

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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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.

In the early economy of New England, the needs of empire and the elite drove capital accumulation which relied on contact with indigenous tribes. In New England, resource intensive products such as beaver pelts, fish, and lumber harvested from old growth forests, which were increasingly rare in Europe, came to Boston and eventually Europe from the Western frontier.<sup>1</sup> The demand for the goods from New England's forests only grew as the British Empire grew. As Europe cleared its forest and hunted animals into extinction, the British Empire turned towards New England's pristine forests and wetlands. "The impersonal drive animating" early New England colonists "wasn't the people's hunger for bread: it was capital's hunger for profit."<sup>2</sup> Seeing opportunity, "entrepreneurial English immigrants like William Pynchon" uprooted themselves from the Boston area, moving West to establish links with indigenous peoples to trade for beaver pelts to send back to Europe.<sup>3</sup> This contact economy trade was profitable.<sup>4</sup> Early colonists quickly became middlemen facilitating trade between Natives and Europe. In Boston, governor Capt. John Leverett, James Whitcomb, and Thomas Brattle made themselves rich victualling Royal Navy ships bound for the Caribbean with goods from the Massachusetts

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<sup>1</sup> Terry L. Anderson, 'The Economic Growth of Seventeenth-Century New England: A Measurement of Regional Income', *The Journal of Economic History*, 33:1 (1973), p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Harris, *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World* (USA, 2022), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Christine M. DeLucia, *Memory Lands: King Philip's War and the Place of Violence in the Northeast*, (New Haven, 2018), p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, Terry L, 'Economic Growth in Colonial New England: "Statistical Renaissance"', *The Journal of Economic History* 39:1 (1979), p. 247; Park, K-Sue, 'Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America', *Law & Social Inquiry*, 41:4 (2016), p. 1009.

interior.<sup>5</sup> Brattle and Whitcomb, were middlemen, who supplied ships and received untaxed goods, such as sugar, in return.<sup>6</sup> This economy, like in Europe, extracted resources from the land at a rate greater than these resources were replenished, meaning New England required increasing amounts of land. Thus, expansion was vital for New England's West to East export economy, as profit dried up when the resources were gone.

This impersonal drive for profit relied on the land and fueled Massachusetts Bay Colony's expansion. Between 1652 and 1653 Massachusetts annexed the claimed territory of the colonies New Hampshire and Maine for control of their resources.<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts used the First Anglo-Dutch War to fortify control of shipping in the Maine region by capturing the neutral French forts at Port Royal and Pentagouet without the Crown's approval.<sup>8</sup> Massachusetts military commander in Maine, Captain John Leverett praised the trade opportunities the new lands brought with Europe.<sup>9</sup> From the outset, the colony focused on profit extraction from the land, and drove Massachusetts to annex rival English colonies, start wars with European nations, and soon drive the Natives from their lands.

The English colonists imported a culture where the ownership of land defined a person's place in the economic and social hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> To the English, Massachusetts offered opportunities for economic and social advancement. Richard Salstonstall summed up the variety of prospects writing, "they shall raise good profit not only by their fishing trade but by hemp, flax, pitch, tar, potashes, soap, ashes, masts, pipe-staves, clapboards, and irons. Therefore, good Sir, encourage men to come over."<sup>11</sup> The requisite land would be opened to English purchase and settlement by increasing contact with New England tribes as the frontier expanded. One could accumulate capital in Massachusetts working as a wage laborer or the production of goods, as noted by

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<sup>5</sup> 'Order of the Council of State, Nov 2, 1654, in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies 1675-1776, Also Addenda, 1574-1674* (London, 1893), p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> The National Archives of the UK (TNA): ADM106/296/63.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Harrison, 'Report to the Navy Commissioners', July 1, 1654, in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies 1675-1776, Also Addenda, 1574-1674* (London, 1893), p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> The King, 'Letter to the Governor and Council of Massachusetts', Feb 18, 1676, in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies 1675-1776, Also Addenda, 1574-1674* (London, 1893), p. 353.

<sup>9</sup> The National Archives of the UK (TNA): SP 46/121/122.

<sup>10</sup> Salisbury, 'The Colonizing of Indian New England', *The Massachusetts Review*, 26:2/3 (1985), p. 449.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Salstonstall, 'Letter to Emanuel Dowing', Feb 4, 1632, in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies 1675-1776, Also Addenda, 1574-1674* (London, 1893), p. 73.

