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eBooks



THE NAME OF WAR

KING PHILIP'S WAR AND THE ORIGINS  
OF AMERICAN IDENTITY

**JILL LEPORE**

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**JILL LEPORE**

***The Name of War***

Jill Lepore was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1966. She received her B.A. from Tufts University, M.A. from the University of Michigan, and Ph.D. from Yale University. She was Assistant Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego, from 1995 to 1996, and a fellow at the Charles Warren Center, Harvard University, from 1996 to 1997. Since 1996 she has been Assistant Professor of History, Boston University. Her Ph.D. dissertation won the Ralph Henry Gabriel Dissertation Prize of the American Studies Association and the Charlotte W. Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship.

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# *The Name of War*

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KING PHILIP'S WAR AND

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THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN

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IDENTITY • JILL LEPORE

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VINTAGE BOOKS

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*What's in a Name?*  
*A Brief Chronology of King Philip's War*

*Prologue*    *The Circle*

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*Chapter 1*    *Beware of Any Linguist*

*Chapter 2*    *The Story of It Printed*

PART TWO • **W**AR

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## *What's in a Name?*

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Words like devastation, rape, slaughter, carnage, starvation are lock and key words to keep the pain at bay. Words about war that are easy on the eye.

I'm telling you stories. Trust me.

—JEANETTE WINTERSON,  
*The Passion*

This is a study of war, and of how people write about it. Writing about war can be almost as difficult as waging it and, often enough, is essential to winning it. The words used to describe war have a great deal of work to do: they must communicate war's intensity, its trauma, its fears, and glories; they must make clear who is right and who is wrong, rally support, and recruit allies; and they must document the pain of war, and in so doing, help to alleviate it. Not all words about war do all these things, but most of them do some. The words used to describe and define war are among the tireddest in any language. "Bloody," "brutal," "cruel," "savage," "atrocious"—all are overused and imprecise. And yet they remain shocking perhaps because of their very vagueness. How does someone far from the scene of battle imagine "savage cruelty" except by thinking the worst?

Words about war are often lies. False reports, rumors, deceptions. One nation's propaganda may be its enemy's profanity: truth in war is relative (which is not to say that some kinds of killing aren't worse than others). "Each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice," Montaigne observed. Or, to paraphrase Hobbes, one man calls cruelty what another calls justice.<sup>1</sup> Such words about war, truths, lies, or fine distinctions, constitute what political scientist Michael Walzer has called a "moral vocabulary of warfare," the language by which combatants justify their own actions while vilifying their opponents.<sup>2</sup> I call your attack a massacre, you call my resistance treachery. One of us may be lying, but one of us may be dying. If I die, your word, "treachery," is almost as important as my wound, since you alone survive to make meaning of my death. War is a contest of injuries and of interpretation. As the literary critic Elaine Scarry has argued, war "differs from all other contests in that its outcome carries the power of its own enforcement."<sup>3</sup> My death gives you the power to claim the victory. And, even if I survive, you can force me to confess to "treachery."

Words about war are slippery, and "war" itself may be the slipperiest of all. War is hell, we say, and war's a game. War is a contagion, the universal perversion. War is politics by other means, at best barbarism, a mean, contemptible thing. We say many things about war, not a few of them profound, and few as pithy as these.<sup>4</sup> Eminently quotable remarks aside, war is perhaps best understood as a violent contest for territory, resources, and political allegiance and, no less fiercely, a contest for meaning. At first, the pain and violence of war are so extraordinary that language fails us: we cannot name our suffering and, without words to describe it, reality itself becomes confused, even unreal.<sup>5</sup> But we do not remain at a loss for words for long. Out of the chaos we soon make new meanings of our world, finding words to make reality real again, usually words like "atrocious" and "betrayal." War twice cultivates

language: it requires justification, it demands description.

