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Reconsiderations

PURITANS AND PEQUOTS: THE QUESTION OF GENOCIDE

MICHAEL FREEMAN

THE event commonly known as the Pequot War has been the subject of considerable historical controversy. Some disputes are over matters of fact; others over issues of interpretation. One interpretive concern is whether the Puritans committed genocide against the Pequots.¹ In order to answer such a question satisfactorily, we must be clear why we are asking it and formulate it as rigorously as possible.

The interpretation of conflicts between European colonists and indigenous Americans raises problems of impartiality. We cannot altogether avoid ethnocentric bias, of course, but we can correct it when we can identify it. We should therefore recognize that to name the encounter of Puritans and Pequots in 1637–38 the “Pequot War” is to adopt the Puritan point of view. We formulate the question of genocide more impartially, therefore, if we ask whether or not the conflict between the Puritans and the Pequots culminated in genocide.

The conflict was important for at least four general reasons. As the first large-scale, violent encounter between the English colonists of New England and an indigenous people, it has a special place in the overall encounter of European and American civilizations. In addition, it was the first large-scale, violent encounter between Puritans and native Americans and thus has a special place in the history of Puritanism. Third, the conflict was an episode in the early history of what was to become the United States of America. It was, therefore, part of the process by which this nation-state was made. Fourth, the event was an instance of inter-ethnic violence, in particular of violence between colonial settlers and indigenous peoples. The nature and causes of this form of violence are clearly of general interest.

The term “genocide” was coined during the Second World War by Raphael Lemkin to identify a type of war crime he thought so novel

¹Steven T. Katz, “The Pequot War Reconsidered,” *The New England Quarterly* 64 (1991): 206–24.

in modern times that it lacked a name. That crime was described as the deliberate destruction of an ethnic group or nation.² In its Convention of 1948, the United Nations made "genocide" a proper subject of international law, although its precise use of the term differed from Lemkin's. Since that time the term has increasingly infiltrated not only political polemic but historical scholarship. Both Lemkin and the U.N. held that "genocide" was a generic concept and that genocide had occurred throughout history.³ This view has been taken by a number of scholars.⁴ Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, for example, include the Pequot War in their historical survey of genocide.⁵ Steven Katz, on the other hand, has argued that this important event cannot be considered a case in an important class of events called "genocide."

In his 1991 article in the *New England Quarterly*, Katz concedes that the conquest of the New World entailed "the greatest demographic tragedy in history." Colonialism involved "manifest evil." It is appropriate to censure the Puritans for the "unnecessary carnage" of the Pequot War. However, "to interpret these events through the radicalizing polemic of accusations of genocide is to rewrite history to satisfy our own moral outrage." The Pequot War was not racial. Although the colonists viewed the Indians through racial stereotypes, the war was not an attack on "'Indianness' per se," a conclusion based on the observation that the English had Indian allies. Moreover, if we analyze the war in its "particular historical context," we are obliged to take account of the Puritans' fear that the Pequots threatened their very survival.⁶

That the English had Indian allies is, however, irrelevant to the question of whether or not the settlers committed genocide against the Pequots, as are the Puritans' fears, unless considered vis-à-vis those of the Pequots. Katz does admit that "both sides had cause to feel aggrieved," that for most Indians the very presence of Europeans was an act of aggression, and that this sense of general aggression appeared to be justified by the considerable number of crimes com-

²Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).

³For the U.N. text, see Leo Kuper, *Genocide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 210.

⁴"The word is new, the crime ancient" (Kuper, *Genocide*, p. 11).

⁵Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 180-93.

⁶Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 206-7, 218, 220, 222-24.

mitted against Indians by unscrupulous English individuals.⁷ But he gives no systematic account of how such perceptions contributed to the causes of the Pequot War. To understand this conflict and to come to grips with the genocide question, we must not only attempt a balanced understanding of the perceptions of both Puritans and Pequots, but we must also set them in the larger context of the European colonization of America.

