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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan., 1981), pp. 56-72

Published by: [Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1916857>

Accessed: 04/12/2011 20:03

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# Cultural Bias in the New England Puritans' Perception of Indians

William S. Simmons

**E** NGLISH Puritan voyagers to New England during the seventeenth century perceived the Indians whom they met there in terms of a mythical model that originated in their Christian past and achieved sharpness in the writings of John Calvin.<sup>1</sup> They saw the world as an arena where forces of light and holiness, represented by Protestant saints, fought against armies of sin and darkness, represented by devils who motivated aristocracies and priesthoods, and infiltrated the Christian community through immoral and undisciplined persons. This mental framework for comprehending evil both within and outside themselves provided Puritan colonists with a theory for interpreting cultural differences between themselves and the native people whom they encountered in the New World. The Puritans who settled in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island believed that the Indian inhabitants of these areas worshipped devils, that Indian religious practitioners were witches, and that the Indians themselves were bewitched. These beliefs appear as matter-of-fact assumptions in the vocabulary of all the New English who wrote about Indian culture, whether they wrote from a sympathetic or hostile perspective and whether they were informed or ignorant of ethnographic facts. Unlike Indian beliefs about the supernatural qualities of Englishmen, which seem to have been temporary and situational, Puritan commitment to the devil-and-witchcraft theory of Indian culture intensified rather than diminished with experience.

My purposes are to identify some of the sources within the Puritans'

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<sup>1</sup> The Indians of the Northeast also perceived the European colonists in terms of their own mythology and world view. See, for example, the Indian traditions of European arrival which were recorded by William Wood, *New England's Prospect*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Amherst, Mass., 1977), 95-96, and John Heckewelder, "Indian Tradition of the First Arrival of the Dutch at Manhattan Island, Now New-York," *New-York Historical Society, Collections*, 2d Ser., I (1841), 71-74.

culture that made the devil-and-witchcraft interpretation of Indian culture self-evident to them, and to suggest some of the ways in which this interpretation influenced and was influenced by Puritan-Indian relationships in the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> For source material I have drawn primarily upon the writings of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English observers who lived and traveled in New England and who knew Indians personally. These observers believed in God, Satan, demons, witches, the moral significance of plagues, and other-worldly intervention in personal as well as national affairs. They were less interested in the intrinsic qualities of Indian culture than in the meaning Indians might have for "the whole of New England life."<sup>3</sup> The ethnic groups mentioned in these sources are mainly the Massachusett, Pokanoket, Wampanoag, Narragansett, Mohegan, and Pequot—near mythical names in the early accounts—all of whom lived in or near the areas of original English settlement.

A number of modern scholars, most notably Roy Harvey Pearce, James Axtell, Neal Salisbury, and Richard Slotkin, have analyzed the emotional and symbolic significance of Indians in the Puritans' literature and world-view.<sup>4</sup> These authors have emphasized that Puritan New Englanders in the seventeenth century considered Indians to be "agents of an external malice," and they have traced this malice to sources within Puritan culture and personality rather than to the Indians themselves.<sup>5</sup> English Puritanism

<sup>2</sup> The Puritans were not alone in believing that the devil inspired Indian culture. Anglican, Dutch, French, and Spanish colonists shared this basically Christian view. See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978). Parts I, II, and III provide a comparison of the images of the American Indian held by Europeans of diverse cultural backgrounds. Much remains to be understood about the influence of different European religious ideologies on the ethnographic interpretation of Indian culture. I focus here only on the Puritans.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Baltimore, 1965), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Pearce, "The Significance of the Captivity Narrative," *American Literature*, XIX (1947), 1-20, "The 'Ruines of Mankind': The Indian and the Puritan Mind," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XIII (1952), 200-217, and *Savagism and Civilization*, chap. 1; James Axtell, "The Scholastic Philosophy of the Wilderness," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), 335-366, and "Through a Glass Darkly: Colonial Attitudes toward the Native Americans," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, I (1974), 17-24; Neal E. Salisbury, "Conquest of the 'Savage': Puritans, Puritan Missionaries, and Indians, 1620-1680" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972), and "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 27-54; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), chaps. 2-6. See also Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*, 80-85.

<sup>5</sup> Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*, 178.

came into existence in a stressful context of dramatic large-scale social change and can be seen as the ideological creation of a revolutionary people intent on challenging their inner selves as well as their larger social environment.<sup>6</sup> Feelings, traditions, and behavior that they tried to repress or modify within themselves they attributed to the devil and through him to their enemies. In their eyes, persons not reborn through Christ—English unregenerates in addition to New World Indians—lived in a depraved natural state under the devil's spell. The reborn self emerged only through a conversion experience that involved emotional as well as social levels of realization. The convert first learned to recognize, lament, and master his sinful natural self. This inner triumph of grace then surfaced in the exemplary social relations of the saint. (Since Puritans perceived the devil and all behavior associated with him as the inversion of godliness, they perceived natural man—Indians as well as English sinners—as an inverted expression of their cultural ideal. This is the key to the Puritans' perception of the native people whom they encountered in North America.)

