

GOD, CAPITAL, LAND:

The Praying Town of Natick, The Extraction of Capital, and English Settler Colonialism in Pre-King Philip's War New England

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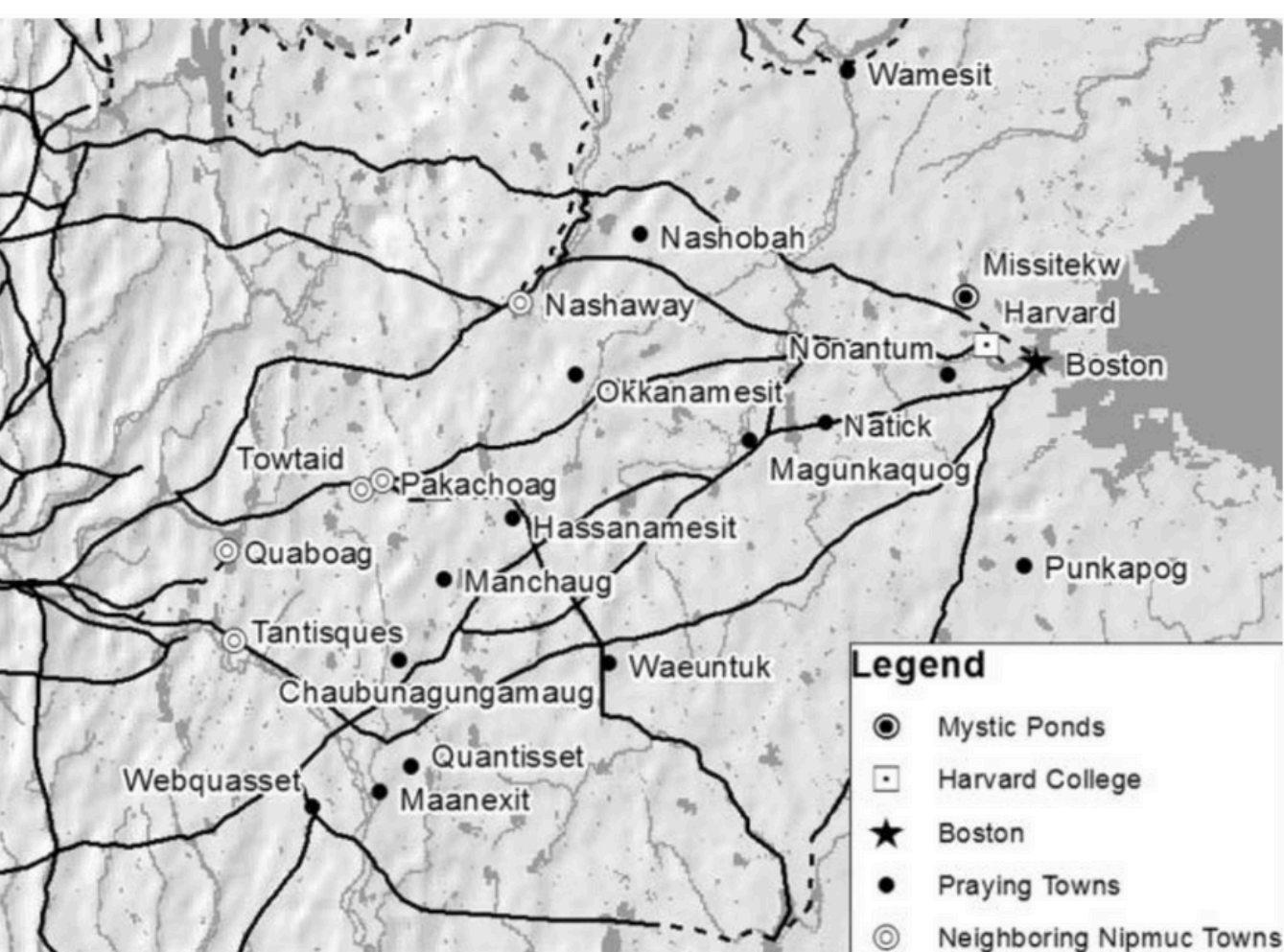


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SUMMARY

To be a Native American in Colonial New England was to be under siege. The English, driven by a desire to extract capital from the land, forced European land concepts onto the unprepared indigenous population. They used a framework of European laws, adapted for colonial expansion, to steal land from the indigenous people of New England. The praying town of Natick was the result of settler colonialism, cultural genocide, and indigenous agency in the face of English domination. It provided a space for the protection of indigenous culture, and its land was protected by the same laws fueling English conquest. This essay argues that Natick is a product of the English desire for profit extracted from the land and that the legal structure established by the English was modified by Daniel Gookin, John Eliot, and the Praying Indians of Natick to protect indigenous lands from English conquest. In this context, Natick should be understood as a contradiction of and a failure in English colonial policy.

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A Map of the Colonial Boston Area
Brooks, Lisa, Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip's War (New Haven: 2018).

