation was now to be found only in holy books and that those who claimed ongoing communication with the spirit world were in league with evil forces violated the fundamental premises underlying Algonquian religious practice. For the Native American, the dreams and the vision quests of individuals, as well as the rituals of the community, were designed to establish an immediate, tangible, and sustaining dialogue with the spirit world. The Puritan conversion experience, requiring both intellectual assent to a body of theological doctrine and an emotional sense of personal worthlessness balanced by a conviction of divine election and redemption, had no counterpart in Native American religious practice.⁴⁰

Even more alien was the Puritan division of the community itself into the Elect and the damned and their insistence that divine grace was accessible only to the few. Native American religiosity was community-oriented and holistic and did not distinguish between saints and sinners in this life, nor did it relegate the unregenerate to eternal torment in the hereafter. As Bowden notes, "Christianity threatened to destroy [the] aboriginal sense of community."⁴¹ It is thus not surprising that, by the most generous estimates, no more than a quarter of the Indian popula-

tion of southern New England in the seventeenth century made any effort to conform to the intellectual and social demands placed upon would-be Christian converts. In their promotional literature, the founders of the Puritan colonies had frequently expressed confidence that the good example of their Christian neighbors would inspire New England's savages to embrace the Puritan way. The Great Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony contained the figure of an Indian brave uttering the words, "Come over and help us." That optimism about Native American receptivity to Christian influence was unfounded. New England's native peoples were not at all eager to renounce their own cultural identity. The "praying villages" established after Puritan New England belatedly sent missionaries to the Indians were inhabited primarily by refugees from tribes fragmented and demoralized by war and disease. The missionary John Eliot recorded the testimony of several former shamans who explained that since the coming of the English they had lost their power to heal, had seen numerous friends and loved ones sicken and die, were often ill themselves, and therefore sought in Christ the protection of a stronger power.⁴² But they were hardly typical. Throughout the seventeenth century, members of the larger, more powerful groups such as the Narragansetts and the Mohegans were highly resistant to the appeals of Puritan missionaries.⁴³

Committed to a religious ideology that held that God's will decreed that man earn his bread by the sweat of his brow and that mandated the diligent exploitation of the earth's resources, the English who settled in New England in the early seventeenth century were unable to appreciate either the Indian economic system or the social values that system expressed. Living in a land of bountiful wildlife and abundant timber (the latter particularly striking in comparison with the deforestation of the British Isles), the Indians built modest wigwams in small villages utterly devoid of the trappings of wealth or power. They thus impressed the colonists as an unenterprising, indeed improvident, people. The Anglican trader Thomas Morton marveled at the natural endowments of New England but noted in puzzlement that the native New Englanders lived "like to our Beggars in England." Morton found the Indians' lack of concern for material wealth in some ways admirable, but most English observers were persuaded that Indian poverty was the result of a serious

character flaw. Indians, wrote William Wood in 1634, were by nature highly intelligent, "having quick wits, understanding apprehensions, strong memories." Indian women "were very industrious." But Indian men, Wood claimed, "would rather starve than work."⁴⁴

Puritan commentators pitied the Indian "squaw." Roger Williams observed that "it is almost incredible what burthens the poore women carry of Corne, of Fish, of Beanes, . . . of Mats, and a childe besides." Christopher Levitt declared: "Their women are their slaves, and do all the work; the men will do nothing but kill beasts, fish, etc." Francis Higginson agreed: "The men for the most part live idly, they doe nothing but hunt and fish: their wives set their corn and do all their other worke." William Wood declared disdainfully that Indian husbands used their wives "as porters to lug home their venison which their laziness exposes to the wolves till they impose it upon their wives shoulders." Not only did the women plant and tend the corn, but they were forced by their mates' irresponsibility to hide it away after harvest, "covering it from the inquisitive search of their gourmandizing husbands who would eat up both their allowed portion and reserved seed if they knew where to find it."⁴⁵

The stereotype of the lazy Indian persisted. Daniel Gookin, the Bay Colony's superintendent of Indian affairs (a man generally considered sympathetic to the Indians), wrote of his charges in 1674 that "they are much addicted to idleness, especially the men, who are disposed to hunting, fishing, and . . . war . . . that little tillage or planting used among them, was principally done by the women. Also in their removals from place to place, which they are inclined to, for their fishing and hunting in the several seasons, the women carry the greatest burthen: they also prepare all the diet."⁴⁶

As is often the case with stereotypes, those characterizations of gender roles in Indian society were not totally false, but they were based upon incomplete and misleading information. Women did indeed do most of the work required to tend, harvest, and store crops. But the characterization of the Indian male as an economic drone will not stand close scrutiny. Despite their reliance on horticulture for much of their food supply, fishing and hunting in the Algonquian societies of southern New England were not recreational activities (as English observers often imagined) but endeavors vital to social well-being. In the not-too-distant

past they had provided the only significant sources of nutrients and were still an essential source of both protein and, through utilization of hide and bone, materials for clothing and implements.⁴⁷

