PSYCHOLOGICAL CONQUEST: PILGRIMS, INDIANS AND THE PLAGUE OF
1616-1618

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By
Alyson J. Fink

Thesis Committee:
Richard C. Rath, Chairperson
Marcus Daniel
Margot A. Henriksen
Richard L. Rapson
We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

THESIS COMMITTEE

[Signatures]

Chairperson

[Signatures]

Margaret Hamilton

[Signatures]

Richard L. Rogers
ABSTRACT

In New England effects of the plague of 1616 to 1618 were felt by the Wampanoags, Massachusetts and Nausets on Cape Cod. On the other hand, the Narragansetts were not afflicted by the same plague. Thus they are a strong exemplar of how an Indian nation, not affected by disease and the psychological implications of it, reacted to settlement. This example, when contrasted with that of the Wampanoags and Massachusetts proves that one nation with no experience of death caused by disease reacted aggressively towards other nations and the Pilgrims, while nations fearful after the epidemic reacted amicably towards the Pilgrims. Therefore showing that the plague produced short-term rates of population decline which then caused significant psychological effects to develop and shape human interaction.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................... iii

List of Tables ........................................................................................ v

List of Figures ...................................................................................... vi

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Before the Plague of 1616 .............................................. 11

Chapter 3: The Plague of 1616-1618 ................................................. 25

Chapter 4: After 1620 ..................................................................... 37

Chapter 5: Divine Providence ............................................................ 45

Chapter 6: Indian Political Affairs after the Plague of 1616 .......... 63

Chapter 7: Conclusion ..................................................................... 75

Bibliography ..................................................................................... 79
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Estimates of Pre-contact Native Populations by Twentieth Century Historians</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. First Encounter Beach Monument</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Indians of New England: Outbreak of the Plague of 1616-1618</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Samoset Road</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Massasoit Road</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Many have died of diseases we have no name for." – Little Wolf (Cheyenne)

Alone in the woods of Great Island in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, sits the tomb of an unknown sixteenth-century Wampanoag woman. Her grave was placed there in 1976 by members of the Wampanoag Nation and the Wellfleet Historical Society. To some she may represent the Indians who once lost their lives to European settlers but now rest in peace. Not far from this grave, high on a sand dune in Eastham, Massachusetts, is a commemorative plaque. Commissioned in 1920, the plaque pays tribute to the men of the Mayflower. It reads “on this spot hostile Indians had their first encounter December 8, 1820 with Miles Standish, John Carver, William Bradford,” (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. First Encounter Beach Monument. Photo November 2007.

The location, today a crowded tourist destination known as First Encounter Beach, is remembered as the starting point of the Pilgrim struggle to make it in the Americas against the hardships of the land and the “hostile” people who inhabited it. The plaque honoring this “first encounter” is not exactly accurate. Not only had these two groups been in contact since the turn of the seventeenth century but the subsequent contact between the Wampanoag Indians and Pilgrims was anything but hostile.

Historians such as Alden Vaughan and James Axtell have asserted that American history textbooks and American historians in general have neglected the positive interaction and influence between the early colonists and the natives who inhabited Massachusetts. A popular historical approach concentrates on Native American resistance, yet it is true that much of the interaction between the two groups was, in fact, more congenial. Without a doubt, the Indians of the Massachusetts Bay area influenced many of the decisions made by the Mayflower colonists. Important, though, are the motivating factors for this affirmative behavior.

What historians have touched on, but not focused on, is the role of an epidemic, known simply as the “plague” which occurred between 1616-1618, on these early relations between the Pilgrims and Indians. My contention is that this plague motivated the affirmative relations between Indians and Pilgrims. In general, when speaking of Indians and diseases, malnutrition and environmental factors are often at the center of

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According to this line of thinking, the settlement of the Americas was not a military but a biological conquest. The plague produced short-term rates of population decline. This in turn caused a significant psychological effect, one based on fear, to develop, which significantly shaped the interaction of the Indians and Pilgrims.

Historians need to consider more deeply how disease has affected human affairs in history. Historian Jared Diamond made this imperative clear: “Because diseases have been the biggest killers of people, they have also been decisive shapers of history.” At present, scholars cannot ignore either the social factors that created disease outbreaks or the consequences of them. This is especially significant in indigenous studies in the Americas, where there have been as many as ninety-three epidemics since European contact. William McNeil claims that historians have not yet considered the effects of an outbreak of a mysterious disease on a population, as opposed to more familiar disease outbreaks. Therefore, studies concerning colonist-Indian relations should, according to McNeil, include analyses of diseases and the effects of epidemics on human interaction. Since he wrote his seminal study of Plagues and Peoples (1989), studies of this nature have been done pertaining to colonial history and Native American history alike, yet, a similar study has not significantly addressed the context of the plague of 1616 and colonist-Indian relations.

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8 Russell Thornton, American Indian Holocaust Survival, 45.
9 McNeil, Plagues and Peoples, 22.
McNeil believes historians in general have overlooked the notion of “Divine Providence” when explaining events such as disease. Concerning the plague of 1616-1618, it is essential to know how notions of “God’s Will” played into the discourse between the two groups after the plague. How did the plague, which occurred in the four years before the Pilgrim landing, lay the foundation for amicable relations if indeed such relations existed? Did the plague alter inter-tribal Indian relations and, if so, how did this affect Indian-colonist relations? How long were the effects of the plague felt in terms of Indian and settler relations?

David S. Jones calls on historians to consider disease and other such complexities into their studies. Historians must acknowledge “the ways in which multiple factors, especially social forces and human agency, shaped the epidemics of encounter and colonization.” Disease dominates Pilgrim accounts of colonization and therefore plays a major role in the colonizing process.

Power and the subsequent opportunity and struggle to gain and maintain it, is one theme in this study. Without the incident of the Indian plague of 1616-1618, the European colonists’ acquisition of the lands of New England would have been a much longer and more difficult task. Leading New England colonial ethnohistorian Neal Salisbury argues that he aims to see how historical experiences shaped the “composition, the culture, and the actions of each group, Indian as well as English, making each what it was at the time of its contact with the other.” Historical methodology is indeed

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important; this study will also look at pre-settlement contacts to understand how these relations may have shaped those at the time of settlement.

This study is as concerned with the discourse that resulted from these events as with the events themselves. The discourse concerning the plague, and specifically its origins, greatly affected the relationships between the Indians and colonists. Both groups wondered where the disease came from and then based their actions and behavior on their conclusions. This discourse is difficult to study because it is recorded in documents shaped by Europeans, from their perspective and not that of the Indians. Yet it is possible to determine that Indians began to act as agents of their interactions by intentionally being amicable toward the Pilgrims for fear of the plague (see chapter five).

Many sources document the exploratory voyages and then the first years of settlement in New England. On the other hand, there is little direct evidence available from the New England Indians because of the epidemic. Fortunately, it was common practice for colonists to keep records on Indians. Being a topic of national interest in Europe, these accounts commenced with the first celebrated explorers of coastal North America.

Popular American education and culture have led many Americans to believe that it was the Pilgrims who first encountered the Indians of Cape Cod in 1620, as memorialized on the plaque in Eastham on First Encounter Beach. Contrary, scholars have known that for more than a century before the Pilgrims landed, the English, Dutch, French, and other Europeans had fished in the waters of Massachusetts Bay. The first

group that can be identified as “Pilgrims” came in 1597, but did not stay.\footnote{David Quinn, “The First Real Pilgrims,” \textit{William and Mary Quarterly} 23, no. 3 (July 1966): 359.} With these early traders, explorers, and would-be settlers came European disease.

Explorer and founder of the Virginia settlement in 1607, Captain John Smith traveled to New England in 1614 on a scouting trip. He hoped later to settle the area of New England. Although Smith only visited New England briefly, six years before the Pilgrims, his accounts of the region are extensive.\footnote{His book, \textit{A Description of New England} was first published in London 1616. In 1620, he wrote \textit{New England Trials}. In 1630, \textit{The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captain John Smith} was published. Smith’s \textit{Advertisement for the Inexperienced Planters of New England or the Pathway to Experience to Erect a Plantation} was published in London in 1631.} This allows scholars to compare the interaction and behavior of the Indians and Smith’s men before the plague with what happened after the plague.

Thomas Dermer, an agent of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, the founder of Maine and principal deed holder of Plymouth Colony, was an explorer and resident of Plymouth. He explored the coast of New England in 1619 and 1620, and he is said to be the only European to have documented the plague.\footnote{Sherburne F. Cook, \textit{The Indian Population of New England in the 17th Century} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 30.} Dermer is also mentioned often in accounts by other European authors.

William Bradford, the first governor of Plymouth Plantation, wrote a history of the colony called \textit{Of Plymouth Plantation}. His account primarily covers the settlers’ interactions with the neighboring Indian tribes, the closest being the Pokanokets, today known as the Wampanoags, and their other neighbors to the north, the Massachusetts.
Ethnohistorian Kathleen Joan Bragdon considers the work of Plymouth Governor Edward Winslow to be highly valuable. His account, *Good Newes from New England: A true relation of things very remarkable at the Plantation of Plimouth in New England*, was first published in 1624. The political and social interactions of 1622 and 1623 between the Wampanoags, Massachusetts, Narragansetts and Plymouth colony are carefully recorded by Winslow. His account is considered sympathetic but on the other hand it also aims to justify the settlement and missionary work. Winslow claimed that his account was “penned….chiefly for the satisfaction of my private friends; but since that time have been persuaded to publish the same.” Therefore, his motives are different from that of John Smith and others, who wrote with the goal of being published. It is strongly speculated that Winslow and Bradford also wrote *Mourt’s Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*. The editor refers to this book as a “well written story of adventure.”

*New English Canaan*, written in 1637 by Thomas Morton, recounts the arrival of the Puritans and their interactions with Native Americans. Thomas Morton was an “Anti-Puritan Trader.” Morton had an alternative vision of what society should be in New England, and he therefore broke away from the Puritans and formed his own settlement at Merrymount. His vision included a measure of equality with the Indians. Most

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Pilgrims and Puritans believed they were better than the Indians; hence, Morton is known for being anti-Puritan. He does, however, give some account of the plague. His perspective on God's Will substantiates other perspectives. Morton's account thus shows the validity of this argument because his bias differs from that of the other sources, yet it maintains a similar perspective on Indian and colonist relations.

This study of Indian and Pilgrim relations is specifically built around the effects of disease on notions about God's Will and it examines how these principles transformed interactions. It is essential, then, that I base my work on examples of European-Indian interactions before 1616. This should provide insights into how the disease changed the pattern of interaction thereafter. I hope to contribute to the field a perspective based on biological events and their effects on human interaction. Within this work I aim to offer a contrasting perspective on colonist-Indian interaction between nations affected by the plague of 1616 and those not. Secondly, I intend to draw attention to the psychological consequences of this virgin soil epidemic, "the plague," and the manifestation of fear in beliefs about Divine Providence.

Chapter two, "Before the Plague of 1616," attempts to give examples of detrimental interactions between explorers, early settlers and traders, and the Indians of the East Coast. To illustrate a pattern of hostile interactions, I draw evidence from Jamestown as well as from the earliest voyages to New England. This chapter also attempts to piece together Indian views and beliefs about the European God and their reaction to his people, the Pilgrims. Lastly, it will also address the historiographical debate over Indian populations in North America before contact. This is imperative for

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27 This is what McNeil claims is lacking in the field. Since 1989, there has been no major work that addresses this particular epidemic or its effects on Indian-colonist relations.
understanding the perspective of the Indians and the psychological effect of virgin soil epidemics.

Chapter three, “The Plague of 1616-1618,” concerns the origins and strain of disease that took its toll on the Indians of New England. This chapter also discusses the impact and psychological magnitude of virgin soil epidemics. Chapter four, “After 1620, Observations by the People of Plymouth,” recounts the arrival of the Mayflower Pilgrims and Squanto’s role at Plymouth Plantation. His role is helpful and significant in understanding political relations and Indian perspective on the plague. Chapter five, “Divine Providence,” will dig deep into primary works and attempt to understand Pilgrim and Indian viewpoints on the epidemic and the spiritual world.

“Indian Political Affairs after the Plague of 1616,” chapter six, discusses the effects of the disease on Indian relations. I examine how indigenous nations not affected by the epidemic, specifically the Narragansetts, interacted with the Pilgrims and the Indian groups decimated by disease. This dynamic further illustrates how drastically the disease altered the course of relations between the settlers and the neighboring Indians and ultimately the development of a sustainable settlement at Plymouth.

