“Subjects . . . unto the same king”

*New England Indians and the Use of Royal Political Power*

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Since Indian John Wompas’s return from England early in the summer of 1677, he had plagued his English and Indian neighbors, traveling “up and downe in a vagron Idle way” and engaging in drunken tirades and other disorderly behavior from Boston to Natick. September 27 found him at Cambridge, near the meetinghouse. A crowd had gathered in response to some alarm, and Wompas was filling their ears: he reminded them pointedly that he held a letter from the king himself, demanding justice on Wompas’s behalf—the express reason for and proud result of his voyage to London. “I am the king’s subject!” Wompas declared. Several English members of his audience protested “that they were his ma[jes]ties subjects as wel as hee.” Ensign William Barret indignantly reported Wompas’s reply: “Hee questioned that . . . as if they were not legal subjects to his ma[jesty].” To underline the colony’s shaky political standing, Wompas told several other Cambridge residents that he had observed Massachusetts’s agents, Peter Bulkeley and William Stoughton, pleading for the preservation of the colony’s charter on their knees before King Charles II, and that the king had reproved them, declaring “that his grand father had [given] them their patten but they had forfeited it and acted contrary to it.”¹ “New England hath lost the day,” Wompas intoned, and “it is knowne in old england.”²

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This little-known incident opens a window onto a seventeenth-century world of interconnected English and Indian power, where one culture could, and did, use the other to bolster its own quest for power in a struggle that reached well beyond New England. The last two decades have yielded a rich array of scholarly work in both Atlantic and Indian history, contributing to a more complex picture of early America. In the burgeoning field of Atlantic history, recent works have noted the persistent connections between Europe and North America, and the impact of trade, politics, and war on the people of both old and New England. In Indian history, scholarship of the last few decades has reshaped older perspectives on natives of the New World. These writers have urged us to reexamine some of the cherished paradigms of earlier perspectives, such as the idea of Indians as egalitarian, nonhierarchical, and nonmaterialistic. Instead, these studies demonstrate that Indians, like Europeans, varied in their political and social structures, experienced conflict among and between themselves, and interacted in mutually beneficial (and mutually destructive) ways with their European neighbors.

The Indian use of royal authority has remained understudied in all of this, although it bridges very directly the study of the larger Atlantic community and Indian history. That Indians recognized the utility of this avenue of appeal and seized it for their own use further demonstrates that natives of the New World were deeply enmeshed not only in trade and war but also in the politics of the Atlantic world. This was, in fact, a logical extension of their increasing involvement in intercolonial struggles, where they both used and were used by colonists in their own power struggles. The English empire of the seventeenth century endured great political uncertainty; the English Civil War and the overthrow and later restoration of English monarchy reverberated in the New World as well as the old. Indian appeals to royal authority, like English appeals, ebbed and flowed with the waxing and waning of both royal and local English power. Indians could and did target times of local English weakness to bolster their own quests for power.

John Wompas’s appeal to the king clearly illustrates Indian involvement in the Atlantic world. To understand the significance of this late-century example, we must first examine the precontact state of Indian understanding of authority and subject status, the impact of English interpretations of authority on the Indians, and the nature of Indian involvement in intercolonial disputes that linked them to the Atlantic world. Conflicting interpretations and uses of political authority created tensions in New England that Indians used to support their own power in a time of rapid change. One dramatic use of such political power came through direct appeals to the king. While appealing to
the crown demonstrated "Native American statecraft, not Native American impotence," it had unforeseen negative consequences as well as positive ones. Indian insistence on equal status as royal subjects threatened local English authority, making the English less trusting of even those Indians who had sworn friendship. When King Philip's War broke out in 1675, that distrust resulted in suffering for both peoples, although the Indians bore the brunt of the disaster.

When John Wompas made the claim that he, rather than the English townspeople of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was a true subject of the king, he invoked a hierarchical model of authority that the English had used to assert their superiority from their first settlement of New England. The concept of subjection, however, existed on local soil well before Europeans arrived in the New World. Indian polities in what became New England were led by sachems, political leaders acknowledged as superiors by their subjects. Roger Williams's *Key into the Language of America*, published in 1643, notes the existence of such relationships among the Narragansetts of present-day Rhode Island by including the phrases "Ntacquetunck ewo" and "Kuttaqueto," which Williams translated as "He is my subject" and "I will subject to you." Subjects had the right to protection and benevolence from their superiors, but they also had obligations to them, such as the payment of tribute. Members of each chieftain paid tribute demanded regularly from their sachems, and sachems themselves sometimes paid tribute to higher sachems they recognized as more powerful and from whom they desired protection. Sachems likewise expected tribute from people they had conquered, as the Pequots of Connecticut did from the Montauk Indians of Long Island. Indians paid tribute with a number of goods, including deerskins and, increasingly with the arrival of Europeans, wampumpeague—blue or white beads made from seashells drilled and strung together.

The forms of authority familiar to New England Indians also encompassed the alliance, an equal relationship characterized by mutual gift giving and mutual assistance, often requested by the sending of presents. The Iroquois of what became New York and Canada used the kinship term "brethren" for political allies and "children" for their subjects. One of the Iroquois chieftains, the Mohawks, had strong ties to the Narragansett Indians of present-day Rhode Island and may have been the source of this same use of kinship terms among the Narragansett. One incident in 1642 gives clear evidence that the Narragansetts distinguished between subjects and allies in similar
ways. In that year Miantonomi, the sachem of the Narragansetts, attempted to win the support of the Montauks against the English. Formerly in a position of superiority over the Montauks, Miantonomi here dramatically altered his relationship with them, “and instead of receiving presents, which they used to do in their progress, he gave them gifts, calling them brethren and friends.”

These traditional political relationships shaped Indian understanding of English political systems and of the agreements made between the two peoples after English settlement. The first treaty between Indians and English in New England occurred in March 1621, when Massasoit, sachem of the Wampanoags of Plymouth, made a “league of peace” with John Carver, the governor of Plymouth Colony. This initial treaty addressed Massasoit as “friend” and “ally” of King James, not mentioning the word “subject” at all, a clear signal to the Indians that they would enjoy an alliance of equals with the English. The stipulations of the original treaty implied reciprocity, or equality, despite some noted exceptions, such as the clause that demanded that Indians deliver any offender against the English to English justice but that lacked a reciprocal clause delivering offenders against the Indians to Indian justice. Nevertheless, the historical record makes it clear that Massasoit assumed reciprocity applied to every aspect of the treaty, stated or not. When Massasoit suspected Squanto of wrongdoing, he demanded the English turn him over to the Indians for judgment. When Plymouth’s governor resisted, Massasoit protested vehemently, “demanding him . . . as being one of his subjects, whom, by our first Articles of Peace, we could not retain.” In addition, the English asked no tribute of the Indians, as superior sachems traditionally did of their subjects. Rather, they gave and received gifts to solidify what they repeatedly referred to as a friendship.

