PEQUOT WAR: THE CONFLICT THAT SHAPED NEW ENGLAND
The roots of the Pequot War can be traced to Puritan land hunger, a negative view of Native culture, the Puritan sense of mission, preconceptions, and misperceptions. Puritans viewed the Pequots as obstacles to expansion and threats to the success of their holy experiment in the wilderness. Essent
cially Puritans believed that conflict with Indians was necessary and inevitable. Rivalries and disputes over land and trade contributed as causes too. A clash of cultures contributed significantly to the outbreak of war as well. Historian Alfred A. Cave contends, “The Pequot War in reality was the messy outgrowth of petty squabbles over trade, tribute, and land among Pequots, Mohegans, River Indians, Niantics, Narragansetts, Dutch traders, and English Puritans.” Puritans transformed these “petty squabbles” into a “cosmic struggle of good and evil in the wilderness.” The war demonstrated to the Puritans and other colonizers that New England could be won by conquest. Pan-Indian unity proved elusive in the face of English expansion. The conflict hastened Indians’ people loss of autonomy, which would eventually culminate in King Philip’s War.
CAUSES

• Puritan preconceptions and ideological beliefs created misperceptions and demanded a campaign to humble the Pequots.
  – Errand in the wilderness
  – Reduce the Indians to civility
  – “Elect” vs. “Satan’s agents”
  – Did not anticipate permanent peaceful coexistence with Indians
  – Persistent fear of vast Indian conspiracy
  – Perceived threat to Puritan security
CAUSES

• Pequot determination to establish and maintain a far-flung tributary network and to control European trade provoked powerful Indian opposition.

The “wampum revolution”
CAUSES

- Shifting balance of power due to English colonization
- Trade rivalries among Indians and Europeans
- English imperialism
- Competition between rival tribes over furs, wampum, land, and access to trade with Europeans
- Pequots, in the early 1630s, incurred the hostility of the Mohegans, Narragansetts, other Indians, Dutch, and English by monopolizing trade and expanding their tributary system, leaving the Pequots diplomatically isolated
CAUSES

• English demands that the Pequots submit to Puritan authority by paying an exorbitant indemnity and delivering the killers of English traders to Puritan justice, which the Pequots found unduly humiliating
• The devastating epidemics that ravaged Indians of southern New England weakened their resistance to European colonization and expansion
• Lack of unity among Indian peoples of southern New England
• Political and social discord in Puritan society itself
CAUSES

• Expansion of trade from the coast to the interior put pressure on natural resources, caused shifts in the ecosystem, and altered Native life ways

• The maelstrom of change made alliances with Europeans more attractive and intertribal conflict more intense
BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

1622 Dutch trader Jaques Elkes visits Pequot village at the mouth of Pequot (Thames) River
Pequots pay the Dutch forty fathoms of wampum as ransom for a captured Pequot sachem’s freedom.
Pequots agree to trade with Dutch.
Pequots begin to emerge as the dominant Indian power in the region by controlling the fur and wampum trade
1626  By defeating “River Indian” sachem Sequin, the Pequots collect tribute from “River Indians” and gain access to valuable furs in the interior.

1628  By this time, Pequots, their tributaries, and rivals devote winter months to the manufacture of wampum for trade with Europeans. Competition for trade, power, influence, and prestige intensifies.
1630s  Increased Dutch and English migration into Connecticut River valley

Pequot efforts to oust Dutch kill Indians (probably Narragansetts or a subject tribe) trading at the House of Hope, a Dutch trading post near present-day Hartford.

Dutch retaliate, killing Pequot sachem Tatobem.

Small pox epidemic ravages Indian populations of Southern New England.
1634  Captain John Stone killed by Pequots or the Western Niantics, a tributary tribe of the Pequots. Circumstances of the attack unclear.

23 October 1634  Pequots send messenger bearing gifts and promises of tribute to Roger Ludlow, deputy governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony.
Power Struggles

Sassacus had difficulty holding the Pequots and their tributaries together under his protection and leadership. The loyalties and alliances of Algonquian villages were rather fluid. Uncas, Wequash, and Soso mounted campaigns to oust Sassacus and to enhance their own power and prestige.
Second Pequot embassy.