The significance of the epidemic is historic; it not only destroyed all but ten percent of the nearly twenty-thousand Native Americans in the Massachusetts Bay area, but it also shaped the way the Indians received the settlers of 1620.28 After all, the

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European settlement of America was not really a settlement but a resettlement of native lands lost to an epidemic.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29} Francis Jennings, \textit{The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 30.
Chapter 2

Before the Plague of 1616

Historians have deduced that Native Americans were in excellent health before the arrival of Europeans. McNeil attributes this to their isolation from "disease pools" because of their location and climate: they proved therefore "highly vulnerable to Old World infections" once those infections appeared. Indian societies in New England were "remarkably healthy" and peaceful. Furthermore, warfare between groups rarely ended in death. Since they were relatively benign, Indian societies stayed stable. It is estimated that the Massachusetts Coast population alone may have been reduced between seventy-five to ninety-percent by pre-settlement epidemics (see Table 1). The psychological impact of the epidemics on surviving Native Americans was massive regardless of the differing estimates of deaths.

30 McNeil, Plagues and Peoples, 147.
31 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 7.
Table 1. Estimates of Pre-contact Native Populations by Twentieth-Century Historians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Thornton</th>
<th>Henige</th>
<th>Dobyns</th>
<th>Kroeber</th>
<th>Mooney</th>
<th>Cook and Borah</th>
<th>Salisbury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Hemisphere</td>
<td>72+ Million</td>
<td>112.5 Million</td>
<td>8.4 Million</td>
<td>100 Million</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>7 Million</td>
<td>18 Million</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>1.148 Million</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36,500</td>
<td>71,900</td>
<td>126,000 - 144,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2+ Million</td>
<td></td>
<td>720,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Ethnohistorians use archaeological and anthropological evidence to construct population estimates. Shown in Table 1 are twentieth-century historian's estimates of indigenous populations for the different regions of the western hemisphere in 1492. The most contentious debates arise over the population of North America. Essentially, the debate is broken into two categories of estimators, the high counters and the low counters.

In 1928, using primary sources, James Mooney wrote an essay on the aboriginal population of North America for the Smithsonian. Mooney’s estimates for the land North of Mexico was 1.153 million. Ten years later, his notes were used by Alfred L. Kroeber, who published the most influential population estimates for North America. Kroeber felt that the early estimates offered by settlers like Smith, Gookin, and Mather were exaggerated and therefore needed to be reduced by modern historians. In 1939, Kroeber indiscriminately decreased Mooney’s estimates to 900,000. This estimate was backed by the Smithsonian and widely accepted by scholars for generations. His estimate later became the cornerstone in a great academic debate. Mooney’s invariably low estimate put the population of New England around 25,000. Mooney counted the minimum population; he admitted his estimates were low. Even so, most twentieth-century historians were guided by Mooney’s and Kroeber’s figures, until a group of high counters emerged from the mid-twentieth century to the 1980s. This movement was

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37 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 22.  
38 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 22.
kicked off by Sherburne Cook in 1943. This led to a wide range of population estimates. For example, the population of New England alone varied with estimates ranging as high as 126,000 and as low as 14,000 for the low counters. Today, "Mooney's figures can no longer be considered reliable." The high and low counters still debate; for example, Russell Thornton estimated the population of North America between seven and nine million in 1987 and a year later Douglas Ubelaker estimated it at 1.894 million.

The high counters argued that the low counters based their estimates on European observations but did not consider the effect of diseases that preceded settlement. Concentrating on estimates for California, Sherburne F. Cook attacked the low counters, and specifically Kroeber. Throughout the 1950s, he launched a new school of scholars who raised the Native American population estimates for North America.

Demographer Henry F. Dobyns' 1966 article in *Current Anthropology* furthered skepticism about the low counters. This was at a time when, he claimed, "relatively little serious study has been directed" to Old World pathogens. Dobyns asserted that waves of disease coursed through North and South America. He estimated that most of the Indians were killed by pestilence before explorers and colonists even had a chance to

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39 Daniels, "The Indian Population," 312.
43 Daniels, "The Indian Population," 306.
count them.46 Therefore, he argued, the low counted count too late, after epidemics had already hit.

In general, archaeologists have at least been able to narrow the Indian population of North America to somewhere between two and twelve million, leaving many ambiguities.47 Dobyns estimates that the population of North America was much higher, at 18 million.48 Since Dobyns' book, there have been a variety of speculations on pre-contact populations. Ethnohistorians have contested pre-contact population numbers, as well as death estimates; dying off estimates range from between seven to one-hundred million.49 Pre-contact and post-contact population die-off ratios range between 2:1 and 50:1.50 “The introduction of new, lethal diseases could affect the native population by reducing the birth rate or increasing the death rate, or both.”51 Jared Diamond, one of the most recent scholars to speculate on pre-contact populations, believes that there were as few as twenty million Indians in the New World, ninety-five percent of whom were killed by disease.52 In New England, Cook estimates from primary sources, such as those written by John Smith and William Bradford, that mortality varied from eighty-eight percent to as high as one-hundred percent in some areas.53

Any research on the topic of pre-contact North American population statistics shows that opinions vary and consensus is sporadic in the academic community. In fact,

51 Cook, “The Significance of Disease,” 495.
52 Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel, 211. Diamond does not specify what in his opinion the “New World” encompasses but it is safe to assume from the rest of text that it is all of North and South America.
53 Cook, “The Significance of Disease,” 497.
many have made their careers disputing arguments made by men such as Mooney and Dobyns. The great disparity in calculations is not a secret in the academic community and indeed there is much discussion of the high counters versus the low counters. One historian who tends to follow the Mooney and Kroeber model is David Henige, a low counter not included in Table 1. In 1998, Henige wrote *Numbers from Nowhere*, in which he takes extensive measures to disprove previous high estimates. Yet, Henige shies away from giving any estimates himself. In *Numbers from Nowhere*, he disputes academic claims of pre-contact statistics. He criticizes his predecessors, Dobyns and Crosby, for inaccurately calculating populations from unreliable primary sources. He says that their estimates are based on creating a population density as a means of cross checking and criticizes the importance that Dobyns places on disease. In spite of Henige's opinion, disease cannot be ignored.

When the Pilgrims arrived in Cape Cod Bay in 1620, Europeans were hardly strangers to the Indians of New England. Twentieth-century Cape Codder and local historian, W. Sears Nickerson, speculated that “every voyager from Lief the lucky down to Gosnold, Champlain, Captain John Smith, and even the Mayflower as she turned back from the dangerous shoals off Monomoyick must have been seen by every [warrior, woman,] and papoose.” In the late sixteenth century, European fishing fleets often traveled to America to hunt cod, herring and haddock. Northeastern North America was explored around 1600, and settlements arose in Nova Scotia in 1604, Quebec in 1608,

55 Henige, *Numbers from Nowhere*, 70-73.
Fort Nassau in 1614, New Amsterdam in 1623 and Plymouth in 1620. In 1602 and 1603, Barholomew Gosnold and Martin Pring respectively, explored Cape Cod and the surrounding region and encountered “stiff resistance.” George Weymouth wrote about Wampanoag whaling traditions in 1605. By the seventeenth century, French fisherman dominated the North Atlantic. Pre-settlement voyages of this kind did lead to encounters between the Indians and Europeans, but since fisherman were not interested in the land they did not pay much attention to the people who inhabited it. Meanwhile, in 1587, two Indians were the first brought to England by one of Walter Raleigh’s ships. In July 1605, Captain George Waymouth arrived in England with five American Indian prisoners. Waymouth’s Abenaki captives sparked the interest and curiosity of the English and thus interest in settling New England. These Indians provided valuable interpretive skills and opened many doors to settlement; England chartered the Virginia Company only one year after the arrival of Waymouth’s captives. Previous to this, the first New England settlement attempt was made by the English in 1607 in Maine; Indian hostility sent those colonists home only one year later. In the same manner as some Spanish and French explorers, the English seemed to think that the Indians would automatically be aware of their own “moral and spiritual inferiority to Europeans” and thus claim the Christian God

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60 Lombardo, Images of Wellfleet, 13.
61 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 3-4.
63 Vaughan, Transatlantic Encounters, 63.
as their own. This was not the case in Maine in 1607, but as circumstances shifted with the onset of disease, non-aggressive Indians became a reality to the south of Maine.

English precedents of kidnapping and aggression towards the Indians of Massachusetts Bay caused the Indians to dislike the English and likewise other Europeans. Champlain traveled to Cape Cod in 1606. At that time it is speculated that the population for the entire region might have been as high as 144,000. During this exploratory voyage along the coast, Champlain had disagreeable encounters with the populous Wampanoags and Nausets of Cape Cod. One of these conflicts took place at the entrance to Nauset Harbor, near what is now the town of Orleans, Massachusetts. There, French explorers posted a cross. In response, the regional Indians removed the cross and later attacked five French sailors on land; one Frenchman died and was buried. Briefly after, to the horror of Champlain, the Indians came, dug up the body and mocked the French, "taking sand in their two hands and casting it between their buttocks, yelping the while like wolves." This is one example of pre-settlement inhospitable behavior between Europeans and Indians. Consequently, the French did not settle the area. They did, however, spend enough time in Massachusetts Bay to make a strong impression on the community there. John Smith states that the French were on the "Isles of Mattahunts" for "neere sixe weekes, [and] left nothing for us to take occasion to

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66 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 29.
67 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 30.
69 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 63.
examine the inhabitants relations, viz. if there be neere three thousand people upon these
Iles...”70

Before the plague of 1616, numerous geographically separated groups of Indians were already fearful of the Europeans, and as a consequence they reacted with hostility to Europeans. After the plague epidemic ravished the area, their fear of the settlers continued but their behavior drastically changed; they acted more amicably toward the Pilgrims.

Although far from New England, the Roanoke settlement demonstrated the effect disease outbreaks can have on settler-Indian relations. Thomas Hariot wrote about relations between Roanoke and the Wiroan Indians. Hariot confirms that the Indians in Virginia blamed a Christian God for the diseases.71 In his remarks, he explores the seemingly peculiar reverence the natives had for the colonists. Hariot said that the Indians “were perswaded that it was the worke of our God through out means, and that wee by him might kil and slaie whom wee would without weapons and not come near them.”72 In this case the Indians did abandon the Virginia colony, and in their brief efforts not to anger the colonists (or their God), the Indians tried to please them.

According to Hariot, the Indians of Virginia believed that the air was filled with (English) spirits that shot “invisible bullets” which made them sick.73 In their encounters Hariot states that the Indians respected the colonists and wanted to learn about their

70 Captain John Smith, 1616 quoted in Cook, *The Indian Population of New England*, 29. Mattahunt today is called Nahant in Essex County, Massachusetts. It is not an island, rather it is a peninsula into the Massachusetts Bay.
religion. One Sachem accepted the religion of the settlers or at least parts of it and this provided one example of the amicable relationship. When Wingina was ill, he asked them to pray for him; Harlot soon after declared that his prayers healed Wingina. In general, “at least some natives accepted European interpretations of the waves of disease as God’s punishment for willful sinners.” Captain John Smith recounts Thomas Harlot’s stay in Roanoke:

And this disease was so strange, they neither knew what it was, nor how to cure it; nor had they knowne the like time out of minde; a thing specially observed by us, as also by themselves, in so much that some of them who were our friends, especially Wingina... And thereupon, when they had any understanding, that any of their enemies abused us in our Journeyes, they would intreat us, we would be a meanes to our God, that they, as the others that had dealt ill with us, might dye in like sort: although we shewed them their requests were ungodly.

Smith’s account demonstrates that some Indians sought to get disease, in a spiritual sense, on their side, to use against their enemies. Since most Indians were in excellent health before contact with Europeans began, this is a significant ideology. The coinciding of the first onsets of catastrophic diseases and the appearance of white skinned strangers must have caused great distress among the Indians. In some cases the Indians believed that disease was not on their side and in other cases the Indians believed that the white man’s God had caused sickness. For example one English account, although with bias, says “they say this plague upon them thus sore fell, It was because they pleas’d not Tantum well.” Tantum was the God of the Penobscotes.

76 Plane, Colonial Intimacies, 46.
77 Smith, The Complete Works, 80.
78 Stannard, American Holocaust, 53
79 Smith, The Complete Works, 441.
In New England, Captain John Smith’s account shows the opposite pattern from Roanoke because, at the time of Smith’s visit, no plague had affected the Indians, whereas in Roanoke, diseases had already affected the interaction between the two groups. When reading the works of Smith it is important to keep in mind that his writing was well read in England and much of it served as an advertisement for prospective investors and immigrants. By 1618, Smith had asked to start his own colony in New England, so his story of New England is skewed by his personal motives as a writer of history and as an entrepreneur. Nevertheless, his writing does show a negative pattern of interaction and aggression in the years preceding the plague.