Within a year of this first agreement, the word “subject” began to appear in interactions between the two peoples. Plymouth colonist Nathaniel Morton asserted that, in the immediate aftermath of the 1621 treaty, Massasoit “acknowledged himself content to become the subject of our sovereign Lord the King.” By September 1621, at least nine other Wampanoag and Massachusetts sachems had signed their names to an agreement also acknowledging themselves “to be the Loyal Subjects of King James.” There is good evidence to believe that Massasoit and these other sachems understood and accepted this relationship. When Edward Winslow visited Massasoit late in 1621, for example, the sachem declared that he was “King James, his man” and that his land was “King James his country.” While we cannot know the precise reasons the Indians may have accepted subjection, we can discern
some compelling possibilities. First, both Indians and English desired trade, and a treaty of peace would help ensure that. Second, a treaty with the English could offer the Wampanoags and the Massachusetts protection against their powerful neighbors, the Narragansetts. Plagues had decimated Massasoit’s people in the years preceding Plymouth’s settlement, while the Narragansetts had somehow avoided any infection. The resulting demographic imbalance made the already powerful Narragansetts threatening indeed.18 The fact that many surrounding sachems and sub-sachems entered into similar agreements with Plymouth implies that these other Indian chiefdoms also viewed submission to King James as a beneficial relationship.

While their acceptance of this subject status might imply that these Indians also allowed the local English to have power over them, some Indians did not seem to think so. Rather, they seem to have believed that being subjects of the king made them the equals of the local English, who were also royal subjects. An incident in 1637 demonstrates this thinking. In the midst of the Pequot War, the Montauks, once subject to the Pequots, volunteered to switch their subjection to the English and to pay them tribute. Narragansett sachem Miantonomi protested strongly, telling Montauk sachem Waiandance that he “must give no more wampum to the English, for they are no Sachems, nor none of their children shall be in their place if they die; and they have no tribute given them; there is but one king in England, who is over them all.”19 Judged against the pattern of the Indians’ past political relationships, English actions and expressions gave the Indians good reason to judge their relationship with the English as one of friendship rather than subjection. Equals—“friends” and “brothers”—exchanged gifts; subjects paid tribute. Thus, since Plymouth gave gifts, did not demand tribute, and referred to Indians as

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“friends,” they must have intended a relationship based on an alliance of equal peoples.

The English, however, had something else in mind. While they acknowledged that the Indians, “together with ourselves,” were subjects of the king, they did not think that shared status made them equals. According to the English interpretation of subjection, when Indian nations signed treaties and submitted to the English king, they entered a hierarchical ladder with the king at the top, followed on descending rungs by colonial governors, magistrates, deputies, and town officers. While the English used the term “subject” for both themselves and the Indians, they insisted that that subject status was mediated through the local English governments with which the Indians had made treaties. The Wampanoags were, therefore, subject to the Plymouth government, the Mohegans to the Connecticut government, and the Narragansetts and Nipmucks to the Massachusetts government. Leaders at Plymouth likely included references to subjection in their agreements with the Indians to present a strong front to the Indians and to assert their connection with a powerful protector, even though, ironically, the colony lacked a patent. The language of subjection became a way to extend English control over the Indians, not just on an imperial but also on a local level.

Plymouth was far too weak to make the full extent of subject status clear to the Indians initially. Their treaty appeared to be, essentially, reciprocal, and most early dealings between the two peoples took place on equal footing. But as the colony grew stronger, it extended more and more control over Indian governance until 1671, when the treaty between Plymouth and Metacom, or Philip, made explicit what English practice had attempted all along: the Indians were subject not only to the king but to the government of New Plymouth. So, while the language of the early treaties suggested equality between English and Indians, over time the English demonstrated that they interpreted these relationships as subjection, not alliance.

The shift from alliance to subjection became yet more pronounced with the arrival of English settlers in Massachusetts Bay in 1630. As they, too, began making formal treaties with the Indians, the new settlers introduced a very different style of subjection. Under the first treaty between the English and five Massachusetts sachems, the sachems agreed to “put ourselves, our subjects, lands, and estates under the government and jurisdiction of the Massachusetts” and to “bee true and faithfull to the said government.” This treaty omitted any reference to the king, as did, by 1643, all other oaths and treaties used by Massachusetts. The colony’s choice to downplay its connection with royal authority reflected years of conflict between king and Parliament,
which led in 1642 to the English Civil War. Massachusetts, which saw Parliament's struggle as its own, justified striking the king's name from its official oaths because Charles I had "violated the privileges of parliament, and made war upon them, and thereby had lost much of his kingdom and many of his subjects." Thus, Massachusetts's support for Parliament's war with the crown justified them in asserting direct rule over the Indians and making the Indians' inferior status explicit in their treaties, something that Plymouth had been attempting in practice, if not in its written agreements.

When New Englanders organized the United Colonies' defensive compact in 1643, Massachusetts, as the group's most powerful member, led Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven in imposing direct rule over Indians. The United Colonies sought further control over Indian chiefdoms by demanding that they submit all grievances amongst themselves to the United Colonies' commissioners and receive permission from them before going to war. In Indian culture, only the chief sachems could give or withhold permission for war; thus, by assuming this right, the United Colonies presented itself clearly as the superior in the relationship.

Through both the United Colonies and the local colonial government, the English of Massachusetts took great care to broadcast the Indians' inferior status. In 1643 Narragansett sachem Pomham submitted to Massachusetts and sought its protection from the onerous demands of Miantonomi, the chief sachem of the Narragansetts. The magistrates questioned Pomham extensively about his understanding of submission, making sure that he accepted the English view of it: did he honor "parents and superiors?" they asked. The sachem replied, "It is our custom so to do, for inferiors to be subject to superiors." Then, the magistrates informed Pomham, they would understand "that we did not receive them in as confederates but as subjects." The colonial leaders may have asserted this hierarchy so explicitly to address what they perceived to be an Indian questioning or misunderstanding of this relationship. Plymouth's original treaty with the Wampanoags had implied that Indians were "confederates" rather than "subjects." Massachusetts leaders wanted no such assumption made here. After their discussion with Pomham, the Massachusetts leaders held a banquet, at which Pomham and his men dined with the governor, but at a separate table—a fitting demonstration of the Indians' inferior status. Clearly, much had changed since 1631, when Massachusetts sachem Chickataubut, "being in English clothes," dined at the governor's own table. Or even since 1641, when Narragansett sachem Miantonomi, offended that a separate table had been set for the Indians, "would eat nothing, till the governor sent him meat from his table."
While the Indians treating with Massachusetts and other United Colonies members seem to have understood English expectations that they submit to and obey local colonial authority (a point hammered home repeatedly by the United Colonies’ commissioners), many Indians resisted the English view of submission. Like the English, these Indians wanted to preserve the peace, but they would not accept their inferior position on the English hierarchical ladder. In 1639, the Pocumtuck sachems of western Massachusetts politely declined to come to a meeting of the United Colonies commissioners to discuss their ongoing hostilities with the Mohegans of Connecticut. In doing so, they drew explicit parallels between themselves and the English, intended to point out their equality. They were, they explained, preparing for a large meeting of their own: “it being all one with the [United Colonies] Comissioners meeting.” In the same message, the Pocumtucks chided the United Colonies’ commissioners for demanding their attendance: “Neither doe they know any engagement that lyes on them to come to the meetings of the English Sachems; and they doe not send for the English Sachems to their meetings.” The Pocumtucks desired English friendship and trade (“They say that as frinds they come to the English for victualls”), but they would not accept the English assumption of authority over their dealings with other Indians: “They are Resolved not to bee beginers of any breach with the English; and will yeild to the English in any thinge but in making peace with Uncas; and that they would not have the English to pswade them to it; for they can not have peace with him.”29 Several aspects of this exchange are striking: the Pocumtucks’ emphasis on friendship, which in their culture signified alliance, not subjection; and their use of English examples to make their case. They clearly saw parallels between their own structures of authority and those of the English; however, they insisted that these structures remain separate. Pocumtuck authority was not a lower rung on an English hierarchical ladder. It was a separate ladder entirely.