Massachusetts Bay-Pequot treaty: Pequot negotiators agree

• to hand over Stone’s murderers
• to pay indemnity of £250 sterling in wampum
• to cede Connecticut lands
• to trade with the English
• to have disputes with Narragansetts mediated by the English.

Pequot council does not ratify the treaty, objecting to the indemnity and arguing that Stone’s murderers were all either dead or beyond their reach.
Jonathan Brewster, trader from Plymouth, conveys message from Uncas, chief of the Mohegans, that the Pequots plan a preemptive strike against the English.

Uncas, master of power, practical politics, cultivated conflict between Puritans and Pequots to achieve his own aspirations.
July 1636  
Conference at Fort Saybrook of Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay officials with representatives of Western Niantics and Pequots. English colonists reassert demands of 1634 treaty. Sassious, Western Niantic sachem, pledges loyalty and submission to English. John Oldham and crew killed by Narragansetts or a subject tribe off Block Island. Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomi condemn the murder and offer reparations. Miantonomi leads party to Block Island to exact vengeance. Canonicus and Miantonomi promise not to ally themselves with Pequots in any dispute between English and Pequots.
Captains John Endecott, John Underhill, and William Turner sent to Block Island with 90 men to apprehend killers of Stone and Oldham and to seek reparations or plunder. Most of the population of Block Island had escaped and had left little to plunder.
August 1636  

Endecott sails troops to Fort Saybrook to punish Pequots.  
Lieutenant Lion Gardiner protests his actions.  
Endecott sails to Pequot Harbor at mouth of Pequot (Thames) River. Pequots ask what he wants, and Endecott announces his goal.  
Pequots request conference.  
Endecott refuses, demanding that Pequots fight in European-style open battle.  
Pequots refuse.  
English troops burn Pequot houses and destroy crops.
Late summer 1636 Pequots attack Fort Saybrook. Siege continues intermittently for months.

Late winter 1637 Mason visits fort but does not provide much relief.
Spring 1637 Pequots attempt to persuade Narragansetts to ally with them against the English. English send Roger Williams to persuade Narragansetts to remain neutral.

March 1637 Miantonomi allies Narragansetts with the English, "solemnizing the treaty with a gift of wampum and the severed hand of a Pequot brave" (Axelrod 19).
LACK OF UNITY

The alliance the English sealed with the Mohegans and Narragansetts sealed the Pequots’ fate. Pequot envoys failed in their appeal to the Narragansetts for unity. Roger Williams and Cushtahamekin helped to convince the Narragansetts to ally themselves with the English in their effort to humble the Pequots.
18 April 1637  Massachusetts General Court authorizes a levy to raise funds for anticipated costs of war against Pequots.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>23 April 1637</td>
<td>Attack on settlers working in field near Wethersfield, in retribution for confiscation of land belonging to Sowheag, a sachem. Seven to nine settlers are killed and two girls are taken captive.</td>
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<td>Late spring 1637</td>
<td>Colonists become increasingly alarmed. Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Connecticut colonies decide to fight Pequots together.</td>
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10 May 1637

Mason leaves Hartford with 90 colonists and 60 Mohegans under Uncas to attack Pequot fort Sassacus, on Pequot Harbor. Some members of the Boston church refuse to join the expedition because John Wilson is the chaplain.
15 May 1637

Mason and Uncas arrive at Saybrook with their troops. Uncas leads 40 warriors into battle against Pequots and Niantics, killing 4-7, taking one prisoner, and leaving one Mohegan wounded.

At Fort Saybrook, Mason’s men torture the prisoner. Underhill shoots him, ostensibly to end his suffering.
16 May 1637 Underhill places his 19 men under Mason’s command.
20 of Mason’s men are sent to reinforce Connecticut’s other settlements.

18 May 1637 Mason and Underhill’s forces embark.

20 May 1637 Mason and Underhill arrive in Narragansett territory.
22-24 May 1637
25 May 1637

English and their allies approach Sassacus’s Pequot Harbor fort. They decide to attack at Fort Mystic instead. English and allies arrive at Mystic at night and make camp.
26 May 1637  

English fire a volley at dawn, then storm the fort. Mason enters at northeast, and Underhill attacks at southwest. Pequots fight fiercely. Mason abandons plan to seek booty and sets fire to 80 huts housing approximately 800 people (men, women, and children). 600-700 Pequots die in an hour. 7 are taken captive, and 7 escape. Two Englishmen are killed, with 20-40 wounded. English march toward their ships, burning Pequot dwellings along the way.
The figure of the Indian fort or Palisado in New England
And the manner of the destroying it by Captnye Winslowe
And Captayne Mason.
“We must burn them.”