In 1614, Smith reported seeing thirty villages along the Merrimack River; this has been confirmed by modern archeologists. At this time he recorded no unusual illnesses among the Indians. Smith and his crew had three small skirmishes with the natives when he visited in 1614. As a result, Smith estimated that when New England was settled he would need an armed force of thirty to forty men to protect a colony of three hundred colonists from the Indians. “In Smith’s eyes, Indian resistance to colonization originated in previous abuses suffered at European hands.”

Smith’s 1614 trip was his last visit to the region, but he did leave some of his men behind under the leadership of Thomas Hunt. Hunt caused the most damage to English and Indian relations in New England. After Smith’s departure, Hunt went to Patuxet and

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captured twenty men, including Squanto.\textsuperscript{85} Without a doubt, the Indians of Patuxet
must have viewed the English as an enemy after both Smith's visit and Hunt's
kidnapping. "Hunt's actions indelibly marked the English as an enemy of the New
England natives."\textsuperscript{86} How then could the Indians alter from taking a destructive path with
the English to adopting a partnership only six years later? If it were not for the "blessed"
plague, Thomas Hunt's actions and the consequent development of anti-English
sentiment might have caused settlement to be unsuccessful.

The Indians of Roanoke believed the sickness that ravished their communities
was caused by Europeans; by the early seventeenth century, this conviction had traveled
up the coast and was adopted by the Indians of New England. Moreover, the fact that few
white men had died of this disease was especially significant when compared to the
considerable Indian casualties from the plague of 1616-1618.\textsuperscript{87} Of the plague Bradford
says "by the marvelous goodness and providence of God, not one of the English was so
much sick or in the least measure taunted with this disease."\textsuperscript{88} The disease was not
"apparently capable of contagion to the English who were exposed to it."\textsuperscript{89} A disease that
only killed the Indians, and no Europeans, as also in the case of Hernan Cortez in
Mexico, must have caused psychological effects on both populations.\textsuperscript{90} It made sense,
then, that the Indians believed the Pilgrims had disease on their side and could
manipulate the disease against them. Relations between the two groups would be shaped
by this belief: that the white man could make the disease come and go as he pleased. The

\textsuperscript{85} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 101.
\textsuperscript{86} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 101.
\textsuperscript{87} "Thomas Hariot Forecasts," 15.
\textsuperscript{88} William Bradford, \textit{Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647}, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (Franklin Center: The
Franklin Library, 1983), 254.
\textsuperscript{89} Packard, \textit{History of Medicine in the United States}, 67
\textsuperscript{90} McNeil, \textit{Plagues and Peoples}, 20.
Indians felt they had to get along with the first settlers because they wanted to keep peace and balance in their world.\textsuperscript{91} From the Pilgrim records, it is evident that the Pilgrims were aware of Indian beliefs about plague, and knowledge of this belief provided the colonists with an advantage in Indian-settler relations.

Hariot also reported his awe with God’s punishment of the Indians; the diseases “miraculously” were patterned only among the Indians, surely a sign of His providence.\textsuperscript{92} Thomas Hariot’s perspective is worthy of note; he and others believed that the Indians fell sick because they had cursed or carried out black magic against the colonists. Hariot wrote, “There was no town where we had any subtle device practiced against us, we leaving it unpunished or not revenged...that within a few days after our departure from every such town, the people began to die very fast.”\textsuperscript{93}

The question must have been asked by both Indians and English alike: why were so many Indians killed by these diseases when there was little evidence of any significant European mortality in either Virginia or New England? William Bradford said that the Indians took notice of this discrepancy.\textsuperscript{94} Pre-colonial records of Indian guesswork as to the causes of their increased mortality are very limited. Yet, it is known that Indians generally did not believe that a sickness could be given to another person.\textsuperscript{95} The Indians believed that since no European died of this disease it must have been controlled or caused by them.\textsuperscript{96} Indian beliefs manifested in fear. This idea alone significantly shaped

\textsuperscript{91} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 11.
\textsuperscript{92} Stannard, \textit{American Holocaust}, 237.
\textsuperscript{93} "Thomas Hariot Forecasts," 15.
\textsuperscript{94} Bradford, \textit{Of Plymouth Plantation}, 255.
\textsuperscript{95} Stannard, \textit{American Holocaust}, 53.
\textsuperscript{96} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 102.
colonial relations. By 1620, the evidence shows that these relations took a drastic turn from common aggression to hospitality.

From 1608 on, English colonizers traveled up and down the coast from Maine to Cape Cod, but by 1614 they still had not been able to cement control of land or Indian loyalty in New England. 97 "English prospects in the summer of 1614 looked hardly more promising than they had at the turn of the century." 98 The onslaught of plague changed English luck and proved catastrophic for the Indians of New England. By the time the Pilgrims landed in Cape Cod in 1620, most Indians in this region were ready to please these strangers rather than anger them into casting sickness upon them. It is here that it is important to acknowledge the importance of timing. If settlement had not occurred in the immediate aftermath of a disease epidemic, when the Indians were weak and in the minority, it is not as likely that the New England settlers would have been successful in their quest to take over Massachusetts Bay. The epidemic of 1616 was therefore a crucial prerequisite to settlement. 99

97 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 96.
98 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 96.
99 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 12.
Chapter 3
The Plague of 1616-1618

The plague took its toll between 1616 and 1618, although occasionally historians extend its influence late into 1619. It especially affected the Indian villages in lower New England, specifically those in the Massachusetts Bay area. (See Figure 2 for a map of the Indians living in this region and those afflicted with the plague.) Perhaps tens of thousands of Indians died from this mysterious illness, simply referred to as “the plague.”

Given the evidence of a disastrous plague in the years between 1616 and 1618, and considering that it was the first Indian plague on record for the seventeenth century, the plague’s significance in the scope of early New England history is pertinent to this study. In order to have a clear understanding of how the disease was perceived by colonists and Native Americans alike it is important to understand the current historiographical argument surrounding disease transmissions between Europeans and American Indians and the diagnosis of this mysterious disease of 1616.

101 Thornton, American Indian Holocaust and Survival, 71
Figure 2. Indians of New England: Outbreak of the Plague of 1616-1618

Understanding the magnitude of the epidemics on Indian populations in the Americas has been hard both for contemporaries at the time of disease and historians today. Today the term “virgin soil” epidemic is commonly used by scholars to describe an outbreak of disease which effects a population with no previous contact with the disease.\textsuperscript{102} The term was coined in the 1970s by Alfred W. Crosby.\textsuperscript{103} Along with William McNeil, these two historians defined an approach that historians have relied on since to analyze disease and immunity among Native Americans. Disease became a mechanism to explain racial differences. According to some, in pre-contact times a rather disease-free environment led to copious Indian populations throughout the Americas.\textsuperscript{104} Then European contact, first in the fifteenth century, brought great waves of death to the Americas. “Throughout the Americas, diseases introduced with Europeans spread from nation to nation far in advance of the Europeans themselves, killing an estimated 95 percent of the pre-Columbian Native American population.”\textsuperscript{105}

Being isolated from Europeans for tens of thousands of years caused AmerIndians to lack immunities developed in the eastern hemisphere. Jared Diamond’s path-breaking book, \textit{Guns, Germs and Steel}, has been controversial for its conclusions concerning why native societies of the Americas were so easily defeated by Europeans, and not the other way around. His theory is based on the idea that European diseases stemmed from the

\textsuperscript{102} Jones, “Virgin Soils Revisited,” 703.
\textsuperscript{103} For more on Virgin Soil Epidemics see Crosby, Alfred W, “Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America,” \textit{William and Mary Quarterly} 3, no. 33 (1976), 289-299.
\textsuperscript{105} Diamond, \textit{Guns, Germs and Steel},78.
diseases of herd animals they domesticated. After hundreds of years of exposure to the diseases, Europeans built up immunity to them yet still transported them; these germs were carried by explorers advancing ahead of European colonists. The New England plague of 1616 is a prime example of a disease that preceded settlement. One theory is that it emerged from the south. An unknown epidemic hit from New Spain to Florida in 1612 and lasted until 1619; this same plague is speculated to have traveled north to New England by 1616, preceding colonization in that area by four years. Various Europeans recorded this “wave effect” of diseases traveling up the coast. For instance, in 1613, the bubonic plague was documented from Sinaloa, Mexico to the Chesapeake Bay. Another theory states that the plague was brought by European explorers and traders prior to the colonization of New England. In 1497, the Cabots were exploring off eastern Canada and New England; they were followed by many other Europeans throughout the sixteen and early seventeen centuries. By 1614, trading was taking place between the Mohegans and Quinnipiac of Southern New England, the Wampanoags of Cape Cod, and the Dutch. The plague and trade with Europeans occurred at the same time. Consequently, the area from Florida to New England has been referred to as “one large epidemic region.”

Regardless of uncertain statistics, no scholar disputes that mortality came on quickly and mercilessly. The sixteenth century witnessed the aggressive conquest of South
America by the conquistadors. When the Spanish arrived in Peru they found that the Inca lands had already been hit by epidemics, carried by neighboring Indians who had been visited by earlier explorers.\textsuperscript{113} To the north, in 1614, John Smith found New England a land full of healthy peoples, yet only five years later English explorer Thomas Dermer found it "void."\textsuperscript{114} Thomas Morton wrote that in 1616 a group of French sailors were shipwrecked and captured by the Indians of Massachusetts Bay. These French sailors may have been the conduit of the first epidemic disease to hit New England. Morton wrote "in a short time thereafter, the hand of God fell heavily upon them, with such a mortall stroake, that they died in heaps."\textsuperscript{115}

Evidence discovered by Rhode Island Governor Roger Williams seems to corroborate how the plagues traveled to New England. In 1638, Williams found that the Narragansett elders associated earthquakes with disease; Williams's research on pre contact earthquakes may in actuality be a history of epidemics in Narragansett history.\textsuperscript{116} Williams shows that early epidemics, probably transmitted by English scouts or fishing vessels, had hit the Narragansetts three times in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{117} The plague of 1616 was unique because it was recorded in colonist documents, whereas those of the sixteenth century were recorded in Narragansett oral histories. Dobyns asserts that many first hand witnesses wrote of a plague during the years 1616 through 1618 thus making the plague of 1616 a starting point in understanding colonist's views on the subject.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{113} Diamond, \textit{Guns, Germs and Steel}, 211.
\textsuperscript{114} Jones, "Virgin Soils Revisited," 722.
\textsuperscript{116} Dobyns, \textit{Their Numbers Become Thinned}, 318.
\textsuperscript{117} Dobyns, \textit{Their Numbers Become Thinned}, 318.
\textsuperscript{118} Dobyns, \textit{Their Numbers Become Thinned}, 22.
In the case of the 1616-1618 outbreak, "the plague," remained an unspecified epidemic. In the academic community it is widely acknowledged that an accurate diagnosis of the disease has not been made. Descriptions of the disease have not been sufficient for medical historians to come to a conclusion as to what the disease was. As Europeans explored more of the American shoreline, they exposed coastal Indians to some outbreaks of disease, but nothing as catastrophic as the plague outbreak of 1616.119 Indeed, among all American Indians, influenza, typhus and plague took many lives.120 Moreover, after contact, the Indians of New England suffered smallpox, yellow fever, scarlet fever, bubonic and pneumonic plagues, hepatitis, tuberculosis, whooping cough, pneumonia, measles, and spotted fever.121 Out of these, smallpox was the deadliest disease brought to the New World by the Europeans. There has been debate over the strain of disease that killed most of the Indians living between Cape Cod and Cape Ann between 1616 and 1618.122

In general, colonists recording the diseases they witnessed often categorized them as plagues, fevers, or smallpox, but this offers little help to modern historians.123 Colonist Daniel Gookin recorded the depredation he witnessed. He chronicled the story of Indians who showed him yellow-stained clothing, saying the disease caused victims to exude yellow.124 A letter read for the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1881 claimed the disease was not smallpox but rather yellow fever.125 The argument was based on

119 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 9.
120 Dobyns, Their Numbers Become Thinned, 2.
121 Barrie Kavasch, "Native Foods of New England" in Weinstein, Enduring Traditions, 16.
122 Plane, Colonial Intimacies, 7.
123 Jones, "Virgin Soils Revisited," 722.
125 Packard, History of Medicine in the United States, 68.
studying different Indian words for diseases, consequently showing that the Indian word for plague meant yellowing of the skin. In the *History of Medicine in the United States*, Francis R. Packard states that yellow fever causes yellowing of the skin in victims, yet he says the epidemic of 1616 could not have been yellow fever since the outbreak Gookin described could not be transmitted to the English. Yellow fever surely would have infected the English. In the twentieth century, yellow fever has been ruled out for the reason that the plague in question lasted through winter, which is not possible for a vector-borne pestilence such as yellow fever.