Belief in witches provided the Puritans with an extremely negative image against which the exemplary citizen and saint could be contrasted.<sup>7</sup> As sainthood was a visible expression of the convert's grace according to God, so witchcraft was the conclusion of the unregenerate's relationship with the devil. The projected attributes of the Puritan devil are traceable to Christian and folk sources in English culture. Satan was known to transform himself into animal, human, and other forms, to communicate directly with mortals through visions, voices, and trances, and to enter covenants with them. Those who entered such covenants and profited from the transfer of the devil's power became witches. With Satan's aid, they controlled familiar spirits, known as devils, demons, and imps, which were believed to cause possession, injury, and death.

Witches and their demons lived in a world that was invisible to most people but could be seen by witches and their bewitched victims. Knowledge of the powers of witchcraft, such as the ability to control familiar spirits, was attributed to persons accused of witchcraft, who were often poor, quarrelsome, marginal, and vulnerable members of society. Occasionally, individuals validated these beliefs by confessing to the practice of witchcraft. This proved a sensible strategy during the Salem episode, when

<sup>6</sup> Michael Walzer, "Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology," *History and Theory*, III (1963), 59-90, and *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), chaps. 2, 9.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, Puritan witchcraft beliefs resembled those of numerous other societies where witchcraft is reported to have existed. See, for example, Clyde Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), 110-113; John Middleton, *Lugbara Religion: Ritual and Authority among an East African People* (New York, 1960), 238-250; and William S. Simmons, *Eyes of the Night: Witchcraft among a Senegalese People* (Boston, 1971), 96-109.

men and women accused of witchcraft confessed and thereby avoided possible execution. Although very few unregenerates actually were thought to have made covenants with the devil, persons not reborn into sainthood were considered his involuntary slaves.<sup>8</sup>

One fundamental point of contrast between Puritan and Indian culture was in attitudes toward the experience of personal revelation. The Puritans who settled New England knew their God through the pages of the Bible and the reasoned words of their ministers, and did not believe that he communicated with seventeenth-century mortals by direct revelation, whether through visions, voices, tongues, dreams, possession, or trance. Robert Cushman, a friend and agent of the Pilgrims, stated this view: "Whereas God of old did call and summon our fathers by predictions, dreams, visions, and certain illuminations . . . now there is no such calling to be expected for any matter whatsoever. . . . God, having such a plentiful storehouse of directions in his holy word, there must not now any extraordinary revelations be expected."<sup>9</sup>

One reason for this attitude was that spontaneous religious activity posed a threat to the ordered hierarchical social relationships and the sustaining reward of living sainthood, the design by which the Puritans constructed the earliest New England societies. Following Calvin, they denounced the unpredictable prophets of enthusiastic Protestantism as contrary to the orderly discipline of Christian society. A god who communicated directly with mortals was thought to be the devil in disguise. When the Massachusetts General Court asked Anne Hutchinson in November 1637 "how shee did know that it was God that did reveale these things to her, and not Satan," she replied, "how did *Abraham* know that it was the voyce of God, when he commanded him to sacrifice his sonne?" The court answered, "By an immediate voice," to which Anne Hutchinson responded, "So to me by an immediate revelation. . . . By the voice of his own spirit to my soul."<sup>10</sup> These words were sufficient to convince the court that

<sup>8</sup> George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York, 1972 [orig. publ. Cambridge, Mass., 1929]), chaps. 10, 18; Norman Cohn, "The Myth of Satan and His Human Servants," in Mary Douglas, ed., *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London, 1970), 3-16; Keith Thomas, "The Relevance of Social Anthropology to the Historical Study of English Witchcraft," *ibid.*, 47-79; Alan Macfarlane, "Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex," *ibid.*, 81-99; Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 1-21.

<sup>9</sup> Cushman, "Reasons and Considerations Touching the Lawfulness of Removing Out of England into the Parts of America," in Dwight B. Heath, ed., *A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth: Mourt's Relation* (New York, 1963), 89.

<sup>10</sup> John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, & Libertines*, in David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Middletown, Conn., 1968), 273; Winthrop, "The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown," *ibid.*, 337.

her god was Satan and that she should be banished into the wilderness outside Massachusetts Bay. John Winthrop wrote in his account of her trial that she "walked by such a rule as cannot stand with the peace of any State; for such bottomlesse revelations . . . if they be allowed in one thing, must be admitted a rule in all things; for they being above reason and Scripture, they are not subject to controll."<sup>11</sup> Although the court did not accuse Anne Hutchinson of being a witch, she was suspected of being one. In her exile, according to the seventeenth-century Puritan historian Edward Johnson, she continued to be "very bold in her strange Revelations" and identified with Indians: "[T]he Indians in those parts [near New Amsterdam] forewarned them of making their abode there . . . but still they continued, being amongst a multitude of Indians, boasted they were become all one Indian."<sup>12</sup>