- Captain John Mason claimed his original intention was “to destroy by the Sword and save the Plunder. But after the English entered Fort Mystic and the Pequots resisted fiercely without fighting in the open, Mason changed his mind, exclaiming: “… We should never kill them in that manner…. We must burn them.”
Pequot Counterattack
English Retreat
Roger Williams observed that “their warres are far less bloody, and devouring than the Warres of Europe.”

John Underhill noted: “I dare boldly affirm, they might fight seven years and not kill seven men.”

The Narragansetts protested the ferocity of the massacre crying, “Mach it, mach it.” Translation: “It is naught, it is naught, because it is too furious, and slays too many.”
The assault on Fort Mystic was designed to inflict terror, break Pequot morale, and to send a message to Indians who had yet to submit to English authority.

After the massacre at Fort Mystic, the Pequots were hunted down, killed or captured, dislocated, executed, or enslaved.
Late May or early June, 1637
Mason and Underhill’s troops unite with Massachusetts troops led by Captain Patrick and Israel Stoughton.
Group of Pequots discovered near Connecticut River is surrounded by Narragansetts who pretend to offer protection, enabling the English troops to capture them.
Survivors flee, some to Manhattan Island.
July 1637  Stoughton and Mason pursue fugitive Pequots.

13 July 1637  English forces surround Mystic survivors in swamp near New Haven. English offer safe conduct to old men, women and children and to non-Pequot residents of the swamp. 200 people accept this offer. 80 warriors refuse it and start shooting arrows at English. English soldiers close in on them.
Mason claimed that the massacre at Fort Mystic served as God’s punishment against the Pequots. He wrote:

– “And indeed such a dreadful Terror did Almighty let fall upon their Spirits, that they would fly from us and run into the very Flames, where many of them perished…. [And] God was above them, who laughed his Enemies and the Enemies of his People to scorn making them as a fiery Oven: Thus were the Stout Hearted spoiled, having slept their last Sleep, and none of their Men could find their Hands: Thus did the Lord judge among the Heathen, filling the place with dead Bodies.”

William Bradford described the slaughter:

– “It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave the praise thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them, thus to enclose their enemies in their hands and give them so speedy a victory over so proud and insulting an enemy.”
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<td>14 July 1637</td>
<td>20-30 Indians (Mason says 60-70) escape in early-morning fog.</td>
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<td>Summer 1637</td>
<td>Sassacus and other Pequots seek refuge with neighboring tribes but tribes are intimidated by the English (and in some cases were already unfriendly with the Pequots). Sassacus is refused sanctuary. English receive severed heads of Pequots as tribute from other tribes, including head of Sassacus sent by Mohawks.</td>
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Treaty of Hartford:

- Survivors of swamp siege divided as slaves among Indian allies: 80 to Uncas and Mohegans, 80 to Miantonomo and Narragansetts, 20 to Ninigret and Niantics
- No Pequot may inhabit former Pequot territory
- Name Pequot to be expunged; Pequot slaves must take name of tribes to which they are enslaved.
Fall 1638  Group of Pequots settle at Pawcatuck in violation of treaty. Mason sent with 40 English soldiers and 120 Mohegans under Uncas to clean them out. Narragansetts attack Uncas as he is plundering the wigwams, but refuse to fight the English.
RESULTS

• English established hegemony by obliterating Pequots as a political and social entity
• Set a precedent for wars of extermination against Indians who stood as obstacles to English expansion
• Elimination of Pequot power, intimidation of potential enemies, reminder to “Saints” that they lived in peril in the wilderness among “Satan’s agents”
• The inability of Indian peoples of New England to unite against English encroachment became apparent
RESULTS

• The differences in European and Indian styles of warfare were revealed in this first real test of arms between English settlers and one of the powerful Indian tribes of New England

• Reinforced Puritan mythology of the American frontier
PEQUOT SURVIVAL, PERSISTENCE, AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION

