# ***Edward Randolph's Description of King Philip's War (1676)***

## Introduction

A decade after Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia, the New England colonies experienced a similar conflict with the Algonquins living in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Following the massacre at Mystic in 1637, the Indian population declined dramatically – from 140,000 to less than 10,000. At the same time, Puritan Church leadership launched a concerted campaign to convert the Indians to Protestantism. Puritan minister and missionary, John Eliot, convinced about 2,000 Algonquins to relocate to “Praying Towns,” where they were taught the Bible and expected to adopt white customs. Eliot’s hoped the “Praying Indians,” as they were called, would return to their villages and convert other Native Americans. Meanwhile, colonial leadership declared legal authority over all Indians in New England while also forcibly taking more and more land from the Algonquins for white settlement.

Forced with death, disease, forced conversion, and removal, many of the Algonquin nations, starting with the Wampanoags, began organizing a resistance movement. John Sassamon, one of the Praying Indians personally mentor by Eliot, informed the colonial Governor of Plymouth, MA about the growing resistance. The Chief Sachem of the Wampanoags, Metacom -called King Philip by the colonists - was brought before the public court. Lacking any evidence of impending rebellion, Metacom was released with a warning that the Wampanoag would be disarmed and physically removed if colonists heard any more talk about rebellion. A few weeks after Metacom’s trial, Sassamon’s murdered body was found in Assawompset Pond, outside of Plymouth. Colonial leaders in Massachusetts arrested and tried three Wampanoag men for Sassamon’s murder. The three men were found guilty and publicly hanged on June 8, 1675.

Following his own trial, Metacom organized a military alliance consisting of two-thirds of the Algonquin communities throughout the colonies. On June 27, the Pokanokets (a band of Wampanoags) attacked a colonial village outside of Plymouth. Within weeks, full-scale war was underway throughout New England. King Phillip’s Confederacy burned villages throughout Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Twelve out of ninety New England towns were destroyed and hundreds of colonists killed. Indian casualties were much higher, about 40 percent of the total population. Indians captured during the war were sold into slavery and sent to the Caribbean or South America, including many of the Praying Indians who were promised protection by the Puritan Church. Following the war, small number of New England Algonquins, particularly the Wampanoags, lived in small communities scattered throughout the colonies. Most served as servants, slaves, or tenants of the colonists.

The same year the war broke out, King Charles II sent Edward Randolph to Boston to assess the state of the colonies. Randolph sent a series of reports back to the King and Parliament about King Philip’s War as well as the governance of the colonies in general. Randolph described the colonies as disorganized and unconcerned with following British colonial policy. As a result, King Charles made Randolph a permanent administrator of the New England colonies tasked with making sure colonists were paying their taxes and following trade regulations put in place by the Navigation Acts. Below is Randolph’s report to King Charles about the war he just witnessed in the New England colonies[[1]](#footnote-1).

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## Primary Source

Eighth Enquiry.

What hath been the original cause of the present war with the natives. What are the advantages or disadvantages arising thereby and will probably be the End? Various are the reports and conjectures of the causes of the present Indian war. Some impute it to an imprudent zeal in the magistrates of Boston to christianize those heathen before they were civilized and enjoining them the strict observation of their laws, which, to a people so rude and licentious, hath proved even intolerable, and that the more, for that while the magistrates, for their profit, put the laws severely in execution against the Indians, the people, on the other side, for lucre and gain, entice and provoke the Indians to the breach thereof, especially to drunkenness, to which those people are so generally addicted that they will strip themselves to their skin to have their fill of rum and brandy, the Massachusetts having made a law that every Indian drunk should pay 10s. or be whipped, according to the discretion of the magistrate. Many of these poor people willingly offered their backs to the lash to save their money; whereupon, the magistrates finding much trouble and no profit to arise to the government by whipping, did change that punishment into 10 days work for such as could not or would not pay the fine of 10s. which did highly incense the Indians.

Some believe there have been vagrant and Jesuitical priests[[2]](#footnote-2), who have made it their business, for some years past, to go from Sachem to Sachem, to exasperate the Indians against the English and to bring them into a confederacy, and that they were promised supplies from France and other parts to extirpate the English nation out of the continent of America. Others impute the cause to some injuries offered to the Sachem Philip; for he being possessed of a tract of land called Mount Hope[[3]](#footnote-3), a very fertile, pleasant and rich soil, some English had a mind to dispossess him thereof, who never wanting one pretense or other to attain their end, complained of injuries done by Philip and his Indians to their stock and cattle, whereupon Philip was often summoned before the magistrate, sometimes imprisoned, and never released but upon parting with a considerable part of his land.

But the government of the Massachusetts (to give it in their own words) do declare these are the great evils for which God hath given the heathen commission to rise against them: The woeful breach of the 5th commandment, in contempt of their authority, which is a sin highly provoking to the Lord: For men wearing long hair and periwigs[[4]](#footnote-4) made of women's hair ; for women wearing borders of hair and for cutting, curling and laying out the hair, and disguising themselves by following strange fashions in their apparel: For profaneness in the people not frequenting their meetings, and others going away before the blessing be pronounced: For suffering the Quakers[[5]](#footnote-5) to live amongst them and to set up their thresholds by Gods thresholds, contrary to their old laws and resolutions.