Francis Jennings has offered us a valuable tool with his analysis of the concept of "contact." In the largest sense, contact occurred between European and Indian societies on 12 October 1492. There were immediate reverberations throughout both continents. Europeans launched more ships and men, while disease and trade goods raced among the Indians far ahead of European explorers. People of each society who had never seen representatives of the other became conscious of the other and of the other's forms of conduct. As a consequence of the first contact, subsequent behavior was modified on both sides, so that no future contact was quite like the first. Each contact was unique, partly because it was the unique outcome of previous contacts.⁸

On both sides of the European-American encounter were a number of peoples with complex economic, political, and military relations. The European states were competitors and enemies who, nevertheless, shared certain beliefs. In particular, many Europeans maintained that wars of conquest and dispossession against heathen peoples were justified.⁹

The first Europeans encountered by indigenous Americans on the east coast of North America were explorers, fishermen, and fur traders. These contacts brought European disease to the native Americans. Contact with agricultural Americans encouraged European colonization. Although Euro-American trade appeared to be beneficial to both sides and relations between settlers and natives were often friendly in the early years, colonization was inherently threatening; as ever-increasing numbers of immigrants set foot on American soil, competition for land and trade intensified.¹⁰

⁷Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 208-9.

⁸Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1976), pp. 41-42.

⁹Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 3-6, 44, 183.

¹⁰Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 8-9, 51; James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial*

The earliest violence in Euro-American relations along the North Atlantic coast may have been perpetrated between 1501 and 1509 by explorers kidnapping members of the Micmac.¹¹ The first English colonizing expedition to America landed at Roanoke in 1585. No conflict with the local people occurred until the English found a silver cup missing and sent a punitive expedition to a nearby native village. The natives denied having taken the cup. The English burned the village to the ground and destroyed the natives' supply of corn. After that, relations deteriorated. Thomas Hariot, a member of the expedition, admitted: "Some of our company towards the end of the year showed themselves too fierce in slaying some of the people in some towns upon causes that on our part might easily have been borne withal." The original colonists left the following year, to be replaced by a relief expedition of twenty men. When another expedition arrived the next year, no settlers were to be found. A subsequent expedition reaching the colony in 1590 found it abandoned. The fate of this first English settlement in America remains a mystery. But we do know that, in its short life, it had managed to generate a considerable amount of violent conflict.¹²

A number of skirmishes between English and native Americans ensued. In 1602 Bartholomew Gosnold, a survivor of the Roanoke adventure, sailed for the northern fishing banks. The coastal natives were cooperative and eager to trade. Yet once again conflict broke out amidst circumstances that remain obscure. Two of Gosnold's crew were attacked for reasons unknown. The following year two ships under command of Martin Pring sailed to the same area. The local Nauset greeted the newcomers warmly, but for reasons that are again not clear, the English turned two large mastiffs on them. Shortly thereafter, an apparent reprisal raid by the Nauset was repulsed by the English. In 1605 Captain George Waymouth explored the area previously visited by Gosnold and Pring and traded with natives of the Maine coast. Despite the friendly welcome extended by the local people, the English suspected them of planning an ambush.

North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 42; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. v, 30, 37; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640* (London: Dent, 1980), pp. 127-29; Gary B. Nash, *Red, White and Black: The People of Early North America*, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1992), pp. 40-41.

¹¹Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 52-54.

¹²Nash, *Red, White and Black*, pp. 42-44; Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, p. 174.