Salstonstall, but the way to become a new world elite was through the ownership of land.<sup>12</sup> The economy was driven by expansion in lands.<sup>13</sup> John Frederick Martin notes that to expand ownership of land, New Englanders had two options, “first to convert more wilderness from public to private ownership; and, second, to improve land and thereby (as Locke would later say) increase its value.”<sup>14</sup> Men such as John Tisdale took this opportunity coming to Massachusetts in the 1630s. In 1650 he purchased land in Taunton on the Taunton River. Tisdale likely was a subsistence farmer and traded in livestock for income. Tisdale accumulated enough social standing in Taunton as a landowner that he was elected constable, selectman, and finally representative of the City of Taunton at the Plymouth General Court.<sup>15</sup> Tisdale is just an example of the social and economic opportunities offered via the ownership of land in New England. Thus, as settlement increased, two practices emerged in New England: land speculation and land improvement, shaping the structure of the Massachusetts land economy.

English understanding of Native ownership of land is complex and varied, and therefore in no way can it be condensed to one definition. One of the major concepts believed by some English was *Vacuum Domicilium*: “a claim to right of possession or property title; Locke’s own concept.”<sup>16</sup> This term appears to be mainly applied by “early seventh-century Puritan theological doctrine as ‘vacant soyle,’ invariably controversial and always at odds with colonial practice even by its small handful of exponents,” to justify the claiming of land in New England.<sup>17</sup> This belief mainly a product of the indigenous conception of property, which was not based in personal ownership of 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.”<sup>18</sup> This framing bases itself on English

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<sup>12</sup> John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill; London, 1991), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Park, ‘Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America’, p. 1009.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Robert L. Tisdale, *The Descendants of John Tisdale: (1614-1675) Colonial Massachusetts* (United States of America, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Corcoran, ‘John Locke on Native Right, Colonial Possession, and the Concept of *Vacuum Domicilium*’, *The European Legacy*, 23:3 (2017), p. 233.

<sup>17</sup> Corcoran, ‘John Locke on Native Right’, p. 233.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England. Of their several nations, numbers, customs, manners, religion and government, before the English planted there. : Also a true and faithful account of the present*

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.<sup>19</sup> The two major factors for this were: many of the Sachems entering into agreements with the Massachusetts government as subjects under the King in return for access to trade and protection from hostile Native groups; and as beavers were not extinct, fur trapping Natives in regions devoid of beavers, wanting to remain in the English market economy, began trading in the most valuable commodity they owned, land.<sup>20</sup>

Using this framework, men such as Superintendent of the Praying Indians, Daniel Gookin, and Captain and Governor John Leverett mixed private and public business to develop large property holdings.<sup>21</sup> The Massachusetts General Court appointed men like Gookin to serve on committee’s to found frontier towns.<sup>22</sup> Men such as Gookin, Captain Thomas Prentice, and Captain Daniel HENCHMEN filled these committees because they served in government as high-ranking officials and their peers on the in the Governor’s office and General Court selected the committees. In Nipmuck County, on a spiritual mission with Reverend John Eliot, Daniel Gookin used his contact with the Nipmucks to meet with the Nipmuck sachems to purchase the tract of land for the town of Worcester on behalf of his committee. If negotiation failed, the Massachusetts’ General Court could and would employ men such as Major Daniel Denison to lead militia forces against Natives in the area that was desired.<sup>23</sup> K-Sue Park’s brilliant article ‘Money Mortgages, and the Conquest of America’ details a third way the English took land from the indigenous people. Operating the framework of adapted English law that simplified the process, the English offered credit to Natives in order to generate debt. The English then induced Natives ‘to then take out ‘mortgages’ on which they would later foreclose.’<sup>24</sup> Either way, the

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*state and condition of the praying Indians ... : Together with a brief mention of the instruments and means, that God hath been pleased to use for their civilizing and conversion ... : Also suggesting some expedients for their further civilizing and propagating the Christian faith among them. / By Daniel Gookin, gentleman. One of the magistrates of Massachusetts colony in New England, who hath been for sundry years past, and is at present, betruſted and employed for the civil government and conduct of the Indians in Massachusetts Colony, by order of the General Court there. ; [Eight lines of Scripture texts] ; Now first printed from the original manuſcript (Boston, 1792), p. 179.*