The Narragansett and Niantic sachems, similarly, refused to accept the English assumption of authority. Niantic sachem Ninigret chided the English for interfering in his conflict with another Indian chiefdom: he wished “the English would lett him alone” instead of summoning him to appear before the United Colonies commissioners to explain his quarrel with his Montauk enemies. He asserted his autonomy and his authority in his own sphere, “adding if youer Governors sonne were slayne and severall other men would you aske Counsell of another Nation how and when to Right youer selves. . . . I doe but Right my owne quarrell.” The Niantics were “another Nation,” Ninigret declared. Like the Pocumtucks, the Niantics desired friendship with the English, but they resented the English overstepping the bounds of friendship. Intervening in Indian wars was the prerogative of a superior, not a friend or ally. Wampanoag sachem Philip would later maintain this same position, asserting that “in what was only between ther indians and not in townshipes that [the English] had purchased, thay wold not have us prosecute.” This insistence on a relationship of equality put the Pocumtucks, Niantics, and Narragansetts squarely in the pattern of the Iroquois, who likewise insisted on reciprocal relations with the Europeans, using the kinship term “brethren” in all their interchanges.

The English had shifted the basis of their relationship with the Indians considerably in the first decades of settlement. The earliest treaties between Indians and English promised alliance and friendship; later treaties demonstrated that the English insisted on the upper hand in the relationship. Trade, and the promise of protection from powerful enemies, continued to entice New England Indians to enter and maintain ties with the English, but many of the same Indians who accepted “submission” to English authority resisted the full Eng-
lish interpretation of it. Instead, they held to the patterns of equal alliance that initial treaties, past experience and association with other Indian nations, and English wording and behavior had originally manifested. And they were not without allies in this stance: the colony of Rhode Island, too, represented the assertions of power from Massachusetts Bay. Rhode Island’s leaders encouraged the Indians in their claims of equality with the English and in their resistance to local English authority.

Like Plymouth, Rhode Island initially lacked a charter granting colony leaders the authority to govern, and the colony was small and numerically weak compared to Massachusetts. More significantly, the founders of the colony had left Massachusetts as exiles, and their continuing relationship with that colony was fraught with conflict. Pointedly excluded from the 1643 establishment of the United Colonies, Rhode Island was derided by Massachusetts and the other colonies as a cesspool of religious and political radicalism that overflowed far too often for the safety and comfort of its neighbors. Locked in disputes with Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut, the isolated and despised colony had little choice but to appeal to outside powers for help. Roger Williams traveled to London in 1643 and obtained a parliamentary patent for the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. John Greene, who obtained a royal charter for the colony in 1663, made a point of securing the right to appeal to the king over any disputes with neighbor colonies. This clause implicitly forced the other colonies to recognize royal appeals, a direct challenge to Massachusetts’s insistence that their charter allowed no appeal over their own authority.\(^{33}\) That insistence made the colony a number of detractors in New and old England.

Keenly aware of the political troubles that Massachusetts incurred with its assertions, Rhode Island was not above highlighting the colony’s bad behavior—and their own comparative loyalty—in order to incline the king to favor their petitions.\(^{34}\) Rhode Islander Samuel Gorton made a career of being a thorn in Massachusetts’s side. Banished from Massachusetts, Plymouth, and two Rhode Island towns for his dangerous religious opinions, Gorton and his followers fled to Shawomet, Rhode Island, where by 1642 he persuaded Narragansett chief sachem Miantonomi to sell him land held by the sub-sachem Pomham.\(^{35}\) Pomham immediately petitioned Massachusetts to take him under the colony’s protection and help him get his land back. Massachusetts agreed and sent an armed band to root out the Gortonists, thus dispossessing both Gorton and Miantonomi. With no local recourse against this attack, the Gortonists sailed for London to appeal to the king, and they arranged to take the Narragansett sachems’ protests along with them.
The Narragansetts’ grievances centered on Massachusetts’s assertions of authority over them and its repeated interference in Indian affairs. The colony had consistently sided with their enemies, the Mohegans, had refused to allow either Indian people to go to war, had fined the Narragansetts heavily for disobeying their orders, and then had consented to the Mohegans’ execution of captured Narragansett sachem Miantonomi. The Narragansett sachems’ complaints against Massachusetts would bolster Gorton’s case, and repossession of Miantonomi would ensure that the land sold to them would stay in their possession. Thus, what started as a minor intercolonial dispute soon became internationalized, influencing the course of Massachusetts’s relations with the Narragansetts ever after.

On April 19, 1644, Samuel Gorton delivered a letter to Charles I of England from Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Pessacus. In the letter, the sachems submitted themselves, their land, and possessions to the king, “upon condition of His Majesties’ royal protection,” his righting whatever wrongs might be done to them, and his overthrowing their enemies. And who might those enemies be? Not “any of the natives in these parts, knowing ourselves sufficient defence.” No, the Narragansetts wanted the king’s protection from “some of His Majesty’s pretended subjects”—the colony of Massachusetts, which had repeatedly demanded the Narragansetts’ subjection. The sachems protested that, as subjects of the king, they should not be forced to “yield over ourselves unto any, that are subjects themselves in any case; having ourselves been the chief Sachems, or Princes successively, of the country, time out of mind.”

The consequences of this pledge to the king became apparent the following month, when Massachusetts sent a letter to the Narragansett sachems ordering them to come and take counsel over their unauthorized war with the Mohegans. The sachems declined to come. Pessacus and Canonicus informed the magistrates that they had “subjected or selves, or lands, & possessions” to “that royal King Charles, & that state of ould England to be ordered, & govrned, according to the lawes, & customs thereof.” More pointedly, they emphasized their equality with the English, “being subjects now, (& that wth joint & voluntary consent,) unto the same king, & state yorselves are.” As equal subjects of the king, the Narragansetts would not accept the mediation of English colonial officials in their disputes. Both must “repair, unto that honorable, & just government” of the king in England. Ending their letter on a conciliatory note, the sachems expressed their willingness to remain in “friendly correspondency” with the colony—as friends, not subjects.