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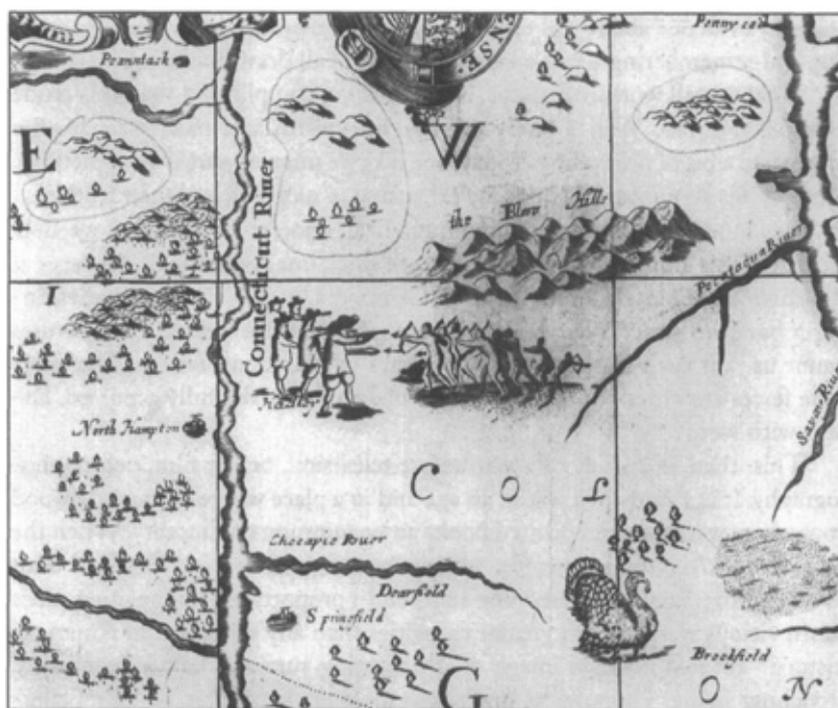
To say that war cultivates language is not to ignore what else war does: war kills. Indeed it is the central claim of this book that wounds and words—the injuries and the interpretation—cannot be separated, that acts of war generate acts of narration, and that both types of acts are often joined in a common purpose: defining the geographical, political, cultural, and sometimes racial and national boundaries between peoples. If you kill me and call my resistance “treachery,” you have succeeded not only in killing me (and in so doing ensuring that I will not be able to call your attack a “massacre”), but you have also succeeded in calling me and my kind a treacherous people. In attacking me, you have kept me out of your territory; in calling my resistance “treachery,” you make clear that I was not worthy to be your neighbor. Your success, however, may be short-lived. Future generations and future historians, certainly my descendants and perhaps even yours, may tell the story of our battle differently. They may even declare it a “massacre.” How wars are remembered can be just as important as how they were fought and first described. If future generations call your attack a “massacre,” new ideas about themselves, rather than any new evidence about you or me, may propel them to do it. Waging, writing, and remembering a war all shape its legacy, and draw boundaries.

How this all works, of course, is rather more complicated than this crude example suggests. War is rarely so straightforward, and most wars require more than a bit of unraveling. Today one way we unravel wars is with pictures. Since words about war can be easily exhausted of meaning and their truth easily questioned, pictures can sometimes mean more to us. When we hear “atrocities,” it is almost impossible not to see stock images: smoking furnaces at Auschwitz, the bloody killing fields of Cambodia, lifeless Bosnian bodies lining a Sarajevo street. Newsreels, photographs, satellite videos. The pictures haunt us. Yet such images were not always so abundant, not because there were fewer atrocities but because they could not be so skillfully captured. Except with words.

This, then, is a study of a war before television, before film, before photography. It is a study of a war in an age and in a place where even crude wood engravings were rare and printed books an uncommon commodity. When the English and Algonquian peoples of seventeenth-century New England went to war in 1675, they devastated one another. In proportion to population, their short, vicious war inflicted greater casualties than any other war in American history.<sup>6</sup> Yet just a single image of the fighting survives: half a dozen tiny crouching figures shooting at one another along the creases of John Seller’s map of New England printed in an English atlas in 1675. It tells us precious little.

The fighting shown on Seller’s map began in June 1675, when three men were hanged by the neck not far from Plymouth Rock. They had been convicted of murdering a man named John Sassamon, who, weeks before his death, had warned the governor of Plymouth Colony that Philip, a Wampanoag Indian leader, was planning to wage war against the English settlers. The three convicted men, all Wampanoags loyal to Philip, were suspected of killing Sassamon, a Christian Indian minister, as punishment for his betrayal. On the gallows, two died the slow, jerky death of strangulation; the third was saved when his rope frayed as he dangled and, finally, dropped him to the ground. But two deaths were more than enough to start a war. Whatever his original intentions, Philip began attacking English towns on June

24, just days after his men were hanged. Over the next fourteen months, one English town after another was laid waste. In July, Middleborough, Dartmouth, Plymouth, and Mendon were attacked. Brookfield in August. Springfield, Hatfield, and Northampton in October. Then, in the winter, Pawtuxet, Lancaster, Medfield, Groton, Longmeadow, Marlborough, Simsbury, and Providence. Still more the following summer. It seemed to the colonists as if the Indians had “risen almost round the country.”<sup>7</sup> And indeed, as the war progressed, other northeastern Algonquians—Nipmucks and Pocumtucks in central and western Massachusetts, Narragansetts in Rhode Island, and Abenakis in Maine—joined Philip’s campaign or fought the English for reasons of their own.<sup>8</sup> By August 1676, when Philip was shot to death near his home in Mount Hope, twenty-five English towns, more than half of all the colonial settlements in New England, had been ruined and the line of English habitation had been pushed back almost to the coast. The struggling colonists had nearly been forced to abandon New England entirely, and their losses left them desperately dependent on England for support.<sup>9</sup>