In assessing gender roles, it must be borne in mind that in the southern New England economy no use was made of domesticated animals. Hunting and fishing thus remained the only means of providing meat and hides. The persistent English description of those activities as play rather than work tells us much about their ethnocentrism but nothing about Algonquian economics. Moreover, the Puritan sources, read closely, reveal that the lazy-Indian stereotype failed to account for certain heavy tasks customarily performed by Indian males. The colonists recorded that they prepared the fields for cultivation by felling trees and removing stumps. They were solely responsible for the manufacture and maintenance of weapons and implements of wood and stone, and they assisted the women in the making of pottery. The men were also responsible for the construction of dugout canoes, some of which were large oceangoing vessels capable of transporting thirty or forty warriors.⁴⁸ The work assigned to Algonquian males as providers of animal protein was both demanding and dangerous. Hunters and fishermen were often absent from their home village for weeks on end and were often in danger of injury or death. Their work demanded "many hours of intense labor under hard conditions." It also required long periods of recuperation.⁴⁹

Roger Williams's associations with the Narragansetts led him to a warm appreciation for their skill and perseverance as hunters and trappers. He noted also that they "take exceeding great paines in their fishing. . . . They lay their naked bodies many a cold night on the cold shoar about a fire of two or three sticks, and oft in the night search their Nets; and sometimes goe and stay longer in frozen water." Declining to join with those who regarded Indian hunters and fishermen as idle social parasites, Williams paid them this tribute: "There is a blessing upon endeavour, even to the wildest *Indians*. . . . The substance of the diligent (either in earthly or heavenly affaires) is precious."⁵⁰

But most of the English colonists in New England nonetheless doubted that Indians were truly diligent. The problem was that Indians did not labor constantly; Accepting as divinely sanctioned the premise that the pursuit of individual wealth, if conducted within the framework of Puritan morality and communal values, was an essential element in a

well-ordered commonwealth, English Puritans could not comprehend the social rationale underlying the Indians' apparent lack of interest in wealth. Teaching their own children that God had called them "unto a workhouse, not a playhouse," the Saints found the Indian reluctance to work longer hours than necessary for subsistence a sign not only of lack of enterprise but of lack of virtue as well.

As Neal Salisbury has explained, Algonquian society was held together by a different premise. Indian New England valued not individual wealth but rather social cohesion based upon reciprocity. Competitive economic behavior was scorned and greed considered antisocial. Reciprocity "was maintained through a complex sequence of rituals. These rituals were especially elaborate and critical in southern New England, where the system of family agriculture might otherwise have increased the potential for an unequal distribution of wealth within their group." As those ceremonies had no counterpart in the experience of European observers, their descriptions of them are vague and sometimes confusing. Roger Williams recorded that, among the Narragansetts, the host or hostess of the Nickommo festival presented to one of the guests substantial amounts of goods and wampum. At the harvest festival a dancer gave "money, coats, small breeches, knives," to the "poore" who begged for favors. Indian games and ceremonials "redistributed wealth and otherwise reinforced social cohesion." William Wood recorded that substantial goods changed hands in the course of those contests. Goal markers were often heavily laden with furs and wampum. But Wood, like other Puritan observers, assumed, disapprovingly, that the Indians were simply addicted to gambling and thus did not comprehend the social purpose of those exchanges.⁵¹

Dutch observers of the customs of the Indians of coastal Connecticut were no more perceptive than the English. They were baffled by a practice among the Pequots described by Nicholaes van Wassenaer as follows: "They have a hole in a hill in which they place a kettle full of all sorts of articles that they either have by them, or can procure, as part of their treasures. Then a snake comes in, then they all depart, and the *Manittou*, that is, the Devil, comes in the night and takes the kettle away, according to the statement of the *Koutsinacka*, or devil hunter, who presides over the ceremony." Van Waessenaer believed he had found evidence of Pequot satanism, but it is more likely that he was describing a redistribution ceremony. A Dutch chronicler of Adriaen Block's voyage up the

Connecticut River in 1614 shed some light on Indian economic attitudes when he reported that, even though the region was rich in fur-bearing animals, its inhabitants took only a few pelts each year. French explorers of the southern Atlantic coast of New England and Cape Cod had made the same discovery. Champlain remarked that "they make no provision of furs except to clothe themselves."⁵² The Indian economy in New England, prior to contact with Europeans, served the subsistence needs of the community and was not directed toward the accumulation of individual wealth.