<sup>19</sup> Park, ‘Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America’, p. 1009; Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge; London, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Jenny Hale Pulsipher, “Subjects... Unto the Same King”: New England Indians and the Use of Royal Political Power’, *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 5 (2003), p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> DeLucia, *Memory Lands*, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Park, ‘Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America’, p. 1024.

outcome remained the same. Committeemen like Gookin, were the proprietors, holding the “rights to the undivided land (which they parceled out among themselves), they convened proprietors' meetings, and they rented and sold their lands there.”<sup>25</sup> This land became increasingly valuable as the English used “land as security for credit, which in turn enabled credit transactions, real estate sales, and real estate to become the basis of a capital market,” and “with its new liquidity, land, by becoming a money equivalent, generated wealth of proportions that would eventually support the birth of a nation.”<sup>26</sup> A caste of settler colonial absentee landlords such as Dr. Leonard Hoar, president of Harvard, along with Harvard University, Ephraim Curtis, Gookin, Gov. Leverett, and Captains HENCHMEN and PRENTICE, who controlled large patchworks of formerly indigenous occupied land, came to dominate New England society and politics.<sup>27</sup>

The formation of this absentee landlord class and land as form of money and credit security represented a structural transformation. The ownership and improvement of land, the Old World principles adapted to fit New England, as noted by Martin, replaced trade, which required the assistance of the local indigenous tribes, as the driving force of the colony's economic structure. This paradigm shift came with a cultural significance. To define English against indigenous, the English desired to develop “neat little boxlike arrangements of noncontradictory categories and unproblematic behaviors, a role for every status and everyone in his place.”<sup>28</sup> The defining category was Indian and English, the savage versus the civilized. The English defined themselves by implementing colonial Old World land principles to the land and creating a legally owned English land, as well as, demarcating themselves via fences, fields, their clothes, material possessions, language, and even their houses.<sup>29</sup>

The result of this shift together with the decline of religion lead to the emergence of the secular corporate town. Initial settlers of Massachusetts were malcontent Puritans and other religious minorities from England.<sup>30</sup> Piety and religious conformity precipitously declined as the

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<sup>25</sup> Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> For more read this article; K-Sue Park, ‘Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America’, *Law & Social Inquiry*, 41:4 (2016), pp. 1007-9.

<sup>27</sup> Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, p. 25; DeLucia, *Memory Lands*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago; London, 1985), pp. 26-7.

<sup>29</sup> Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York, 1998), p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> Orla Alamon Towns, ‘Edward Randolph and His Relation to the Colony of Massachusetts’ (Master's Thesis, University of Illinois, 1917), p. 1.

colony expanded, as those who sought profit over salvation arrived.<sup>31</sup> Regardless of religion, the English “articulated a binary logic in which settler colonial civilization was imagined and created in opposition to the chaos of the American wilderness” via the corporate town. The corporate towns, such as Dedham, were founded as a land corporation, with shareholders that restricted the divisions and sale of land in order to maintain control of the town, its finances, and improve the land in the Lockian sense. In these towns, the churches often were founded over a year after the town’s incorporation and the leading men were landowners not clergy.<sup>32</sup> Martin describes Dedham as a “secular, business organization for the purpose of holding, managing, and developing wilderness land, and this organization was distinct from the church and congregation.”<sup>33</sup> This description can be applied to Mendon too. Much of the early records of Mendon consist of meetings of the commissioners, which included Daniel Gookin, focused on the division of parcels of land into parcels for individuals, establishing restrictions on the selling and renting of land without proper authority, and making sure the plantation is settled.<sup>34</sup> Later records emphasize property disputes with Natives in the area, for example the *Annals of the Town of Mendon from 1659 to 1880* report, “wee have purchased this Tract of Land twice of the Indians to above thirty pound price, wee are so beleagred wlli them as wee Interfere upon youre (other) plantations Aponomisco, Manchaug, Shockologue, Nashwag’, and King Philip pretends a great share in our best land & meddo, so wee must mend our line, for peace sake, by what is within your good leave, wch we pray.”<sup>35</sup> The Mendon residents’ emphasis on control of the meadow demonstrates their commitment to the ownership and extraction of value from the land. “The need to sustain their herds drove the English to seek Indian land,” resulting in the formation of corporate towns like Mendon and Sudbury, which was built to take advantage of a meadow and the adjacent river.<sup>36</sup> The force that is the accumulation of capital drove the initial expansion into indigenous lands. The ownership of land brought with it improvement of the land, further disturbing the lifestyles of Natives in Massachusetts.

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<sup>31</sup> Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 396.