The religious beliefs and rituals of the Indians of southern New England corresponded in many specific ways to English fantasies about the devil and witches, and English observers were attentive to these correspondences. Edward Winslow, Roger Williams, and others learned that most Indian deities were believed to communicate directly with mortals through dreams and visions. In contrast to the Puritan view that such experiences were disruptive of orderly social life, Indians who received such revelations were accorded great honor in their community. Numerous accounts attest that the New England Indians gave serious attention to messages from that part of the self, identified by them as a soul, that communicated through visions and dreams. They refined trance to the degree that groups of persons could experience the same visions together, apparently while awake. Ezra Stiles recorded one such example: "Philip in 1675 attacked Bridgewater with 600 Indians & on May 8 burnt all the houses not pallisadoed—English Band there then was 26 Men. They had a Pawaw when the Devil appeared in the Shape of a Bear walking on his 2 hind feet; the Indians all followed him & drew off. The Indians said if the Appearance had been a Deer they would have destroyed the whole Town & all the English."<sup>13</sup>

A powerful spirit known as Hobbamock was said to enter certain persons and to remain in their bodies as a guardian and familiar. Hobbamock seems to have been a collective term for the disembodied souls of the dead, both Indian and English, which reappeared in the shape of humans,

<sup>11</sup> Winthrop, *Short Story*, *ibid.*, 274.

<sup>12</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, ed., [Edward] *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence*, 1628-1651, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1910), 186. For association of Anne Hutchinson with witchcraft see John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage, II (Boston, 1826), 9, and Winthrop, *Short Story*, in Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, 280-282.

<sup>13</sup> Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., 1755-1774, with a Selection from His Correspondence* (New Haven, Conn., 1916), 232.

animals, and mythical creatures, and entered living humans, who then became known in the Indian dialects as *powwows*. The *powwow* or shaman was the principal religious practitioner in southern New England Indian culture. Each spirit that entered him brought its own particular talent, such as the ability to cure, utilize sorcery, divine the future, attract game animals, or change the weather. The shaman was observed to go into trance, during which time spirit voices spoke through him and his soul journeyed to communicate with deities on behalf of sick or troubled clients. He presided at cures and at public calendrical rituals such as those at mid-winter and harvest. Because of his oracular powers, he was consulted by sachems in policy decisions. Indian behavior and morale in King Philip's War were strongly influenced by shamanistic prophecy.<sup>14</sup>

Hobbamock was one of many *manitos*. A creator god was believed to live in the southwest, whither souls returned after death.<sup>15</sup> Seasons, the points of the compass, species of plants and animals, natural phenomena, and heavenly bodies were all represented by deities, some of whom were reported to communicate directly with humans through dreams. Roger Williams reported of the Narragansett that "there is a generall Custome amongst them, at the apprehension of any Excellency in Men, Women, Birds, Beasts, Fish, etc. to cry out *Manitto*, that is, it is a God . . ." <sup>16</sup>

Puritan observers interpreted the Indian Creator and sometimes the category *manito* as mistaken, confused, and dessicated vestiges of the Christian God. Hobbamock they saw as the devil, *powwows* as witches, and their familiars as demons (the devil's angels) and imps. Many of these interpretations appear in a description written in 1652 by Thomas Mayhew, Jr., about the Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard. Mayhew spoke the Wampanoag language and through his work as a missionary was one of the Puritans who best understood Indian culture. This passage is a remarkable example of how the missionary integrated his intimate knowledge of Indian religion into the partisan framework of his own ethos and world-view:

<sup>14</sup> For more detailed analyses of New England Indian religion and world view see Frank Shuffelton, "Indian Devils and Pilgrim Fathers: Squanto, Hobomok, and the English Conception of Indian Religion," *New England Quarterly*, XLIX (1976), 108-116; William Scranton Simmons, *Cautantouwui's House: An Indian Burial Ground on the Island of Conanicut in Narragansett Bay* (Providence, R.I., 1970), chap. 4, "Southern New England Shamanism: An Ethnographic Reconstruction," in William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Seventh Algonquin Conference*, 1975 (Ottawa, 1976), 217-256, and "Narragansett," in William C. Sturtevant et al., eds., *Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast*, XV (Washington, D.C., 1978), 190-197.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (Providence, R.I., 1936 [orig. publ. London, 1643]), 130.

<sup>16</sup> The English were potential beneficiaries of this "apprehension of . . . Excellency." Williams went on to note that when the Narragansett "talke amongst themselves of the *English* ships, and great buildings, of the plowing of their Fields, and especially of Bookes and Letters, they will end thus: *Manittowock* They are Gods" (*ibid.*, 126).

When the Lord first brought me to these poor Indians on the *Vinyard*, they were mighty zealous and earnest in the Worship of False gods and Devils; their False gods were many, both of things in Heaven, Earth, and Sea: And there they had their Men-gods, Women-gods, and Children-gods, their Companies, and Fellowships of gods, or Divine Powers, guiding things amongst men, besides innumerable more feigned gods belonging to many Creatures, to their Corn, and every Colour of it: The Devil also with his Angels had his Kingdom among them, in them; account him they did the terror of the Living, the god of the Dead, under whose cruel power and into whose deformed likeness they conceived themselves to be translated when they died; for the same word they have for *Devil*, they use also for a *Dead Man*, in their Language: by him they were often hurt in their Bodies, distracted in their Minds, wherefore they had many meetings with their *Pawwaws*, (who usually had a hand in their hurt) to pacifie the Devil by their sacrifice, and get deliverance from their evil; . . . The *Pawwaws* counted their Imps their Preservers, had them treasured up in their bodies, which they brought forth to hurt their enemies, and heal their friends; . . . This Diabolical way they were in, giving heed to a multitude of Heathen Traditions of their gods, and many other things, under the observation whereof, they with much slavery were held, and abounding with sins, having only an obscure Notion of a god greater than all, which they call *Mannit*, but they knew not what he was, and therefore had no way to worship him.<sup>17</sup>