Despite their inability to comprehend, let alone appreciate, Indian economic values, early European observers did occasionally express approval of some of their accomplishments. In 1524 the first European report from Narragansett Bay praised the natives' skill in the use of stone, clay, wood, and bark, out of which they crafted implements that were not only exceedingly functional but also aesthetically pleasing. Giovanni da Verrazzano wrote that "their arrows are wrought with great beauty," with heads made of "emery, jasper, hard marble." He added that they "construct their boats of single logs, hollowed out with admirable skill, and sufficiently commodious to contain ten or twelve persons; their oars are short, and broad at the end and are managed by rowing by force of the arms alone, with perfect security, and as nimbly as they chose." They were also superb farmers, painstaking in their cultivation of their fields. Verrazzano declared Narragansett corn the best in North America.⁵³

The Pilgrims, landing at Cape Cod short of supplies in the late fall of 1620, also had good reason to appreciate the Indians' horticulture. As their chronicler recounted, a shore party, digging in a mound of freshly turned sand, found near the surface a basket full of Indian corn of varied colors. "It held about three or four Bushels, which was as much as two of us could lift up from the ground, and was very handsomely and cunningly made." After carrying off the corn in order to restock their own depleted larders, the Pilgrim foragers found other underground storehouses containing beans and acorns as well.⁵⁴

Shortly thereafter, settled in Plymouth, the colonists endured a bleak winter in which half of their company perished from hunger or disease. In the spring, however, the Pilgrims learned from their newfound Indian friend and informant Squanto how to plant corn, as the chronicler

recalled, "according to the manner of the Indians" and that summer enjoyed bountiful harvests. The Indian farmers of southern New England produced a food surplus for trade with nonhorticultural Indian groups to the north and, in the initial years of contact with English colonists, provided food to the newcomers as well.⁵⁵ The banquet table at that first Thanksgiving at Plymouth so often celebrated in American popular history was well stocked with Indian commodities.

The Indian economy in southern New England was based not only on the utilization of the crops grown near their villages but also on maintenance of fishing camps and game reserves. The parklike appearance of the southern New England forests so often remarked upon by European observers was the result of systematic clearing out of underbrush and periodic burning of groundcover that, as William Cronon has noted, "not merely attracted game but helped create much larger populations of it. Indian burning promoted the increase of exactly those species whose abundance so impressed English colonists: elk, deer, beaver, hare, porcupine, turkey, quail, ruffed grouse." Their management of game reserves was thus a form of husbandry.⁵⁶

The Puritans, however, refused to recognize the legitimacy of Indian claims to hunting grounds or to uncultivated land adjacent to beaches, lakes, and streams. Invoking the principle of *vacuum domicilium*, John Winthrop, John Cotton, and other colonial leaders declared that New World lands not actually under cultivation did not rightfully belong to anyone and could, therefore, be occupied by the Puritans under the authority of their royal patent. Winthrop, invoking the authority of the Old Testament, asked rhetorically, "Why may not Christians have liberty to go and dwell among them in their wastelands and woods (leaving them such places as they have manured for their corn) as lawfully as Abraham did among the Sodomites?" Adding a secular, legalistic argument in support of the assertion implicit in that question, Winthrop declared that the "natural right" of hunter-gatherers to use of the land was immediately superseded whenever more advanced peoples asserted their "civil right" to improve the land for the raising of crops and the domestication of livestock.⁵⁷ A tract published in 1630 to promote the settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony declared that "the Indians are not able to make use of one fourth part of the Land, neither have they any settled places, as Townes to dwell in . . . but change their habita-

tion from place to place.”⁵⁸ In a similar vein Robert Cushman of Plymouth maintained that since the natives of the region were “not industrious, neither have art, science, skill or faculty to use either the commodities of it” but rather allowed the land to be “marred by want of manuring, gathering, ordering, etc.,” the English had a superior claim to ownership. The Reverend John Cotton agreed, declaring that “hee that taketh possession of the [land] and bestoweth culture and husbandry upon it, his Right it is.”⁵⁹

The Puritan assertion that the Indians of New England made no productive use of the land seems paradoxical—some would say meretricious—in the light of their own testimony about Indian horticulture. But the differences between Algonquian slash-and-burn methods of cultivation and the more intensive (and environmentally disruptive) English agriculture combined with the Indians’ lack of domesticated animals and continued reliance on hunting to justify a distorted image of native savagery and sloth. Roger Williams provoked the wrath of the Puritan authorities by arguing that, since the Indians “hunted all the country over, and for the expedition of their hunting voyages . . . burnt up all the underwoods in the country,” they had lawful title to all of New England. The forests of the New World could best be compared, Williams concluded, to the “great Parkes” of the “Noble men” and to the king’s “great Forrests in England. . . . No man might lawfully invade their propriety.” His unorthodox attitude toward Indian land rights was a factor in Williams’s subsequent banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Of Williams’s argument, John Cotton declared: “We did not conceive that it is a just Title to so vast a Continent, to make no other improvement of millions of Acres on it, but onely to burn it up for past time.”⁶⁰