<sup>32</sup> *Annals of the Town of Mendon from 1659 to 1880*, ed. John G. Metcalf (Providence, 1880), p. 20-21; Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, p. 145, 300.

<sup>33</sup> Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*, pp. 145.

<sup>34</sup> *Annals of the Town of Mendon from 1659 to 1880*, p. 2-4.

<sup>35</sup> *Annals of the Town of Mendon from 1659 to 1880*, p. 39-40.

<sup>36</sup> Virginia DeJohn Anderson, ‘King Philip’s Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 51:4 (1994), p. 603, 620.

The largest disruptions of the indigenous lifestyles came as a result of English agriculture and livestock practices. The English imported swine, sheep, and horses to Massachusetts “because they considered livestock essential to their survival.”<sup>37</sup> These imported animals disrupted the New England ecosystem. As the English cleared forests for fields, Natives, who relied on hunting and gathering for a large portion of their food, competed against English swine for nuts, seeds, and roots in the shrinking forests of Massachusetts.<sup>38</sup> Gookin recorded the challenges posed by livestock in Marlborough, “the Indians here do not much rejoice under the Englishmen's shadow ; who do so overtop them in their number of people, stocks of cattle, &c. that the Indians do not greatly flourish, or delight in their station at present.”<sup>39</sup> The importation of animals destroyed the hunting, gathering, and farming practices of Natives. The English agriculture and husbandry systems placed New England Native’s mode of production under attack, threatening their survival and freedom.

As the population of New England exploded between 1650-1670, the number and size of corporate English settlements increased.<sup>40</sup> In Billerica, the General Court gave colonists “liberty to find out a parcell of wast land suiteable for their accomodation, & present the same to the next sessions of this Court, who will be ready to accommodate them so farr as may be donn without prejudice to former grants or to the publicke.”<sup>41</sup> By ordering Billerica not to violate private or public grants, the General Court effectively required the colonists to take or purchase land from Native Americans, as most absentee Englishmen would not sell their property at accessible prices. Thus, the increase in corporate towns built on formerly indigenous controlled land and the “sizable checkerboard of claims to Native places, in or nearby traditional homelands of Massachusetts, Pennacooks, Nipmucs, Pequots, and Narragansetts” owned by absentee landlords such as Daniel Gookin forced Native Americans from their traditional lands and interrupted their seasonal migratory patterns.<sup>42</sup> The English Old World economic, political, and social structures clashed for legitimacy against “the decentralized and highly consensual

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<sup>37</sup> Anderson, ‘King Philip’s Herds’, p. 602.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, ‘King Philip’s Herds’, p. 605.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Gookin, ‘Historical Collections. 1, 228’, in Joseph Allen (ed.), *History of Northborough, Mass., in various publications and discources* (Worcester, 1880), p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia, 2005), p.77.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Att a Generall Court for Elections, held at Boston, the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, 1675’, in Nathaniel Bradstreet Shurtleff (ed.), *Records of the governor and company of the Massachusetts bay in New England : Printed by order of the legislature* (Boston, 1853), p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> DeLucia, *Memory Lands*, p. 44.

principles governing Algonkian politics.”<sup>43</sup> Upwardly mobile Englishmen like Tisdale and elites like Gookin drove the Native Americans off their land.<sup>44</sup> Pigs and cattle challenged Natives for their food. The pressure became so great that in 1662 King Philip negotiated a pause in sales of land with the colony of Plymouth.<sup>45</sup> Patrick Wolfe sums up English settler colonialism as a “zero-sum contest over land on which conflicting modes of production could not ultimately coexist.”<sup>46</sup> From the impersonal drive for land that eroded Native political sovereignty with English authority coming to dominate Indian-White relations, land ownership, and the means of production, the need for land and food, and the personal drive of the Christian Minister John Eliot and his associate Daniel Gookin, Natick was born.

Patrick Wolfe writes, “Settler colonialism destroys to replace.”<sup>47</sup> Native settlements were replaced with English settlements, often built on the same land. 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.”<sup>48</sup> To the English, they saved the Indian by freeing them from Satan’s influence.<sup>49</sup> Reverend John Eliot led this mission, supported by the puritanical political elite of New England, such as Daniel Gookin.<sup>50</sup> 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.”<sup>51</sup> 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

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<sup>43</sup> Gregory D. Smithers, ‘Rethinking Genocide in North America’, in Donald Bloxham, and A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford, 2010), p. 326; Morrison, ‘The Bias of Colonial Law’, English Paranoia and the Abenaki Arena of King Philip’s War, 1675-1678’, *The New England Quarterly*, 53:3 (1980), p. 364.