In the sixteen century smallpox became the first Old World disease to penetrate the New World. In 1633, there was a confirmed epidemic of smallpox in New England. In 1634, William Bradford, the famed governor of Plymouth Plantation, described a group of Indians in Connecticut who fell sick with smallpox. Out of nine hundred who fell sick, Bradford said that over half died. Bradford wrote that they “fell sick of the smallpox and died most miserably; for a sorer disease cannot befall them, they fear it more than the plague.” Since Bradford makes a distinction between smallpox and the plague, it can be concluded that the 1616 epidemic may not have been smallpox, but rather another epidemic brought from Europe. Bradford wrote about both epidemics, 1616 and 1633, yet he does not draw comparison between them. Roger Williams of Rhode Island also distinguished Indian knowledge of two separate epidemics, the plague.

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126 Packard, *History of Medicine in the United States*, 69
129 Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust*, 63.
and the pox. In his study of language he lists words that meant sickness in the language of the Narragansetts; he lists the plague and pox separately, as in his translations “he hath the Pox” and “he hath the plague.”

Williams and Bradford confirmed that the Indians knew both diseases separately, thus showing that the smallpox they experienced in 1633, was not the same as the disease outbreak seventeen years earlier.

From the time of Spain’s invasion of Mexico, Europeans had witnessed smallpox’s spread to indigenous populations. The English also knew very well that smallpox was an extremely contagious disease. Yet, there is no evidence that they quarantined themselves from infected individuals. In fact, the evidence suggests the opposite behavior. Sir Ferdinando Gorges reported that an agent working with him, named Vines, slept in a cabin with infected bodies but never felt as little as a head ache from it. If it were smallpox, Vines may well have gotten the disease. Conceivably more notable is that Vines most likely would have been able to identify smallpox and would therefore not have slept in the cabin in the first place. Historian Elizabeth A. Fenn asserts that in the English colonies “smallpox was probably better understood than any infectious disease other than syphilis.” Surely Europeans familiar with a disease and its contagion would not put themselves in the position of falling victim to it. The smallpox claim for 1616 has

132 Cook, “The Significance of Disease,” 488.
133 Roger Williams, A Key into the Language of America; or an Help to the Language of the Natives in that Part of America, called New England, (1643) in Cook, “The Significance of Disease,” 488.
134 Cook, “The Significance of Disease,” 488
135 Fenn, Pox Americana, 29.
137 Packard, History of Medicine, 67.
138 Fenn, Pox Americana, 29.
been invalidated by leading historians, and recent scholarly hypotheses have claimed the disease was the bubonic plague.\footnote{139}

The most convincing evidence shows that the plague of 1616-1618 may have been a form of either bubonic or pneumonic plague.\footnote{140} Bubonic and pneumonic plagues are transmitted by rats and fleas, both of which have been documented in primary sources.\footnote{141} Pneumonic plague could have been transmitted from person to person through the air in winter and the symptoms described could very well be related to these plagues.\footnote{142} "The only first-hand European witnesses whose observations survive, Richard Vines and Thomas Dermer, both referred to the disease simply as "the plague," and the remaining evidence likewise supports the conclusion that the epidemic represented a strain of plague."\footnote{143} Additionally, Edward Johnson described the disease and its victims: "Their Disease being a sore Consumption, sweeping away whole Families, but chiefly young Men and Children, the very seeds of increase."\footnote{144} A 1620 reference to the word consumption is defined as a "consumption of the lungs," further evidence of pneumonic plague.\footnote{145} The argument that the "plague" of 1616 was really a form of pneumonic plague is convincing, although not yet widely accepted in all recent scholarship.\footnote{146}

\footnote{140} Cook, "The Significance of Disease," 489.
\footnote{141} Cook, "The Significance of Disease," 489. Explorers Marc Lescarbot and Samuel Champlain both reported rats exiting their American anchored ships in the early 17th century.
\footnote{142} Cook, "The Significance of Disease," 489.
\footnote{143} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 101.
\footnote{146} Bragdon, \textit{Native People of Southern New England}, 26. Bragdon referred to the 1616 epidemic as "a virgin soil epidemic of unknown origin...referred to as the 'plague.'"
In 1616, French explorer Samuel de Champlain wrote about two villages in Cape Cod; he estimated that each had about six to eight hundred people. In 1620, upon their arrival, the Pilgrims reported seeing bones in villages and fields. They reported that the population had been reduced to fewer than one hundred.¹⁴⁷ This gave justification for the Pilgrim reliance on divine justification for their invasion. If the epidemic, and specifically the deaths caused by it, had not occurred before their arrival, the Pilgrims would not have had such a strong justification for taking the land they “discovered.” Combining the indisputable bout of depopulation with Christian scripture gave form to a strong sense of entitlement among the Pilgrims. (See chapter five.)

When studying disease, historians are confronted with ambiguities. Instead of looking at multiple factors contributing to population decline, many historians have lumped together these uncertain factors and given just one reason as to why Native Americans perished with such massive mortality rates: they lacked immunity to the disease. David S. Jones redefines how historians should look at disease in early American history by showing that scholars need to examine multiple causes for population decline, epidemiological, environmental, and human. Jones envisions the role of malnutrition, drought, famine, war, simultaneous infections, and social and economic chaos as interrelated major factors in population decline of Native Americans.¹⁴⁸ In this case historians seem to have mastered why there was no disease in the pre-contact America but understanding the toll and effect of new diseases is less clear. “Colonialism interacts with

¹⁴⁷ Plane, Colonial Intimacies, 26; Dobyns, Their Numbers Become Thinned, 43.
disease to produce population decline.”

By attributing population decline to such simple terms as saying they had no immunity and therefore perished, historians have ignored a complex set of events and are doing an injustice to their subjects. Jones concludes that “whenever historians describe the depopulation of the Americas that followed European arrival, they should acknowledge the complexity, the subtlety, and the contingency of the process....only then can they do justice to the crucial events of the encounter between Europeans and Americans.”

Accordingly, in this study it is essential to consider what social conditions existed prior to and in the aftermath of the epidemic and to also examine what social ideologies existed in the minds of the colonizers. This approach leads to a greater understanding of the discourse that evolved around the plague and its origins in ideas about “God’s Will.”

Dobyns’ notion of a “large epidemic region,” encompassing the entire east coast, exhibits how disease interrupts social interactions. The disease almost certainly was transmitted through trading activities. Once populations were decimated, this trading and social network was disrupted. Because this transpired before settlement, colonists entered the region at a vulnerable time. Disease affected social patterns in Indian societies. Scholars have studied such effects on the Indians of South America. They found that epidemics were followed by social disruption significantly displayed in reduced fertility because of “reduced fecundity due to the disease or the loss of a

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151 Dobyns, *Their Numbers Become Thinned*, 325.
spouse." Likewise, it should be discovered how this contributed to the relations and discourse between the Pilgrims and Indians in the area most distant from the original Floridian epidemic of 1612. In her book, *Colonial Intimacies*, Anne Marie Plane examines Native American domestic culture using population studies as a means to demonstrate how mortality affected and shaped consciousness. Plane notes that, “perhaps the most enduring, the most lasting effects of colonization were invisible, its effects on how people thought.” In her study she focuses on the fact that the Indians were “survivors of massive and traumatic epidemics,” and she recognizes that she cannot understand their actions without considering this fact. The same can be said about Indian–colonist relations; they cannot be understood without considering the true devastation experienced by the Indians, whose actions were shaped by their experience. It is essential then to examine population figures in order to gain an understanding of the tremendous loss among the Indians of New England. Without understanding this loss, historians cannot begin to understand the psychological element of fear that penetrated each village and influenced Indians’ relations with the colonists. Squanto was a pertinent example of someone who used the psychological effects of disease to manipulate relationships (discussed further in chapter four). Russell Thornton wrote in 1997 that it is necessary to look at how European diseases interact with Native Americans to produce long-term rates of population decline. What needs more attention is how European diseases interacted with Native Americans to produce short-term rates of population decline and therefore significant psychological effects on human interaction.

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154 Plane, *Colonial Intimacies*, 27
Chapter 4

After 1620

Using Champlain's map from 1605 and John Smith's map from 1614 as guides, the Pilgrims landed in what is known today as Provincetown, Cape Cod. In 1620 there were about 102 *Mayflower* settlers. Estimates show that by 1630, after the arrival of the Puritans, there were triple that number. Twenty years later, there were over 18,000 European settlers living in New England. Areas affected by the plague showed the highest European population growth.

The Pilgrims were in search of refuge when they chose New England for their settlement, but they were also involved in the quest for profit by developing the wilderness. The Council for New England divided the land into tracts for the "sole purpose of dividing it up among themselves." Pilgrims would make the land a garden for God. Gorges, official deed holder of Plymouth, said of New England, "when God should be pleased, by our ordinary frequenting that country, to make it appear that it would yield both profit and content."

Although there was a shift in Indian behavior toward the English, initial encounters after the plague were violent; in fact, Dermer died of wounds he received in a

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157 Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 28;
fight with Epenow, a former English captive and Indian of Martha’s Vineyard. Dermer, acting on behalf of Gorges, visited New England with Squanto in 1619. Dermer received a violent welcome by the Indians mainly because they saw the English as an enemy of the French; after the plague, the Indians had initially allied with the French because of one French captive’s prophecy of the epidemic in 1615 (discussed further in chapter five). His prophecy was seen as a “manifestation of French spiritual power to which the Indians had best align themselves.” Being one of the first English to return to New England after the plague, Dermer experienced a great deal of hostility. Back in England, though, Gorges took the accounts of Dermer and Vines as signs of “weakness of the surviving coastal Indians, especially their vulnerability to European microbes and power.” Before his death, Dermer reported to Gorges that New England would be agreeable to settlement for the purpose of the fishing trade. Additionally, New England appeared as if it would provide the best farming to support a colony. Seven months to the day after presenting his petition for the “second colony” in America to the Privy Council, Gorges had the charter for the Council for New England sealed on November 3, 1620.

The Mayflower Pilgrims arrived in Plymouth on December 26, 1620. Before reaching Plymouth, though, they had landed on Cape Cod on November 11th. Of the cape, William Bradford wrote that all they could see was “a hideous and desolate

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161 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 108.
162 Preston, Gorges of Plymouth Fort, 162.
163 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 106.
164 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 108.
165 Preston, Gorges of Plymouth Fort, 164.
166 Preston, Gorges of Plymouth Fort, 168-170.
wilderness full of...wild men." The Indians were perceived as wild and irrational and the colonists as rational. Of them Bradford says, “the cry of the Indians was dreadful” and that “the Indians came skulking about them, and would sometimes show themselves aloof off, but when any approached near them, they would run away.” Bradford predicted they would find mischief in their encounters with the Indians. Bradford had believed he would encounter trouble in New England; surely he based this on the well-known previous encounters of Hariot, Dermer, Gorges, and Smith.

Bradford’s initial judgment of the Indians did not anticipate the Pilgrim’s later reliance on them. Peaceful interactions between the Indians and the Mayflower Pilgrims did not initially happen on Cape Cod. The first expeditions by the Mayflower Pilgrims on Cape Cod involved the ransacking of deserted Indian homes, fields, and later graves. It was very soon after their early November landing that the Pilgrims found themselves in contact with the Indians of modern-day Eastham, Massachusetts. On December 8, 1620, the expedition from the Mayflower encountered the Indians on what is known today as First Encounter Beach off Samoset Road. According to Bradford’s account, the Indians attacked the Pilgrims, possibly out of fear.

Bradford decided that Corn Hill and the rest of the cape would not serve as a suitable location to settle; the Pilgrims set sail from Cape Cod and eventually chose Plymouth as their home. Plymouth was selected mainly because there was fresh water and a deep harbor. But more importantly, Indians had cleared the land and planted maize.