Although forced to proceed cautiously in the early years of settlement, out of fear of provoking a pan-Indian uprising, the Puritans by the 1640s came to deny not only Indian ownership of uncultivated lands but also Indian sovereignty in their own villages. In 1648 the trader William Pynchon, resisting attempts by the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s magistrates to bring to trial some Indians suspected of murdering other Indians, denied that the English could claim any legal jurisdiction over Native Americans “until they have fully subjected themselves to your government . . . and until you have bought their land; until this be done, they must be esteemed a free people.” As Alden Vaughan has noted,

“Pynchon’s reasoning, so ripe with possibilities for more peaceful and equitable Anglo-Indian relations, fell on deaf ears.”⁶¹

English observers in the early seventeenth century were puzzled by the Native American political system. They were soon forced to recognize that their earlier preconceptions about Indian lawlessness and anarchy were mistaken. Noting that their Indian neighbors and trading partners acknowledged certain hereditary claims to sachemships, and that the more prominent sachems were often paid tribute, the English at first concluded that those sachems were “kings” and that the Indians were therefore monarchists operating in a feudal political structure. Thomas Lechford claimed that the Indian kings and their “petie Lords,” the “sagamores,” exercised “an absolute tyrannie” over their subjects. But more perceptive observers knew that this was not the case. Roger Williams observed that, though the sachems might seem to “have an absolute Monarchie over the people,” they actually did not have the power to undertake anything “unto which the people are adverse.” In New England, as throughout most of North America, Native American leaders governed by building consensus. Daniel Gookin noted some years later that Indian “kings” had little ability to coerce, as their followers, if upset by “harsh dealing,” could easily “go and live under other sachems that can protect them.” Thus, Gookin reported, the sachems’ “principal endeavor” was to win and hold support by “acting obligingly and lovingly unto their people, lest they should desert them, and thereby [diminish] their strength, power and tribute.”⁶²

It is now understood that the native inhabitants of New England at the time of contact were organized into a large number of village-based kinship bands, each under the leadership of a “sachem” or “sagamore.” In some areas, particularly along the coast, villages were loosely confederated in quasi-tribal organizations. Contact with Europeans accelerated that process. Some dominant sachemships such as the Pequots collected tribute from their weaker neighbors. Although the Puritans characterized the tributary relationship as that of defeated and oppressed peoples to a conqueror, receipt of tribute placed the dominant sachem under obligation to protect his tributaries from external enemies but, given the nonauthoritarian nature of Indian polity, did not seriously affect life within the subordinate villages.⁶³

In New England, it appears that the office of sachem was semiheredi-

tary and patrilineal. On occasion, women (perhaps the daughters of sachems who died without direct male heirs) succeeded to sachemships. On occasion also, the rights of hereditary succession were not observed, leading to much confusion among scholars endeavoring to understand the Indian political system. The evidence suggests that personal qualities as well as the hereditary rights of candidates were factors in the selection, with less able direct heirs sometimes being displaced in favor of more capable relatives.⁶⁴

Seventeenth-century English reports of Indian groups in New England contained a bewildering variety of tribal names. Most were not in fact tribes or even sachemships, for as Gordon Day has noted, early English settlers were prone to coin a new tribal designation for the inhabitants of "each river, village, or fish camp."⁶⁵ The proliferation of imaginary Indian tribes was most pronounced in the Connecticut River valley, a region crucial to our analysis of the origins of the Pequot War. A nineteenth-century historian claimed that "ten distinct tribes" lived within the confines of the town of Windsor alone.⁶⁶ Early twentieth-century ethnologists discarded most of those so-called tribes but generally listed eight tribal entities on or near the lower west bank of the Connecticut River. Following a convention established by the seventeenth-century Puritan historian William Hubbard, they were referred to as the "River Indians." It is now recognized that those groups can better be understood as bands loosely related to one another through intermarriage and allied politically in loose and transitory alliances among village sachems. The well-articulated and continuous leadership hierarchies characteristic of true tribes were not present in the Connecticut River valley in the early seventeenth century.⁶⁷

We have little reliable information on the interrelationships among the River Indian bands. Dutch sources, as we will note later, claimed that they were led in the early 1620s by a "grand sachem" named Sequin. Secondary accounts of the Connecticut Indians written between the eighteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries must be used very cautiously. New England Indian lore contains, as one scholar has warned, "an inseparable mixture of fact and romantic fiction."⁶⁸ A particularly blatant example of romantic fiction is a once very popular characterization of the sachem Wagingcut and his Podunk "tribe" as valiant freedom fighters opposing the brutal and rapacious Pequots. Mathias Spiess in 1935 wrote

that "there is still an old saying among older folk living around East Hartford and South Windsor, when alluding to brave warriors, 'they fought like a Podunk, to the last man,' for it is said that in one battle the Podunks were outnumbered by their enemy and all had been killed but one. He kept up the fight until he was slain."⁶⁹