<sup>44</sup> Tisdale, *The Descendants of John Tisdale*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Ranlet, ‘Another Look at the Causes of King Philip’s War’, *The New England Quarterly*, 61:1 (1988), p. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: 1999), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 8:4 (2006), p. 388.

<sup>48</sup> Salstonstall, ‘Letter to Emanuel Dowling’, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> Bross, Kristina, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons* (Ithaca and London, 2004), p. 165-6.

<sup>50</sup> James W. Moreley, *Natick 1651-2000: The Many Lives of a Storied New England Town* (United States, 2019), p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven; London, 2011), p. 62.

towns in structure and mode of production, governed by “thoroughly religious institutions.”<sup>52</sup> Eliot Eliot’s mission was more than just conversion, the Indian was to be destroyed and reborn Anglicized in appearance, production, culture, and their God.

Beginning with the New Left, historians attack John Eliot for his mission of converting Native Americans.<sup>53</sup> Father of genocide studies, Raphael Lemkin concluded Eliot’s conversions constituted a cultural genocide.<sup>54</sup> While Eliot’s intentions were genocidal, in the context of settlers designing “to fill [New England’s] ‘empty’ spaces with their version of settler colonial civilization, carving out of the New England wilderness the towns, villages, and farms that comprised the material foundation for a Christian society in the New World,” the formation of Natick must be viewed not only as a genocidal project by the English but as an attempt at preservation by the Natives at Nonantum.<sup>55</sup> As Richard Cole Harris and Gregory Smithers write, “‘Colonialism has more than one voice’; understanding these complex and sometimes contradictory voices goes a long way to explaining ‘genocidal episodes’ in the settler colonial history of North America.”<sup>56</sup>

In order to convert the Natives, Eliot learned the Algonquian language and made contact with the Native settlement at Nonantum along the Charles River.<sup>57</sup> Eliot recorded John Speen’s reasoning for converting to Christianity, “because I saw the English took much ground, and I

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<sup>52</sup> DeLucia, *Memory Lands*, pp. 38-9; Moreley, *Natick 1651-2000*, p. 18; Jean Maria O’Brien, ‘Community Dynamics in the Indian-English Town of Natick Massachusetts, 1650-1790 Volume One’ (PHD Dissertation, the University of Chicago, 1990); Anne Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca; London, 2000), p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Ranlet, ‘Another Look’, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Smithers, ‘Rethinking Genocide in North America’, p. 324.

<sup>55</sup> These intentions are genocidal by the modern definition created by Lemkin, who focused on the colonization of America when trying to define genocide. For more information read: John Docker, ‘Are Settler-Colonies Inherently Genocidal? Re-reading Lemkin’, in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: 2008), pp. 81-101, and Smithers, Gregory D., ‘Rethinking Genocide in North America’, in Donald Bloxham, and A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 322-342; DeLucia, *Memory Lands*, pp. 38-9; Daniel Gookin, *Historical Account of the Doings and Suerings of the Christian Indians, in the Years 1675, 1676, 1677* (1836; New York: 1972), pp. 434-40, *passim*; Bross, *Dry Bones*, p. 21; John Docker, ‘Are Settler-Colonies Inherently Genocidal? Re-reading Lemkin’, in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: 2008), pp. 86, 89, 95 in Smithers, ‘Rethinking Genocide in North America’, p. 324-5.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: 2002), p. 46; A. Dirk Moses, ‘Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the “Racial Century”’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 36:4 (2002), p. 28, in Smithers, ‘Rethinking Genocide in North America’, p. 324.

<sup>57</sup> Lepore, Jill, *The Name of War*, p. 29; Moreley, *Natick 1651-2000*, p. 18.

thought if I prayed, the English would not take away my ground.”<sup>58</sup> The Natives at Nonantum accepted Eliot’s proposal to form the first praying town, and led by Waban and Speen, they selected Natick as their site.<sup>59</sup> Settling at a praying town gave the newly converted Praying Indians a way of protecting their land. By controlling their land, the Natives at Nonantum were able to secure a place to defend their core identity. Acceptance of Christianity and the praying town came with the explicit benefit of protection of indigenous controlled land.<sup>60</sup> Despite changes to their lifestyle, appearance, and mode of production, until post King Philip’s War, the core identity of the Natick indigenous people remained intact.<sup>61</sup>