According to James Rosier, a member of the English party, it became necessary "to take some of them, before they should suspect we had discovered their plot."¹³

In 1614 Thomas Hunt sailed to New England, where he seized more than twenty natives from Patuxet (site of the future Plymouth Colony) and Nauset, and sold them into servitude. One explorer commented that the natives of New England had by this time "contracted such an hatred against our whole nation as they immediately studied how to be revenged." Notwithstanding such episodes, friendly trade between English and native Americans was still possible. Nevertheless, Alden Vaughan sums up the situation into which the Puritans sailed in the following terms:

by the time the first Puritans arrived in New England some tribes had particular reasons to question the friendliness and integrity of Europeans. It is not hard to imagine the impact of Hunt's kidnapping excursion on the wronged tribes (the Nausets and Wampanoags) in particular and on the coastal tribes in general. In 1620 some of the Indians of southern New England still viewed the white man with suspicion if not with hatred.¹⁴

In 1620 the *Mayflower* Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, near the site of Captain Thomas Hunt's kidnappings. The natives of Nauset had recently attacked English explorers on Cape Cod. Captain Thomas Dermer had explored the New England coast a few months earlier and reported that the local Wampanoag bore "an inveterate malice to the English." The early actions of the English did not augur well: they took corn from an underground storage area and craftware from some wigwams. Their first contact was an attack by the Nauset, in which no serious injuries were sustained on either side. Despite these difficulties, conditions favorable to establishing the colony included the depopulation of Indian lands due to the ravages of disease, the natives' interest in goods the settlers could provide, and the military assistance the newcomers could give local tribes against their enemies. In March 1621 John Carver, the first governor of the Plymouth Colony, concluded a treaty with Massasoit, the Wampanoag chief. Under its terms Massasoit promised that his people would not harm the English and that, if they did, he would hand over the offenders

¹³Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*, revised ed. (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 6-9; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 87-91.

¹⁴Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 14-16; see also, pp. 59-60; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, p. 75; and Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, p. 101.

for punishment. Carver and Massasoit each agreed to aid the other in the event "any did unjustly war against him." The treaty ended with a declaration that King James would esteem Massasoit "as his friend and ally." This treaty is often credited with the good relations that obtained between Plymouth and the Wampanoag in the early years of the colony, but the treaty was not a balanced one. Massasoit had an obligation to deliver up those of his people who harmed the colonists, but there was no corresponding obligation on the part of the settlers. The Puritans appear to have interpreted the treaty as subjecting Massasoit to the King of England, but nothing in the treaty text confirms that view as Massasoit's intention.¹⁵

The Massachusetts Bay colonists found themselves in a situation similar to that of the earlier settlers at Plymouth. The local native tribes, the Massachusett and the Pawtucket, had also been devastated by plague and also faced native enemies. For these reasons, the Bay settlers were welcomed by the local people, and initial Puritan attitudes to the natives were generally favorable. However, the Puritans were also afflicted by fear and suspicion.

Word of the 1622 Indian uprising in Virginia had spread quickly and still prompted grave concerns among new and old settlers alike. But this event must also be understood in historical context. After the settlement at Jamestown was established, John Smith, president of the council, adopted a policy of burning Indian canoes, fields, and villages to extort food supplies and to cow Powhatan, paramount chief of the local tribes, into submission. Powhatan made a number of retaliatory attacks on the colonists, and the English counterattacked with considerable ferocity. In 1622 the Indians launched a war against the colonists in which almost one third of the settlers were killed. Some of the colonists admitted to those back home that the cause of the attack was "our own perfidious dealing with them," and the Virginia Company acknowledged that fear of dispossession had inspired the Indian attack.¹⁶

The Massachusetts Bay Company, in its instructions, had reminded John Endicott, governor of the earlier Salem colony, of the Virginia uprising. The colonists left England well armed. The Massachusetts

¹⁵Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England from Bradford to Edwards* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 48–50; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 111, 113–15, 175–76; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 65–67, 70–78. Vaughan reprints the text of the treaty on p. 338.

¹⁶Nash, *Red, White and Black*, pp. 59, 60–62; Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, pp. 174–76.

