

Here (say they) a general laughter ensued among them (the Indians), that they had remained for so long a time ignorant of the use of so valuable implements; and had borne with the weight of such heavy metal hanging to their necks for such a length of time. They took every white man they saw for a Mannitto, yet inferior and attendant to the *supreme Mannitto*, to wit, to the one which wore the red and laced clothes. Familiarity daily increasing between them and the whites, the latter now proposed to stay with them, asking them only for so much land as the hide of a bullock would cover (or encompass,) which hide was brought forward and spread on the ground before them. That they readily granted this request; whereupon the whites took a knife, and beginning at one place on this hide, cut it up into a rope not thicker than the finger of a little child, so that by the time this hide was cut up there was a great heap. That this rope was drawn out to a great distance, and then brought round again, so that both ends might meet. That they carefully avoided its breaking, and that upon the whole it encompassed a large piece of ground. That they (the Indians) were surprised at the superior wit of the whites, but did not wish to contend with them about a little land, as they had enough. That they and the whites lived for a long time contentedly together, although these asked from time to time more land of them; and proceeding higher up the Mahicanittuk (Hudson river), they believed they would soon want all their country, and which at this time was already the case.

“What Can You Get by Warre . . . ?”

The English settlers at Jamestown, Virginia, were ill prepared for life in what to them was a new world and a strange land. Half of the colonists died during the first winter of 1607. The survivors depended heavily on the Powhatan Indians of the coastal plain to feed and assist them. The Indians exchanged corn for merchandise, but aggressive English behavior alienated them. Moreover, many Indians believed that the English “were a people come from under the world to take their world from them.” One chief told Captain John Smith, “We perceive and well know that you intend to destroy us, that are here to intreat and desire your friendship.”¹

¹ Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 1:247, 2:175.

Knowing the English could not survive without the Indians' corn harvest, he threatened to abandon the country and leave them to starve if they chose to wage war. Growing tensions between the English and Indians broke down in hostilities in 1609.

In "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia," which he published first in 1612, John Smith recounted an exchange with the Indian leader Powhatan. Powhatan had heard rumors from Indians at Nansemond on the lower James River that a nation would arise from Chesapeake Bay to destroy his empire, and Smith's policy of instilling respect by the threat of force did nothing to calm his fears. Powhatan's opening comments may indicate that he was so old he had outlived most of his people or, more likely, that the Powhatans already had suffered three epidemics, of which no record survives.

6

POWHATAN

Speech to Captain John Smith

1609

Captaine Smith, you may understand that I having seene the death of all my people thrice, and not any one living of these three generations but my selfe; I know the difference of Peace and Warre better than any in my Country. But now I am old and ere long must die, my brethren, namely Opitchapam, Opechancanough, and Kekataugh,² my two sisters, and their two daughters, are distinctly each others successors. I wish their experience no lesse then mine, and your love to them no lesse then mine to you. But this bruit from Nandsamund, that you are come to

²Opechancanough, Opitchapam, and Kekataugh ruled the populous chiefdom of Pamunkey, near the mouth of the Pamunkey River. Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 117. Opechancanough was taken prisoner by Smith in 1608 and led the later wars of resistance against the English in Virginia.

destroy my Country, so much affrighteth all my people as they dare not visit you. What will it availe you to take that by force you may quickly have by love, or to destroy them that provide you food. What can you get by warre, when we can hide our provisions and fly to the woods? whereby you must famish by wronging us your friends. And why are you thus jealous of our loves seeing us unarmed, and both doe, and are willing still to feede you, with that you cannot get but by our labours? Thinke you I am so simple, not to know it is better to eate good meate, lye well, and sleepe quietly with my women and children, laugh and be merry with you, have copper, hatchets, or what I want being your friend: then be forced to flie from all, to lie cold in the woods, feede upon Acornes, rootes, and such trash, and be so hunted by you, that I can neither rest, eate, nor sleepe; but my tyred men must watch, and if a twig but breake, every one cryeth there commeth Captaine Smith: then must I fly I know not whether: and thus with miserable feare, end my miserable life, leaving my pleasures to such youths as you, which through your rash unadvisednesse may quickly as miserably end, for want of that, you never know where to finde. Let this therefore assure you of our loves, and every yeare our friendly trade shall furnish you with Corne; and now also, if you would come in friendly manner to see us, and not thus with your guns and swords as to invade your foes.

A Pequot Looks Back at King Philip's War

When the Pilgrims first landed at Plymouth, the local Wampanoag Indians fed and helped them survive their first winter and the chief, Massasoit, made a treaty of friendship with them. But after two generations of coexistence, Massasoit's son, Metacomet, known to the English as King Philip, went to war against the English. It was one of the bloodiest conflicts in American history. Fifty-two English towns were attacked, a dozen were destroyed, and many Indian villages were burned. More than 2,500 colonists died, perhaps 30 percent of the English population of New England. At least twice as many Indians died in the fighting and some estimates suggest that the combined effects of war, disease, and starvation killed half the Indian population of New England. King Philip's War, as it became known, left an enduring legacy in its influence on subsequent attitudes and policies toward Indian peoples.

Sometimes, how wars are remembered and written about—even what they are called—can be as important as how they were fought. The

people, by taking from them all rights, which has been strictly adhered to ever since. Look at the disgraceful laws, disfranchising us as citizens. Look at the treaties made by Congress, all broken. Look at the deep-rooted plans laid, when a territory becomes a state, that after so many years the laws shall be extended over the Indians that live within their boundaries. Yea, every charter that has been given was given with the view of driving the Indians out of the states, or dooming them to become chained under desperate laws, that would make them drag out a miserable life as one chained to the galley; and this is the course that has been pursued for nearly two hundred years. A fire, a canker, created by the Pilgrims from across the Atlantic, to burn and destroy my poor unfortunate brethren, and it cannot be denied. What, then, shall we do? Shall we cease crying and say it is all wrong, or shall we bury the hatchet and those unjust laws and Plymouth Rock together and become friends? . . .

We want trumpets that sound like thunder, and men to act as though they were going at war with those corrupt and degrading principles that robs one of all rights, merely because he is ignorant and of a little different color. Let us have principles that will give everyone his due; and then shall wars cease, and the weary find rest. Give the Indian his rights, and you may be assured war will cease.

But by this time you have been enabled to see that Philip's prophecy has come to pass; therefore, as a man of natural abilities, I shall pronounce him the greatest man that was ever in America; and so it will stand, until he is proved to the contrary, to the everlasting disgrace of the Pilgrims' fathers.