Puritan authors were attentive to more than those aspects of Indian culture that corresponded to their notions of Satan and witches. They were often acutely aware of the "natural" qualities of the native Americans and compared the Indians with themselves in this regard. A variety of authors praised Indians for their generosity, their fine senses of sight and hearing, their hardiness, practical intelligence, and enthusiasm, and the wisdom of some of their leaders. At the same time, Puritans considered the Indians to be vengeful, cowardly, and addicted to idleness, lying, and stealing. Roger Williams associated these undesirable "natural" qualities with Indian child-rearing practices, which he described as loving and permissive. He observed in his *Key* that "their *affections*, especially to their children, are very strong. . . . This extreme *affection*, together with want of *learning*, makes their children sawcie, bold, and undutifull."<sup>18</sup> To Williams and others, the "natural" child created Indian culture. Puritans distin-

<sup>17</sup> Mayhew in Eliot and Mayhew, "Tears of Repentance: Or, a Further Narrative of the Progress of the *Gospel* amongst the Indians in New-England . . .," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d Ser., IV (1834), 201-202.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, *A Key*, 29. See also Daniel Gookin, "Historical Collections of the Indians in New England," ed. J. H. Fiske (n.p., 1970), 14; originally published in *Mass. Hist. Soc., Colls.*, 1st Ser., I (1792), 146-226.



guished themselves from Indians, nature, and sinners by their intentions toward that child: "your *Children*, are the *Children of Death*, and the *Children of Hell*, and the *Children of Wrath*, by Nature," wrote Cotton Mather to his flock, "and . . . from *you*, this *Nature*, is derived and conveyed unto them. . . . [W]ould it not Break thy Heart if thy *Children*, were in Slavery to . . . *Indians*? *Devils* are worse than *Indians* . . . Til thy *Children* are brought home to God, they are the slaves of *Divels*."<sup>19</sup> Although "natural" Indians may have enjoyed some physical, mental, or emotional advantages over Christian English, their servitude to the devil made these advantages unenviable.

The interpretive bias that sensitized Puritans to similarities between Indian culture and devilish aspects of their own also predisposed them to misinterpret or overlook many aspects of Indian culture that were unique. For example, Indian beliefs about the soul, death, and the afterlife appear to have been quite different from those held by Puritans but nevertheless were portrayed mainly in terms of the ways in which they resembled English beliefs. Puritans perceived the Indian world-view as one in which the false god and the real devil presided over two afterlives, in which the souls of the dead received differential treatment according to their behavior on earth. Although they saw in the Indian world-view a structure like their own, they believed that Indians were deluded in their hopes for salvation. "These are the mourners without hope," wrote William Wood, and Roger Williams commented, "I believe they are *lost*."<sup>20</sup>

Expectations of wayward versions of themselves are evident with respect to areas of Indian culture other than religion. If one examines the kinship data in Roger Williams's *Key*, for example, it appears that Williams did not recognize any categories in Narragansett that differed from categories in English. Reconstructing the Narragansett kinship system from his data, one arrives at the English nuclear family with additional wives. The Narragansett and other southern New England people probably were organized into a system of exogamous matrilineal clans, which, if they existed, English observers missed completely.<sup>21</sup> These observers interpreted differences from the exemplary Puritan family in courtship, mating, and sexual patterns as "uncleanness," "whoredomes," and the like—visible evidence of a society formed, or rather deformed, by bondage to the devil.

Despite the Puritans' belief in the spiritual unity of the lost, they also assumed that the devil behind Indian culture was a weaker devil than their own and perhaps even a different one. Cotton Mather once examined this difference experimentally by speaking to the demons in a possessed En-

<sup>19</sup> Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered. Or an Essay to Render Parents and Children Happy in One Another* (Boston, 1699), 10, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Wood, *New England's Prospect*, ed. Vaughan, 111. Williams, *Key*, "To the Reader."

<sup>21</sup> William S. Simmons and George F. Aubin, "Narragansett Kinship," *Man in the Northeast*, IX (1975), 21-31.

glish woman in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, but when he spoke to them in Natick, a Massachusetts dialect, "the *Daemons* did seem as if they did not understand it."<sup>22</sup> That the Indian devil was believed weaker is indicated by the English fear of English witches and their low regard for the efficacy of Indian sorcery. English settlers did not fear bewitchment by Indian shamans nor did they explain their misfortunes in terms of shamanistic spells, and when behavior diagnosed as possession occurred among themselves, they seldom attributed it to Indians. The original settlers believed that Indian devils and witches held power over other Indians but were impotent against the English. Winslow and others remarked how Indian visions would disappear when any Christian English appeared in the vicinity of Indian ritual.<sup>23</sup> Puritan missionaries attributed English immunity to shamanistic spells to the greater power of the Christian God, and offered protection from the shamans as an inducement for Indians to convert.