Detail from John Seller, “A Mapp of New England, 1675.” *Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University*

Yet Indian losses were far, far greater. Colonial armies, with their Pequot and Mohegan allies, pursued enemy Indians from Narragansett Bay to the Connecticut River Valley, killing warriors in the field and families in their homes. Those Algonquians who fought the English saw their communities decimated: thousands were killed in the fighting while thousands more died of disease or starvation or were shipped out of the colonies as slaves. Those who retreated beyond the Connecticut River found themselves fighting on two fronts: with the traditional Iroquois enemies, the Mohawks, to the west, and with the English to the east. Closer to the Atlantic, not even Christian Indians loyal to the English were spared; in the fall

of 1675 most were removed from their towns and imprisoned on barren islands, where many died of cold or hunger during the long winter. Always brutal and everywhere fierce, King Philip's War, as it came to be called, proved to be not only the most fatal war in all American history but also one of the most merciless.

However remarkable for the magnitude of its destruction and the depth of its cruelty, King Philip's War is almost as remarkable for how much the colonists wrote about it: more than four hundred letters written during the war survive in New England archives along with more than thirty editions of twenty different printed accounts. In letters, diaries, and chronicles, Englishmen and women in New England expressed their agonies, mourned their losses, and, most of all, defended their conduct.<sup>10</sup> Not all colonists agreed about the causes of the war, or about how it should be waged, but most agreed about what was at stake: their lives, their land, and their sense of themselves. And, in the end, their writings proved to be pivotal to their victory, a victory that drew new, firmer boundaries between English and Indian people, between English and Indian land, and between what it meant to be "English" and what it meant to be "Indian."<sup>11</sup>

Yet those boundaries were never stable, either before or after the war. Seventeenth-century New England was, after all, a frontier, at once a dividing line and a middle ground between at least two cultures.<sup>12</sup> Boundary setting, as frontier historians have pointed out, "the very essence of frontier life."<sup>13</sup> And it has been the fate of the American frontier to endlessly repeat itself. (And, perhaps, to echo across the continent: not long after King Philip's War ended, unrelated hostilities erupted in New Mexico when Pueblo Indians revolted to free themselves of Spanish rule.<sup>14</sup>) The same cultural anxieties and land conflicts that drove Indians and colonists to war in 1675 would continue to haunt them after the war had ended. Not only that, but their descendants, and their distant relatives, peoples from other parts of Europe and from more western parts of America, would fight uncannily similar wars over and over again.<sup>15</sup> King Philip's War was not, as some historians have suggested, the foundational American frontier experience or even the archetypal Indian war.<sup>16</sup> Wars like this had been fought before, and every war brings its own stories, its own miseries. Yet there remains something about King Philip's War that hints of allegory. In a sense, King Philip's War never ended. In other times, in other places, its painful wounds would be reopened, its vicious words spoken again.

War cultivates language, but frontier wars cultivate language in a very particular way. As Patricia Nelson Limerick has written, "the process of invasion, conquest, and colonization was the kind of activity that provoked shiftiness in verbal behavior."<sup>17</sup> Much of that shiftiness has its roots in European ideas about nature, God, and man, ideas that can be traced to the earliest New World encounters and to questions about the humanity of the indigenous peoples of America. And words are at the center of the encounter between the Old World and the New, between the European "self" and the native American "other."<sup>18</sup> As the bishop of Avila famously remarked when presenting Queen Isabella with the first Spanish grammar book in 1492, "Language is the perfect instrument of empire."<sup>19</sup> Yet seventeenth-century English colonists in New England were plagued with anxieties of identity, not of self and

other but of a more complicated, triangulated self, other, and another.<sup>20</sup> At least as far back as the Reformation, the English had measured themselves—their civility, their piety, their humanity—against other Europeans, especially the Spanish, whom they condemned for their cruelty to Protestants during the Spanish Inquisition. And, after the first European ventures into the New World, the English continued to measure themselves against the Spanish, whom they again condemned for cruelty, now against Indians during the conquest of Mexico.<sup>21</sup> If papism was a defining element of infidelity, cruelty was a defining element of savagery. Yet a cruel European, from the perspective of the English, was still better than a savage, just as a papist was clearly more pious than a pagan.