With many such reasons, but whatever be the cause, the English have contributed much to their misfortunes, for they first taught the Indians the use of arms, and admitted them to be present at all their musters and trainings, and shewed them how to handle, mend and fix their muskets, and have been furnished with all sorts of arms by permission of the government, so that the Indians are become excellent firemen. And at Natick[[6]](#footnote-6) there was a gathered church of praying Indians, who were exercised as trained bands, under officers of their own; these have been the most barbarous and cruel enemies to the English of any others. Capt. Tom, their leader, being lately taken and hanged at Boston, with one other of their chiefs.

That notwithstanding the ancient law of the country, made in the year 1633, that no person should sell any arms or ammunition to any Indian upon penalty of £10 for every gun, £5 for a pound of powder, and 40s. for a pound of shot, yet the government of the Massachusetts in the year 1657, upon design to monopolize the whole Indian trade did publish and declare that the trade of furs and peltry with the Indians in their jurisdiction did solely and properly belong to their commonwealth and not to every indifferent person, and did enact that no person should trade with the Indians for any sort of peltry, except such as were authorized by that court, under the penalty of £100 for every offence, giving liberty to all such as should have license from them to sell, unto any Indian, guns, swords, powder and shot, paying to the treasurer 3d. for each gun and for each dozen of swords; 6d. for a pound of powder and for every ten pounds of shot, by which means the Indians have been abundantly furnished with great store of arms and ammunition to the utter ruin and undoing of many families in the neighboring colonies to enrich some few of their relations and church members[[7]](#footnote-7).

No advantage but many disadvantages have arisen to the English by the war, for about 600 men have been slain, and 12 captains, most of them brave and stout persons and of loyal principles, whilst the church members had liberty to stay at home and not hazard their persons in the wilderness.

The loss to the English in the several colonies, in their habitations and stock, is reckoned to amount to £150,000 there having been about 1200 houses burned, 8000 head of cattle, great and small, killed, and many thousand bushels of wheat, peas and other grain burned (of which the Massachusetts colony hath not been damnifyed one third part, the great loss falling upon New Plymouth and Connecticut colonies) and upward of 3000 Indians men women and children destroyed, who if well managed would have been very serviceable to the English, which makes all manner of labour dear.

The war at present is near an end. In Plymouth colony the Indians surrender themselves to Gov. Winslow, upon mercy, and bring in all their arms, are wholly at his disposal, except life and transportation; but for all such as have been notoriously cruel to women and children, so soon as discovered they are to be executed in the sight of their fellow Indians.

The government of Boston have concluded a peace upon these terms.

1. That there be henceforward a firm peace between the Indians and English.
2. That after publication of the articles of peace by the general court, if any English shall willfully kill an Indian, upon due proof, he shall dye, and if an Indian kill an Englishman and escape, the Indians are to produce him, and lie to pass trial by the English laws.
3. That the Indians shall not conceal any known enemies to the English, but shall discover them and bring them to the English.
4. That upon all occasions the Indians are to aid and assist the English against their enemies, and to be under English command.
5. That all Indians have liberty to sit down at their former habitations without let[[8]](#footnote-8)...
1. Edward Randolph *Letter to King Charles II*. [Full source here.](https://archive.org/details/americanhistoryt01hartuoft/page/458) From: Albert Bushnell Hart, ed*., American History Told by Contemporaries* (New York, 1898), volume 1, 458-60. Believed to be in the public domain. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Remember Le Jeune and Lalemant’s *Jesuit Relations* – Jesuits were French or Spanish Catholic. Puritans were English Protestant. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mount Hope is a town in Rhode Island, closer to Narragansett than Providence. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A Periwig is a stylish wig worn by men during the seventeenth century. [Here are some examples](http://thisisversaillesmadame.blogspot.com/2017/02/the-periwig.html), if you’re interested. Not really an accurate word to describe the hairstyle and head dress of Indian men, but Randolph uses the closest term he knows. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Quakers, or Society of Friends, broke with the Church of England during the 1650s, and preached the importance of “inner light,” meaning every person has an inner connection with the divine spirit. Salvation was available to all and required no deference to authorities. Quakers challenged the government by refusing to pay taxes or swear in court, and by advancing ideas of human equality that threatened established divisions based on wealth, social rank, and gender. They were also pacifists who refused to take sides in any conflict, and the only colonists to arrive to the colonies unarmed. Both church and government officials targeted Quaker Meeting Houses and arrested and jailed many Friends (Quakers). Groups of Quakers started emigrating to Boston in 1656, where they were not welcomed by Puritan leadership. Despite the fact that the Puritans were also a dissenter church forced to flee England because of persecution, Puritans also distrusted all other religions, even fellow dissenter churches. Quakers were immediately banned from Massachusetts colony, and several were publicly executed in Boston. As Randolph references here, many Quakers found shelter with the Algonquin Indians. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Village outside of Boston. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. While it was very common during the seventeenth century to string together clauses like this sentence, you should never write a sentence like this in the twenty-first century. Just FYI. Here’s the gist of Randolph’s point: colonists were not allowed to trade guns and ammunition with the Indians or else face punitive fines. In the 1650s, New England colonial leadership started issuing licenses to trade with the Indians. The license also allowed colonists to trade weapons and ammunition with the Indians as long as they paid the colonial government its due. Who benefits from this, according to Randolph? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. delay. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)