

To “supply them with Indian boys enough”: The Plight of Children in King Philip’s War
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Terror became a defining characteristic of the fighting during King Philip’s War. In a conflict that evolved into total warfare, tactics of shock and brutality appeared to be the only method either side could use against an enemy who seemed to only grow stronger.¹ One such tactic was the use and manipulation of children in order to gain an advantage over the enemy. Children represented a future generation and an asset to society; they also represented a weakness to be exploited in the event of a total war. As the leadership of both sides of the conflict faced crises, they utilized children as one of the only means available to establish control, punishment, and cultural dominance during and after King Philip’s War.

Each side employed their own children in the conflict. In the spring of 1676 the Plymouth Council ordered English youths under the age of sixteen to perform guard duties in their towns within the colony.² This law put a lot of pressure on these children that could mean life or death for the inhabitants of Plymouth’s towns. The colonists’ recruitment of children into such positions not only put the children’s lives in jeopardy, but also required the children to be actual actors in the war.

Algonquian boys, on the other hand, arguably presented a formidable danger to English soldiers. These boys learned the skills necessary to be avid hunters and warriors from early childhood.³ Boys perfected tactics of warfare, marksmanship, and navigation of the region’s swamps through continuous practice.⁴ Like their brothers, uncles, and fathers, they probably outperformed grown English men in the forest warfare of King Philip’s War.

The visibility of enemy children as participants on both sides likely served to some extent as justification of the killing of children in this conflict. Colonial leadership undoubtedly viewed Indian youths as threats. On 22 July 1676, the Plymouth General Court declared that no Indian captive older than fourteen years could reside within the jurisdictions of the colony; such captives would be confiscated by the government, and then most likely sold out of the colony.⁵ Massachusetts leadership considered Indian captives as young as thirteen to be a threat after King Philip's War. The Council passed an order on 29 March 1677 that restricted colonists from buying or housing any Indian above the age of twelve.⁶

The decisions made by the leadership of both sides of the war forced children to endure hardship and deprivation. The harsh winter of 1675-6 brought dire conditions for both the English captive children as well as the Wampanoag and Narragansett children traveling with the same company as Mary Rowlandson. English families also experienced difficult times in this period, but they were in a significantly better position than the families of Philip's forces. The group of Indians Rowlandson accompanied lacked food throughout most of her narrative. Rowlandson regularly observed hungry English children among their captors.⁷ She also recorded the death of two Indian infants, including the child of her mistress, Weetamoo.⁸ It is possible that these babies, if breastfeeding, died from disease or starvation.

While some of Philip's forces sent their women and children to a safer environment among the Narragansetts during the war, Rowlandson's narrative illustrates that Indian women and children accompanied the men on the warpath. The warpath was a dangerous environment for women and children, who experienced threatening circumstances as they

either pursued the enemy or ran from the enemy. Indian women cared for the children and carried all the belongings during such furious marches.⁹ As a result, young Indians and their mothers often lagged behind the men. English forces could more easily overtake these vulnerable Indians as prisoners in such instances. Benjamin Church's scouts, who traveled ahead of the rest of the company as they pursued the enemy, often caught up with the women, children, and others weary from travel.¹⁰ Soldiers then questioned these women and children prisoners, often successfully, for intelligence on the rest of their group. In a letter to the Connecticut General Court, the Massachusetts General Court gave updates on their pursuits of the enemy in May 1676. They wrote that after a rout with the enemy, "An Indian boy was taken, that, on examination, affirmed this party of the enemy was 3 or 4 hundred, & belonged to Nepsuchnit."¹¹ When the English forces came upon the temporary residence of Tyasks, the second in command to Philip, they found many women and children left behind. The English captured Tyasks's wife and son along with others and took them as prisoners to Plymouth.¹² In this manner, Church captured Philip's wife and son along with many other children. As Philip's company scattered, attempting to flee from Church's men, women and children were left behind.¹³

In captivity and servitude, the tactics used to manipulate enemy children by the opposing sides often paralleled each other. Both sides forced enemy children into the lowest level of society in order to claim cultural superiority. The English used the servitude of Indian children as a vehicle for colonization as well as the assertion of cultural domination. The idea of using indentured servitude had been central to the plans of Gookin and John Eliot and was supported by the Commissioners of the United Colonies. The

destruction wrought on Indian societies during the war provided the perfect avenue for colonial authorities to implement their plans to remove children from Indian homes and contract them to work for English families. The Massachusetts Council even appointed the mastermind behind the plan, Gookin, to be on a committee in charge of the distribution of Indian children. In his actions as member of the committee, he obtained two servants for himself: an eight-year-old boy and six-year-old girl.¹⁴ By creating a legal and forced dependence on Puritan families, a subjugated position for these children was guaranteed. The English household ideology and the visibility of defeated Indians as servants after the war created cultural hierarchies that would eventually become racial in nature.¹⁵

Through traditional practices of captivity, the Algonquians also forced English children into a role of slaves or servants. These individuals had the lowest status within Algonquian communities.¹⁶ Roger Williams described these individuals as “like the dead, they had no names.”¹⁷ The inferior position allowed for the manipulation and coercion of children to perform work for their superiors.