Distinctions such as these lay behind much of the Puritans' moral posturing in their writing about King Philip's War. As Stephen Greenblatt has written, "Language is, after all, one of the crucial ways of distinguishing between men and beasts," and, as I argue, the language of cruelty and savagery was the vocabulary Puritans adapted to this end.<sup>22</sup> English colonists in New England defined themselves against both the Indians' savagery and the Spaniards' cruelty: between these two similar yet distinct "others," one considered inhuman and one human, the English in New England attempted to carve out for themselves a narrow path of virtue, piety, and mercy. Out of the chaos of war, English colonists constructed a language that proclaimed themselves to be neither cruel colonizers like the Spaniards nor savages like the Indians. Later on, after nearly a century of repetition on successive American frontiers, this triangulated conception of identity would form the basis of American nationalism as it emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But by that time, the British had come to replace the Spanish as the third element of the triangle. Meanwhile, Algonquians in New England, who, in the seventeenth century, had defined themselves in opposition to their English and Iroquois neighbors, created a new ethnic identity two centuries later. And, in the twentieth century, they would come to define their own, Indian, nationalism.

WORDS ABOUT WAR—even the names of wars—can be contentious indeed. Historians, admittedly a contentious lot, have failed even to agree on what to *call* King Philip's War. Its very name, each word in its title—"King," "Philip's," "War"—has been passionately disputed. Philip is said to have been neither a "king" nor, truly, "Philip," and not only historians but contemporaries, too, have insisted that what took place in New England in 1675 and 1676 was simply too nasty to "deserve the Name of a War."<sup>24</sup>

Can what happened in New England in 1675 and 1676 rightly be called "King Philip's War"? Alas, three impassioned arguments say no. The first condemns the colonists' aggression and suggests that the conflict be called a "Puritan Conquest." The second celebrates Indian resistance and proposes "Metacom's Rebellion," insisting that Philip is more accurately referred to by his Algonquian name, Metacom (sometimes rendered as "Metacomet" or "Pometacom"), and that calling him a "king" is derisive. A third argument takes the view that the fighting is better understood as an Indian civil war, since many Mohegans and Pequots, as well as Christian Indians, fought alongside the English against the Wampanoags, Pocumtucks, Nipmucks, and Narragansetts.<sup>25</sup> But what really happened? Did the Puritans conquer? Did

Metacom rebel? Did one Indian brother fight another? Did King Philip wage a war? Yes, yes, yes, and yes again.

All wars have at least two names. In Vietnam, the conflict Americans call the “Vietnam War” is called the “American War.” What most Americans now call the “Civil War” has been called (by Northerners) the “War of the Rebellion” and (by Southerners) the “War of Northern Aggression.” Names of wars are always biased; they always privilege one perspective over another. This is no less true of “Metacom’s Rebellion” than it is of “King Philip’s War.” And, though names of wars may tell us a good deal, they rarely tell us everything. Calling what happened between 1739 and 1742 the “War of Jenkins’ Ear” tells us about the sad fate of a British sea captain’s auditory apparatus, but not that the war was fought between England and Spain. Still, it is a telling name, since Captain Robert Jenkins’ ear, cut off by the Spanish as punishment for smuggling, became a symbol of the conflict (especially after Jenkins presented it to Parliament). “King Philip’s War” is telling in the same way. Philip was not, literally, a king; his own people may have called him by a name other than “Philip”; and, at the time, they probably called the fighting something other than “King Philip’s War.” Nevertheless, Philip did begin a war in which his people’s sovereignty (their “kingdom”) was lost, and his death did become a symbol of the English victory. (His severed head was staked on a pole for public viewing in Plymouth.) Meanwhile, the colonists did call what happened “King Philip’s War,” and the very fact that what their enemies called it has not survived (“Metacom’s Rebellion” is mere conjecture) is part of what the fighting was about in the first place: it was a contest for meaning—and the colonists won.

“King Philip’s War” is not unbiased, but its biases are telling. (And some of its biases are less biased than historians have assumed.) Perhaps it will be best to consider each of the contested terms in “King Philip’s War” in turn. To begin with, calling an Indian leader a “king,” though it eventually became mocking, began as a simple (though inaccurate) translation of *sachem*. The English called many prominent Indian leaders “kings,” partly in recognition of the sachems’ very real political authority and partly as a result of the colonists’ overestimation of that authority. Most sachemships were hereditary, and English colonists saw them as roughly analogous to European monarchies, however much smaller in scale. “king” might have seemed a fitting, if not entirely satisfactory, translation of “sachem.” “Philip,” too, was an English creation; it was the name given to Metacom when he and his brother Wamsutta appeared before the Plymouth Court in 1660 as a gesture of friendship and fidelity.<sup>26</sup> In 1677 one colonist, with the benefit of hindsight, suggested that Metacom, “for his ambitious and haughty Spirit,” had been originally “nick-named King Philip.”<sup>27</sup> But, in 1660, naming Metacom and Wamsutta “Philip” and “Alexander” after the ancient leaders of Macedonia was most likely a reference (oblique to us but obvious to them) to the seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, an engraving of an Indian mouthing the words, “Come Over and Help Us,” and itself an echo of Acts 16:9, in which the Apostle Paul sees a vision of a Macedonian begging him, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”<sup>28</sup> Plymouth authorities like their Massachusetts counterparts, saw Indians as pagan Macedonians who, at heart, were desperate for the light of the gospel. “Philip” was no compliment, but that doesn’t make it a joke.