Massachusetts officers, led by Gov. John Winthrop, responded to this let-
ter with a collective gasp of outrage, deeply resenting the direct challenge to their authority. Winthrop, however, suspected that this letter actually had been “written by Gorton’s company.” The General Court immediately directed two messengers to the Narragansett sachems to ask “whether they did own that letter . . . and by whose advice they had done as they wrote, and why they would countenance and take counsel from such evil men, and such as we had banished from us, and to persuade them to sit still, and to have more regard to us than such as Gorton.” The messengers only met with further humiliation: Canonicus refused to let them in to speak with him, leaving them to stand shivering in the rain for two hours. Then, when Pessacus arrived, he escorted the messengers not to the sachem’s residence but to an “ordinary wigwam” (a slight comparable to not seating Miantonomi at the governor’s table) and insisted that, rather than obeying Massachusetts, the Narragansetts would do as they pleased.39 The messengers had no choice but to return home and report their failure to the magistrates. In their eyes, the visit provided further proof of the arrogance and intractability of the Narragansetts, a characterization the colonists revived during King Philip’s War.

Conflict continued between the Narragansetts and Massachusetts, and between Rhode Island and the other colonies, in the ensuing decades. The United Colonies’ insistence on the right to disallow war and the Indians’ refusal to submit to such interference resulted in several English missions to try to enforce their demands. Because the United Colonies charged the expenses of these expeditions to the offending Native parties, the Narragansetts had to mortgage, and then lost, their land to English creditors in order to pay their debts.40 Clearly, the Indians had reason to seek the king’s aid to “right their wrongs” and “protect them from their enemies.” In 1664, they got their chance.

In that year, newly restored King Charles II sent four royal commissioners to New England in response to many complaints against Massachusetts, including some from the Narragansett sachems. Politically, the colony had entered an especially dangerous period. It had openly supported the English
Commonwealth government and harbored two of the men who participated in the trial and execution of Charles I. These actions gave the new king ample reason to view Massachusetts as a rebellious colony. Its leaders rightly feared that the crown would revoke the Massachusetts charter. The fact that Narragansett complaints appeared among the chief abuses the royal commissioners listed against Massachusetts strongly suggests that the Indians recognized the colony’s political vulnerability and exploited the opportunity to present their grievances directly to the king. Through such skillful tactics, the Indians highlighted their own status as loyal, obedient subjects and increased the chances that their complaints would be remedied.

The 1664 visit of Charles II’s royal commissioners substantiates the effectiveness of Indian appeals to the king. The commissioners visited the sachems in their own land, announced the abrogation of all their debt to Massachusetts, and then, much to the horror of Massachusetts, placed the Narragansetts directly under the authority of the king. Shortly after the royal commissioners departed, the Narragansett’s behavior, according to Massachusetts, took an alarming turn. While the “salvage natives bordering upon this & other his majesties colonies . . . have beene principally awed by the Massachusets,” the magistrates now found “that awe turned into contempt by their unwonted, proud, & insolent words & deeds” against persons and colonies. Travelers among the Indians reported such taunts as, “Whence are you? Of the Massachusets?” The magistrates complained that to the formerly submissive Indians “Massachusets men are all but as a strawe, bloune awayWithout breath . . . so that this bridle taken of[f], what else could be expected but trouble from them, especially seeing there were intimations that it was occasioned from some words & acting of the [royal] commissioners . . . whittingly or unwittingly, God knowes.”

In a letter to the king in July 1665, the Massachusetts General Court further complained that the royal commissioners had publicly derided the United Colonies, which had served as the liaison to the Indians, as “that usurped authority.” Fearful of growing Indian assertiveness, they lamented the “causeless complaints from Indians receaved & countenanced, in so much that the very carriage & deportment of many of the heathen is changed towards us.”

New England colony records do not mention royal commissioner visits to other Indian groups, but some of those who failed to receive a personal visit nevertheless saw the potential of appealing over the heads of colonial officials. When Mohegan sachem Uncas complained to Connecticut magistrates of a long-unsettled dispute over land, he warned that he could follow a similar course, “Wherefore he is weary of such Court attendance, intimating that...
if...there be no effectual course taken for a faire & just issue, he then shalbe enforced to apply himselfe unto King Charles his Commissioners for releife.”

Maine Indians, too, saw advantage in appealing to the commissioners. Royal Commissioner George Cartwright reported to the king that an Indian sachem near the headwaters of the Merrimack River had petitioned to be taken under the king’s protection, like the Narragansetts.

Not only did Indians appeal to the king to support them in their disputes with the local English, but they used royal authority as a lever in their disputes with other Indians. Although the Narragansetts were, apparently, the only Indian group to petition the king directly, they were not the only Indian group the commissioners visited. Philip of the Wampanoags appealed to the royal commissioners to help resolve a dispute between himself and the Narragansetts over land at Mount Hope. The commissioners declared in Philip’s favor, confirming the lands to him in the name of the king. Philip also attempted to use the royal commissioners to undermine Narragansett and Niantic authority outside his territory. In a 1666 letter penned by Philip’s scribe John Sassamon, one Eliese Pokonoahkit (probably Philip) instructed the Montauk Indians not to pay tribute to Ninigret, who was coming to collect it, until “the honoured Commissioners” could hear and judge Ninigret’s claim to it. The visit of the royal commissioners likely made an impression on Massachusetts sachem Josiah Wampatuck as well. When his counsellors complained to English authorities that the sachem had not obtained their permission to sell some land in the Blue Hills to Englishman Richard Thayer, Wampatuck made out a deed in Plymouth Colony Court conveying his land to King Charles II, promising him a yearly payment of five pounds (collectible from Richard Thayer) and craving his protection. Wampatuck used direct appeal to royal authority to subvert both Indian authority and local English power for his own benefit.

In the decade following the royal commissioners’ visit, New England Indians found themselves alone with the English: the 1664 English conquest of the Dutch and their great distance from the French had removed any rival al-
"Subjects . . . unto the same king"

liances they could have turned to their advantage. Given the narrowing of the political field, the Indians’ only recourse against the English, short of armed resistance, was to appeal directly to the king. The Narragansetts, Wampanoags, and Mohegans all used this strategy in 1665, and particularly in the case of the Narragansetts, they clung to the hope that royal authority made them fellow subjects and equals—hence able to accept or reject the demands—of the English.

Ninigret revealed the Narragansetts’ and Niantics’ persistent attachment to this line of authority when he spoke before the Rhode Island Council in 1669. He affirmed that he had maintained loyalty ever since himselfe heard the words by the Commissioners, spoken as from King Charles his mouth, and hath since laid it up in his heart that the King did looke upon himselfe and Sucquansh [Pessacus] and their Indians as his subjects, together with the English; and said hee understood that the English of this Colony were to help them, if any should bee too mighty for them, and they to doe the like to the English if any should invade or make war upon the Colony.