That tale cannot be traced to any contemporary source and does not ring true, for the Puritan soldiers who observed Indians in battle during the Pequot War testified that they were not particularly fanatical or bloodthirsty as warriors and were hardly prone to "fight to the last man." Contrary to the stereotype that portrays primitive peoples living in a state of constant warfare, with "every man against every other man" (as Thomas Hobbes put it in 1651), the actual level of violence in most of pre-Columbian America was quite low. Describing New England's Indians, Roger Williams reported that "their warres are far less bloody, and devouring, then the cruell Warres of Europe." The Indian mode of battle, as Williams described it, appeared to be stylized and ritualistic, "with leaping and dancing, that seldome an arrow hits." When blood was drawn, the warriors more often than not withdrew to tend the wounded. Major battles fought on a "pitch field," Williams reported, would "seldome" result "in twenty slain." Encounters in wooded areas were even less lethal, as "every Tree is a Bucklar." One recent authority notes that "contact . . . invariably transformed war patterns, very frequently intensified war, and not uncommonly generated war among groups who previously had lived in peace. Many, perhaps most, recorded wars can be directly attributed to the circumstances of western contact." As we shall see, that observation is highly relevant to our examination of the origins of the Pequot War.⁷⁰

It is worth noting in connection with the later vilification of the Pequot sachem Sassacus and his followers that, prior to the Pequot War, Puritan sources portray Wagingcut the Podunk sachem who visited Salem and Boston in 1631 in a quest for aid against the Pequots not as a hero or victim but as a manipulative and power-hungry opportunist.⁷¹ Early Puritan sources, by contrast, contain a surprisingly positive description of the character and habits of the Pequots. An English visitor to the Bay Colony in the early 1630s, summarizing Puritan impressions of the Indians of the Northeast, described the Mohawks and the Abenakis as potential threats to the English colonies and characterized the Narragansetts as

grasping and mercenary but declared that the Pequots were courteous, affable, and trustworthy, "just and equal in their dealings, not treacherous either to their countrymen or English."⁷²

The English assessment of Pequot character changed drastically after the Pequots refused to apprehend and surrender to Puritan justice Indians responsible for the death of Captain John Stone, a disreputable trader killed on the Connecticut River in 1633. The Reverend Philip Vincent, in his account of the Pequot War published in London in 1638, contrasted the "very loving and friendly" behavior of the Indians of the Boston-Plymouth area with the "barbarous and cruel" nature of the Pequots, a "warlike people which have been terrible to their neighbors, and troublesome to the English." Other Puritan writers followed Vincent's lead. The vilification of the Pequots reached its height some forty years after the war, when the Reverend William Hubbard declared that they exceeded all other New England Indians in ferocity. In explanation, Hubbard claimed that the Pequots were not natives of the region but had invaded Connecticut "from the interior of the continent" shortly before the founding of the Pilgrim colony at Plymouth in 1620. Driving away the peaceful local inhabitants, the Pequots, he declared, "by force seized upon one of the goodliest places near the sea, and became a Terror to all their Neighbors."⁷³

Despite the lack of corroboration for Hubbard's belated claim in the primary source materials from the 1630s, historians, until quite recently, generally accepted his story and often used the Pequot "invasion" to support the argument that the Pequot War was a defensive war against a vicious aggressor who threatened Indians and Englishmen. Most authorities have held that the Pequots were offshoots of the Mahicans, an Algonquian group located in the upper Hudson valley of New York. Pressure from the Iroquois in the late sixteenth century presumably had forced a number of Mahicans to abandon their homeland and migrate to the southeast, where they displaced some of the indigenous inhabitants of coastal Connecticut.⁷⁴

Since most of the archaeological, linguistic, and documentary evidence now available demonstrates that the Pequots did not invade New England on the eve of English settlement but instead were indigenous to the region, an explanation of the extraordinary persistence of the Pequot invasion myth is in order. Quite simply, historians throughout the nine-