“War” is, of course, the slipperiest, most disputed word in “King Philip’s War,” but the

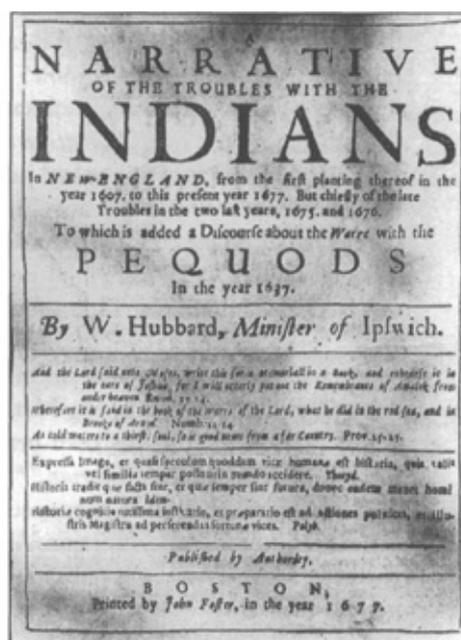
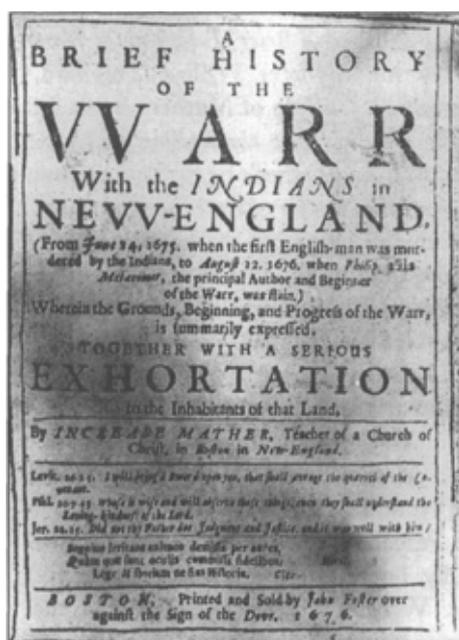
recently proposed alternatives are poor substitutes. “Conquest” implies that the outcome of the hostilities was predetermined, while “rebellion” suggests that Philip was a treasonous subject of King Charles. Neither is quite true (much as the colonists would have liked to believe both). “Indian Civil War” rings false, too, since, although the colonists were quick to call upon Indian allies, the majority on both sides perceived the war as an English-on-Indian conflict. In the end, “war” may be the word that takes the conflict most seriously, but tellingly, even at the time of the fighting, the word “war” sparked controversy. In the fall of 1676, soon after Philip’s death, Increase Mather, the Puritan minister of Boston, published *Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England*. A few months later, William Hubbard, minister of nearby Ipswich, took exception to the title of Mather’s book. In the preface to his own *Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England*, Hubbard distinguished his book from Mather’s by explaining that he had titled his work a “narrative” because “the Matter of Fact therein related (being rather Massacres, barbarous inhuman Outrages, than Acts of Hostility or valiant Atchievements) no more deserve the Name of War than the Report of them the Tide of an History.”<sup>29</sup> Here was no “history” of a “war”; there was a “narrative” of some “troubles.” In Hubbard’s mind, to call the conflict a “war” and to account of it a “history” gave it a dignity it did not deserve, not to mention giving Mather the stature he did not merit. Hubbard no doubt bridled that, in his own preface, Mather had boasted, “I have performed the part of an *Historian*.”<sup>30</sup> Did Mather pretend to be Thucydides? Did he suggest that what happened in New England in 1675 and 1676 could be likened to the Peloponnesian War? Perhaps it is only fair to observe that Increase Mather was a bombastic bully, but ultimately the two ministers’ petty squabbling is beside the point. When Hubbard declared that the Indians’ fighting—“Massacres, barbarous inhumane Outrages”—simply did not “deserve the Name of a War,” he made Mather seem somewhat pretentious; more importantly, he made New England’s Algonquians seem entirely inhuman.



Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony *Courtesy of the Massachusetts Archives*

The Reverends Hubbard and Mather, much as they bickered, had a great deal in common. Most importantly, they shared what the seventeenth-century English scholar Samuel Purchas

called the “literall advantage”: they could write, and most Indians could not. “Want of Letters,” Purchas argued, left Indians in awe of Europeans’ astounding abilities and led them “to thinke the Letter it selfe could speake.” Compared to men who could read and write, Indians were no more than “speaking Apes.” For Purchas, the “literall advantage” truly separated men from beasts—“amongst Men, some are accounted Civill, and more benevolent, Sociable and Religious, by the Use of letters and Writing, which others wanting are esteemed Brutish, Savage, Barbarous.”<sup>31</sup> With this, both William Hubbard and Increase Mather would have agreed. Like all literate Europeans in the New World, Hubbard and Mather had a veritable monopoly on making meaning, or at least on translating and *recording* the meaning of what they saw and did, and even of what they supposed the Indians to have seen, done, and said. And herein lies the circularity of the “literall advantage”: “speaking Apes” cannot respond in writing to the writers who label them inhuman.



Title pages of Increase Mather, *Brief History*, LEFT, and William Hubbard, *Narrative*, RIGHT. Both courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society



LEFT: *Reverend Increase Mather*, London, 1688, by Jan Van der Spriett. *Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, RIGHT: *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics*, c. 1681, unidentified artist. *Courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Gift of Mr. Robert Winthrop*

Nowhere are differences like the “literall advantage” better illustrated than in the contrast between two portraits from the 1680s, one of Mather himself, and one of Ninigret, Narragansett sachem.<sup>32</sup> Mather sits in his library, studying his books and manuscripts. Ninigret stands in the woods, armed with a knife and club. To the Europeans who painted these portraits, Mather was clothed in the fine fabrics of arts and letters (his collar even seems to be made of the pages of an open book), while Ninigret was naked in body, mind, and soul.

If, in the seventeenth century, the “literall advantage” proved decisive, recent challenges to the name “King Philip’s War” have attempted to even the odds, to take away the colonists’ monopoly on making meaning of the war by asking, What would the Indians have called it? Most historians who have asked this question have begun with the assumption that no Algonquian would have called the conflict “King Philip’s War.” But those who spoke English might have. At least one Nipmuck, in a note tacked to a tree outside a burning English town, called the fighting a “war,” and Metacom at least occasionally called himself “King Philip.” (A rebellious letter written from Mount Hope to the governor of Plymouth and transcribed by Philip’s interpreter, Tom Sansuik, begins, “King Philip desire to let you understand that he could not come to the Court.”<sup>34</sup>) Moreover, Philip, who probably knew the alphabet, signed documents with a “P,” not an WM—only his scribes occasionally added “alias Metacom” to his mark, probably to accommodate the colonists, who were meticulous record-keepers.<sup>35</sup>

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light background. The text reads "Philip alias metacom &amp; his P mark". The word "Philip" is written in a cursive script. "alias" is in a smaller, simpler script. "metacom" is in a bold, blocky font. "&amp;" is a simple ampersand. "his" is in a cursive script. "P" is a large, bold, blocky letter. "mark" is in a cursive script.

Mark of Philip, alias Metacom

It is possible that Philip called himself “Philip” when addressing the English and “Metacom” when talking with Indians. But it seems more likely that he simply abandoned the name Metacom after 1660. After all, Philip was raised in a culture in which people commonly adopted new names, leaving old names behind. Edward Winslow had observed in 1624, “As their names are significant and variable, for when they come to the state of men and women they alter them according to their deeds or dispositions.”<sup>36</sup> For just this reason, it is possible that Philip renamed himself during the war, to mark a new stage in his life, but surely he would not have returned to Metacom, the name of his youth. That no record of Philip’s new name survives should come as no surprise. Those who knew Philip by the name he went by at the time of his death, in August 1676, would not have uttered it: a strict naming taboo

prohibited it. As Roger Williams had reported, “the naming of their dead *Sachims*, is on ground of their warres”; in 1665 Philip himself had traveled to Nantucket to kill an Indian who had spoken the name of his deceased father, Massasoit.<sup>37</sup> If Philip took another name during the war, it has not survived. (Although one small, uncorroborated bit of evidence suggests that he may have been renamed “Wewesawamit.”<sup>38</sup>) And, since he seems to have initially taken “Philip” in earnest, calling him “Metacom” today is no truer to his memory, especially because “Metacom” became a popular substitute for “Philip” only in the early nineteenth century, when white playwrights, poets, and novelists sought to make the war sound more authentically, and romantically, Indian.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, as relates to seventeenth-century evidence, there are few clues about what Algonquians might have called the war, with the important exceptions of Philip’s inky “I” and rare notes left by retreating Indians. Nearly all of what we know about the fighting—whether “brief histories” or “narratives of troubles”—comes from the colonists themselves, and, as the Massachusetts seal (“Come Over and Help Us”) so poignantly illustrates, more than a bit of skepticism must be brought to words the colonists quite literally put into the mouths of their Algonquian neighbors. Yet those neighbors were neither as silent as the colonists hoped nor as “inarticulate” as most historians have assumed. Still, perhaps the question of what Algonquians might have called King Philip’s War is ultimately futile. Or perhaps it is simply the wrong question. In either case, the question this study asks is slightly different: If war is, at least in part, a contest for meaning, can it ever be a fair fight when only one side has access to those perfect instruments of empire, pens, paper, and printing presses?