While the praying town sought to destroy the Indian identity and replace it with an Anglican Christian identity, in Natick the reality of the praying town was far more complex than that. The Praying Indians, secure in their land and protected by the legal structures designed by John Eliot and Daniel Gookin, were able to adapt their identity to the changing world around them. Fundamental to the preservation of the Natick people’s identity was the land. The Natick tract sat on the North and South banks of the Charles River, giving Natives direct access to Boston as well as fresh water. The soil in the Natick was ideal for English style farming and livestock rearing and large old growth forests enabled traditional hunting and gathering practices.<sup>62</sup> The Praying Indians retained their “long-standing patterns of mobility and social engagement.” Thus, a hybrid Anglo-Indigenous structure and culture formed on the Natick lands. From the land rose an Anglicized permanent settlement complete with a meeting house and church at the center. Conversely, the Natick Praying Indians lived in traditional wigwam style houses.<sup>63</sup> The Praying Indians’ clothes became mixed, as Christina Bross observes, “converts

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<sup>58</sup> John Eliot, *A further account of the progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England: being a relation of the confessions made by several Indians (in the presence of the elders and members of several churches) in order to their admission into church-fellowship. Sent over to the corporation for propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst the Indians in New England at London, by Mr John Elliot one of the laborers in the word amongst them*, ed. John Macock, (London, 1660), p. 58.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip’s War, Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the end of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore, 2010), p. 40.

<sup>60</sup> James D. Drake, *King Philip’s War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst; London, 1999), p. 62.

<sup>61</sup> David J. Silverman, “‘We Chuse to Be Bounded’: Native American Animal Husbandry in Colonial New England”, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 60:3 (2003), pp. 517.

<sup>62</sup> William Biglow, *History of the Town of Natick, Mass. : from the aays of the apostolic Eliot, MDCL, to the present time, MDCCCXXX* (Boston, 1830), p. 4; Harold W. Van Lonkhuyzen, ‘A Reappraisal of the Praying Indians: Acculturation, Conversion, and Identity at Natick, Massachusetts, 1646-1730’, *The New England Quarterly*, 63:3 (1990), p. 407.

<sup>63</sup> Lepore, *The Name of War*, p. 85-7.

often blended Indian and English clothing”<sup>64</sup> They adopted the English language and the Christian faith, but also maintained their dialect of Algonquian.<sup>65</sup> Archaeological evidence confirms traditional practices including burial practices similar to pre-contact Algonquian tradition rather than English style burials.<sup>66</sup> Based on this evidence, Elise Brenner “concluded that the Indians in all probability continued to live in their more ‘traditional’ ways rather than conforming to Puritan norms.”<sup>67</sup> The land owned solely allowed the Praying Indians to retain their identity by embracing aspects of the new economic, legal, and community structures which dominated Massachusetts. As Jean M. O’Brien says, at Natick, “they could rebuild kin connections and community within their homelands.”<sup>68</sup> Natick as a one-dimensional English cultural genocide is to ignore the reality of the Praying Indians. The legal structure reinforces that Natick was not simply a form of English cultural genocide, but a survival mechanism taken by the Indigenous people.

In forming Natick, Eliot and Gookin established a legal structure that adapted the English legal structure used in corporate towns to protect the Praying Indians’ land from seizure by the English and therefore protected their identity and practices. The site of Natick likely belonged to John Speen, though Dedham claimed parts of the territory.<sup>69</sup> Though the formation of the town differed from English settlement, Speen appeared to relinquish his control and the General Court allotted the land to indigenous settlers in equal legal standing to the English claims to land.<sup>70</sup> While individuals and families received personal plots, unlike the English, the members of the community held the land in common in a manner similar to “traditional indigenous practices throughout New England,” with Waban and Speen serving as representatives for the town.<sup>71</sup> By accepting and adapting English beliefs about the fixity of land and ownership the Natives secured themselves ownership which Gookin and the General Court viewed as equal to that of

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<sup>64</sup> Bross, *Dry Bones*, p. 146.

<sup>65</sup> Bross, *Dry Bones*, p. 146-7.

<sup>66</sup> Drake, *King Philip’s War*, p. 60.

<sup>67</sup> Drake, *King Philip’s War*, p. 61.

<sup>68</sup> Jean M. O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians before King Philip’s War* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Gookin, Daniel, *An Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in New England in the Years 1675, 1676, 1677* (1831), p. 469.

<sup>71</sup> Waban has no known first name. He was a Massachusetts while Speen appears to be a Nipmuck; Coughlin, “To Have and To Hold...Forever’: An Exhibit of 18<sup>th</sup>- Century Land Documents’, *18<sup>th</sup>- Century Documents, Natick Massachusetts*, <https://natickdeeds.omeka.net/exhibits/show/to-have-and-to-hold/timeline-context> [accessed June 7, 2024].

English towns. The structure in which the land was held prevented individuals from selling off land or taking out mortgages on their individual plots for the English to foreclose. Thus, the Natick Praying Indians secured their land from the predatory mortgages detailed by Park.

By submitting to English law in the Praying Town the Natick Praying Indians integrated themselves into the increasingly dominant English legal and bureaucratic structure of New England themselves under the protection of the Superintendent of the Praying Indians Gookin and the General Court. This submission granted greater protections, as from the founding of Natick until King Philip's War, the General Court passed a series of laws "to regulate litigations involving the Indian debtors in order to protect them from ruthless white creditors."<sup>72</sup> This legislation included laws that required Englishmen to receive approval from the General Court to purchase or receive Native land. Further laws were passed restricting the alienation of land the General Court granted to Natives.<sup>73</sup> Gookin explains the Court's reasoning, "First, to prevent differences and contention among the English and Indians in future times about the propriety of land. Secondly, to secure unto them and their posterity places of habitation."<sup>74</sup> Importantly, the Court enforced these alienation laws. For example, around 1660 the Natick Praying Indians attempted to gift Governor John Endecott's son John Endecott Jr. land in Natick. The Court, led by Gookin and Governor Endecott denied this gift, granting Endecott land elsewhere.<sup>75</sup> Integration into the English legal structure confirmed Praying Indians' ownership of their land.

Recent historiography attacks Daniel Gookin as a one-dimensional genocidaire interested in destroying the Indian and replacing it with a Christian identity, while accumulating personal wealth. Reality is more complex than that portrayal despite Gookin engaging in cultural genocide. Gookin understood the need for indigenous people to have their own land. He wrote, "the propriety is in the English; and it is necessary for the Indians, as the case stands, for their present and future security and tranquility, to receive the land by grant from the English, who are growing and potent people comparatively to the Indians."<sup>76</sup> While paternalistic in tone and language, the material results for the Praying Indians was land security. He and Eliot took this a

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<sup>72</sup> Yasu Kawashima, 'Jurisdiction of the Colonial Courts over the Indians in Massachusetts, 1689-1763', *The New England Quarterly*, 42:4 (1969), p. 545.

<sup>73</sup> James Warren Springer, 'American Indians and the Law of Real Property in Colonial New England', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 30:1 (1986), p. 38; O'Brien, 'Community Dynamics', p. 45-6.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Gookin in Drake, *King Philip's War*, p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> Lawrence Shaw Mayo, *John Endecott: A Biography* (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 208-9.

<sup>76</sup> Gookin, *Historical Collection*, p. 179 in O'Brien, 'Community Dynamics', p. 44.

step further, establishing an internal system of magistrates and courts in Natick. The shape of the institutional structure that emerged in Natick was identical to the English court system in Massachusetts. Eliot initiated the plan to keep issues within the praying town from entering to English courts.<sup>77</sup> Despite his paternalistic attitude, Gookin was a true advocate for the physical and legal wellbeing of the Natives and, as a member of the General Court, centralized the system under himself.<sup>78</sup> The adopted English legal structure returned a level of sovereignty to the Praying Indians of Natick enabling them to reinstate traditional hierarchical practices and values in a world where indigenous sovereignty waned.<sup>79</sup> Gookin's role in this should not be downplayed. He encouraged the Praying Indians' sovereignty and enabled it by designing a legal structure that protected the Natives from outside attack and represented them in legal proceedings and at the General Court, resulting in a culture that kept governance in the hands of the community.

By 1650, there were very few colonists who found the concept of the Praying Towns attractive, especially in corporate towns, such as Dedham where even the minister John Allin opposed Natick's ownership of land.<sup>80</sup> Unlike the lay people, most members of the Court were strict Puritans and believed in the promulgation of the Gospel and praying towns.<sup>81</sup> With Gookin as the advocate, the Praying Indians in Natick obtained a direct connection to the General Court, the highest authority in the colony, avoiding the more hostile English lay courts. This connection aided the Praying Indians further as the Court was puritanical in disposition and sympathetic to the Indians.<sup>82</sup> The Praying Indians' connection to the Court proved useful in the protection of their lands. When Dedham challenged the Natick Praying Indians for the rights of land on the South bank of the Charles River, the General Court, persuaded by Gookin and Eliot, ruled in favor of the Natick.<sup>83</sup> The Court's decision noted that despite Dedham having the better claim to the land, the Praying Indians had, as Eliot put it, "their native right, w<sup>ch</sup> cannot, in strict justice, be vtterly extinct" and following in English property law had made improvements to the land in

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<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, 'Community Dynamics', p. 60-1.

<sup>78</sup> O'Brien, 'Community Dynamics', p. 61; Kawashima, 'Jurisdiction of the Colonial Courts', p. 540.

<sup>79</sup> Mandell, *King Philip's War*, p. 41.

<sup>80</sup> Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission*, p. 110; Bross, *Dry Bones*, p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Mayo, *John Endecott*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>82</sup> Bross, *Dry Bones*, p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> Drake, *King Philip's War*, p. 63.

question, making them owners of the land in the Court's eyes.<sup>84</sup> Gookin and Eliot prevented the sale of indigenous land repeatedly, including after King Philip's War.<sup>85</sup> The legal support of Eliot and Gookin together with the Praying Indians' embrace of beliefs about land and English style living served to protect the Praying Indians' land and therefore their culture.

Despite their aide to the Natick Praying Indians, Gookin and Eliot still should be seen as perpetrators of a cultural genocide. Their protections did not come from a desire to protect the indigenous cultures of Massachusetts, but a desire to exterminate the indigenous identity and convert them. Their legal protections came from the same English understanding of land ownership that justified the conquest of Massachusetts and a paternalistic attitude towards the indigenous peoples that relocated to Natick. By examining the English role in the protection of indigenous land rights and the Praying Indians' agency in accepting the English legal and social structures, ownership of land, and adoption of Anglo-Indigenous lifestyles to preserve their culture, it becomes clear that the structure of the praying towns was more than an English project of cultural genocide in practice. To describe it in practice as an attempt to destroy Indian culture would reduce the Praying Indians to non-actors in their own fate. Yet, Natick was a product of the structure of the unique English settler colonial economy and resulting culture. At the same time, Natick was an opportunity taken by the Praying Indians to save their land, bodies, and culture. As the land speculators, like Daniel Gookin and Governor John Leverett, and English corporate towns destroyed and replaced the Indigenous people in Massachusetts through a form of legal and economic conquest, along with violence, the Natives in areas such as Nonantum recognized their indigenous culture based in the land was under attack. To save their culture, they accepted Christianity and Eliot and Gookin's praying town project in return for the protection of their land, autonomy, and culture.

This is what makes Natick a contradiction in colonial Massachusetts. It was a series of compromises forming a hybrid society. This contradiction makes it a failure of English colonial policy designed to conquer as much land as possible and extract maximum profit from that land. In a land supposed to be free for the taking, 4000 at Natick and the other praying towns that followed stood unconquerable. Further, Natick, to the English it was neither English nor Indian.

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<sup>84</sup> Whitmore, *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts Through 1686*, 336. *Mass. Bay* 5:53, 57, 64, 84, 91 in Springer, 'American Indians and the Law of Real Property', p. 58; Cogley. *John Eliot's Mission*, pp. 110-1.

<sup>85</sup> Massachusetts Archives, Massachusetts Archives, Vol. 30, Doc. 285-286, Digital, Daniel Gookin Sr. and John Eliot, Petition of Daniel Gookin, Sr. and John Eliot to the Massachusetts General Court, 1684.

To other indigenous peoples, especially those following King Philip, it was no longer indigenous. The civilized versus savage distinction created by the English colonists—the “neat little boxlike arrangements of noncontradictory categories and unproblematic behaviors” that they strove to create—broke down.<sup>86</sup> Natick represents the failure of settler colonial policy in New England. Until 1675, the Praying Indians from the wilderness of English conquest built a garden for themselves at Natick. The Praying Indian and their legally untouchable land would face their greatest threat in King Philip’s War. The result of this threat, like Natick, was contradictory. It was deadly and lifesaving for the Praying Indians of Natick.

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<sup>86</sup> Sahlins, *Islands of History*, pp. 26-7.

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