

Citizenship, Property, Identity And Representation: The Historical Journey Of Southern New England's Native Peoples

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AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

Please note: The information recorded here are from personal notes and may, therefore, contain factual errors. Additions and corrections are most welcome. JD

Alden Vaughan: Why do historians disagree? Why, with the same materials and data, do historians disagree?

Why don't all the Supreme Court justices agree when a case is brought to them?

Scholars, like Supreme Court justices, come to different conclusions because they are different people with different values/experiences/etc.

Historians also write in different periods. A decade or two decades makes a big difference in interpretations. Add to that different cultural values, age, region of the country or world.

Also, new papers and other evidence are discovered. In addition, not everything can be read by everyone—there is just too much out there. Thus, there is a different slant. Historians are not simply presenting facts, but trying to present the *meaning* of the evidence—they are interpreting information.

In the history of New England archaeology plays a role. New things are literally dug up, leading to new data and new interpretations.

There is a pendulum effect in the writing of history...if historian A writes an extremely laudatory biography of someone, then historian B might write something quite the opposite (same for any historical person or events that are *frequently* written about). Reputations change because interpretations change.

Question: Do your students question how historical information is presented?

Answers: If students come from other schools, other places.... AP (often more finessed), previous teachers' interpretations, what they learned before....

What was the cause/were the causes of the Civil War? (slavery? Cotton? States' rights?)

The conversation is also about the narrative—the psychological need for a narrative—the simpler the better. We live by generalizations. This can lead to the deletion of evidence, ignoring certain elements, etc. Every historian, by choosing certain facts to interpret, leaves out others.

Always go back to the original source.....(But sources can be manipulated. What is to be done if you find information that contradicts your thesis? What about nuances?)

The writing of the history of Indian-White encounters in New England (and elsewhere, for that matter), begins even before settlement. We have the first person, participant, histories of the early explorers. Though often not flattering, they could be kinder than what came later.

The Indians were also reporting their histories (not in writing, but orally and through mnemonic devices like wampum belts). The encounters were immensely important to the Indians, as well. The problem is that it was harder to get to the Indians histories precisely because they were not written. Thus, we have a very much one sided view of the events.

The Indians for the first explorers and settlers were helpers and traders. Thus, the earlier reports were more positive (about Indian physical health and hardiness, ability as farmers and fishers—though not about their spiritual beliefs). After King Philip's war there is very little positive to be found.

There comes a point (mid 18th century) where the Indians are written of as cipher—the Indians are no longer there, or, are disappearing. This will continue into the 20th century.

One reason Alden Vaughan got involved in Indian history was that they seemed to be absent from the story—except at the very beginning. Why did the Indians simply disappear from the secondary source histories? Going to the primary sources the Indians reappear and play a major role (John Winthrop's diaries, Roger Williams, Thomas (?) Morton, Cotton & Increase Mather , etc.).

In high school and college textbooks this invisibility is massive before the 1960's. Then came the revolution of the 60's and things changed radically. The Civil Rights movement played a big role in this. Also, in the history field *New Social History*, or *history from the bottom up*, became important—with emphasis on regular people (versus important historical figures). Ethno-history was also becoming a force, even before the 60's. In the Americas ethno-history usually dealt with Indians (cultural anthropology). The focus early on was often on Aztecs, Maya, Inca versus the North American Indians. Anthropologists were the vanguard of this movement. Historians followed.

Early on ethno-history was dominated by cultural anthropologists. The writing style was very different from the historian's with lots of jargon—which made them difficult reading. The methodology of the cultural anthropologist tended to start with now and move back (upstream), whereas the historian starts with then and moves to now (downstream). The cultural anthropologist looks for continuity; the historian with change.

Historians seldom go out into the field (go to libraries); the anthropologist likes to go out into the field. Historians look for point of view (bias) whereas cultural anthropologists tend to report. PRIMARY SOURCES ALSO HAVE A POINT OF VIEW (BIAS).

History 'from the bottom up' helps create a much more nuanced approach to history.

Issues of interpretation in primary sources is extremely important. The presentation of body parts (hands and heads) by the Pequot War was seen by the English as a form of tribute whereas the Indians saw it as a form of reciprocity (a statement that they were *allies with* the English not *servants of* the English).

(Discussion about how this can be brought into the schools—especially into the primary and middle schools)

Tom & Alden discuss connections between what happened then and what is happening now.....

ALDEN VAUGHAN: On Primary Sources & other reliable sources

We have a very brief description of the ‘first Thanksgiving’ from Mourt’s Relation (Document A-1, handout); a much later document that purports to come from 1623, but in reality probably from the 1930’s (A-2); and a Summer Thanksgiving (after a period of fasting and prayer because of drought) (A-3)

Documents: *Certain Questionsto the Indians, and Answers* (B2)... English ‘leagalise’---basically relinquishing tribal authority to the English. How did the Indians understand it?

Did the English interpreter either misrepresent or simply lack the language skills to get things across? Were there two interpreters (one Indian, one English)—most likely not. Was the wine consumed before or after the conversation? How did the Indians understand it? Did they think they could speak for their entire people? What was meant by tribe (most likely separate communities)?

TOM DOUGHTON: What’s at stake in the interpretation of events? Why are historiography/historical interpretation is so important for the federal recognition of Indian tribes? (Briefly discusses how state and federal recognition is different).

A description of what is now Framingham in the early years of colonization. Lots of evidence of native life—of the things they left behind—but nothing of the people. This region was the Nipmuc homeland of Assabet.

Homelands in this region generally consisted of five to ten square miles with several settlements/solitary wigwams, etc. People were joined through common kinship and tended to live near important fishing places on local rivers....

19th century regional historians such as Josiah Campbell present homeland areas as enclaves with discrete & unrelated settlements. Separate ‘tribes’ were identified with towns and their self identification as a people was ignored. Thus, we have the Nipmucs

divided up into the Hassenamisco (sp), Chabungagmaug (sp) and Assabet tribes. This was especially true as time progressed. The discovery of Indian artifacts often created discomfort among the whites and were destroyed. Indian names were kept often for romantic reasons...to create a (white) connection (long time) to the region... also acted as trophies of a sort.

Why did Massachusetts Euro-Americans feel a sort of undefined dread of Indian relics—especially burial areas? Partly because they were seen as disappeared people... once here but now (and often suddenly) gone.

There was a mythology about the nature of the “savages”; where they came from, etc. (We’re they from Asia, the lost tribes of Israel, some other exotic place?).

What’s at stake? Town histories often make it clear that “there were never any Indians here...they were down the road somewhere else”, or, “they were here but vanished long ago” Or, the ones who remained weren’t really Indians but racially mixed beggars.....

The idea that God provoked a plague before white settlement in order to make way for the newcomers...or sent one afterwards (1630s ff) to do the same sometimes acted as a justification for the white seizure of Indian lands (perhaps palliated the guilt?).

The emphasis that the Indians disappeared or were so bastardized that they were no longer “the real thing” has had a huge impact on the status of the native peoples who survived and remained in their homelands.

Federal recognition of Indian tribes is based on certain mandatory criteria. If they meet these then they can exercise a degree of autonomy from the local and state authorities. They are subject to the criminal code but not the civil code (which explains their right to build casinos, ignore certain administrative rules, build casinos, etc). It is about much more than casinos!

Congress, federal courts, the President may all ‘recognize’ tribes. Tribes that were “terminated” in the 1950’s were ‘remedied’ by the new process. However, the new policy is heavily skewed to the ‘great nations’ of the West and against the peoples of the East. Much depends on what was written about them by local historians, etc. Harriet Forbes writing on the “last of the Nipmuc” had a profound effect on the BIA’s refusal to recognize the Nipmuc when they petitioned. They had, after all, disappeared. Harriet Forbes had said so.

The whole issue of tribes is highly problematic... often ‘tribes’ were divided up by locations recognized by the whites (*see the discussion above*). If a community petitions for recognition but has not been recognized or described by historians/anthropologists using the same names that the tribe uses to describe itself a serious problem arises. How do ‘disappeared’ people reappear? How do Assabets or Hassenamisco (sp) become Nipmucs?

It means that outsiders get to decide who was who and what it means to be a Nipmuc, Mashpee, etc. If outsiders call you the Hassanemisco tribe (but not Nipmuc) and you call yourself Nipmuc (not Assabet, etc.) then the BIA may dismiss the petition since the tribe petitioning didn't exist (for outsiders).

If a native family doesn't appear on the Earle document (1861) enumerating the local Indians, then they cannot be considered legitimate by the current standards. There is a family that has traced its history directly and continuously back to a Pequot man and Mary Peagan (17th century) that was rejected as members of the Nipmuc people(by the BIA) since there were three Mary Peagans living on the Nipmuc land at that time. The requirement is to prove *which* Mary Peagan. The precision of the BIA requirements is quite extreme.

The mandatory criteria for Federal acknowledgement must all be met with equal weight placed on each one criterion. Tribes terminated in the 1950's by Congress can never apply for recognition. If a tribe petitioned and was rejected the members can never re-apply under another name (nor can any 'members' of the tribe be joined to another group).

Federal and state recognition are not the same thing. In MA people who are on state recognized rolls have certain prerogatives (including free tuition in state schools). States are now beginning to revoke recognition if the federal government refuses recognition.

Costs of getting recognized range from \$600,000 and \$3,000,000. Who helps in the process of recognition? Historians! At up to \$ 7,000 day. The experts on native peoples are not native peoples but the historians, ethnographers, etc. The issue isn't casinos, but communal self-definition. Historiography is essential.

In New England (and elsewhere) developers have attempted to co-opt members of the tribes to be the 'authentic' representatives of the autonomous political entity even when there is no basis for doing so, often setting factions up to fight against one another. As developers "help" tribes get recognized, Mary suddenly becomes "Princess" Mary and John, "Chief" John in order to establish that a tribal political organization exists. John and Mary may be paid very high fees with the understanding that they will not divulge the developers interests in the project. If competing developers pay John and Mary to be "chief" and "princess" the tribe may be divided into hostile factions each claiming the other is fake. This happened in the case of the Nipmucks and helped contribute to the failure of the tribe to recognized.