The method of obtaining captives in warfare to replace population levels through adoption into the tribe was not as prevalent among Wampanoags and Narragansetts as it was for the Iroquois nations.¹⁸ It appears that one of the main reasons Philip’s forces took English children as hostages during King Philip’s war was to obtain ransoms and gain leverage over the English. The Indians utilized these children as tools for negotiation to advance the strategies of Indian leaders. They hoped these actions would lighten the heavy hand of English sentences on their prisoners.

English leaders understood that an important purpose of Philip's acquiring of captives was to allow for negotiations. English children became bargaining chips for lives of their kin in this respect. The English, in turn, expressed a willingness to negotiate the fates of their Indian prisoners. The Massachusetts Council sent a Christian Indian, Tom Dublett, to speak with the enemy leaders and offer goods or wampum as a ransom payment for the captives or an exchange of prisoners.¹⁹ In another instance, the Massachusetts court composed a letter on 5 May 1676 to the enemy chiefs, intimating they were willing to hear the proposals the sachems had for the return of English women and children captives.²⁰ In a petition to the Massachusetts General Court, Englishman John Lake asked the court to postpone the execution of an enemy sachem, Sagamore Sam, so that the Indian might help in locating and redeeming his brother Thomas, who had been captured by Philip's forces. He recommended that Sagamore Sam's life might be spared if he could bring back his brother safely.²¹ Indian leadership understood the possibility that taking English captives could help lighten the sentence of their own people taken prisoner. It was up to English leadership to secure the safety of the Indians' English prisoners in such negotiations.

It is clear that in the crisis of King Philip's War, both societies targeted children for cultural dominance. Algonquin captors expected their hostages, including children, to conform to established social norms or suffer physical abuse.²² In this aspect of traditional captivity, natives forced cultural superiority over their prisoners. A captive's inability to assimilate to Algonquin culture could mean physical abuse, hunger, and even death. While adults such as Rowlandson experienced punishment through their inability or unwillingness to accept Algonquian mores and expectations,²³ some children may have had

a different experience. It is possible that more children were taken than adults because it was easier to get them to conform to, and respect the rules of, native culture. Research has shown that adults in native captivity took longer to accept Indian life. If a child could pick up on the language, which is naturally easier for children than adults, he or she could uncover the key to culture in a native society.²⁴ Although some children may have been able to appease Indian masters through respect and understanding of social norms, Algonquin warriors traditionally treated their captives harshly. Warriors did not practice rape, but they would torture or kill women and children deemed useless to them.²⁵

There are only a few examples of the commodification of English prisoners within the native societies. Although documents are scant, Rowlandson provided a couple of insightful examples in her narrative. Rowlandson made clear her master, Quanopin, did not take her from her home. Rather, her Narragansett captor sold her to Quanopin.²⁶ Likewise, a praying Indian sold Rowlandson's ten-year-old daughter, Mary, for a gun.²⁷ Rowlandson also expressed fear of the possibility of her son Joseph's captors selling him to the French when he went in search of gunpowder.²⁸ These examples, though few, show us that captives, including children, were traded amongst the Indians during wartime based on need and demand. Although on a scale nowhere close to the global market tapped by the English authorities in the commodification of Indian prisons of war, we can observe that the trade in captive children and others occurred on both sides of the conflict.

The English consistently used native hostages, families in particular, as a method to ensure the fidelity of allied Indians by securing a threatening posture over their children. *The London Gazette* reported in August of 1675 that the English used Christian Indian

soldiers in attempting to locate Philip. Before marching to the English camp, the allied Indians left their wives and children with the English as hostages.²⁹ Oftentimes, Indians wanting to submit to English mercy had to offer their families as hostages along with their fighting services. Three Indians named Peter, George, and David wanted to submit with their small group of kin to the English authority at Plymouth during the war. On 28 June 1676, the Plymouth Council engaged in intense questioning of these Indians about their whereabouts and actions over the last year. Although the three men described that they had fled the fighting and had no reason to engage the English, the councilmen responded that their actions had been so treacherous, that they needed some sort of security of their fidelity before they could grant them mercy. David responded, "Wee cannot make satisfaction for the wronge don; but if our weemen and children can be secured, wee will doe any service wee can by fighting against the enemy." The council agreed to accept the military support of the men and to take the women and children as hostages.³⁰ The English also used children as hostages on the battlefield. In one example, Church arranged a surrender of the sachem Annawan's village. At one point, Annawan walked away. Feeling threatened, Church gathered all the guns and positioned himself "close under young Annawan [the chief's son]; that if he should anywhere get a gun, he should not make a shot at him, without endangering his son."³¹

One of the darkest aspects of King Philip's War was the English practice of shipping away enemy Indians as commodified labor. In one estimate, the English shipped 1000 natives out of the colony as slaves.³² Among these Indian slaves were great numbers of children. The English authorities punished children for the actions of their leadership,

simultaneously setting an example by proclaiming dominance over the enemy. These children, many alone, were separated from their families and sold for colonial revenue.