Puritan writers sometimes acknowledged that shamans may have been effective beyond Indian cultural boundaries. In 1625 Captain Wollaston initiated a small non-Puritan plantation on the south shore of Massachusetts Bay near the site of an abandoned English settlement at Wessagusset, now Weymouth, Massachusetts. After two years this attempt failed and the inhabitants moved to Virginia. Increase Mather learned that Wollaston "conceited that the *Indian* Powas had brought that Place under some Fascination, and that *Englishmen* would never thrive upon *Enchanted Ground*."<sup>24</sup> God preserved Plymouth, Mather concluded, because he "saw that they designed something better than the World in their planting here."<sup>25</sup> Indian shamans were thought to have bewitched English dogs: "it is particularly affirmed," wrote Cotton Mather, "that the *Indians* in their wars with us, finding a sore inconvenience by our *dogs*, which would make a sad yelling if in the night they scented the approaches of them, they sacrificed a *dog* to the devil; after which no *English* dog would bark at an *Indian* for divers months ensuing."<sup>26</sup> The Rhode Islander Joshua Tefft, who joined with the Narragansett in King Philip's War, was thought by his English captors and executioners to have been bewitched, perhaps by the Indian devil.<sup>27</sup> The Puritan's indifference to Indian witchcraft should not

<sup>22</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England . . .*, I (Hartford, Conn., 1820 [orig. publ. London, 1702]), 507.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Winslow, *Good Newes from New England . . .*, in John Masefield, ed., *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers* (New York, 1917), 344; Daniel Denton, *A Brief Description of New-York: Formerly Called New-Netherlands* (London, 1670), 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Mather, *Early History of New England; Being a Relation of Hostile Passages Between the Indians and European Voyagers and First Settlers*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (Albany, N.Y., 1864), 104.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>26</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, I, 506.

<sup>27</sup> James N. Arnold, "Jo[s]hua Tefft," *The Narragansett Historical Register*, III (1884-1885), 167.

be seen as evidence for lack of conviction in their beliefs about Indians, but rather as a reflection of their assumptions of moral and social superiority to Indians, unregenerates, and dogs. In a similar way, the Central African Zande nobility believed in the commoners' witchcraft but did not seriously fear its effects on themselves.<sup>28</sup>

The principal difference in the Puritans' belief about English witchcraft and Indian *pownows* was that they saw Indian satanism in the visible world of Indian culture and, as their ministers frequently emphasized, in the event of Indian attack. Shamanistic ritual was the invisible world made real, and Puritan war against Indians was war against devils or the agents of devils. Captivity by Indians was interpreted as a journey into Hell. Among themselves, the English projected witchcraft attributes upon those whom they accused. In the New World, Puritan witchcraft beliefs provided a framework for evaluating cultural differences, and through them Indians became mythologized.

As Puritans expected punishment for their sinfulness, so they interpreted Indian misfortune, as in the terrible contact-period plagues, as punishment for the sinfulness they believed inherent in Indian culture. Indians feared sorcery from the English and suspected that some of their contact-period diseases originated in English intent. In 1637 the paramount Narragansett sachem, Canonicus, accused Roger Williams and the English of "sending the plague amongst them, and threatening to kill him especially." Williams replied with a masterly stroke that reassured Canonicus that the English were not responsible for the afflictions of his people and at the same time implied that such afflictions were attributable to the English God through whose eyes Indians now could see themselves as sinful. "I not only sweetened his spirit, but possessed him, that the plague and other sicknesses were alone in the hand of the one God, who made him and us, who being displeased with the English for lying, stealing, idleness and uncleanness, (the natives' epidemical sins) smote many thousands of us ourselves with general and late mortalities."<sup>29</sup> By such words as "lying," "stealing," "idleness," "uncleanness," and "epidemical sins," Williams made clear his judgment of cultural differences.

The devil-and-witchcraft theory relieved the Puritans of the uncertainties of understanding Indian motives and of accepting friendly behavior at face value, and injected an element of suspicion into friendly interaction. This pattern is evident in the first friendly encounter between the Pilgrims at Plymouth and the sachem Massasoit in 1621. According to William Bradford's hearsay report, Massasoit's decision to make contact with the English was preceded by an assembly of shamans from all over the area: "before they came to the English to make friendship, they got all the

<sup>28</sup> Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford, 1958), 104-106.

<sup>29</sup> John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Letters of Roger Williams, 1632-1682* (Narragansett Club, *Publications*, 1st Ser., VI [Providence, R.I., 1874]), 17.