teenth and most of the twentieth centuries were misled by some circumstantial evidence that appeared to corroborate Hubbard's tale. Sources from the 1630s call the band led by the dissident sachem Uncas the "Mohegan." The resemblance of "Mohegan" to "Mahican" suggested a return to an original tribal designation. Equally suggestive was the presence of the same term on a map of New England prepared in Holland after Adriaen Block's exploratory voyage up the Connecticut River. Historians drew the wrong conclusions from those references. Since "Mohican" and "Mohegan" mean nothing more than "people of the river" in the Algonquian dialects of the region, common use of the term does not really prove a common origin. But some Pequot-Mohegan folklore recorded early in the twentieth century by Frank Speck, professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, also appeared to confirm Hubbard's claim. Fidelia Fielding, the last native speaker of the Pequot-Mohegan language, told Speck that her forebears had once lived in New York. He noted that "knowledge of the Mohawks and the ancient fear in which the latter were held, is still a live resentment in the Mohegan village." Another elderly Mohegan woman related that, "when a child of 7 years, my great-great aunt used to take my sister, brother, cousin, and myself on the hill near where the church now stands, point to the northwest, and tell us that was the way her folks came, and that we must never forget it." A third informant recalled that his great-grandfather had told a story of a migration across a great desert and a great body of fresh water, and of conflicts with the Mohawk which finally drove them out of New York. The folk memories Speck recorded persist. To this day, Mohegan Indians living in Uncasville, Connecticut, believe that they are descendants of the New York Mahicans.⁷⁵

That testimony notwithstanding, it is now apparent that the tale of a Pequot invasion of Connecticut on the eve of the founding of Plymouth was a fabrication intended to give added force to the demonic characterization of the Pequots. The study of comparative New England Algonquian linguistics led Speck to conclude that the stories told to him by his Mohegan informants could not possibly have had their origin in an early-seventeenth-century flight from the Hudson valley but were instead probably reflections of an earlier, more widespread Algonquian migration myth, of which the Delawares' Walum Olum was another expression. (More recently, however, scholars have questioned the authenticity of the Walum Olum.) Memories of conflicts with Mohawk

intruders into western New England in the historic period combined with older migration stories to create an erroneous folk account of Pequot-Mohegan origins. The crucial point is that scientific comparison of the surviving remnants of the Mohegan dialect in New York and Mohegan-Pequot in Connecticut revealed beyond any reasonable doubt that the two dialects were "not closely related." Speck concluded, from his comparison of Pequot-Mohegan with a number of other Algonquian dialects in New England and elsewhere, that the linguistic evidence indicated that the Pequots were indigenous to the region. Recent linguistic scholarship has confirmed that conclusion. Ives Goddard's comprehensive analysis of phonological innovations in eastern Algonquian languages discloses greater similarity between the speech of the Pequots and the dialects spoken by the Pequots' southern New England neighbors than between Pequot and any Algonquian language spoken outside New England.⁷⁶

The available archaeological data also suggest that the Pequots were not newcomers to southern New England. Ceramic remains in the region are scarce, due to the climate, the high acid content of the soil, and the destruction of sites as a result of postcontact construction.⁷⁷ But the comparison of contact-period Pequot-Mohegan potsherds with Mahican ceramics from New York disclosed that Mahican pottery "cannot be ancestral" to Pequot ware. Peculiarities in the ceramic remains attributed to the Pequot-Mohegans are now regarded as the result of postcontact innovations common in the Northeast, not as evidence of an extraregional origin.⁷⁸ Ethnohistorical evidence also fails to support the invasion story. In a recent survey of the cultural traits attributed to the various New England groups by seventeenth-century European observers, Dean R. Snow has concluded that the Pequots did not differ from their neighbors in any significant way.⁷⁹ Finally, some documentary records of a mid-seventeenth-century legal controversy over land claims indicate that Indian witnesses, regardless of group affiliation or attitude toward the claims, agreed that the Pequots had lived on the Thames River "long before the Pequots were conquered by the English" and had therefore been "immemorably of and entitled to" land in Connecticut. The Mohegan leader Uncas, a descendant of Pequot sachems, dictated a statement in 1679 that traced his genealogical descent through four generations. He claimed that a number of his Pequot ancestors had married into prominent Narragansett and Niantic families. If Uncas's

recollection of his ancestry was at all accurate, his Pequot forebears must have lived in the region on reasonably congenial terms with their neighbors for at least a century and a quarter prior to their earliest encounters with the Dutch and the English.⁸⁰

At the time of their first contact with Europeans, the Pequots occupied the coastal area between the Niantic River in Connecticut and the Wecapaug River in western Rhode Island. According to the most reliable modern estimates, in the early 1630s they numbered around 16,000. Their territory was the most densely inhabited in New England. The great epidemic of 1616-19, which killed around 90 percent of the Native American inhabitants of the eastern coast of New England, did not reach either the Pequots or their Niantic and Narragansett neighbors. The smallpox epidemic of 1633, however, did not spare any of the Indians of the region. Pequots suffered a mortality rate estimated at around 80 percent and at the outbreak of the Pequot War in 1636 probably numbered only about 3,000.⁸¹