John Hull, Massachusetts's treasurer, recorded in his Colony Journal a list of Indian prisoners sold as slaves at a public auction on 24 August 1676. Of the seventy-eight Indian prisoners sold that day, at least thirty-eight were children.³³ While some of these children lived as slaves in New England, we can be sure that many were sold into foreign slavery. This is especially likely for those bought in large groups by one person, and those purchased by merchants. No doubt many merchants seized the opportunity to trade Indian slaves. Samuel Shrimpton, a Boston merchant, appears on Hull's list. He bought sixteen Indian slaves that day, at least five of whom were children.³⁴ Although Shrimpton is condemned in his actions of the Indian slave trade through surviving documents, he was certainly not the only merchant who realized the advantages in trading the labor of Indian children and others.

The apparent English demand for Indian children, particularly boys, as slaves during and after the conflict is perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of the enslavement of Indian prisoners. The type of work male servants performed may account for part of this observation, as Gookin had reported a lack of servants in New England.³⁵ As colonial leadership passed laws throughout the colonies restricting servitude, many Englishmen petitioned the courts to keep their adult and child Indian servants, describing their families' need for the servants' assistance.³⁶ Church, who captured many of the enemy Indians' children through the adoption of native warfare tactics, affirms the peculiar desire for Indians boys in his narrative of the war. Church and others evidently made a habit of

generously presenting captive Indian boys to friends and compatriots. In one such instance, Church gave to General Josiah Winslow eighteen enemy captives as a present. Church described Winslow as pleased and thankful for the exploit and the trophies. Winslow then sent two prisoners, "likely boys," as a gift to Boston. He told Church that he had no doubt but Church's "faculty would supply them with Indian boys enough before the war was ended."³⁷ Winslow's statement seems to convey a demand, even an excitement, for Indian boys as slaves. Church also presented a soldier under his command, Thomas Thaxter, with an Indian boy upon returning with captives to Plymouth after a campaign.³⁸

Other instances provide evidence that the ownership of Indian boys symbolized prestige and power. In *Making War and Minting Christians: Masculinity, Religion, and Colonialism in Early New England*, R. Todd Romero described an event in Plymouth Colony in 1623 where Emmanuel Altham, an investor and leader of the Company of Adventurers for New Plymouth, explicitly asked Philip's father, Massasoit, for an Indian boy, presumably for a slave. Romero's analysis of the conversation and Altham's intentions reveal a possibility that his ownership of an Indian boy could have helped confirm his position among the gentry and remind others of his family's power in both commerce and law.³⁹ Another example exposes further the exchange in Indian boys among the English gentry. In 1679, the industrious Shrimpton purchased a parcel of land in Boston from John Harwood, Jr. The deed described Shrimpton's payment as two hundred seventy pounds and an Indian boy.⁴⁰

During the terror of King Philip's War, both Indian and colonial leadership believed their motives to be righteous. In order to achieve success in the war, each side sought any

possible weakness on the part of the enemy for some sort of advantage. In an often hopeless struggle, control of the enemy children became one of the only tactics to effectively assert punishment and cultural superiority. Children underwent violence, deprivation, and exploitation as a result. Through the manipulation of English and Indian children, the weakest and most cherished members of society, the leadership of either side could hope for victory in King Philip's War. Furthermore, through the control of the enemy's posterity, the victors could also hope for a secure future and dominance of New England.

¹Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare 1675-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 81.

² Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England* (Boston: William White, 1856), 5:193. Hereafter cited as *PCR*.

³ Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1991), 52.

⁴ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 82. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 18; 82.

⁵ Almon Wheeler Lauber, *Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the United States* (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 144-5.

⁶ Lauber, *Indian Slavery in Colonial Times*, 145-6.

⁷ Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, Who Was Taken by the Indians at the Destruction of Lancaster, in 1676*, 5th ed. (Lancaster: Carter, Andrews, and Co., 1828), 13; 26-7; 52.

⁸ Rowlandson, *Narrative*, 35; 43-50.

⁹ Rowlandson, *Narrative*, 22; 24.