Court prohibited the selling of guns and ammunition to the natives and ordered the construction of special trading establishments in each town so that natives would not visit English houses.¹⁷

Whether from motives of prudence or principle, the company issued instructions that land be purchased from natives who claimed title so as to "avoid the least scruple of intrusion." Vaughan claims that all early land sales were voluntary exchanges. He concedes that later land was acquired by conquest but maintains that in New England no war was fought for the purpose of overriding native land claims. Jennings counterargues that land was often acquired by force or fraud. From our historical remove, we cannot adequately assess the fairness of the early land deals, but we do know that their cumulative effect was to increase the political and cultural domination of the English over the native Americans in New England, which generated increasing native resistance, which led to overt conflict, which in turn had as its outcome accelerated English acquisition of land and political control.¹⁸

The Puritans believed themselves to be culturally superior to the natives, but since the principal difference was one of religion, the natives were, in the first instance, subjects for conversion—social and religious—rather than extermination. John White exhorted the colonists to treat the natives mercifully, for, although they appeared to be in the power of Satan, the Puritans could raise them to godliness. However, if the heathen should resist conversion or pose a threat to the Christian community, then they might be dealt with, in Vaughan's words, "as the children of the Old Testament dealt with the foes of Israel."¹⁹

¹⁷Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629-1700* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 55, 135-39; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 183-84, 189-91; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 43-44, 94-95, 97-98, 103-4.

¹⁸Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 104-14, 152-53, 310-13; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 82, 83, 128-30, 135-36, 139-40, 143-45, 183; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 11-12, 85-86, 113, 119, 176-77, 180-81, 184, 186-87, 196-97, 199-201; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, pp. 65-66, 199-200; Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, pp. 155, 163, 181-82; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, pp. 38-40, 78-80.

¹⁹Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, p. 201; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. xi, xii, 1, 19-21, 24, 62-64, 236-38, 260-61, 303-6, 333; Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, pp. 4, 35-36, 42, 46, 51-52, 65, 70-74, 78, 85-86, 106, 108, 112-13, 118-23, 127, 129-30, 134-35, 137-38, 140, 142-44, 147, 164, 170-72; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, pp. 37-38, 118-19, 123; Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 7-8, 29; Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, pp. 11, 13, 62, 123-24, 150,

English immigrants to America believed that they had the right to settle there; consequently, if their colonization was resisted by the native inhabitants, they had a right "to pursue revenge with force." Kupperman argues that the English regarded the natives as "treacherous," not because they thought them "savages" but because they considered treachery to be a natural human response to the project of domination in which they knew themselves to be engaged. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive: Christians are likely to distrust heathens and invaders those whom they are invading.²⁰

Europeans wanted goods from America and were eager to trade with the natives to get them. Thus, European traders had a motive to perceive the natives as friendly: people with whom they could do business. Trade and genocide are not mutually compatible. Native Americans wanted European goods, too, but the economic balance of power was unequal and trade was more destructive to native American society than it was to European. The natives were converted from self-sufficient hunters and agriculturalists into suppliers for the European market. Access to desired European goods created new patterns of intertribal rivalry and warfare. Thus the trade system enabled Europeans to engineer an effective divide-and-rule policy vis-à-vis the indigenous peoples.²¹

Pre-contact native peoples had engaged in war to settle boundary disputes, avenge insults, and extend or resist tribal authority. Such warfare, however, caused few deaths, because tribes or bands were too small to risk heavy casualties, the abundance of the land and the modest expectations of material well-being generated no motive for wars of conquest, and neither military technology nor military organization was adapted to large-scale destruction. Pre-contact native warfare was, therefore, almost certainly less destructive than European warfare. Native American warfare was conducted almost entirely by men killing men; women and children were rarely killed, though they

175; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 6–7, 60, 148–49, 241, 248–49; Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, pp. 42–48, 64–66, 71, 78–79.

²⁰Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 8–9, 51; Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, p. 42; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. v, 30, 37; Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, pp. 127–29; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, pp. 40–41.

²¹Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 8–9, 50, 55, 57, 59–60, 67–72; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, p. 37; Lynn Ceci, "Native Wampum as a Peripheral Resource in the Seventeenth-Century World-System," in *The Pequots in Southern New England*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), p. 51; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 39–40, 77, 86, 87, 94–95, 125–26, 159–60, 168.

were often taken captive and incorporated into the capturing tribe. Europeans killed men, women, and children in their attacks on Indian settlements. Similarly, pre-contact Indians did not wage war by attacking the food supplies of their enemies; this was a common tactic of Europeans.²²

By their first contact with Europeans, the Pequots had gained control, probably by warfare, of a substantial area of what is now southeastern Connecticut. William Starna estimates that there were about 13,000 Pequots just before contact, a number that was reduced to about 3,000 in the early contact period, that remnant that had not succumbed to European diseases. Dutch traders became active in the Connecticut Valley in the early 1620s. Shortly after their first contact with the Dutch in 1622, the Pequot defeated the River Indians and established control of the lower Connecticut Valley. In 1633 the Dutch made a treaty with the Pequot that granted them the right to occupy a tract of land on the site of what is now Hartford. The treaty specified that all natives were to be allowed access to the trading post that the Dutch were to establish there under the name of the House of Good Hope. The following year some Connecticut Valley natives who had been forced off their land by the Pequots invited the Plymouth colonists to build a trading post some miles upriver from the House of Hope at Matianuck (today Windsor) by purchasing land from the local inhabitants. In reaction to this European intrusion, the Pequots killed some Indians trading at the House of Hope. In 1634 Dutch traders captured Tatobem, a Pequot sachem, and killed him even though the Pequots had paid a ransom for him. In retaliation the Pequots attacked the House of Hope.²³

It is generally agreed that the story of the Puritan-Pequot conflict begins with the death of Captain John Stone in the spring of 1634. Stone was a West Indian trader and pirate who had attempted to steal a ship of the Plymouth Colony's before he arrived at Massachusetts Bay. Plymouth demanded that he be returned so that he could be tried for a capital offence. Massachusetts refused this demand but

²²Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, pp. 7–8; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. xx, 17, 37, 39–40, 58; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 26, 79, 206; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 150, 151–53, 155.

²³Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 55–56, 115–16; William A. Starna, "The Pequots in the Early Seventeenth Century," in *Pequots in Southern New England*, pp. 33–34, 46, 57; Alfred A. Cave, "Who Killed John Stone? A Note on the Origins of the Pequot War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 49 (1992): 512–13; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 188–89; Laurence M. Hauptman, "The Pequot War and Its Legacies," in *Pequots in Southern New England*, pp. 71–72.

later expelled Stone for conduct unbecoming a Puritan asylum-seeker. On his way to Virginia, Stone made a detour up the Connecticut River, where he kidnapped some Indians for ransom. In retaliation, he and his band were killed by Indians. Massachusetts then demanded that the Pequots surrender those who were guilty of the deaths of Stone and his men.²⁴

The Pequots, at this point at war with the Dutch and the Narragansetts, were vulnerable. Late in 1634, they decided to send ambassadors to the Bay Colony to negotiate for peace and trade. A treaty was concluded. It appears that the Pequots promised to hand over Stone's killers (Jennings disagrees with this assessment) and consented not to obstruct English settlement in Connecticut. In 1635 English migrants began to establish settlements on the Connecticut River. Trade was carried on peacefully. No problems arose in 1635.²⁵

On 18 June 1636, a Plymouth trader, Jonathan Brewster, reported that the sachem Uncas, who had broken away from the Pequots to form his own small Mohegan tribe, had told him that "the Pequots have some mistrust that the English will shortly come against them . . . and therefore out of desperate madness do threaten shortly to set both upon Indians and English jointly." Katz believes that Uncas "may well have fabricated the rumor," but the colonists, aware of their small numbers and mindful of the 1622 Virginia uprising, were disposed to take it seriously. On 4 July the Massachusetts Bay colony demanded that the Pequots comply with the terms of the treaty of 1634, surrender the killers of Captain Stone, and reply to several other charges of bad faith. Should the Pequots fail to meet these demands, Massachusetts threatened to terminate their treaty of friendship with the Pequots and to "revenge the blood of our countryman as occasion shall serve."²⁶