Contemporary English reports on the Pequots indicated that they possessed two heavily fortified hilltop villages, at Weinshauks (seat of the grand sachem Sassacus) and Mystic (residence of two of their "principal" sachems). These forts, some believe, may have been constructed in response to difficulties with Europeans, for a Dutch report in 1614 enumerating Indian settlements in the area makes no mention of hilltop forts in Pequot country. In addition to Weinshauks and Mystic, there were an undetermined number of smaller villages, each containing about thirty wigwams, "mostly located along estuaries and marshes." There are also reports of smaller settlements containing only a few residences. Each village cultivated fields of approximately 200 acres.⁸²

Reports from Indian informants indicate that there were some twenty-six Pequot sachems but that their power and influence varied. William A. Starna, reviewing what is known about their functions, concludes that Pequot sachems, in common with other Indian leaders in the region, operated "within a sociopolitically reciprocal structure." The Pequot sachem possessed little formal power but maintained his influence "through his own persuasive powers" and through ritual gift giving, which functioned to "fulfill social obligations and gain prestige in the process." The feudal and monarchial models that early English observers attempted to apply to Pequot society were, as Starna notes, "misleading." Pequot society operated on "consensus" and maintained "a village ori-

ented consensual government.”⁸³ The claim, first advanced by Puritan writers and often repeated by scholars, that Pequot culture differed from other Algonquian groups finds no support in the ethnohistorical evidence available to us.

As we have seen, the records of early contact tell us that the English in New England regarded their Indian neighbors as a degenerate and lazy people who worshiped and served the devil. Puritan commentators reporting evidence that contradicted their preconceived images of Indians as savages were usually unable to comprehend the meaning of their disclosure and often explained it away by claiming that God had intervened to curtail their savage behavior. But what of the Indian side of the story? How did they perceive the intruders? The impressions of Englishmen formed by the native New Englanders in the early years of contact are difficult to reconstruct, but the sparse evidence available suggests that the Indians at first saw Europeans as men possessing fearfully powerful manitou. Wood related a story told by an Indian informant who reported that “they took the first ship they saw for a walking island, the mast to be a tree, the sail white clouds, and the discharge of ordnance for lightening and thunder, which did much trouble them, but this thunder being over and this moving island steadied by an anchor, they manned out their canoes to go and find strawberries there.” But the ship then fired a broadside in salute, and the Indians in terror retreated to the shore, “not daring to approach till they were sent for.”⁸⁴

Closer acquaintance allayed some fears but not others. The European presence remained troubling. About twenty years after the founding of Plymouth, an Indian convert to Christianity recalled a dream he believed he had experienced during the plague that devastated Indian New England a few years prior to the appearance of the Pilgrims. As Thomas Shepard recorded the Indian’s testimony, “he did think he saw a great many men come to these parts in cloths, just as the English are now apparelled, and among them, there arose up a man all in black, with a thing in his hand which he sees now was all one English mans book: this black man he said stood upon a higher place then all the rest, and on the one side of him were the English, on the other side a great number of Indians: the man told all the Indians that God was *moosquantum* or angry with them, and that he would kill them for their sinnes.” In his dream, the Indian narrator was then assured that he and his family

would be spared, apparently because they were predestined to embrace Christianity.⁸⁵ Shepard rejoiced at the man’s acknowledgment of Indian sin and depravity. But the image of a figure clad in black holding up a book and proclaiming God’s punishment of Indians tells us much about postcontact Indian perceptions of their Puritan neighbors. No less cogent is a more mundane observation by Roger Williams, who wrote of his conversations with his Narragansett trading partners in Rhode Island:

*Oft have I heard these Indians say,
These English will deceive us
Of all that’s ours, our land and lives.
In th’end they will bereave us.
So say they, whatever they buy,
(Though small) which shewes they’re shie
Of strangers, fearefeull to be catcht
By fraud, deceit, or lie.*⁸⁶

(C) English
deceitful

After a meticulous study of Algonquian folklore, William S. Simmons has concluded that “the Indians of southern New England understood and remembered the unprecedented events of colonial contact by means of indigenous symbolic images. Manitos, floating islands, flying and underwater ships, giant birds, thunder and lightning, sounds of music in the air, a strange white whale, dreams, premonitions and warnings, all give us a feeling for how the Indian apprehended this portentous moment in history.”⁸⁷ The symbols they passed down in the folklore of first contact were, for the most part, sinister. The Gay Head Indians, for example, made use of the image of a white animal, which carried for them the connotation of misfortune. Gladys Tantequideon recorded their prophecy of the white man’s coming: “Mitark, the last hereditary chief, called the people together on Indian Hill at sunset and told them that he was going to die. And while he was talking a white whale arose from the water off Witch Pond.” Mitark then explained that the white whale was the sign of the coming of a new people, whose bodies would also be white. He warned, “don’t let them have all the land because if you do the Indians will disappear. Then he died and shortly after the white people appeared.”⁸⁸ Mitark’s admonition is probably apocryphal. But, given the events soon to unfold, it is tempting to believe that white

whales and other strange manifestations did give warning of things to come.