The Narragansetts and Niantics were royal subjects “together with the English,” not beneath them. The Pequots, Ninigret pointed out for contrast, “paid tribute to the English, being overcome of them.” Likewise, he had conquered the Montauk Indians, who now paid tribute to him, “even as the Pequits did the like” to the English. The Narragansetts and Niantics were nations, like the English, able to conquer and exact tribute. They owed allegiance to the king and only friendship to his other subjects. Later the same year, royal commissioner Samuel Maverick reported on Massachusetts’s most recent demand for back tribute the Narragansett sachems owed: “they [Narragansetts] payed them [Massachusetts] not, telling them they would pay King Charles and none else.”

The Wampanoags appeared far less frequently than the Narragansetts in United Colonies records before 1665; that changed after Wampanoag sachem Philip met with the royal commissioners and received confirmation of his lands, as if from the king himself. Evidence that Philip’s thinking about the advantages of appealing to royal authority may have mirrored Ninigret’s appears in a 1671 near-outbreak of Indian-English violence in Plymouth, a prelude to King Philip’s War. Philip was forced to answer for his hostile actions before officials from Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, who charged him with misrepresenting his status by stating that his subjection to Plymouth constituted nothing more than “neighborly and friendly correspon-
The phrase echoes Pessacus's and Canonicus's letter to Massachusetts twenty-five years earlier, in which they denied the colony's jurisdiction over them, claiming that both they and the English were now "subjects . . . unto the same king." Compelled to give up his arms and resubmit to English authority, Philip protested that "The Governour [of Plymouth] was but a Subject, and . . . he would not Treat except his Brother King Charles of England were there." 54

These words provide a key to Philips's actions during King Philip's War, shaped in part at least by his interpretation of royal authority. The war, which raged in New England from June 1675 to April 1678, was prompted by longstanding Indian grievances against English infringements on their land and authority. Before war broke out, Philip met with John Easton and other officials from Rhode Island and laid out his complaints, which Easton later linked to Massachusetts's and Plymouth's attempts to assert their authority over surrounding Indians. Easton sent his account of the war, with its accusations against Massachusetts and Plymouth, to New York's royal governor, Edmund Andros. He also may have sent copies of the narrative to England, proving to authorities that, contrary to Massachusetts's repeated protests, the colonies, not the Indians, bore responsibility for the conflict. 55

Coming on the heels of this declaration of grievances, Philip's resort to war suggested that he believed force was necessary to combat English affronts to Indian sovereignty that talk had so long failed to remedy. Hostilities began in Swansea, where Indians fired on and looted some local English houses. Mischief escalated quickly to outright war, and Plymouth called on its United Colonies allies, Massachusetts and Connecticut, to assist them. The fight soon spread, drawing in the Nipmuck Indians of Massachusetts by August, the Pocumtucks by September, and, by December, the powerful Narragansett Indians. Indians held the upper hand through the winter of 1676, but by spring disease, starvation, and the deaths of some critical leaders weakened and disheartened the Indians. Many began surrendering to English governments in the summer of 1676. Philip himself was killed in August, and by the autumn, there was peace in southern New England. The war continued another two years in New Hampshire and Maine, drawing forces and draining resources from Massachusetts to defend its northern provinces. The war, which weakened Massachusetts significantly, paved the way for royal intervention that, by 1685, would transform the colony from a "holy commonwealth" to a royal province. 56

While Philip could not have foreseen the specific impact of the war on the English, he deliberately sought royal intervention on his own behalf during
the war. Philip’s flight to New York in the winter of 1676 suggests that he saw royal power as a shield against local English authorities. Philip probably chose New York for his winter refuge because he knew he could meet with the powerful Mohawk Indians, whom he hoped to persuade to join him in his fight against the English.57 But New York may also have appealed to him as the home of the only royal governor in New England—Edmund Andros, whom Philip may have seen as another source of assistance.

Philip knew Andros’s name and authority from at least one earlier incident. When Philip met with John Easton and other officials from Rhode Island, they recommended that he submit his grievances to an outside mediator, someone unlikely to side with Plymouth, as Massachusetts and Connecticut had in 1671. That mediator was Governor Andros. Like many Rhode Islanders before them, Easton’s delegation explicitly encouraged Philip to see royal authority as separate from and even opposed to Plymouth’s and Massachusetts’s authority; the Wampanoags, they explained, “having submited to our king to protect them others dared not otherwise to molest them.”58 Rhode Island had stayed out of the fracas of 1671, earning Philip’s accolade: “[he] had litell Case to doute but that to us [Rhode Island] under the king thay wold have yelded to our determinations in what ani should have Cumplained . . . against them.” Apparently, Philip saw Rhode Island, with its seal of approval from the royal commissioners, as a more likely source of justice than the United Colonies.59 Perhaps Andros, too, appeared to be someone from whom he could receive assistance, or at least someone who would not attack him while he gathered his strength.

Andros’s status as a royal governor itself may have suggested New York as a place of refuge to Philip. The royal commissioners of 1664–1665 had encouraged both the Wampanoags and the Narragansetts to make their submissions directly to the king or to the commissioners in his stead. With the commissioners gone, Andros represented the closest approximation of royal authority. News of Andros’s initial negotiations for the establishment of a league of peace, the “covenant chain,” between the Iroquois and the English in New York may also have reached Philip, giving him reason to hope that Andros might consider an alliance with him as well.60

It would be surprising if the astute Philip were not also aware of the tensions between New York and the New England colonies, particularly its border disputes with Connecticut. A flare-up in that dispute likely went a long way toward convincing Philip that New York would be a safe haven, even a potential ally. On June 28, 1675, days after war broke out in Plymouth, Andros sent a fleet of four ships to the mouth of the Connecticut River. There,
the ships raised the flag of the Duke of York and remained in siege outside Saybrook for several days. Connecticut authorities well knew what Andros wanted: in behalf of the Duke of York, whose patent overlapped Connecticut’s, Andros had previously demanded surrender of all lands between the Connecticut and Hudson Rivers, and he had reiterated the demand as recently as June 1675. Such surrender would mean the virtual extinction of Connecticut, whose major towns, including Hartford, lay on the western shores of the river. Connecticut refused to allow Andros to land, in spite of his protestations that he had come to offer help in the “trobells wth the Indians.” Scorning this claim, Samuel Symonds of Massachusetts wrote to Connecticut’s governor John Winthrop, Jr. “If a man pretends friendship, & to helpe against the Indians,” he wrote, “you will consider how his actions sute with his words, and act accordingly.” If Philip or other Indians knew of this standoff, it could only have strengthened the idea, nurtured by the royal commissioners, that the colonies of New England were in royal disfavor and could look for no help from the king or his royal governor.

Whether Philip and his allies knew of this inter-English struggle or not, Connecticut’s leaders believed the Indians knew about it and that it helped incite their hostilities. The Connecticut Council complained bitterly of Andros’s invasion “with some considerable force” into Connecticut, an attack particularly unwelcome at a time “when the heathen rage against the English and by fire and sword have destroyed many of his Ma[jes]ties good subjects, our neighbours of Plimouth Colony, and still are carrying their heads about the countrey as trophies of their good success.” The Connecticut Council declared Andros’s invasion illegal and criminally opportunistic: “his . . . actions in this juncture tend to the encouraging of the heathen to proceed in the effusion of Christian blood, which may be very like to be the consequences of his

European traders selling arms to the Indians.
From Bryant, Popular History of the United States.
actions, and which wee shall unavoydably lay at his dore.”