Powachs of the country, for three days together in a horrid and devilish manner, to curse and execrate them with their conjurations, which assembly and service they held in a dark and dismal swamp."<sup>30</sup> Nathaniel Morton of Plymouth later interpreted this shamanistic event as showing "how Satan laboured to hinder the gospel from coming into New-England."<sup>31</sup> The authors of *New England's First Fruits*, an early account of missionary efforts and conversions, expressed the suspicion inherent in Puritan cross-cultural perception: "Yet (mistake us not) we are wont to keep them at such a distance, (knowing they serve the Devill and are led by him) as not to imbolden them too much, or trust them too farre; though we do them what good we can."<sup>32</sup> This model of Indian culture was closed to alternative interpretation. Since the devil was a deceiver, and natural man was capable of courtesy and hospitality, such behavior on the Indians' part did not result in an accumulation of trust, for trust could exist only among saints. Roger Williams, after observing that "a man shall generally finde more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these *Barbarians*, than amongst thousands that call themselves Christians," concluded:

*Gods providence is rich to his,  
Let none distrustful be;  
In wilderness, in great distresse,  
These Ravens have fed me.*<sup>33</sup>

For Williams, Indians' kindness was evidence of his salvation, not of their trustworthiness.

The Indians could find exemption from the consequences of their devil-and-witchcraft status in two ways. The first was military alliance (which did not require religious conversion), the strategy followed most successfully by Uncas and his Mohegans and later by the Saconnet with Benjamin Church. The second was complete religious and cultural conversion, combined with political submission, the strategy followed by the small sachemdoms near Massachusetts Bay, in Plymouth Colony, and on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Military alliance did not improve Indians in Puritan eyes. Cotton Mather characterized the rivalry between the Pequot and the Narragansett and Mohegan, which resulted in the Narragansett and Mohegan becoming allied with the united Puritan colonies in the Pequot War, as "a *division in the kingdom of satan* against itself, as was very

<sup>30</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), 84.

<sup>31</sup> Morton, *New England's Memorial: Or a Briefe Relation of the Most Memorable . . . Passages of the Providence of God . . .* (Boston, 1826 [orig. publ. Cambridge, Mass., 1669]), 63n.

<sup>32</sup> *New England's First Fruits* (New York, 1865), 16.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Key*, 16-17.

serviceable to that of our Lord."<sup>34</sup> The conversion efforts of Thomas Mayhew, Jr., of Martha's Vineyard and John Eliot of Roxbury confirmed Puritan witchcraft theory. Both Mayhew and Eliot recorded testimonies in which the converts confessed their sinfulness and diabolical ways, which were more or less synonymous with being Indian.<sup>35</sup> Accounts survive of converted shamans who confessed in detail how they had been inhabited by devils, serpents, and the like, and how they found themselves unable to bewitch Christians and therefore chose to convert.<sup>36</sup> Philip's great error, according to Increase Mather in his history of King Philip's War, was to reject Eliot's ministry:

It is observable that several of those nations which refused the gospel, quickly afterwards were so *Devil driven* as to begin an unjust and bloody war upon the English, which issued in their speedy and utter extirpation from the face of Gods earth. It was particularly remarked in *Philip* the ringleader of the most calamitous war that ever they made upon us; our *Eliot* made a tender of the everlasting Salvation to that king; but the monster entertained it with contempt and anger, and after the Indian mode of joining signs with words, he took a button upon the coat of the reverend man, adding, *That he cared for his gospel just as much as he cared for that button*. The world has heard what a terrible ruine soon came upon that monarch, and upon all his people.<sup>37</sup>

As Mather's words suggest, the Puritan belief that Indians served the devil provided a rationale for the destruction or enslavement of entire populations in war. Puritan soldiers nevertheless had mixed feelings and showed restraint in killing those whom they had defeated. Even this ambivalence could be explained by the devil's cunning. When the soldiers under John Mason's command killed some four hundred inhabitants of the Pequot stockade in the Mystic fight of May 1637, Mason had to urge two of his men to use their swords, and John Underhill stated that his younger

<sup>34</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, II, 480.

<sup>35</sup> These are to be found mainly in the 7 religious tracts reprinted as *Tracts Relating to the Attempts to Convert to Christianity the Indians of New England* (Mass. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, 3d Ser., IV [Cambridge, Mass., 1834]), 1-288, and in Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts: Or, Some Account of the Lives and Dying Speeches of a Considerable Number of the Christianized Indians of Martha's Vineyard, in New-England* (London, 1727).

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Mayhew, "Strength out of Weaknesse; Or a Glorious Manifestation of the Further Progress of the Gospel among the *Indians* in New-England," ed. Henry Whitfield, Mass. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, 3d Ser., IV, (1834), 185-187, 205-206; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mather, *The History of King Philip's War*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (Boston, 1862), 208-209.

soldiers disliked the sight of the slaughter they had completed.<sup>38</sup> In his account of the Pequot campaign in *Wonder-Working Providence*, Edward Johnson reported that Indian shamans may have influenced some of these soldiers, for "there were some of these Indians, as is reported, whose bodies were not to be pierced by their sharp rapiers or swords of[for] a long time, which made some of the souldiers think the Devil was in them, for there were some Powwows among them, which work strange things with the help of Satan."<sup>39</sup> This is one of the few cases recorded in which Puritans acknowledged that Indian witchcraft may have worked effectively against them; in actuality, the Puritan soldiers may have blamed the shamans for whatever reluctance they felt as they destroyed the Pequot men, women, and children with their swords.