THIS STUDY ASKS other questions, too, of course, questions about cruelty, language, memory, and, most of all, identity. I argued earlier that war cultivates language, but in writing this book has at times seemed to me that war cultivates questions, many of them disturbing and all too few of them answerable. Scholars of the generation whose work has most inspired me were themselves compelled to write about war because of their experiences as witnesses to Vietnam, a war best remembered for the debate over whether it ought to have been waged at all. In his tellingly titled *Just and Unjust Wars*, for instance, Michael Walzer explained, “I do not begin by thinking about war in general, but about particular wars, above all the American intervention in Vietnam.”<sup>40</sup> Nor did I, nearly two decades after Walzer, begin by thinking about war in general, but about a particular conflict, the Persian Gulf War. That war, notable for its excess of video images through extensive television coverage, led me to wonder how war could be represented without pictures. In an age when there were few technologies for visual representation, how effective were words in describing and justifying war? That question, in turn, led me to consider how cultures lacking not only television but also literacy come to terms with war. And, like Walzer, while I began by thinking about a particular war, I soon found myself facing some rather grand philosophical questions. To me, the most pressing of these is, How do people reconcile themselves to war’s worst cruelties? Or, as Elaine Scarry put it, “By what perceptual process does it come about that one human being can stand beside another human being in agonizing pain and not know it, not know it to the

point where he himself inflicts it?”<sup>41</sup> Between each line and on the words on every page, the question drives my investigation. Yet nowhere do I answer it, nor did I ever expect to. It has seemed to me the most unanswerable of all.

As distressing as it can be to study cruelty, King Philip’s War, like most bulky chunks of the past, is filled with fascinating characters, bizarre happenings, and strange tales. Not surprisingly, I have found myself caught up in these stories, with the result that the questions that brought me to this topic, however urgent, are sometimes seduced into slumber by the cunning charms of a pressing plot. Analysis, however, is a light sleeper. Just when it seems that plot might take over entirely, rest assured that analysis will soon be awake, as cranky and demanding as ever. In the end, this book is just another story about just another war, but happily, along the way it is also a murder mystery, an adventure story, and a tale of peril on the high seas.

The structure of this book is shaped both by the action of the war and by my own ideas about its importance. Bookended by the Prologue and the Epilogue, the four parts of the study—Language, War, Bondage, and Memory—describe and define four elements of the conflict and also four themes of my analysis. Part One examines why so many colonists wrote so much about King Philip’s War while New England’s Algonquians wrote so little, and, investigating, along the way, how war alters an individual’s relationship to language. Next, Part Two traces how boundaries were drawn during King Philip’s War, both on the physical landscape and on the landscape of the human body, and how the war’s cruelties were explained and justified by both sides, especially in religious terms. Part Three contrasts New Englanders’ differing experiences of bondage during the war: captivity, confinement, slavery. Last, Part Four analyzes how subsequent generations of Americans have remembered King Philip’s War, most notably through *Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampanoags*, a wildly popular play that was performed in theaters across America in the 1830s and 1840s.

Meanwhile, to preserve the flavor of the stories of King Philip’s War, and most especially to help readers appreciate the differences in the spoken and written language among colonists and Indians, I have preserved the original spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources with the following important exceptions: superscripted characters have been brought down; abbreviations have been spelled out; fanciful or conventional italics have been removed, unless they were clearly intended for emphasis; mistaken homonyms (“there” used for “their”) have been corrected if their usage might confuse the reader, but not otherwise; and, when relevant, the following letters have been changed: “u” to “v,” “v” to “u,” “j” to “i,” “y” to “th,” and “t” to “c.”<sup>42</sup> (Remember that what we see as poor spelling does not always imply poor education; seventeenth-century spelling is entirely idiosyncratic.) Additionally, all “old style” dates have been modernized—that is, dates between January 1 and March 25 have been changed to the modern calendar and are considered part of the new year (thus, what in seventeenth-century notation “February 10, 1675/6” is here rendered as “February 10, 1676”). And, in rendering Algonquian personal names, whose spellings often vary tremendously, I have in each case chosen the least quirky and simplest spelling for use in the text; variant spellings are recorded in the notes.