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170 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 64.
there. Plymouth, the new home of the Pilgrim emigrants, had formerly been the Indian village of Patuxet, a village completely wiped out by the plague of 1616. The Pilgrims did not choose the former Patuxet on their own. After his trip there in 1619, Dermer had recommended the empty site in a letter in 1620.172

From exploration in the late sixteenth century to the outbreak of smallpox in 1633, the political scene among the Indians and English in New England continually shifted. This is best exemplified in the relationship of the Pilgrims to their Indian interpreter Squanto, a Patuxet Indian who had been kidnapped in 1614 by Smith's party. After being taken to England, where he met Gorges, Squanto was sent on a commission to New England in 1619. Gorges felt that Squanto may have been the key to ending French success and English failure in the New World.173 Dermer left Squanto behind, after which he was taken prisoner by the Wampanoags until the Pilgrims found him there in March 1621.174

Speaking about Squanto's childhood home, Thomas Morton recalled finding carcasses left "for Crowes, Kites, and vermin to pray upon. And the bones and skulls upon the severall places of their habitations, made such a spectacle after my coming into those partes."175 Neal Salisbury accounted for the colonist settlement of Plymouth with the following words: "The epidemic of 1616-1618 had, in a literal way, prepared the coastal region for settlement. It had wiped out the entire village of Patuxet."176 The Pilgrims documented their experience: "about four years ago all the inhabitants died of an

172 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 109.
173 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 107.
174 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 107-108.
176 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 175.
extraordinary plague, and there is neither man, woman, nor child remaining, as indeed we have found none to hinder our possession, or lay claim unto it." 177 Their closest neighbors were the Wampanoags and they quickly became allies.

Samoset and then Squanto approached the Pilgrims in a gesture of friendship. After speaking to them in English, Massasoit, the leader of the Wampanoags, handed Squanto over to the Pilgrims. 178 Upon returning to his former home he found his village abandoned and the inhabitants died. The Pilgrims and Squanto encountered "Villages [that] lay in ruins because there was no one to tend them. The ground was strewn with the skulls and the bones of thousands of Indians who had died and none was left to bury them." 179 This was not a surprise as "Squanto undoubtedly knew something of the epidemic that had ravaged New England, including Patuxet, during his absence." 180

Local Indians took part in social exchanges because they feared the consequences of upsetting the balance of the universe. 181 Squanto, who was also called Tisquantum, was best known for his diplomatic achievements. The earliest post-plague interactions were first navigated by him. There are no written accounts by him, only those about him.

The Indians welcomed the colonists for two other reasons, though, both the direct effect of the plague. The plague had reduced the numbers and strength of the Indians, and consequently land was plentiful enough to share. Furthermore, the colonists appeared less threatening than other Indian groups in the area, the lesser of two evils. 182 Disease

177 Mourt's Relation (Bedford: Applewood Books, 1963), 51. The author of Mourt's Relation is unknown although it is believed that Edward Winslow wrote the majority of it with some help from William Bradford. Therefore, this direct quote may be from Winslow or Bradford.
178 Bragdon, Native People of Southern New England, 151.
180 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 139.
181 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 49.
182 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 175.
had directly affected the sociopolitical relations of the region.\textsuperscript{183} Squanto's diplomacy was aimed more so at the later of the two. His orchestration of diplomacy between the sachems and Pilgrim leaders had a major influence on Pilgrim success in the New World.

Squanto’s contributions were cut short by his death in 1622; he died suddenly of an “Indian fever.”\textsuperscript{184} He is known for his mostly successful attempts at undermining sachems, usually to the benefit of himself or the Pilgrims.\textsuperscript{185} It was speculated that Squanto intentionally destabilized peaceful efforts by the Wampanoags. Consequently, Massasoit suggested that he be killed because of the anti-Wampanoag advice he gave to Pilgrim leaders.\textsuperscript{186} However, his most famous actions were those that greatly aided the Pilgrims by exploiting Indian fear. Edward Winslow recalled Squanto’s dedicated effort: “[a] wicked practice of this Tisquantum; who, to the end he might possess his countrymen with the greater fear of us, and so consequently of himself, told them we had the plague buried in our store-house; which, at our pleasure, we could send forth to what place or people we would, and destroy them therewith, though we stirred not from home.”\textsuperscript{187} His efforts to persuade the Massachusetts into thinking that the settlers controlled disease illustrate where his loyalty lay. More importantly, though, is that he told them that he could protect them from the plague, thus securing his position of authority and weakened that of the sachems. Squanto proved instrumental in

\textsuperscript{183} Bragdon, \textit{Native People of Southern New England}, 150.
\textsuperscript{184} Bragdon, \textit{Native People of Southern New England}, 151.
\textsuperscript{185} Bragdon, \textit{Native People of Southern New England}, 151.
\textsuperscript{186} Salisbury, “Squanto: Last of the Patuxets,” 242-243.
\textsuperscript{187} Winslow, \textit{Good Newes from New England}, 16.
strengthening the political position of Plymouth Colony among the surrounding Massachusetts groups, while at the same time strengthening his own position.¹⁸⁸

In Eastham, Massachusetts, the modern town where the Pilgrims first stepped on shore, the road leading away from First Encounter Beach is Samoset Road. A few miles North is Massasoit Road. It is as if Samoset (road) is leading the Pilgrims to Massasoit. In reality he did. Samoset was the Indian who introduced Squanto to the colony, which directly lead to the orchestration of the treaty between Massasoit and the Pilgrims.¹⁸⁹

Two roads, paved in the twentieth century, pay tribute to two Indian allies of the Pilgrims. The irony of the beach shrine at the site of the “first encounter” and the town’s attempt to pay homage to the leaders of the Indians escapes many of the thousands of residents and tourists who visit the region in the summer months. The shrine leads many to believe a hostile and savage enemy awaited the Pilgrims, but Samoset and Squanto represent the fallacy of that belief.

Figure 2. Samoset Road sign, Eastham, Massachusetts. Photo January 2008.

Figure 3. Massasoit Road sign, Eastham, Massachusetts. Photo January 2008.
This chapter explores specific evidence about the Pilgrim application of Divine Providence in their settlement. A combined theological and psychological premise, shaped by the plague, created a code of conduct towards the Indians in Plymouth which influenced their colonial actions far more than their pure religious doctrines.

There were three overwhelming signs from God that the Pilgrims were his chosen people. First was the open land, ready for settlement and farming. Second was the decimation of the neighboring Indians, subsequently allowing peaceful settlement to occur. Finally, was the gift of Squanto, without whose help the initial Pilgrim success may not have been attained. Conversely, the Indians had seen signs of the spiritual world working against them in the form of the plague. They also saw signs of the English power in curing the sick, including the use of inexplicable technology interpreted as magic, and they were sensible of the general good health of the Pilgrims.

As mentioned in chapter two, the role of the supernatural in timing was considered more than just a coincidence. A mutual certainty developed that the supernatural controlled diseases; just as the Indians believed that disease was on the colonists’ side, the colonists thought their God protected them from Indian curses by causing sickness among the heathens. Disease served as an excuse for taking the land, all as part of God’s divine plan for the Pilgrims. Stories of the epidemic are said to have become “fireside legends” in the colonies. This significant folklore has been pushed

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aside in histories of Pilgrims. This folklore occurred in Biblical form, often with the Pilgrims comparing themselves to the children of Israel.\textsuperscript{191} The lands of New England were for them as such.\textsuperscript{192} The plague is also repeatedly discussed and often praised in Pilgrim writings as the Pilgrims were gripped by the miracle of this divine intervention.

Pilgrim thought deemed that success in the "New World" would prove to the "Old World" that "God rewarded those who lived by His word."\textsuperscript{193} In his history of Plymouth Plantation, Bradford "draws heavily on biblical style and imagery in his composition."\textsuperscript{194} Thomas Morton compared the land to that of biblical esteem, saying "I will now discover unto them a Country whose indowments are by learned men allowed to stand in a parallel with the Israelite's Canaan, which none will deny, to be a land farre more excellent then Old England."\textsuperscript{195} Looking to the Old Testament, the Pilgrims shaped their actions in regard to the Indians. They would be kind and loving but would not fully accept their Indian neighbors. Only when the Indians accepted the Bible would they be freed from Satan; the Pilgrims believed that God would show them the way to accomplish this.\textsuperscript{196}

Historians believe that Bradford intentionally corresponded his text to Biblical prophesy in order to show God's preference for the Pilgrims.\textsuperscript{197} Often in various segments of his account, he forthrightly declares his beliefs about God's role in the colony's success; for example, the \textit{Mayflower's} safe arrival on Cape Cod was attributed

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\textsuperscript{193} Vaughan, \textit{New England Frontier}, 18.
\textsuperscript{195} Morton, \textit{New English Canaan}, 61.
\textsuperscript{197} Morison, "Notes from the Editors," 18.
\end{flushright}
to “God’s good providence.” Bradford wrote “God gave them a morning of comfort and refreshing (as usually He doth to His children) for the next day... [they were] secure from the Indians.” Perhaps the most straightforward use of biblical references is in Mourt’s Relation. In reference to Genesis 17:8, the author(s) wrote “neither is there any land or possession now, like unto the possession which the Jews had in Canaan...the seed of Abraham...that he (the Lord) gave it them as a land rest after their weary travels...but now we are all in all places strangers and Pilgrims most properly having no dwelling......[having removed] himself to another country.” The author goes onto say that it is the job of the Pilgrims to convert the heathens since “to us they cannot come, our land is full; to them we may go, their land is empty.” In believing that God gave them possession of the land in New England, the Pilgrims were able to view the plague as a positive work of God.

Scripture was evidence of God’s plan. The Book of Genesis 1:28 says “Multiply and replenish the earth.” The Pilgrims saw it as God’s plan to have them use the vacant land left by the Pawtucket Indians. John Mason often used Deuteronomy 20:16-17, “Of the cities...which the Lord thy God doth give thee for inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth...But thou shalt utterly destroy them,” as justification for killing Indians. Likewise, English victories in small squirmishes, were often cited as instances of God beating Satan.

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198 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 58.
200 Mourt’s Relation, 89-90.
201 Mourt’s Relation, 91.
202 Dobyns, Their Numbers Become Thinned, 43.
203 Stannard, American Holocaust, 177.
204 Salisbury, Maniou and Providence, 3.
In *New English Canaan*, Thomas Morton recalled carcasses left above ground without burial. Morton proclaimed the glory of God, “as I travailed in that Forrest, nere the Massachusetts, it seemed to mee a new found Golgatha.” Golgotha was a place of torment or burial. In biblical terms it was the hill in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Morton says that “the hand of God fell heavily upon them [the Indians]” and that there were so many dead “that they died in heapes.”

In addition to leaving the free land, the outbreak of plague set the scene for missionaries to reshape native families and culture in a Christian manner. In 1622 Morton wrote, “And herein this, the wondrous wisedome and love of God is shewne, by sending to the place his Minister, to sweepe away by heapes the Salvages, and also giving him length of dayes, to see the same performed after his enterprise was begunne, for the propagation of the Church of Christ.” The plague allowed God’s word to be spread and provided another illustration of Divine Providence.

Edward Winslow wrote his book *Good Newes from New England* in 1624, in order to show for the Pilgrim colonists “the wonderous providence and goodness of God, in their preservation and continuance, being delivered from many apparent deaths and dangers.” He writes that God possessed the hearts “of the salvages with astonishment and fear of us; whereas if God had let them loose, they might easily have swallowed us up.” It seems Winslow believed the plague was God’s means of containment.

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206 *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, s.v. “Gologatha.”
After first landing in Cape Cod, Bradford had said of their skirmish with the Indians, that it “pleased God to Vanquish our enemies and give us deliverance; and by His special providence so to dispose that not any one of them were either hurt or hit.”

Bradford says that by God’s will, not one Englishman was taken by this sickness. Along the same lines, Winslow states “God has raised some unknown or extraordinary means for our preservation.”

Chapter eight of Edward Johnson’s *Wonderworking Providence* is dedicated to the “wonderfull Preparation the Lord Christ by his Providence, wrought for his peoples abode in this Western world.” In it Johnson proclaims:

This great mortality being an unwonted thing, feare[d] them the more, because naturally the Country is very healthy. But by this meanes Christ (whose great and glorious workes the Earth throughout are altogether for the benefit for his Churches and chosen) not onely made roome for his people to plant; but also tamed the hard and cruell hearts of these barbarous Indians, insomuch that halfe a handful of his people landing not long after in Plimoth-Plantation, found little resistance.

The first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, recalled that “through the lords special providence...there hath not died above two or three grown persons and about so many children all last year, it being very rare to hear of any sick agues or other diseases...for the natives, they are near all dead of the smallpox, so as the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess.” Bradford and Johnson’s statements demonstrate they believed the Pilgrims had God’s approval for Plymouth Colony.

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The English were not the only European colonists to believe God was on their side against the Indians. After the “discovery” of the Americas by Christopher Columbus, it was the Spanish who extended their empire into the Americas. By the time the *Mayflower* sailed into Massachusetts Bay, the indigenous population of Mexico had already been reduced from ten million to one million.218 The success of the Spanish gave them a great advantage over English, French and Dutch efforts to secure land in the New World, consequently setting off a race between the latter nations to snatch up land on the eastern coast of North America.