Very soon afterwards, Captain John Gallop found John Oldham dead in his pinnace near Block Island. Evidence of guilt pointed to the Narragansett and the Block Island natives. However, the Narragansett managed to appease Massachusetts by returning Oldham's two sons and his possessions. Miantonomo, a paramount sachem of

²⁴Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 189–90, 194–95; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, p. 123; Cave, "Who Killed John Stone?" pp. 509–21.

²⁵Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 190–97, 202; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 210–11; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 124–25; Hauptman, "The Pequot War," p. 72.

²⁶Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 202–5; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, p. 126; Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," p. 209.

the Narragansett, led a party of two hundred warriors to Block Island to take revenge on behalf of Massachusetts. The Bay Colony decided, nevertheless, to seek its own revenge on the Block Islanders and on the Pequots. On 25 August a punitive expedition set sail from Boston under the command of John Endicott. "They had commission," wrote Winthrop, "to put to death the men of Block Island, but to spare the women and children, and to bring them away, and to take possession of the island; and from thence to go to the Pequots to demand the murderers of Captain Stone and other English, and one thousand fathom of wampum for damages etc., and some of their children for hostages, which if they should refuse, they were to obtain it by force." Endicott found few to execute on Block Island, but he destroyed wigwams, crops, and canoes. He then went after the Pequots. He was, however, unable to engage them, and, after killing one Pequot and burning some crops, he returned to Boston.²⁷

The next winter the Pequots launched an avenging attack on the settlers in Connecticut. Meanwhile, Massachusetts formed an alliance with the Narragansetts against the Pequots. Settlers at Wethersfield had dispossessed sachem Sowheag in violation of an agreement with him, and he asked the Pequots to help him take revenge. On 23 April 1637 the Pequots attacked workers in the fields around Wethersfield, killing six men and three women, destroying property, and taking two girls captive. A week later the General Court of Connecticut declared "offensive war" against the Pequots.²⁸

Connecticut mobilized a troop of ninety Englishmen under Captain John Mason and about seventy Mohegans and "River Indians" under Uncas. Then, following the lead of Narragansett guides, Mason marched his men to the Mystic River, where the smaller of the two Pequot settlements lay. Mason later wrote of his plan: "We had formerly concluded to destroy them by the sword and save the plunder." The attack was launched on 26 May 1637. Entering the village, Mason set the wigwams on fire. The English surrounded the village with two concentric rings, the English on the interior, their native allies on the exterior. As the Pequots fled the flames, the English put them to the sword. Estimates of Pequot dead vary from four to seven hundred, men, women, and children, burnt or killed by the English

²⁷Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 206–11; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 126–30; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, p. 218.

²⁸Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 211, 213–14, 217; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, pp. 68–69; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 131–32; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 218–19.

or their Indian allies. Almost none of the villagers escaped the slaughter. Two Englishmen were killed.²⁹

Many of the Pequots not in the fort at the time of the attack were killed, often in massacres or mass executions, or captured in the following months. The war was brought to an end in September 1638, when the sachems for the remaining Pequots were forced to sign the Treaty of Hartford, by which the Pequot nation was officially declared to be dissolved. The colonial authorities forbade the use of the Pequot name in order, in Captain Mason's words, "to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." Estimates of Pequot killed range from one quarter to two thirds of the tribe.³⁰

Katz argues that the Pequot War was no genocide. The colonists, having learned of hostile Pequot plans, "rightly felt, given their demographic vulnerability, that their very survival was threatened." In choosing to make war, they were choosing to end threats to their existence as individuals and as a community. The attack on the Pequots was motivated neither by racial hatred nor by greed for land, even though the Puritans may have held racist beliefs and certainly coveted Indian land. "[F]or those charged with protecting the members of expanding English communities, the violence had to be stopped at all costs." The colonists' response to Indian threats was perhaps excessive, but their fears were not unfounded.³¹

In reaching his conclusions, however, Katz conflates two different questions: the first concerns English motives for going to war; the second is whether the war was genocidal. Katz conflates these questions because he holds that the Puritans acted in self-defense and defensive wars cannot be genocidal. But this thesis is not supported by his own account of the facts. He concedes that the rumor of a general Pequot attack was probably false but inconsistently asserts that the

²⁹Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 218–24; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, pp. 3–4, 4–5, 221; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 139, 144–45; Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, p. 185; Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, pp. 90–91; Hauptman, "The Pequot War," pp. 73–76; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, pp. 83–84.

³⁰Starna, Hauptman, and Wherry, preface to *Pequots in Southern New England*, pp. xiv–xv; Hauptman, "The Pequot War," pp. 76–77, 233–34, n. 12; Ceci, "Native Wampum," pp. 60–63; Starna, "Pequots in the Early Seventeenth Century," p. 46; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 122, 147–50; Nash, *Red, White and Black*, p. 85; Kevin A. McBride, "The Historical Archaeology of the Mashantucket Pequots, 1637–1900," in *Pequots in Southern New England*, pp. 104–5; Sherburne F. Cook, "Interracial Warfare and Population Decline among the New England Indians," *Ethnohistory* 20 (1973): 6–9.

³¹Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 211–12, 222–23.

Puritans *rightly* felt that their survival was threatened. Whatever the real Pequot threat and the reasonableness of Puritan fears, Katz admits that Puritan responses were excessive. The colonists probably escalated the conflict by their overreactive raid on Block Island. Katz claims that the Pequot had geopolitical ambitions and that the Puritans did not. Yet he provides little evidence for this claim about Pequot aims and acknowledges that the English were expanding and that they coveted Indian land.³² On Katz's own account, therefore, the Pequot War was caused in part by Puritan provocation and overreaction.

Even if Katz were correct in saying that the Pequot War was motivated by the Puritans' fear for their survival, he would not thereby have shown that their actions were not genocidal, for such motives are consistent with genocide. Chalk and Jonassohn, in their sociological history of the phenomenon, have identified four motives for genocide across the ages, of which one is the elimination of threats.³³ Thus Katz's account of Puritan motivation does not support his claim that they did not commit genocide.

Katz's argument depends upon his definition of "genocide." He takes the term to mean "an intentional action aimed at the complete physical eradication of a people." He admits that this is a more stringent use of the term than that adopted by the U.N. Convention, which thereby serves as the operative definition for the purposes of international law. He justifies his narrowing of the definition on the ground that Raphael Lemkin coined the term "to describe the Nazi policy toward European Jews." The more restrictive definition is, then, more appropriate than that of the U.N. in considering the Pequot War.³⁴

The historical assumption underlying Katz's definition is, however, false. Lemkin did not coin the term "genocide" to describe Nazi policy toward European Jews. He defined "genocide" as "the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group." Genocide could be accomplished by a variety of means, from killing all members of a nation or group outright through coordinating different actions aimed at demolishing the essential foundations of a group's life, with the final intention of annihilating the group itself. The objectives of such a plan would be to disintegrate political and social institutions, culture, language, na-

³²Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," p. 212.

³³Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, p. 29.

³⁴Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," p. 213, n. 24.

tional feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups and to destroy the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. The national pattern of the oppressed group would be obliterated and the national pattern of the oppressor imposed. An oppressed population allowed to remain might suffer this imposition or, if the territory had been vacated, colonists from the oppressor group could superimpose their imprint on the area. Lemkin gives as examples of genocide the confiscation of property belonging to Poles, Jews, or Czechs on grounds of their nationality or ethnic identity.³⁵ Katz's appeal to Lemkin to exclude the Pequot War from the definition of genocide is clearly unsuccessful.