New England Puritan writers differed in the degree to which they understood Indian culture on its own terms apart from the myth they imposed upon it. Gerald Berreman's article on "Social Categories and Social Interaction in Urban India," offered some observations that illuminate the social context of cross-cultural insight in Puritan sources: "People are most knowledgeable about those in their own and nearby[status] groups. They are more knowledgeable about those superior to themselves in status and power than about those inferior. People know well those who dominate them, but know little about those they dominate. . . . [U]ntouchables know a great deal about Brahmins; Brahmins know little about untouchables."<sup>40</sup> Although all Puritans would have considered themselves as Brahmins in contrast to Indians, the earliest writers—Winslow, Williams, and Thomas Mayhew, Jr.—knew the most about Indians. There is a relationship between the degree to which these authors understood Indians in other than mythical terms and their political relationships vis-à-vis Indian cultures. Winslow, Williams, and Mayhew, who were among the pioneers in the areas where they settled, depended upon diplomacy, tact, and goodwill to survive during the earliest years of coexistence with Indian populations. These Puritans who were most knowledgeable about Indians wrote in a context where relationships between the cultures were more

<sup>38</sup> John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War: Especially of the Memorable Taking of Their Fort at Mistick in Connecticut in 1637* (London, 1643), 8; John Underhill, *Newes from America; or, a New and Experimentall Discoverie of New England . . .* (London, 1638), 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> Jameson, ed., *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence*, 168.

<sup>40</sup> Berreman, "Social Categories and Social Interaction in Urban India," *American Anthropologist*, LXXIV (1972), 573. In a personal communication, Francis Jennings has suggested that in accounting for ethnographic bias in Puritan writing one should not overlook the possibility that Winslow, Hubbard, and Increase Mather lied about Indians in order to achieve political ends. This point of view is compatible with the argument expressed here—that Puritan cultural bias provided a rationale for depersonalizing Indians in the process of destroying them by force, and that the biased view prevailed as power over the Indians increased.

equal and where English domination had yet to be established. Of all seventeenth-century writers, Winslow and Williams were the least ethnocentric in their observations. Mayhew was the most effective Puritan missionary to the Indians and, next to John Eliot, the best known. To a certain extent, knowledge of Indians was necessary to usurp them, whether in religion or war. Mayhew's missionary successes on Martha's Vineyard reveal a very practical understanding of Indian belief embedded in the English vocabulary of God, the devil, and imps, which he used to persuade shamans and their followers to exchange one set of deities for another. Through this transfer of symbols he initiated the most profound social conversion to occur anywhere in New England, as a result of which the Martha's Vineyard Indians became a separate English-like minority in the plural society that developed on that island.<sup>41</sup> Eliot, who ministered to the most plague-weakened, subjugated, and powerless sachemdoms in southern New England, knew less about Indian culture in its own terms than did any of the above-mentioned three. Although Eliot interacted extensively with Indians, he did so from a position of greater power, and to a greater extent saw them as projections of his Christian world-view.

Despite their belief that Indian culture was a barrier to salvation, Puritan writers differed also in the degree to which they viewed Indian life with a sympathetic eye. Whereas equality in power relationships between the cultures tended to favor a less mythical, more empirical perspective, persons who were alienated from the dominant orthodoxy of Puritan society tended to view Indians in a more positive light and identified with them to a greater extent. Roger Williams, for example, was fond of pointing out ways in which Indians exceeded Europeans in their natural qualities, and was sympathetic to ways in which Narragansett religious and political interests resembled his own: "They have a modest Religious persuasion not to disturb any man, either themselves *English, Dutch*, or any in their conscience, and worship, and therefore say . . . *Peace, hold your peace.*"<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975), chap. 14; Salisbury, "Conquest of the 'Savage,'" chap. 5; Simmons, "Conversion from Indian to Puritan," *NEQ*, LII (1979), 197-218; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675* (New York, 1979), chaps. 9, 10. For further recent discussions of Indian conversion see James P. Ronda, "'We Are Well as We Are': An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIV (1977), 66-82, and Charles M. Segal and David C. Stineback, *Puritans, Indians, and Manifest Destiny* (New York, 1977), chap. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, *Key*, 129. John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz examine the literary basis for Williams's friendly perspective in the introduction to their edition of *A Key* (Detroit, Mich., 1973), 13-69. Slotkin, in his discussion of the Pequot War narratives written by John Underhill and Philip Vincent, supports the suggestion that commitment to orthodoxy was associated with commitment to the image of