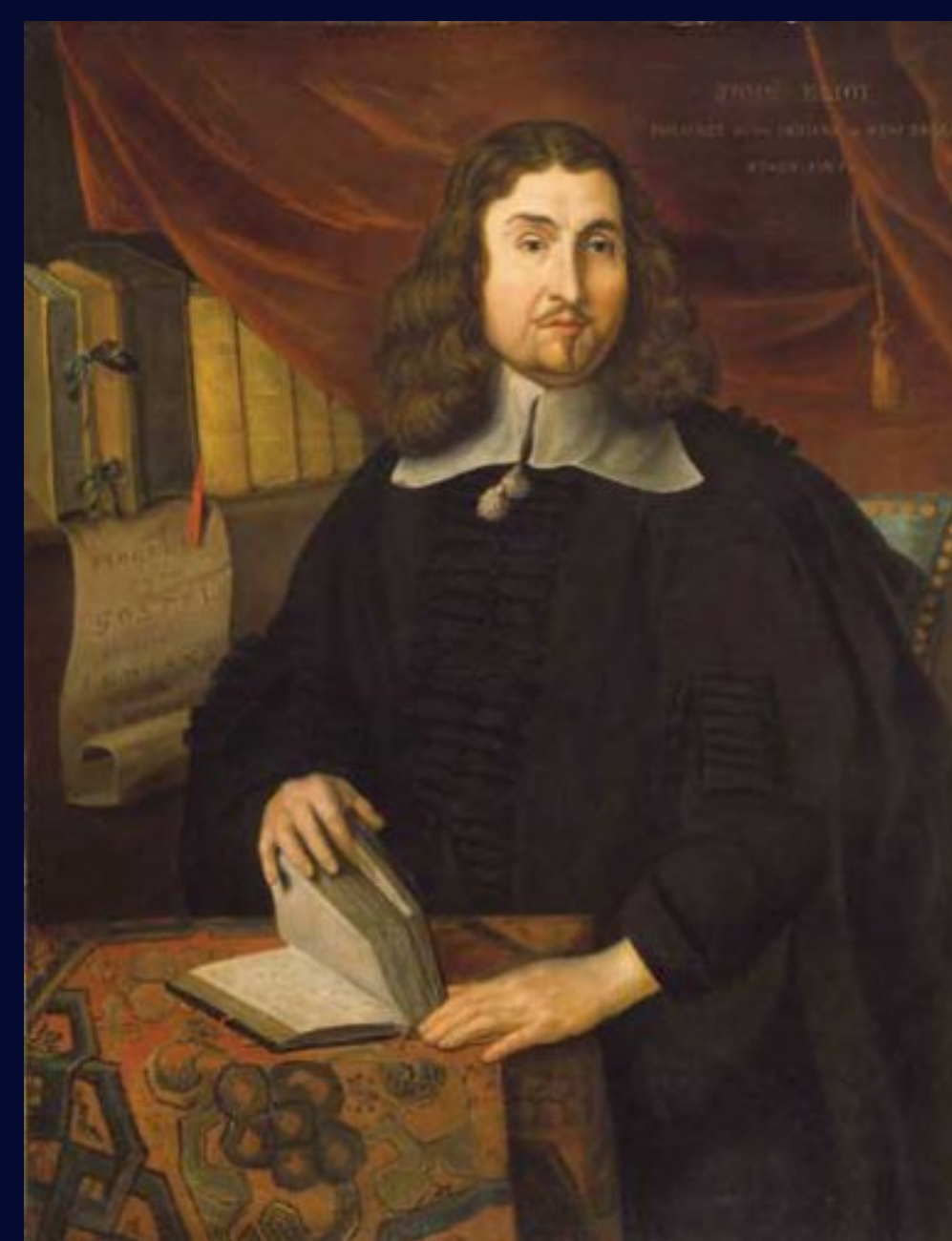
Taking the Land

Daniel Gookin summed up how the English took control of land from the New England region Natives, "First, that the English claim right to their land, by patent from our King. Secondly, yet the English had the grant of most of the land within this jurisdiction, either by purchase or donation from the Indian sachems and sagamores, which were actually in possession, when the English came first over." This framing bases itself on English property law, adapted for colonization, and Native American tribes accepting "European conceptions of property" and the imposition of English laws, which they did, often not knowing the consequences.



JOHN ELIOT

As the English filled indigenous lands for the extraction of profit, the Massachusetts Bay Colony sought to replace the Native faith with protestant Christianity. Salstonstall, writing in 1632, described the pinnacle of colonization as "being worthy instruments of propagating the gospel to these poor barbarous people." To the English, they saved the Indian by freeing them from Satan's influence. Reverend John Eliot led this mission, supported by the puritanical political elite of New England, such as Daniel Gookin. Sacvan Bercovitch describes Eliot's mission best; he writes of Eliot "the destiny of Christ's people in America was the destiny of mankind...John Eliot exulted in those prospects with every Indian conversion he obtained." Finding many of the English in Massachusetts unsatisfactorily pious and the migratory nature of the Native mode of production an obstacle to conversion, Eliot planned to develop praying towns to be sedentary Anglicized towns in structure and mode of production, governed by "thoroughly religious institutions." Eliot's mission was more than just conversion, the Indian was to be destroyed and reborn Anglicized in appearance, production, culture, and their God.



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