The intention of the Treaty of Hartford was "to eliminate the Pequot threat once and for all." After the treaty was signed, Katz tells us, Pequots were not physically harmed.³⁶ But he acknowledges that the Pequots henceforth ceased to exist as an independent polity, that survivors were no longer to be known as Pequots, and that they were not to be permitted to reside on their tribal lands. The treaty, he says, "required the extinction of Pequot identity," and its terms "suggest an overt, unambiguous form of *cultural* genocide."³⁷ Thus he shifts from maintaining that the Pequot War was not genocide to stating that it *was* genocide, but cultural, not physical. Cultural genocide is, of course, a form of genocide.

Katz's argument that the Pequot War was not genocidal rests primarily on his claim that the evidence shows no genocidal intent prior to the war nor even of genocidal behavior during and after the war. Thus he is forced to characterize Mason's statement that the English had decided to destroy the Pequots by the sword as "a phrase not at all unusual to the language of military conflict"; in that context, such comments "almost always" signal not the annihilation of the enemy but the disruption of its capacity to fight. But even Katz implies that Mason's statement admits of a genocidal interpretation, and the survival of some Pequots, even their survival as a people, does not refute the charge of genocide, for if it did, we would have to say that there was no Nazi genocide of the Jews.³⁸

Whatever the intent of the Puritans prior to the war, Katz does not

³⁵Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, p. 79.

³⁶Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 222–23.

³⁷Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 219–20 (emphasis Katz's).

³⁸Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 215, 220, 223.

dispute that the goal of the Treaty of Hartford was to annihilate the Pequot people as such. This was genocide if genocide is, as Lemkin proposed, the deliberate destruction of peoples. Katz claims that the recent use of the term "genocide" to describe various past and present persecutions is tied to the emotive power the concept has acquired because of its association with Auschwitz.³⁹ But to associate genocide with Auschwitz can be misleading in two ways: the first is to exaggerate the similarity between some event and the Nazi policy toward the Jews; the second is to refuse the name "genocide" to any event that differs significantly from that policy. Katz's argument that the Pequot War was no genocide amounts to the claim that it was significantly different from the Nazi attack upon the Jews, which it surely was. But Katz establishes this obvious point with some unconvincing claims. He asserts that the identification of the Puritan attack upon the Pequots as "genocide" is a polemical, radical rewriting of history to satisfy a sense of moral outrage. This is itself a polemical and implausible thesis quite simply because the *outcome* of the Pequot War fits the definition of genocide originally proposed by Lemkin as well as that incorporated into international law.

The Puritan-Pequot conflict is best understood in the wider historical context of contacts between Europeans and indigenous Americans. These contacts constituted complex patterns of mutual advantage, alliance, provocation, revenge, suspicion, fear, and conflict. It is clear from English sources that the English could be aggressors and that, when provoked, they could take revenge that seemed even to some among them excessive. Acts of unprovoked aggression were probably committed by both sides. Both sides took revenge in very destructive forms. Thus, each had reason to fear the other. The Pequot War may have seemed to the Puritans a justified preemptive strike, but the suspicions, fears, and calculations of the Puritans were of a kind common in ethnic conflicts, including those that result in genocide.

The so-called Pequot War should be understood in all its historical specificity and, as such, should be understood as more than a dramatic episode in the early history of New England. It was an example of the complex processes of interaction between European colonists and indigenous Americans that could end in the destruction of one group. To call this event a genocide rather than a war is *not* to say that the Puritans were proto-Nazis nor that there were no significant

³⁹Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," pp. 213, n. 24.

differences between the Nazi genocide of the Jews and the Puritan attack upon the Pequots. It is certainly not to rewrite history. It is, rather, to register the Pequot War for what it historically was: one of the many cases in which nation-destruction was part of the process of nation-building.⁴⁰

⁴⁰See Walker Connor, "Nation-building or nation-destroying?" *World Politics* 24 (1972): 320-55.

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