By comparing Spanish and English colonial conquests and the role of disease, dissimilarities will emerge. By 1550, Spanish land in the Americas was ten times larger than that of Spain.219 The Spanish exploited and brutalized the people, land, and resources at the cost of millions of Indian lives. In Mexico and South America, disease played a major role in the destruction of the Indians, but so did the military forces of Cortes in 1519 and Pizarro in 1532. Both power and disease blessed the Spanish conquistadors with success. “European-transmitted epidemics made major contributions” to conquest.220 Of course, God too was on their side. “God hath caused among the Indians so great a fear [of Spanish soldiers] and their arquebuses that, with only hearing it said that a Spaniard is going to their pueblos, they flee.”221 Although they share a commonality, the epidemics that the Spanish and English encountered varied in execution. While God presumably blessed the Spaniards with Indian plagues, the Spanish also had thousands of Indian allies. This lead the Spanish to believe it was God favoring

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221 Taylor, *American Colonies*, 56.
their military victory. The main difference was that in the case of the Spanish, epidemics came with invasion, whereas in the case of Plymouth, epidemics preceded invasion, producing an organic psychological result. This is significant in establishing a difference in the pattern of settlement between the English and other European imperialists. Military might, manpower and biological superiority were separate factors in settling Plymouth, while they were conglomerate factors in New Spain. The conquest of New England was influenced to a much greater extent by religious and spiritual thought than historians have recognized and therefore, the English colonial take over should be considered a psychological conquest.

Another disparity between the Spanish and the English experiences was not in their ideology but rather in their aspirations. The Spanish wanted the Americas for gold and slaves while the New England settlers wanted the Americas for land. Gorges’ intentions were for the New England colony to acquire land and divide it up among the Council for New England. Winthrop said “the country lay open to any that could and would improve it.” The Spanish had a troublesome debate over rationales as to why God killed the Indians with disease. Missionaries argued whether God had sent plagues to kill the Indians for their sins or to punish the Spanish by taking away their slave supply. For the English it was clear why God had taken the Indians, to give Indian

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222 Taylor, American Colonies, 57. Taylor cites this quote from a “Spanish priest.”
223 Stannard, American Holocaust, 237
224 Preston, Gorges of Plymouth Fort, 171.
226 Stannard, American Holocaust, 237.
lands to them. To the colonists, disease was God’s stamp of approval for their venture. This fit with their material desires for the land as well.\textsuperscript{227}

To further understand this psychological conquest model, it is necessary to weigh Plymouth’s colonial experience against its contemporaries. The French, concentrating on the gulf of the St. Lawrence River, honed in on fish and fur, both valuable trading commodities. This commerce engaged the French and Indians in a “mutual dependency.”\textsuperscript{228} Traders relied on Indians as hunters and allies against other hostile groups, and Indians relied on the traders for metals, cloth and alcohol, all of which they grew more dependent on as time passed.\textsuperscript{229} As in the case of the Spanish, the experience of the French was far different from that of the English. New France hardly developed a steady population and even seven years after the founding of Plymouth, New France still only had eighty-five colonists and depended on supplies from France and “Indian goodwill for their survival and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{230} Contrary to this, Plymouth scarcely relied on the plague survivors nor were they threatened by them. The Massachusetts Bay Indians were too decimated by the recent plague to pose a genuine threat; on the other hand, Indians from Narragansett Bay, not affected by the plague, did pose a direct threat. (See chapter six.)

Dutch colonies were in the same situation as the French. New Netherland was a trading center still reliant on the home country. In contrast, the English colonies were considerably more independent of the British monarchy and their motives were hardly solely material. They did not need to kill or enslave the Indians as the Spanish did, nor

\textsuperscript{227} Stannard, \textit{American Holocaust}, 239.
\textsuperscript{228} Taylor, \textit{American Colonies}, 92.
\textsuperscript{229} Taylor, \textit{American Colonies}, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{230} Taylor, \textit{American Colonies}, 100.
did they need to befriend them as the French and Dutch did; the English did not need the Indians, to be more precise, but they needed their land, which God had delivered via the epidemic.

"Imagine how much more difficult the colonists’ lot would have been if instead they had come to a crowded land of well-defended villages, or to a truly virgin continent without any already cleared lands."\(^{231}\) This observation is important in understanding the role of divine providence in the settlement of Plymouth as well as in the relations between the Pilgrims and Indians.

The Spanish attempted to settle in Virginia but by 1572, after an Indian uprising, they deemed Florida the northern limit of their territory.\(^{232}\) There is not just a disjunction between the English and other European colonizers but also a discrepancy between Plymouth and similar English colonies in North America. Without Spanish competition, the English set their eyes on Virginia. The situation in Virginia differed greatly from that of New England and these differences highlight the psychological model. Instead of seeking gold, the English colonizers aimed to create wealth by the use of plantations. In 1585, Roanoke, an island colony, was established by the English; it quickly failed due to logistical tribulations.\(^{233}\) The second English attempt at settlement came in 1607, at Jamestown. This area was populated by nearly 24,000 Algonquian Indians. The Algonquians chose to use the settlers for their own benefit. "Instead of trying to crush the newcomers...Powhatan hoped to contain them, subject them to his power, enlist them

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\(^{231}\) Taylor, *American Colonies*, 44.
\(^{232}\) Taylor, *American Colonies*, 118.
as subordinate allies." On the other hand, the Jamestown settlers "meant to
Christianize the Indians by first absorbing them as economic subordinates," as this would
then free up the land for settlement. "The English insisted that God required them to
improve the wilderness into [English] productive farmland, subduing the Indians in the
process." Again, in Plymouth, this type of "plan" was not needed because the Indians
were already subdued and the land already free. The effect in Jamestown was often
catastrophic; brutal violence was flowed back and forth between the colonists and
Powhatan's villages, whereas in Plymouth, violence was rare and small-scale. The
colonists of Jamestown were unhealthy, disease-ridden themselves, and they routinely
relied on the Indians for food; a much different scene from those in Massachusetts Bay.
The most compelling evidence of the difference between Plymouth and Jamestown in
terms of Indian relations is the Jamestown Massacre of 1622. This Indian uprising killed
roughly 350 colonists, and quickly changed the English policy there to one of Indian
expulsion. Jamestown encountered nearly a half century of Indian resistance.

Quite clearly, many colonists used the epidemic as evidence that God wanted the
English to settle in New England. Yet, the notion that divine providence resulted in
abundant lands and easily conquerable Indians was not an idea that originated with the
settlers in the Northeast. Rather, this idea transcended borders. The Spanish colonizers
of South America also believed that God meant for them to have the land they

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“discovered.” After all, it was easy; God was rooting for them. Father Domingo de Betanzos said of the Spanish conquest of South America that the Indian beasts were punished for their paganism. Accordingly, the British cited Spanish experiences with Indians, and their views were influenced by Spanish ideology. Virginia settler Edward Waterhouse said that in dealing with the natives of Virginia, the English should do the same as the Spanish did, exterminate the peoples. This notion conflicts with general histories, which tend to distance the English from the “Black Legend” associated with the Spanish. Perhaps in the absence of the plague, Pilgrims may have adopted a policy similar to the Spanish; after all, in Jamestown removing the Indians became policy after the 1622 Massacre.

“Illness reflected divine will, either testing or (more often) punishing the weak characters of sinners.” Pilgrim beliefs dominated society. Pilgrims believed that God had chosen them as his favored people and therefore He would give them abundance because of their “covenant” with Him. The Puritans believed that they often saw signs of God’s work in many forms, including the punishment of sinners (sudden death, disease, etc.).

According to Alan Taylor, the Pilgrims thought of the Indians as “pagan peoples who had surrendered to their worst instincts to live within the wild, instead of laboring hard to conquer and transcend nature.” The basic belief of the Pilgrims was that divine

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239 Stannard, American Holocaust, 65.
240 Stannard, American Holocaust, 218
241 Stannard, American Holocaust, 228.
242 Stannard, American Holocaust, 228.
243 Kupperman, Indians & English, 132.
244 Taylor, American Colonies 178.
245 Taylor, American Colonies, 183.
246 Taylor, American Colonies, 188.
providence protected them from attacks. In general, the colonists held their beliefs as truth, and they did not tolerate those who went against them. God wanted the Indians to be annihilated, and God was on the Pilgrim’s side. Smith wrote “it seems God hath Provided this Country for our Nation, destroying the natives by the plague, it not touching one Englishman, though many traded and were conversant amongst them.”

Pilgrim Edward Johnson described the plague and God’s role in inflicting it, “Who by a more admirable act of his Providence not long after prepared for his peoples arrival” with “a great mortality among them... where the English afterward planted.” Johnson’s account, written almost a decade after the plague, demonstrated English interest in the plague long after it occurred; it must have been a significant event for the aftermath to have such long-lasting significance in Puritan histories, yet, as mentioned earlier, most modern histories tend to ignore its significance.

Bradford and Phineas Pratt both tell a story of a group of French shipwrecked sailors who were captured by the Indians and treated “worse than slaves.” Two of the men were kept by the Indians until they were later rescued by Thomas Dermer a few years before the Mayflower arrived. This was at the same time that Dermer witnessed the plague. Prophecy was very important to Puritans because it justified and gave truth to God’s works. The French shipwreck story was also recalled by Cotton Mather, a member of the Massachusetts’s Bay Colony, and he claimed that the story was originally relayed.

248 Stannard, American Holocaust, 6.
251 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 81.
to the Pilgrims by the surviving Indians upon settlement. In 1615, one of the French captives told the Indians that his God could destroy the Massachusetts. The English God “being angry with them for their wickedness, would not destroy them all, but also people the place with another nation, which would not live after their brutish manners.” This prediction came true shortly after with the onset of the plague of 1616 and the arrival of the Mayflower. Mather goes on to say “which blasphemous mistake was confuted by an horrible and unusual plague, whereby they were consumed in such vast multitudes that our first planters found the land almost covered with their unburied carcases and that they were left alive were smitten into awful and humble regards of the English, by the terrors which the remembrance of the Frenchman’s prophesie had imprinted on them.”

The Pilgrims believed that God sometimes showed his providence in the form of dreams. Preacher John Eliot recalled a dream he had around the year 1618, in which there was a “great sickness,” when a man in black with a book, presumably the Bible, told the Indians that God would punish them for their sins against him. To Eliot, this dream was providential for the plague. This was another way to justify their occupation of the land as part of God’s true plan.

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253 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 106.
255 Plane, Colonial Intimacies, 46.
Evidence concerning how the Indians interpreted the plague of 1616 is limited and often second hand, as was Edward Johnson’s, whose version was reported by the Indians after settlement.256

Their Disease being a sore Consumption, sweeping away whole Families, but chiefly young Men and Children, the very seeds of increase. Their Powwowes, which are their doctors, working partly by Charmes, and partly by Medicine, were much amazed to see their Wigwams lie full of dead Corpes, and that now neither Squantam nor Abbamocho could help, which are their good and bad God and also their Powwows themselves were oft smitten with death stroke.257

The reality of being “spiritually powerless” must have been shocking and terrifying to the Indians. The Indian survivors of the plague often suffered “spiritual deprivation.”258 Some groups stopped performing burial rituals, as they felt spiritually powerless.259 All this making the Indians pliable about accepting the idea of God’s will and power being on the side of the English. Squanto believed in the Christian God. On his death bed, Squanto asked Bradford to pray for him so that he could go to the “Englishman’s God in heaven.”260

While in Virginia in 1608, Captain John Smith took a prisoner, an Indian named Amoroleck. Amoroleck stated that he had heard of strangers who were coming “from the under world” to conquer them.261 “The belief that the newcomers were from the underworld allowed the Indians to explain otherwise inexplicable phenomena, such as English resistance to the diseases that so devastated native populations.”262

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256 Johnson, Wonderworking Providence, 40-41.
257 Johnson, Wonderworking Providence, 41.
258 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 106.
259 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 106; Morton, New English Canaan, 130-132
262 Kupperman, Indians and English, 177.
living on Martha's Vineyard also felt that the strangers' motives were of an evil nature. The Vineyard Indians believed that one of their deities, Maushop, lived in the cliffs off what is today called Gayhead. When Europeans arrived on the island, the Indians alleged that Maushop left the island permanently.263

Europeans had long impressed Indians with their "magic" objects, guns, swords, and the compass; these stories come up often and are part of colonialism. It is important to acknowledge a degree of European exaggeration in telling these stories, even so, they remain important. Military leaders often studied sachems and imitated their behavior in order to create an impression of magical power. Furthermore, some English leaders used European medicine to cure Indian sickness. Edward Winslow did this and became a sort of "shaman" or healer to the Indians. The Indians believed men like Winslow in Plymouth, or Roger Williams in Rhode Island or Hariot in Roanoke, could help them fight the new diseases they encountered.264 A significant example of this was Winslow's attention to Massasoit's sickness, when, he was thought to be near death only to have Winslow cure his sickness.265 Massasoit and his people believed that Winslow was the "instrument of his preservation."266 Winslow recorded that one of Massasoit's chief men spread the word that when the sachem was very sick and almost near death "his friends the English came to see him, and how suddenly they recovered him to this strength."267

Adding to this sense of English power was the coincidence of the French prophecy

264 Kupperman, Indians & English, 180.
265 Winslow, Good Newes From New England, 33-35.
266 Winslow, Good Newes From New England, 35.
267 Winslow, Good Newes From New England, 36.
coming true, the good health of the English, and their magical powers. Scholars may from this appreciate the perspective of the Indians.

The Massachusetts referred to the English as “cut-throats,”\textsuperscript{268} signifying they had power over life and were treacherous: reasons to be nice to them. One Narragansett sachem, Canonicus, told Roger Williams that he believed the “English had deliberately sent the plague among his people.”\textsuperscript{269} Besides the Indian perspective, the Pilgrims themselves had notions of their own power, believing that God was on their side. Having little need for violence, the Pilgrims often exerted this power in a diplomatic manner with their neighbors, the Wampanoags. Massasoit, always an ally of Plymouth, warned the Pilgrims of a possible attack by the Massachusetts. He claimed that if they killed the Massachusetts’ sachem, the plot would be foiled. It is believed that Massasoit exploited the notion of an attack to better his position with the Pilgrims,\textsuperscript{270} showing that Massasoit felt he needed to be on the Pilgrims “good side.” The rumor provided an opportunity for Plymouth to “reassert and expand its control of the surrounding territory and its inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{271} The result was a brutal attack, lead by Miles Standish, where a handful of Indians were tricked into dwellings and killed. After this it was reported that the Cape Cod Indians, fearful of an attack themselves, abandoned their homes and hid in swamps and woods. In these damp places many of them became sick and died. In 1623, Winslow reported that “the God of the English was offended with them [the Indians], and would destroy them in his anger; and certainly it is strange to hear how many of late have, and

\textsuperscript{269} Kupperman, \textit{Indians & English}, 178.
\textsuperscript{270} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 132.
\textsuperscript{271} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 132.
still daily die amongst them...so as non of them dare come amongst us.”

Both the Indians and the Pilgrims seemed to believe that God worked in favor of the Pilgrims. To the Indians, their attempt to attack Plymouth caused them to fall ill to disease, and to the Pilgrims, divine providence had transpired, warning them of the attack. After the warning, Winslow credited God with “preserving us from falling when we were at the pit’s brim, and yet feared nor knew not that we were in danger.”

Without interpreting the plague as a consequence of God’s Will, the Pilgrims had little moral reasoning for taking their new lands. Biblical coincidences gave the Puritans an acceptable rationale for their endeavor. Justification for taking the land of the Indians would have been rather weak without the plague; with many healthy Indians, attaining land would have to come in the form of a gift, a purchase or a reward for a war, all less virtuous than divine intervention on epidemic terms. Puritan ideologies relied on religious truth to justify taking land away from the savages. Without this ideology little righteousness could be claimed in proving to the “Old World” that “God rewarded those who lived by His word.”

Divine Providence bestowed the plague, which destabilized the Indians and prevented attacks against the colonists. Even King James remarked that God sent “this wonderful plague among the salvages.” Colonist opinion held steady that God had validated settlement by killing a great number of Indians and by intensifying fear among the survivors. Puritans believed that God had caused the epidemic specifically to allow

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272 Winslow, Good News From New England, 52.
273 Winslow, Good News From New England, 52.
274 Segal and Stineback, Puritans, Indians, and Manifest Destiny, 32.
275 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 18.
amicable relations between the colonists and Indians. The Indian susceptibility to
disease and the Pilgrim perception of God's will inflicting such diseases affected Pilgrim
goals and outcomes in New England much more than being good Pilgrims shaped their
interactions. The psychological implications of the plague played out in the discourse on
God's will and divine providence.

277 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 176.
Chapter 6

Indian Political Affairs after the Plague of 1616-1618

New Plymouth encompassed the land from the eastern shore of Narragansett Bay to the western shore of Massachusetts Bay. With the exception of the Indians to the west of Narragansett Bay, the Pilgrims befriended most, if not all, of their Indian neighbors. Before the establishment of Plymouth Plantation, the population density of the region was around .22 per square mile. The many Native American groups living in the region were fairly equal in population. A conservative estimate of the pre-Mayflower population of New England is estimated around five thousand. A high estimate puts the total for the region around 100,000. Of these, the Narragansetts and the Wampanoags were among the largest Indian groups living in New England until the plague. After the plague, the Narragansetts greatly outnumbered the Wampanoags. Adding to this imbalance was the arrival and settlement of the Plymouth Pilgrims; the result was a drastic change in Indian politics. The Pilgrims, although welcomed by the Wampanoags, quickly realized that they had to give consideration to the changes that occurred in Indian politics. Divine providence allowed them to settle peacefully among the people of Massachusetts Bay. But a large threat, untouched by epidemic, forced

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278 Vaughn, New England Frontier, 76.
279 Vaughn, New England Frontier 29.
280 Thornton, American Indian Holocaust, 24.
281 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 30.
283 Vaughn, New England Frontier, 22.

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the settlers to assert themselves. Though Massasoit and the Wampanoags steadily stood by Plymouth, the Narragansetts were a constant threat to the settlement.

Thomas Dermer reported that the Narragansett Indians of the west side of Narragansett Bay were not struck by the plague:\textsuperscript{284} "The Narragansetts lived but on the other side of that great bay, and were a strong people and many in number, living compact together, and had not been at all touched with this wasting plague."\textsuperscript{285} This must have been an alarming contrast to what the Pilgrims had encountered at the former village of Patuxet. Narragansett territory, in modern Rhode Island, had limited pre-plague contact with the English, helping the tribe to avoid early epidemics.\textsuperscript{286} This directly affected the power relations that developed between the Narragansetts and the colonists.

Winslow reported that "the office and duty of the powah is to be exercised principally in calling upon the devil, and curing diseases of the sick or wounded."\textsuperscript{287} In groups affected by the plague, Pow-wows often visited the sick in an attempt to heal them, further spreading disease and causing their own deaths, which obviously undermined their powers. It was widely believed, by both the Narragansetts and their enemies, that they were able to avoid the plague because of ritual sacrifices made to a deity named Cautantowwit.\textsuperscript{288} The Narragansett Pow-wows did not get sick, giving them security in their magical powers. In fact, though, the Narragansetts made offerings to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{284} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 102; Williams, "The Epidemic of the Indians of New England," 22.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Bradford, \textit{Of Plymouth Plantation}, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Plane, \textit{Colonial Intimacies}, 187n.
\item \textsuperscript{287} Winslow, \textit{Good Newes from New England}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Salisbury, \textit{Manitou and Providence}, 106.
\end{itemize}
Cautantowwit by burning their possessions rather than performing Pow-wows. Their burning method almost certainly quarantined them from local disease. "And because the plague hath not reigned at Nanohigganset as at other places about them, they attribute to this custom there used." The Narragansetts were known by other groups for their "religious rituals" which aided them in avoiding epidemics which hit the region in the early seventeenth century. Their avoidance of the plague was the knowledge needed to increase their confidence and violent behavior.

The Narragansetts were said to be the most "industrious in New England." Escaping the plague "may account for its [the Narragansett's] more aggressive posture in the subsequent decades." The Narragansett were so powerful that their sachems spoke for other Indian groups in the "west bay" communities. They had represented their neighbors since the end of the plague in 1619. The Narragansett also threatened surrounding tribes and the Pilgrims. Survivors were vulnerable to the Narragansetts, who increased their raids after the end of the plague. For example, Nanapeshamet, a Pawtucket sachem, was killed in one of these raids. In response, Massasoit "humbled" himself to the Narragansett and moved away from their bay and closer to the Taunton River. This triggered survivors of surrounding villages to form composite villages to

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289 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 106.
290 Winslow, Good News from New England, 60.
291 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 147.
292 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 302.
293 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 55.
294 Paul A. Robinson, "A Narragansett History from 1000 B.P to the Present," in Weinstein, Enduring Traditions, 82.
295 Robinson, "A Narragansett History," 82.
296 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 105.
297 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 105.
protect themselves better. Stronger sachems controlled weaker sachems, of which Massasoit remained the strongest in opposition to the Narragansett. This was at least in part because of his ties to Plymouth.

Squanto’s legacy is based on the negotiations he conducted between the Plymouth Pilgrims and Massasoit’s group of Indians. Squanto orchestrated a treaty linking all of the Indian groups of the Massachusetts Bay, under Massasoit and in alliance with Plymouth. Massasoit used Plymouth as “an unwitting ally in a bid for autonomy.”

Mourt’s Relation clearly states “because he [Massasoit] hath a potent adversary the Narragansett, that are at war with him, against whom he thinks we may be some strength to him, for our pieces are terrible unto them.”

Previously large and powerful groups, such as the Pawtuckets, Massachusetts and Wampanoags, were largely killed off in the plague, allowing the Narragansetts to increase their influence in trade with the Dutch in the west. Until the Pequot war of 1637 diminished the Pequots of Connecticut, they were the most significant Narragansett enemy and competition. The Pequots and Narragansetts, neither of them being affected by the plague of 1616, were able to strengthen their power and dominance over others by means of the Wampum trade. “It [the trade of wampumpeag] makes the Indians of these parts rich and powerful and also proud thereby.” The Narragansetts defeated some of the minimally surviving tribes in the area due to decline in their

298 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 105.
299 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 105-106.
300 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 364n.
301 Mourt’s Relation, 58.
302 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 109-110.
303 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 55.
304 Robinson, “A Narragansett History,” 82.
305 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 192.
numbers and the decline in the fur trade. The Narragansett dominated trade between the Dutch and Indians in their bay. Unlike the Dutch and French, the Plymouth colonizers were not interested in trade, rather they were interested in land; therefore, they aimed to dominate the local tribes. The Mayflower settlers wanted “material prosperity” and “control of their religious, political and cultural environment.”

Dominating these once hostile combatants depended heavily on Indian submission, and the plague facilitated such submissions; all neighboring groups yielded to Plymouth. Since the Narragansetts traded frequently with the Dutch and displayed their military strength, their rapport with the Pilgrims was strained to the point where they referred to the English as the “knife men,” just as the Massachusetts had called the Pilgrims “cut-throats.”

The Narragansetts resented the pact between the Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag Indians. This alliance, made in March 1621, was orchestrated by Squanto, who told Massasoit that in his travels he had seen how powerful the English were and that if Massasoit would befriend them, his enemies would bow to him. The treaty between the Indians and the Pilgrims states that “if any did unjustly war against him, they would aid him; if any did war against them, he should aid them.” The Narragansetts were the most-likely enemies of both the Wampanoags and Plymouth.

In the summer of 1621, the Narragansetts, angry at the peace treaty between Plymouth and Massasoit, devised a plan to intimidate Indians who were helping the

306 Salisbury, “Squanto, the Last of the Patuxets,” 236.
307 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 122.
308 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 111.
309 Bragdon, Native People of Southern New England, 30.
311 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 79.
312 Vaughan, Transatlantic Encounters, 72.
313 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 78.
Pilgrims. Corbitant, a sachem of one of the Wampanoag groups under Massasoit, was not a friend of the English and wanted to punish those Wampanoags who helped the settlers. He secretly joined forces with the Narragansetts in an attempt to bring down Plymouth. Corbitant kidnapped Squanto, Hobbamock, and Tockamahamon, saying that with this action “the English had lost their tongue!” He was referring to the loss of their translator, Squanto. Believing that Squanto might be dead, ten Plymouth men set out to capture Corbitant, their “bitter enemy.” The kidnapping ended favorably, Squanto and Tockamahamon were rescued by the Pilgrims and Corbitant made it into hiding. This event resulted in the signing of a second treaty between Plymouth and the surrounding Indians; bordering sachems Corbitant, Quadaquina, Epenow, Obbatineqat, Chickataubut and Canacum all agreed to be subjects [or an ally] of King James. Obbatineqat, a sachem from north of Plymouth, is said to have chosen to sign on the side of Plymouth because, since the plague, the Micmacs had increased their raids on corn. In northern Massachusetts Bay, groups often had to shift the site of their villages to avoid attack. In the wake of the plague, Plymouth’s neighbors were forced to choose Plymouth because of the protection it offered from aggressive groups with large post-plague surviving populations.