¹⁰ Benjamin Church and Thomas Church, *The Entertaining History of King Philip's War, which began in the Month of June, 1675. As Also of Expeditions More Lately Made Against the Common Enemy, and Indian Rebels, in the Eastern Parts of New England* (Boston, 1716; Newport, 1772); reprinted in *The History of Philip's War, Commonly Called The Great Indian War, of 1675 and 1676*, 2nd ed. (Exeter, N.H.: J. & B. Williams), 112.

¹¹ *MCR*, 5:97.

¹² Church, *Entertaining History*, 106.

¹³ Church, *Entertaining History*, 111.

¹⁴ "Indian Children Put to Service, 1676," *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 8 (1854): 270-3.

¹⁵ Ann Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 116.

¹⁶ Laura Arnold, "'Now . . . Didn't Our People Laugh?' Female Misbehavior and Algonquian Culture in Mary Rowlandson's *Captivity and Restauration*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21, no. 4 (1997): 10.

¹⁷ Roger Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America* (1643), 5. Quoted in Arnold, "'Didn't Our People Laugh?'" 10.

¹⁸ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 102, note 3.

¹⁹ Massachusetts Council to the Indian Sagamores, March 31, 1676, Mass. Arch. 68:193. Quoted in Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1999), 145. Lepore included a discussion on how Indians taken captive by Philip's forces, such as James Printer, ultimately helped in the release of English captives. Lepore, *Name of War*, 145-149.

²⁰ *MCR*, 5:93.

²¹ Petition of John Lake to Massachusetts Council, 15 September 1676, MHS Photostats.

²² Arnold, "'Didn't our People Laugh?'" 8-9.

²³ Arnold, "'Didn't Our People Laugh?'" 8-10; 16.

²⁴ James Axtell, *White Indians of Colonial America* (Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1979), 31-3. For more information on native language as a key to understanding symbolic and cultural aspects of Algonquian life, see Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), chap. 1-2.

²⁵ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 29.

²⁶ Rowlandson, *Narrative*, 12.

²⁷ Rowlandson, *Narrative*, 16.

²⁸ Rowlandson, *Narrative*, 42.

²⁹ Image of a broadside of *The London Gazette*, "From Monday August 16 to Thursday August 19, 1675," printed in Lepore, *The Name of War*, 56.

³⁰ *PCR*, 5:201-3.

³¹ Church, *Entertaining History*, 141.

³² Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 80.

³³ George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* (Leominster, Mass.: for the author, 1896), 479-80. Because Hull used some vague terms in describing the Indian prisoners, it is possible that there were more than thirty-eight children out of the total seventy-eight. Hull used the terms "girl," "boy," "lad," "infant," and "papoose" to denote child prisoners.

³⁴ Bodge, *Soldiers*, 479. Surviving documents reveal that Shrimpton was involved in many Indian issues of the day. In 1675, Shrimpton agreed to quarter one hundred Christian Indians on Noddles Island, one of his properties. In exchange, the Massachusetts General Court allowed him five Christian Indian prisoners as laborers, who he returned to the Massachusetts Council

later (Lauber, *Indian Slavery*, 143-4.). In a letter to his wife, written 8 July 1676, Shrimpton wrote that he recently purchased nine Indian slaves, who he planned on shipping to Jamaica. Of these Indians, he debated keeping three for himself (Samuel Shrimpton to Elizabeth Shrimpton, 8 July 1676, MHS Photostats).

³⁵ Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (1674), reprinted in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1st Ser., 1 (1792): 219. In Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau's research of the child servants of color in Rhode Island, boys represented two-thirds of the indenture contracts for people of color, even though the sex ratio was close to even. They concluded that the results "suggest that boys of color were considered especially suitable objects for bound labor." Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau, "Colonizing the Children: Indian Youngsters in Servitude in Early Rhode Island," in *Reinterpreting New England Indians and the Colonial Experience*, ed. Colin G. Calloway and Neal Salisbury (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2004), 156.

³⁶ Petition of Josiah Winslow on Behalf of Lieutenant Waye to the Massachusetts Court of Magistrates, 12 October 1676, MHS Photostats. Petition of John Jacob, Nathaniel Baker, and Mathew Cushon to the Massachusetts Council, 21 December 1676, MHS Photostats. Petition of John Thaxter to the Massachusetts Council, 11 January 1676/7, MHS Photostats.

³⁷ Church, *Entertaining History*, 57.

³⁸ Petition of John Thaxter to the Massachusetts Council, 11 January 1676/7, MHS Photostats.

³⁹ R. Todd Romero, *Making War and Minting Christians: Masculinity, Religion, and Colonialism in Early New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 60-2.

⁴⁰ Deed of Sale from John Harwood, Jr., to Samuel Shrimpton, 12 September 1679, David Stoddard Greenough Family Papers, 1631-1859, Box OS 1, Massachusetts Historical Society.

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