If, by fleeing to the royal colony of New York, Philip hoped to take advantage of the conflicts between New York and New England, he had good reason. Andros openly displayed his disdain for the independent-minded colonies of New England. In an exchange between Sir John Werden, secretary to the Duke of York, and Andros, Werden urged Andros to prevent sales of powder to any of the Indians at war with New England, adding snidely, “though their neighbour Christians deserve small courtesy, yet still their being Christians makes it charity not to furnish their enemies with opportunity to hurt them.” Royalist distaste for the United Colonies did not go so far as to back the Indians against them, and Andros did send powder to assist in defense—but to Rhode Island, not to any member of the United Colonies. Later, in response to a request from Massachusetts governor John Leverett and repeated pestering from Connecticut, Andros agreed to ask local Mohawks to refrain from assisting Philip in the war. Nevertheless, Philip remained safely in Andros’s colony for months.

The chief contemporary chroniclers of King Philip’s War, William Hubbard and Increase Mather, both claimed that hundreds of hostile Indians had sought refuge in New York. Hubbard recorded an Indian captive’s testimony that over 250 warriors, plus women and children, had fled to Albany where they received shelter from the Mahican Indians. John Pynchon of Springfield, who was in a better position to know the Indians’ movements than Hubbard of Ipswich, reported that “The body of them is drawn off toward Albany, where they are harbored under Andros . . . We shall be in danger to be continually disturbed if he do harbor our enemies in his government.”

Captive Indians even testified that the Mohawks, traditional enemies of many of the New England Indians, had wanted to attack the Pocumtucks who fled Springfield “but the Governour of New-York secured them.” Though Andros had banned sales of powder to the Indians, that had not kept them from finding ample supplies. Captured Indians testified that powder came from Albany, chiefly from Dutch merchants who ignored the ban on sales to hostile Indians. With or without Andros’s direct complicity, Indians obtained what they needed: bullets, powder, and security. Clearly, Indians saw royal authority as an effective lever in their disputes with colonial authorities. Past successes probably encouraged Indian leaders to believe the king would always support them, emboldening them to resist English invasion of their territory and interference with native governance. Any hope that the king would favor them over his other subjects, however, would meet with disappointment.

47
As soon as hostilities began, the English colonists across New England demonstrated their inclination to view all Indians who had challenged or circumvented their authority as enemies. The Narragansetts’ story exemplifies how appeals to the crown altered New English perceptions and actions. Among the Indians, the Narragansetts had the longest history of appealing directly to the king, dating from their 1644 submission to King Charles I. At the time, this action greatly alarmed colonial leaders, and their suspicion of the Narragansetts grew dramatically in succeeding years. Despite a Narragansett promise to remain neutral in King Philip’s War, many English saw them as a perilous threat. This reflected the Narragansetts’ status as the largest and most powerful group of Indians in the region. Undoubtedly, it also reflected their history of resisting English authority and of joining their efforts with men such as Samuel Gorton and Roger Williams, themselves banished from the Massachusetts colony. The very name some contemporaries attached to the war signals their fear of the Narragansetts. Only forty years after the war ended did anyone call it “King Philip’s War.” Contemporaries usually used some version of “the Indian War” or “the Narragansett War.” Joshua Scottow, who served as a captain in the war in Maine, referred to the war exclusively as “the Narragansett War” in his 1694 history of the Bay Colony, failing to mention either Philip or the Wampanoags at all.74 Boston merchant Richard Wharton identified the enemy as “the Narragansetts” only; he complained in February 1676 that if the English had provided the supplies so desperately needed, “the Narragansets had been utterly subdued.”75 When Plymouth messenger James Brown named the six Indian tribes he claimed were “flock[ing]” to Philip, the “Narragansets” appeared first on the list.76 This preoccupation with the Narragansetts, who did not enter the war until the English attacked them in December 1675, rather than the Wampanoags, who initiated hostilities, grew out of long-standing English distrust of a people who had challenged their authority for half a century.

In a dramatic demonstration of their view that the Indians were not their equals but disloyal subordinates, English officials claimed that hostile Indians had committed treason. Massachusetts colonist Nathaniel Saltonstall, who published three short accounts of the war in London, made a point of claiming that the Indians’ uprising constituted treason. One of his accounts quoted the 1621 peace treaty between Plymouth and Philip’s father, Massasoit, with his promise “That neither he nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of our people.”77 The same account cited Massasoit’s and Philip’s reconfirmation of the terms of this treaty in 1639 and 1662. Saltonstall also noted that the captured Narragansett sachem Canonchet was drawn and quartered—
traditional punishment for traitors. Capt. Benjamin Church, whose troops captured Philip, related that the Wampanoag sachem later suffered the same treatment.75

Ironically, though Rhode Island had supported the Narragansett challenge to Massachusetts’s authority, it joined the other English colonies in charging hostile Indians with treason following King Philip’s War. For over thirty years, through such men as John Easton and Samuel Gorton, Rhode Island had encouraged Indian sachems to view themselves as equal subjects of the king, possessing the same status as the highest ranking colonial officials. Nevertheless, Rhode Island tried ten or more Indians for treason in August 1676. The court declared that the Indians had “rebelliously adheared to Indians of another Collony called Plymoth, namely, Philip chiefe Sachem of the Indians in that said Collony” who had murdered “many of his said majestys good Subjects.” For these acts, Rhode Island condemned the convicted traitors as “Rebell[s] in the Face of the Court” and executed them.76 The court failed to mention that the Indians were also his majesty’s subjects. Rhode Island’s wartime actions, specifically the executions for treason, demonstrate that the colony had given past assistance not to further Indian-English equality but to bolster its own quest for authority against Massachusetts.

Fresh from his audience with the king in 1677, Indian John Wompas stirred the same colonial anxieties over royal undermining of local authority. When he goaded Cambridge residents as “not legal subjects to his majesty,” he rubbed the noses of English officials in the scandal of their ongoing boundary disputes, crowing that they had no business sending soldiers to the long-contested territory of Maine, where King Philip’s War was still raging. Just as Massachusetts saw the Narragansetts as a perilous threat, its leaders claimed that Wompas was “justly to be suspected of conspiring with the Enemy [against] us.”77 Undoubtedly, invoking royal authority made Wompas much more alarming than his misbehavior alone would have.

By appealing directly to the king, both Wompas and the Narragansetts helped undermine Massachusetts’s standing with the crown by focusing unwelcome attention on the colony’s apparently unjust dealings with the Indians. That such Englishmen as Samuel Gorton appealed to the king as a way of challenging Massachusetts’s authority should not surprise us. That Indians used the same methods, and that they used them at times when Massachusetts was particularly vulnerable, suggests a high degree of political astuteness and knowledge of colonial politics. Any number of outcomes demonstrate how well the Indians used this tool, including the words of Edward Randolph, the king’s agent, after he visited Massachusetts in 1676. Randolph cited the In-
Indian war as evidence that the colony abused the Indians and bore responsibility for provoking hostilities.\textsuperscript{78} The colony's treatment of their Indian neighbors and skillful Indian handling of royal authority contributed, by 1683, to the revocation of the Massachusetts charter and establishment of direct royal government in the colony.