Since they were working on his side, the Corbitant conspiracy in 1621 hurt the pride of the powerful Narragansetts. It is speculated that the Narragansetts wanted to

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314 Vaughan, New England Frontier, 75.  
315 Vaughan, New England Frontier 75.  
316 Mourt’s Relation, 74.  
317 Mourt’s Relation, 74.  
318 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 119-120.  
319 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 120.  
320 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 121.  
321 Vaughan, New England Frontier 79.
expand their hunting grounds and trade influence into new areas, including Massachusetts Bay.322 "In the month of November, 1621...the great people of Nanohigganset, which are reported to be many thousands strong, began to breathe forth many threats against us."323 Tensions further increased when, in January 1622, the Narragansetts sent Plymouth a bundle of arrows wrapped in a snakeskin. Squanto explained to leaders in Plymouth that this was a clear threat. Initially, Plymouth responded to the threat with pleas for peace, since the Narragansetts had not been weakened by the plague.324 In the end, Bradford did not back away from this threat, but sent the snakeskin back with bullets in it.325 Bradford remarked on the reasons behind the hostility of the Narragansetts: "and it is like the reason for their won ambition who (since the death of so many of the Indians [from the plague]) thought to domineer and lord it over the rest, and conceived the English would be a bar in their way, and saw that Massasoit took shelter already under their wings."326 Canonicus, the Narragansett sachem, was so frightened of the returned snakeskin that he would not accept it or let it in his house.327 It was passed around from Indian to Indian until it was returned to Plymouth unopened. Plymouth stood up to the Narragansett threat because it had been able to sign treaties with the indigenous groups of Massachusetts Bay. The motivation behind their alliances included protection from groups such as the Micmacs, but even more the Narragansetts, who had become dominant after surviving the plague which had decimated others.

Undoubtedly the Pilgrims must have been fearful of the Narragansetts. For example, the Narragansetts had “spoiled” some Wampanoag men, which “struck some fear in us, because the colony was so weakly guarded, the strength thereof being abroad.” They built up their fort in the wake of the snakeskin incident. “Knowing our own weakness, notwithstanding our high words and lofty looks towards them, and still lying open to all casualty, having as yet (under God) no other defense than our arms, we thought it most needful to impale our town.” Fear of the Narragansetts did not diminish with this event. In June 1622, Winslow wrote that they built another fort with a continual guard to “utterly discourage the savages from having any hopes or thoughts of rising against us.” The Chesapeake attack of 1622 may have also prompted Winslow to favor this new fort.

Regardless of how the Narragansetts avoided the plague, the fact that they did gave them strength in dealing with the Pilgrims. By the late 1630s and early 1640s powerful Indian groups threatened peace in the English settlements of Massachusetts Bay; if war broke out between the powerful groups, the colonies would be pulled in. Bradford believed that the Narragansetts were the greatest threat to the colony. From the Narragansetts’ point of view, the colonists at Plymouth must have stood in the way of their domination of the Indians in the area, especially since Massasoit had already joined with them in a pact. The coalition between the Indians and the Pilgrims would not

328 Mourt’s Relation, 71.
329 Winslow, Good Newes From New England, 10.
330 Winslow, Good Newes From New England, 18.
331 Vaughan, New England Frontier 155.
332 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 96.
have occurred without a preexisting situation the plague and the knowledge that the Narragansetts had survived it.

Soon, though, the tides turned, and when Squanto had the opportunity, he used the common fear of the plague against the Narragansetts. In order to head off an attack by the Narragansetts and other groups who were now changing alliances, it was necessary for Squanto to stir the political pot. Bradford recalled, "Yea, he made them believe they [the Pilgrims] kept the plague buried in the ground, and could send it among whom they would, which did much terrify the Indians." As of May 1622, many Indians believed the plague was inflicted by the will of the Pilgrims; they built their relationship with hostile Indians upon this belief. The colonists' knowledge of this fear allowed the power to shift to their side, as they were able to avoid direct conflict with the Narragansetts for the rest of the decade with their "secret weapon".

In 1629, almost ten years after the Mayflower Pilgrims established Plymouth Plantation, John Winthrop started his own colony and relationship with the Indians of Massachusetts Bay. Winthrop traded with the Indians himself; he treated them with respect, but he always made sure that the Indians understood that they did business on his terms. Almost three decades after the plague of 1616-1618, the attitudes of the Indians toward the settlers had begun to change. Winthrop felt the need to establish "his terms," whereas the Plymouth settlers had acknowledged an overwhelming feeling that the Indians were trying to please them. Yet, Winthrop, like Bradford before him, felt that God had killed the Indians to allow the colonists to survive in peace.

333 Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 96.
Fears of the plague, and likewise English power to inflict disease, began to subside. Social dynamics also underwent adjustments; by this time, many Indians were Christian, dependent on trade and participation in the English economy and many even adopted at least some English clothing. Winthrop began to observe a change in their relationship with the Indians. It seemed that just as Indian groups gained strength and the will to stand against the English disease, political dynamics again shifted. This is demonstrated by Narragansett Chief Miantonomo’s 1632 request for a treaty with the English; at this time the Indians had a surplus of land and the English were ready to exchange trade items that were needed to protect themselves against other large Indian groups in New England, such as the Pequots. A major outbreak of smallpox in 1633 affected the Narragansett threat and allowed the colonists to extend their settlement further without force. Mortality in the epidemic was estimated at ninety-five percent. That outbreak of smallpox may have allowed Roger Williams to settle in Narragansett territory by 1636. Narragansett enemies, the Pequots, met their near demise in 1637. Winthrop, along with settlers in Connecticut and allied Indian tribes, almost brought the Pequot Indians to the brink of extinction after a short war. At the end of the 1630s, smallpox and other “virgin soil” outbreaks dwindled. “By the 1640s the Narragansetts, while assiduously resisting Christianity, had begun to believe in the superiority of the Englishman’s God over theirs, finding evidence in the Puritan’s impressive material

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338 Robinson, “A Narragansett History,” 82.
possessions if not in his theological contentions." In 1643, Winthrop formed a confederation with Connecticut, New Haven and Massachusetts against the hostile Indians. Joining his colony with Plymouth, he felt it was the colonists' duty to control the remaining Indians.

In 1660, Roger Williams wrote that other neighboring Indians, such as the Cowwesets and Nipmucks, have “long since forsaken the Narrigasett Sachims.” Only thirty years after the arrival of the Pilgrims at Provincetown, scholars believe that the Indian population of New England was “reduced to one-tenth of its former strength.” The final demise of the Narragansetts came with King Philips War in 1675 and 1676, when approximately two thousand Narragansett Indians were killed.

As time passed and the plague of 1616 became a distant memory, Indian aggression increased dramatically. Nevertheless, by the time the Indians overcame fears about colonial will to control and inflict illness, the re-conquest of their lands proved impossible. Colonists up and down the east coast had already developed a resilient colonial system and their power was too strong to be destroyed by the decimated forces of the Indians. Furthermore, superior weapons and a larger English population gave the English the upper hand, one which the Narragansetts never regained. The history of the Narragansetts illustrates the role the plague of 1616 played in Plymouth’s relationship with the former powerful Indian groups of New England. Plymouth’s amicable

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relationship with Massasoit contrasted with its hostile relationship with the Narragansetts, a group not physically affected by the plague.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

Based on the descriptions left by the Pilgrims, the strain of plague that ravished the coast of Massachusetts Bay from roughly 1616 through 1618 was a form of either bubonic or pneumonic plague. It was most likely transmitted by Europeans on vessels traveling up and down the coast of North America. The plague especially hit hard the village of Patuxet, later the home of Plymouth Plantation. Effects of the plague were felt by the Wampanoags, Massachusetts, and Nausets on Cape Cod. On the other hand, sheltered by Narragansett Bay and given their ritual practice of burning diseased possessions rather than performing the regionally prevalent pow wow, the Narragansetts were not decimated by the same plague. Thus they are a strong exemplar of how an Indian nation, not affected by disease or its psychological implications, reacted to settlement. This example, when contrasted to that of the Wampanoags and Massachusetts, demonstrated that one nation with no experience of death caused by disease reacted aggressively toward other indigenous nations and the Pilgrims, while nations fearful after the epidemic reacted more amicably toward the Pilgrims. In other words, the plague produced short-term rates of population decline which then caused significant psychological and political effects.

Imagine that the plague of 1616-1618 had not occurred. Imagine that when the Mayflower landed, its occupants encountered the village of Patuxet, with three thousand
adult males, instead of skulls and bones. What policy would the Pilgrims have adopted in dealing with the Indians? Would the Indians have been amicable or hostile? A glimpse at this counter-factual history may help to illustrate the true impact of the plague on Indian and Pilgrim relations.

Based on the precedents established in the pre-plague years, it is safe to speculate that the Pilgrims would have encountered stiff resistance to their settlement of the land. Men like Dermer and Hunt made quite the impression on the Indians, who considered the English their enemy. Champlain also encountered hostile Indians and the French did not settle the area as they desired. Likewise, the experiments of the English in Roanoke, Jamestown, and Maine in 1607, either ended in failure or met strong resistance and violence. From his experiences, Smith predicted that if the English were to settle in New England they would need an armed force to protect them from the Indians. Lastly, Massasoit only aligned himself with the Pilgrims because of his group’s weakened state; the Wampanoags needed protection from the stronger Narragansetts. If there was no plague, Massasoit would have had little motivation to befriend the Pilgrims. It is therefore safe to assume that the Pilgrims would have found few, if any allies in New England. Based on pre-1616 estimates, the number of Indians living in the region if there was no plague might have been more than one-hundred thousand; a daunting prospect for the 102 Pilgrims on the Mayflower.

If the plague had not ravished the village of Patuxet in his absence, Squanto would have certainly been returned by Dermer to live there. He would have had no need

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346 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 104. Gookin estimated that the Pawtuckets, Massachusetts and Wampanoags each had roughly 3000 adult males before the epidemic hit.
347 Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 30. My estimate is based on Salisbury’s pre-plague population estimates for New England.
to befriend and help the Pilgrims; he only did so because he was at the time a prisoner of Massasoit. In the post-plague political realm, Squanto often acted to benefit his own position and as a result that of the Pilgrims. If the village of Patuxet had survived, Squanto would have had no need to act in this manner. Winslow praised Squanto for his efforts to persuade the Massachusetts into thinking that the settlers controlled disease. It is almost certain that the Wampanoags also believed that Squanto could have protected them from the Pilgrims unleashing the plague upon them. Since Squanto was instrumental in strengthening the political position of Plymouth Colony with the surrounding Massachusetts groups, and this position was based on his knowledge of the plague and the psychological application of Indian fear of it, it can be assumed that in the absence of the plague Squanto’s allegiance to Plymouth and thus the strong relationship between the Indians and Pilgrims would not have existed.

If the plague had not left the land vacant, Thomas Dermer surely would not have written to Gorges in 1620 to tell him that the lands of the former village of Patuxet would be prime for settlement. Rather, he might have suggested that the Pilgrims settle further inland, perhaps near a smaller nation such as the Micmacs, a group that later formed a strong trading partnership with the Dutch. This may have meant that the English would have had to adopt a policy similar to what the French and Dutch had, a relationship built on trade. This, of course, would have greatly reshaped Plymouth’s purpose in the Americas.

If the plague had not occurred, the psychological conquest of New England would not have been possible, since it was a conquest based on fear. The “virgin soil” epidemic that was the plague of 1616 caused a particular reaction among the Indians that the
Pilgrims attributed to God. The Pilgrims deduced that God had purposely sent the plague and Squanto to help them, and had provided the vacant lands for them to have a successful and peaceful settlement. The Pilgrims believed they were God’s chosen people. The coincidence of timing, in that the Pilgrims arrived two years after the plague had run its course, not only solidified this conviction for the Pilgrims, but in a similar manner solidified to the Indians, who came to believe that the Pilgrims had disease spiritually on their side.

From this knowledge historians can gain a new perspective on the history of Plymouth Plantation. In reading sources such as Bradford, Morton and Winslow, historians can look at the psychological effects within the biological framework of the plague. This may inspire further study on how disease affected the conquest of other Indian nations by causing a psychological effect. It may also interest others in the field to apply this theory to Jamestown. Although settled before the plague of 1616, Jamestown may still have undergone a psychological transformation from diseases traveling up and down the coast. It possibly will turn out that historians have overlooked the role of disease in motivating affirmative relations between Indians and other European settlers, as it was, until now, overlooked in the case for Plymouth Plantation, the Indians of Massachusetts Bay and the plague of 1616-1618.
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