On New England's Atlantic coast, the English settlements established by Puritans and others were dependent in their early years upon Indian goodwill and Indian trade. It was a dependency that the English from the outset found troublesome and problematic. The Plymouth Colony, founded in 1620 by members of a radical English Separatist congregation previously in exile in Holland, owed its survival to the goodwill of Massasoit and his Pokanoket band. But the assistance and support the Pilgrims received from their Indian neighbors, though often celebrated in later histories, had little effect on their belief that Indians were basically treacherous. To cite but one example of English distrust, the Plymouth leaders insisted that Massasoit's people leave their weapons behind when visiting English settlements and that they not visit unannounced. The Pilgrims, however, always remained fully armed in the presence of Indians. Edward Winslow related that one sachem, skeptical of English intentions, asked, if the newcomers did indeed bear Indians the great love they professed, "how cometh it to pass that when we come . . . you stand upon your guard, with the mouths of your pieces presented to us?" Told such military displays were a sign of respect, the sachem declared that "he liked not such salutations."⁸⁹

Plymouth took to heart Captain John Smith's advice about the necessity of intimidating "savages." In 1623, after hearing rumors that Massachusetts tribesmen living near a rival English trading colony at Wessagussett were organizing an anti-English uprising, Miles Standish and a small party of armed men killed eight suspects, decapitated their leader, the sachem Wituwamet, and stuck his head on a post on top of the Plymouth blockhouse as a "warning and terror" to other Indians. The Wessagussett traders, deemed incompetent to deal properly with the Massachusetts because "they feared not the Indians, but suffered them to lodge with them," were forced to disband. They were offered sanctuary, which most declined, at Plymouth.⁹⁰

The Anglican trader Thomas Morton reported that the Indians were indeed impressed by Standish's ruthlessness and thereafter called the English "Wotowequenage, which in their language signifies stabbers or Cutthroats." Plymouth's willingness to use extreme measures to guarantee its security against the dangers believed to be lurking in the wilder-

ness led also to the arrest and exile of Morton, who was accused of furnishing guns and powder to Indian men and of fornicating with their women. Governor Bradford complained that Morton and his followers at Merrymount "set up a maypole, inviting the Indian women for their consorts, drinking and dancing about it like so many fairies."⁹¹ Plymouth's leaders were offended by both the Wessagussett men, who had not been able to overawe the local Indians, and by Morton, "whose interracial cavorting threatened to fracture a cultural and moral barrier."⁹² Wessagussett's weakness, as they saw it, threatened the physical security of Englishmen in New England, but Morton's behavior posed a spiritual danger to them as well. The fact that both were rivals in the Indian trade reinforced the conviction that neither could be tolerated.

The handful of English settlements established in the 1620s remained sparsely populated throughout the decade. Only with the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by more prosperous nonseparating Congregationalist Puritans in 1630 did eastern New England witness a substantial influx of the people Morton's Indian friends called the "Wotowequenage . . . or Cutthroats." The founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had planted their towns and fields in a coastal region largely depopulated by the great plague of 1616-19. It has been estimated that the 3,000 English settlers who poured into the colony between 1630 and 1633 outnumbered the surviving Native Americans in the immediate vicinity by more than fifteen to one. By 1638 the English population exceeded 11,000. After the arrival of the Puritans, the local Indians suffered from periodic recurrences of mortality from diseases of European origin. In early March 1631 John Pond, a young resident of the Bay Colony, wrote to his father in England that "here are but few eingeines [Indians], and a great sort of them died this winter. It was thought it was of the plague." The local inhabitants were little threat to the English. They were impressed not only by the noise and destructiveness of English weaponry but also by the newcomers' immunity to the diseases that ravaged the Indians. Shortly after the founding of Plymouth, Squanto had warned a local sachem that the English "had hid the plague under ground . . . if he should give any offense to the English party, they would let out the plague to destroy the all." The sachem was thereby "kept . . . in great awe." The leaders of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies made no such claim, explaining that God alone controlled the plague. But the objective of their policy, and Squanto's, was the same: to

keep the local inhabitants "in great awe." The methods employed ranged from conducting military drills near Indian villages to the dispatching of armed men to disperse suspicious Indian gatherings. The Indians of the region proved to be quite "tractable." But as trading partners they were disappointing. John Pond's remark, in his letter to his father, that "whereas we did expect a great store of beaver, here is little or none to be had," is amply confirmed in the records of both colonies. Impelled to seek new sources of peltry and interested also in the acquisition of new lands for cultivation to the west, the English in New England would soon encounter native peoples more numerous and less tractable than the handful of demoralized plague survivors they had so easily intimidated during the early years of their venture.⁹³