In the end, appeals to the king failed to secure lasting Indian power in the region. The Indians could not have known that, contrary to the protestations of John Easton and others, the king would not support them against his English subjects. Nonetheless, the choice to appeal was a rational one, demonstrating an astute understanding of English political systems and the ability to use these for their own purposes. For a time, Indians did acquire power and a lever against overbearing English authorities. No wonder, then, that during King Philip's War contemporaries equated the Indian threat with the royal threat, lamenting, "we [have] greatly incensed [God] to stir up many Adversaries against us, not only abroad, but also at our own Doors."\textsuperscript{79} And no wonder the embattled English responded so fiercely to the threat closest at hand.

Notes

I would like to thank Daniel Richter, Neal Salisbury, Alice Nash, Mark Choate, and the editors of the \textit{MHR} for helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this article, and Jane Kamensky and David Hackett Fischer for long-standing encouragement and direction.

1. Suffolk Court Files, \#1642, Massachusetts Archives (hereafter cited as MA), Columbia Point, Mass.

2. Daniel Meade and Hannah Meade depositions, Oct. 8, 1677, Collection 77, Autographs of Special Note, Box 1, Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine. Wompas was committed to prison in Cambridge for his reproachful speeches, threatening the life of an English woman, and trying to sell land—English and Indian—he had no legal right to. He escaped from prison on October 1, 1677, and died not long thereafter. Middlesex Court Records (David Pulsifer transcript), 3:192, MA. The courts were dealing with the tangled aftermath of Wompa's land sales as late as 1681, when a group of Christian Indians petitioned to have Wompa's sales revoked. Massachusetts Archives Collection (hereafter cited as MAC), vol. 30:260a, MA.

3. See, for example, David Cressy, \textit{Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century} (Cambridge, Eng., 1987); David Hackett Fischer, \textit{Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America} (Oxford, 1989); Michael Leroy Oberg, \textit{Dominion and Civility: English Imperialism and
“Subjects . . . unto the same king”


4. From quite different perspectives, the works of Alden Vaughan, Francis Jennings, James Axtell, and Neal Salisbury helped shape the development of Indian history in the last generation. Building on the foundation of these writers are Kathleen A. Bragdon’s reexamination of precontact Indian culture, Native People of Southern New England (Norman, Ok., 1996); James Drake’s study of the breakdown of ties of interdependence between English and Indian, King Philip’s War: Civil War in New England (Amherst, 1999); Ann Marie Plane’s study of the parallel influences of Indian ways of marriage and the progress of English dominance, Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England (Ithaca, 2000); and Daniel K. Richter’s reimagination of English and Indian interaction in early America from an Indian perspective, Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).


6. Roger Williams, A Key into the Language of America (1643; Bedford, Mass., n.d.), 141.


20. By the time of King Philip’s War, both Plymouth and Massachusetts assumed the Narragansetts were under Massachusetts’s authority, dating back to the 1636 treaty between Massachusetts and the Narragansetts that made them allies in the Pequot War. JWJ, 191. Rhode Island, the colony in which the Narragansetts lived, disagreed.

21. The Mayflower Compact, which likewise asserted the Pilgrims’ subjection to King James, was entered into after early evidence of “faction” among the immigrants, leading to the conclusion that, lacking a patent, some sort of compact of government was needed to preserve order. Citing their connection to their “dread sovereign” was one way to undergird their uncertain authority. Heath, Mount’s Relation, 17–18.

22. PCR, 5:76.

23. Submission of the Massachusetts sub-tribes to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Mar. 8, 1644, in Vaughan, New England Frontier, 342.

24. Connecticut, founded by settlers from Massachusetts, followed the same pattern. In contrast to its neighbor colonies, Rhode Island, whose settlers were religious and political dissidents from Massachusetts, openly proclaimed its loyalty to the king throughout this period.


26. See the Aug. 27, 1645, treaty between the United Colonies and the Narragansett Indians, reprinted in Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 437–440. Winslow, who had close contact with the Wampanoags and other tribes in the region, stated that the Indians’ “sachims cannot be all called kings, but only some few of them, to whom the rest resort for protection, and pay homage unto them; neither may they war without their knowledge and approbation.” Good Newes, 61–62.

27. JWJ, 458–461.

28. JWJ, 47, 410–411.

29. PCR, 10:221.
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30. PCR, 10:125.
32. See, for example, the Iroquois’ refusal to address the English governor of New York as “Father,” insisting that they “Let the old covenant that was made with our ancestors be kept firm. . . . Then we were called Brethren” (quoted in Richter, Facing East from Indian Country, 148). While we cannot know how long this pattern had been in use among the Iroquois, the first recorded treaty between the Iroquois and the Dutch in 1645 clearly shows the Iroquois using the reciprocal kinship term “brethren” for the Dutch. Jennings, History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy, 129. While both the English and French attempted to impose a more hierarchical relationship on the Iroquois, in which they were the “fathers” and the Indians “children,” both were unsuccessful.
33. Joseph Henry Smith, Appeals to the Privy Council from the American Plantations (New York, 1950), 45, 51–53. More pressing political business, which culminated in his execution in 1649, led Charles I to set the Massachusetts charter business aside. Immediately after the Restoration in 1660, Charles II seemed unaware that the charter had almost been vacated and, in response to Massachusetts’s 1662 request, he confirmed it. Political enemies of Massachusetts quickly brought the king up to speed on the colony’s past abuses, so that by the decade of the 1670s, when Wompas appeared before the king, the 1637 quo warranto was dredged up frequently in the ongoing proceedings against the Massachusetts charter.
34. For example, Rhode Island made a point of using the king’s name in all its official oaths and orders and at the opening of its court sessions, something the other colonies, with the occasional exception of Plymouth, let lapse. And Rhode Islanders with complaints against Massachusetts frequently added into their letters and petitions such pointed comparisons of the two colonies as the claim that Rhode Island was “ready to assent and yeeld all obedience to [the king’s] supreme authority, not making our Pattents a cloak for contempt, or warrant to disobey and oppose his Royall commands.” Randall Holden and John Greene to the Committee of Trade and Plantations (1679), in RICR, 3:62.
36. While the political body carrying out these actions was the United Colonies, rather than Massachusetts, the Narragansetts wrote and spoke as if it were the colony. This was likely because Massachusetts was the most powerful member of the confederation and because Massachusetts’s 1636 treaty with the Narragansetts made them the colony to whom the Narragansetts were subject. For an account of these events, see Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 228–235.
37. RICR, 1:133.
38. PCR, 10:415–416.
39. JWJ, 509.
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40. MAC, vol. 30:83, MA.

41. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England (cited hereafter as MCR) (Boston, 1854), vol. 4, pt. 2, 158–161. In addition to the Narragansetts’ 1644 submission to the king and their post-1660 petitions mentioned by the royal commissioners, the Narragansetts sent the king a petition in the care of Roger Williams in the early 1650s, asking the king to protect them from overzealous Christian Indian missionaries. Roger Williams to the General Court of Massachusetts, Oct. 5, 1654, in RICR, 1:291–297.


44. William Leete and Robert Chapman to the Governor and Assistants of Connecticut, June 30, 1665, in MHSC, 4th ser., vol. 7:556.


47. Calendar of State Papers, 5:580, item #1197. As the commissioners of the United Colonies did not meet from 1664 to 1667, and then on a drastically limited scale, the commissioners referred to are probably royal. Royal Commissioners Robert Carr and Samuel Maverick were still in Boston until March 1666. See also Correspondence of Roger Williams, 2:599n.


49. RICR, 2:269. The Council had called Ninigret to answer for the report that he was planning to draw other Indian nations into a combination to cut off the English, and that seven of Philip of the Wampánoags’ ancient men had been in council with him for over a week. Ninigret denied any such plot, supplied acceptable excuses, and pledged his loyalty, doing so according to the direct line of submission he had insisted on since the royal commissioners’ visit.


51. Correspondence of Roger Williams, 2:579.

52. This crisis contains an incident similar to the one described above, in which the Pocumtucks resisted English assumptions of superiority over Indians. Two English messengers, James Walker and James Brown, arrived at Mt. Hope, Philip’s “seat,” to ask why the Indians were preparing for war. When Brown attempted to speak with Philip, the sachem knocked the man’s hat from his head, an “incivility” that was laid to Philip’s charge later. It is striking that Philip aimed at the hat. Quakers were frequently upbraided in New England courts for refusing to remove their hats, evidence that they did not honor authority. Brown certainly would have removed his hat to stand before the governor and council, but he did not remove it before the Indian sachem. So Philip, like the magistrates at court, removed it for him. Here, once again, we see the clash of English and Indian expectations. Philip expected to
be treated with honor, as befitted his station, but even English messengers refused, or did not think, to give it. And when Philip insisted on his due, they accused him of incivility and insubordination. James Walker to Governor Prince, Sept. 1, 1671, Winslow family II papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (cited hereafter as MHS), Boston, Mass. (reprinted in MHSC, 1st ser., vol. 6:197).

53. PCR, 5:77–79.


It is worth noting that on the eve of war in 1675, when Plymouth’s Governor Prince demanded that Philip appear before him, Philip sent a letter of refusal by another member of the infamous Gorton family, Samuel Gorton, Jr. Gorton and his father were no happier about the war than any other English colonists, but his presence with Philip indicates a past relationship, during which the same ideas that lay at the foundation of the Narragansetts’ resistance to local English authority may have been nourished. Samuel Gorton, Jr., to Josiah Winslow, late June 1675, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, MHS.

55. Easton, “A Relacion of the Indyan Warre,” 17. I am indebted to Jill Lepore for telling me about the copy of Easton’s account in the New York State Archives. Francis Jennings uses Easton’s account to bolster his interpretation of the war as an English opportunity for “easy plunder.” He acknowledges, however, that any English hopes for such an outcome were disappointed. The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (New York, 1976), 297–325.


57. Drake, King Philip’s War, 122.


59. The royal commissioners appointed Rhode Island, which the king had praised for graciously receiving his agents, to act in the stead of the commissioners after they returned to England. This gave them the right to represent the king to the Indians in their area and to have jurisdiction over the “King’s Province,” the long-disputed
Narragansett lands. Easton, “A Relacion of the Indyan Warre,” 17; Calendar of State Papers, 5:341–350, item #1103. For a detailed account of the royal commissioners’ visit, see Paul Lucas, “Colony or Commonwealth: Massachusetts Bay, 1661–1666,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., vol. 24 (1967): 88–107. Philip’s willingness to meet with Rhode Island, at the same time he had refused to meet with Plymouth, is added evidence that he saw the former as a more likely source of justice. For Philip’s refusal to meet with Plymouth, see Samuel Gorton, Jr., to Josiah Winslow, late June 1675, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, MHS; and Benjamin Batten to Sir Thomas Allin, June 29–July 6, 1675, in Calendar of State Papers, 9:251, item #614. Batten notes that, on June 23, 1675, Plymouth sent three “plenipotentiaries with three attendants” to treat with Philip, who refused to meet them.

60. Stephen Saunders Webb, 1676: The End of American Independence (New York, 1984), 298, 356. One poignant incident in November 1675 suggests that seeing the king as a refuge had spread beyond the Indian sachems to their followers. In that month, a group of captive Indians was brought before the Massachusetts General Court to be examined before being sold out of the country. Among them was a Wampanoag woman who made the special request that she be sent to “King Charles his country.” MHS photostats, Nov. 5, 1675, MHS.

61. Thomas Stanton, Sr., to [Waite?] Winthrop, July 11, 1675, Winthrop family papers, MHS.


64. Sir John Werden to Major Andros, Aug. 31, 1676, in Calendar of State Papers, 9:445, item #1024.

65. See Edmund Andros to Governor Leverett, Oct. 16, 1675, in MAC, vol. 68:17, MA. Andros claims the Mohawks would not assist Philip and his allies. Leverett’s answer is in shorthand. See also PCR, 10:453.


68. Mather, Brief History, 132. In his 1676, Stephen Saunders Webb argues that Andros encouraged Philip to remove to New York permanently in order to increase the population of the Duke of York’s dominions (370).


70. Samuel Symonds to Sec. Sir Joseph Williamson, Apr. 6, 1676, in Calendar of State Papers, 9:445, item #1024.
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71. Thomas Church’s The Entertaining History of Philip’s War, published in 1716, was the first account of the war to use a version of the name “King Philip’s War.” A Narrative of the Planting of the Massachusetts Colony Anno 1628. Published by Old Planters, the Authors of the Old Men’s Tears (Boston, 1694), 38–39, 42, 43–45, 72.


73. James Brown to Gov. Winslow, June 15, 1675, Winslow family II papers, MHS.


75. Nathaniel Saltonstall, “A New and Further Narrative of the State of New-England,” in Narratives of the Indian Wars; Church, Diary of King Philip’s War, 156.

76. A Court Martial held at Newport, Rhode Island, In August and September, 1676, for the trial of Indians, charged with being engaged in King Philip’s War (Albany, 1858). Plymouth and Massachusetts viewed Rhode Island’s trial and execution of these war criminals as a presumptuous abuse of the authority those colonies had long claimed over the Wampanoags and Narragansetts. Plymouth demanded that all war criminals be sent to them for trial, to which Massachusetts added its second. Edward Rawson to Josiah Winslow, Aug. 20, 1676, Winslow family II papers, MHS. Rhode Island undoubtedly felt its claim to authority over the Indians, confirmed by the royal commissioners in 1665, superceded that of both colonies. While they agreed to return Plymouth Indians who fled to Rhode Island, they refused to send Narragansetts to Massachusetts, trying and executing them themselves.

77. Meade depositions, Maine Historical Society Archives.


79. Mather, A Brief History, 102–103.