Finally, a word about the title of this study. In 1677, when William Hubbard explained

why he had called his account of King Philip's War a "narrative," he uttered the mouthful that bears repeating: "The Matter of Fact therein related (being rather Massacres, barbarous, inhumane Outrages, than Acts of Hostility or valiant Achievements) no more deserve the Name of a War than the Report of them the Tide of an History."<sup>43</sup> A better illustration of the importance of language I could not have asked for, and so, with a nod to Reverend Hubbard, I borrow the tide for this, my own set of words about war.

# *A Brief Chronology of King Philip's War*

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1675

JANUARY

29 John Sassamon dies at Assawampsett Pond.

JUNE

8 Sassamon's alleged murderers are executed at Plymouth.

11 Wampanoags are reported in arms near Swansea.

14- Rhode Island, Plymouth, and Massachusetts authorities attempt negotiation with Philip  
25 and seek guarantees of fidelity from Nipmucks and Narragansettsy.

24 Wampanoags begin attacking Swansea.

26 Massachusetts troops march to Swansea to join Plymouth troops.

26- Wampanoags attack Rehoboth and Taunton, elude colonial troops, and leave Mount  
29 Hope for Pocasset. Mohegans travel to Boston and offer to fight on the English side.

JULY

8-9 Wampanoags attack Middleborough and Dartmouth.

14 Nipmucks attack Mendon.

15 Narragansetts sign a peace treaty with Connecticut.

16- Massachusetts envoy attempts to negotiate with the Nipmucks.  
24

19 Philip and his troops escape an English siege and flee Pocasset for Nipmuck territory.

AUGUST

2-4 Nipmucks attack Massachusetts troops and besiege Brookfield.

13 Massachusetts Council orders Christian Indians confined to praying towns.

22 A group of unidentified Indians kill seven colonists at Lancaster.

Captain Samuel Moseley arrests fifteen Hassanemesit Indians near Marlborough for the

Lancaster assault and marches them to Boston.

#### SEPTEMBER

1-2 Wampanoags and Nipmucks attack Deerfield. Massachusetts forces led by Moseley attack the town of Pennacook.

12 Colonists abandon Deerfield, Squakeag, and Brookfield.

18 Narragansetts sign a treaty with the English in Boston. Massachusetts troops are ambushed near Northampton.

#### OCTOBER

5 Pocumtucks attack and destroy Springfield.

13 Massachusetts Council orders Christian Indians removed to Deer Island.

19 English repel Indians from Hatfield.

#### NOVEMBER

c-1 Nipmucks take captive Christian Indians at Magunkaquog, Chabanakongkomun, and Hassanemesit, including James Printer.

2-12 Commissioners of the United Colonies order a united army to attack the Narragansetts.

#### DECEMBER

7 Massachusetts Council prints a broadside explaining the case against the Narragansetts.

19 United colonial forces attack Narragansetts at the Great Swamp.

### 1676

#### JANUARY

Philip travels westward to Mohawk territory, seeking, but failing to secure, an alliance.

14 Joshua Tift is captured by the English.

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27 Narragansetts attack Pawtuxet.

#### FEBRUARY

10 Nipmucks attack Lancaster; Mary Rowlandson is taken captive.

14 Philip and Wampanoags attack Northampton. Massachusetts Council debates erecting a wall around Boston.

21 Nipmucks attack Medfield.

23 Massachusetts General Court debates the fate of Christian Indians.

Indians assault sites within ten miles of Boston.

#### MARCH

13 Nipmucks attack Groton.

26 Longmeadow, Marlborough, and Simsbury are attacked.

27 Nipmucks attack English forces near Sudbury.

28 Indians attack Rehoboth.

29 Providence is destroyed.

#### APRIL

21 Indians attack Sudbury.

#### MAY

2-3 Mary Rowlandson is released and returns to Boston.

18 English forces attack sleeping Indians near Deerfield.

30 Indians attack Hatfield.

c.31 Christian Indians are moved from Deer Island to Cambridge.

#### JUNE

12 Indians attack Hadley but are repelled by Connecticut soldiers.

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19 Massachusetts issues a declaration of amnesty for Indians who surrender.

22 Captain Tom is executed in Boston.

#### JULY

Major John Talcott and his troops begin sweeping Connecticut and Rhode Island, capturing large numbers of Algonquians who are transported out of the colonies as slaves throughout the summer.

James Printer surrenders in Cambridge.

4 Captain Benjamin Church and his soldiers begin sweeping Plymouth for Wampanoags.

11 Indians attack Taunton but are repelled.

27 Nearly two hundred Nipmucks surrender in Boston.

#### AUGUST

2 Benjamin Church captures Philip's wife and son.

12 Alderman, an Indian soldier under Church, kills Philip.



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