By the end of 1676 Puritan armies had destroyed all autonomous Indian groups within their frontiers, and information about those cultures began to recede into Puritan memory. With the southern New England Indians converted, enslaved, powerless, or dead, only the mythical versions of their religion and world-view remained. To the Puritan historian William Hubbard, Indian religion was of no consequence, except for the fact that it involved devils: "As for their religion, they never were observed by any of the first comers or others, to have any other but what was diabolicall, and so uncouth, as if it were framed and devised by the devill himselfe, and is transacted by them they used to call pawwoves, by some kinde of familiarity with the devill. . . . It is not worth the while either to write or read what it was."<sup>43</sup> Cotton Mather elaborated this myth as the historical framework for summarizing Indian-white relationships throughout the seventeenth century: "These *parts* were then covered with nations of barbarous *indians* and infidels, in whom the *prince of the power of the air* did work as a spirit; nor could it be expected that nations of wretches, whose whole religion was the most explicit sort of *devil-worship*, should not be acted by the devil to engage in some early and bloody action, for the extinction of a plantation so contrary to his interests, as that of *New England* was."<sup>44</sup> In 1773 Ezra Stiles wrote the epitaph to any Puritan interest in the intrinsic qualities of Indian religion: "The Powaws of the American Indians are a Relict of this antient System of seeking to an evil invisible Power. . . . But in general the System is broken up, the Vessel of Sorcery shipwreckt and only some shattered planks and pieces disjoyned floating and scattered on the Ocean of the human Activity and Bustle. When the System was intire, it was a direct seeking to Satan; and this the Indians avow their Powaws to be to this day (tho' no Powaw exists now in N. England)."<sup>45</sup> Sampson Occum, an eighteenth-century Mohegan New Light convert, wrote the Indian epitaph to the religious basis of his ancestral culture when he asserted meekly and ambivalently in 1761 that Indian shamans were at least equal to English witches: "I dont see for my part, why it is not as true, as the English or other nation's witchcraft, but it a great mystery of darkness."<sup>46</sup>

Pearce, Salisbury, and Slotkin have argued that warfare against the Indians, cast in the God-and-devil framework, was also war against culturally undesirable potentialities of the Puritan self that were projected upon In-

Indians as a negative moral threat (*Regeneration through Violence*, 69-78).

<sup>43</sup> Hubbard, *A General History of New England from the Discovery to MDCLXXX* (Cambridge, Mass., 1815), 34-35.

<sup>44</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, II, 479-480.

<sup>45</sup> Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., President of Yale College* (New York, 1901), 385-386.

<sup>46</sup> Occum, "An Account of the Montauk Indians on Long-Island, A.D. 1761," *Mass. Hist. Soc., Colls.*, X (1809), 109.



dians, with the added incentive of great rewards in land and power.<sup>47</sup> Curiously but appropriately, the negative moral qualities which seventeenth-century Puritans attributed to Indians threatened to reappear as alien aspects of themselves once they had nearly exterminated real Indians. English ministers now spoke of English vices in terms of Indianization. The Indian as they saw him emerged from his place of origin, within themselves: "our *Indian* wars are not over yet," wrote Cotton Mather. "We have too far degenerated into *Indian* vices. The vices of the *Indians* are these: They are very lying wretches, and they are very lazy wretches: and they are out of measure indulgent unto their children; there is no family government among them. We have shamefully Indianized in all those abominable things. Now, the judgments of God have employ'd *Indian* hatchets to wound us, no doubt, for these our *Indian* vices."<sup>48</sup> In a sermon on the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Providence, the Reverend John Callender warned the citizens of that town not to defile themselves with Indian "abominations" or else they themselves would be destroyed: "if we indianize in our Manners and Vices, they will in Time draw down the like, or as heavy Judgments of God, upon us, as those with which he hath destroyed our Predecessors[the Narragansetts]. God grant that *the People*, who have been *Overthrown in the Wilderness* may be Examples to us, to prevent our lusting after any Evils, lest we be destroyed likewise of the Destroyer!"<sup>49</sup>

The Puritan settlers of colonial New England employed a structural model based upon the opposition between God and the devil as their framework for interpreting the Indians upon whom they imposed themselves. Their beliefs and expectations about devils and witches, who inhabited an invisible dimension within Puritan culture, provided a structure for comprehending and relating to real Indians across the frontier. This structure provided a moral basis for distancing, depersonalizing, and eventually displacing the native inhabitants, and when this process was completed, it provided the plot for historical interpretations of these events. The Puritans' world-view shaped their understanding of Indians in several ways. They were alert to aspects of Indian culture that confirmed their

<sup>47</sup> Pearce, "Captivity Narrative," *Am. Lit.*, XIX (1947), 1-20, "Ruines of Mankind," *Jour. Hist. Ideas*, XIII (1952), 200-217, and *Savagism and Civilization*, 19-35; Salisbury, "Conquest of the 'Savage,'" 1-77; Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*, 157-179. Axtell's "Scholastic Philosophy of the Wilderness," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), 335-366, and "Through a Glass Darkly," *Am. Indian Culture and Research Jour.*, I (1974), 17-24, provide an important complement to the views expressed by these authors. Axtell's "White Indians," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXII (1975), 55-88, is an imaginative exploration of the appeal which Indian culture held for European captives and others who lived intimately with Indians.

<sup>48</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, II, 344.

<sup>49</sup> John Callender, *An Historical Discourse, on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode Island . . .* (Providence, R.I., 1838), 142.

presuppositions but were insensitive to the internal realities of Indian motivations, practices, and beliefs. Knowledge of Indian shamanism, selective observations of Indian behavior, the confessions of Christian Indian converts, and Puritan successes in intercultural warfare all confirmed that their vision was true. Although some early seventeenth-century writers showed an appreciable understanding of Indian culture from the Indian point of view, this interest waned as Indian power and population diminished. In the end, after some sixty years of close coexistence, Puritans remembered Indians mainly in terms of the myth by which they accounted for evil within themselves.