

---

Dead Men Tell No Tales: John Sassamon and the Fatal Consequences of Literacy

Author(s): Jill Lepore

Source: *American Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), pp. 479-512

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713381>

Accessed: 12/12/2008 12:00

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=jhup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



The Johns Hopkins University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Quarterly*.

# Dead Men Tell No Tales: John Sassamon and the Fatal Consequences of Literacy

JILL LEPORE  
*Yale University*

---

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES, OR SO THE SAYING GOES. IT MAKES A wonderful threat, a line Humphrey Bogart might use on a sniveling Peter Lorre as he holds a gun to his head: “Keep your mouth shut, weasel, or your number’s up—you know what they say, dead men tell no tales, at least not in this two-bit gin-joint.” Yes, it makes a very effective threat, especially in a *film noir* setting. But “dead men tell no tales” is also a piece of folk wisdom, morbid and somewhat fatalistic, which means just what it says: the stories of the dead die with them. With this, most historians would disagree. After all, we have a great deal invested in the idea that the dead do tell tales. It is our task, and our passion, to listen to those tales, or rather to *read* and interpret them, hoping to make sense of the surviving written fragments of a day, a life, a nation-state.

No doubt but that this is tricky work, especially when we are trying to read the tales of those whom some historians have labeled “inarticulate,” people who left few written documents, if any, that might tell us about their lives. Trickier still is telling the tales of dead people who, when alive, spoke a language now dead—dead not in the sense that Greek and Latin are dead languages but dead in the sense that almost no one living today can understand them. These are among the problems involved in writing the history of Native Americans of southeastern New England whose languages—Massachusett, Narragansett, and Mohegan-Pequot—have become extinct.<sup>1</sup>

---

Jill Lepore is a doctoral candidate in American studies at Yale University. She is currently completing a dissertation on the language of cruelty in King Philip’s War.

*American Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (December 1994) © 1994 American Studies Association

Another reason it is difficult to read the stories and write the histories of “inarticulate” people who spoke “dead” languages is that we have believed they themselves lacked not only the tools to communicate with us across the centuries but the sensibility to do so as well. That is, we have believed that such people lacked both literacy, the ability to read and write, *and* historical awareness, the sense of existing on a timeline. These “prehistoric” people could neither record their history nor understand it.

Where did we get this idea?

Twenty-five years ago anthropologists argued that literacy makes history possible. Not only does the invention of writing mark the advent of history proper, they claimed, but the ability to write down and record events also creates a “historical sensibility,” an awareness of the “pastness of the past.” People who communicate orally can understand the past only in terms of their present-day, face-to-face relationships; they create “myths” that emphasize continuity between past and present. Yet literate people, with their written records, cannot fail to notice the distinction between what was and what is. And since there are often inconsistencies between what was and what is, literate cultures invented history to document and interpret change over time. The concept of history, these scholars argued, was thus a direct “consequence” of literacy.<sup>2</sup>

In the years since this ambitious theory was proposed, anthropologists, historians, and other literacy scholars have unraveled its frayed edges so that little of its fabric remains intact today. While anthropologists have demonstrated that oral peoples quite self-consciously preserve history through oral tradition,<sup>3</sup> historians have become increasingly aware that literate peoples (including historians themselves) are prone to myth making.<sup>4</sup> We postmodernists are no longer confident in our ability to tell the difference between myth and history.<sup>5</sup> And the great divide between orality and literacy, once clearly marked by the boundary between myth and history, has been challenged on other grounds as well. Scholars have insisted that literacy is not simply a technology we acquire but is also a value whose worth is culturally constructed.<sup>6</sup> Some, such as anthropologist Ruth Finnegan, suggest that we would do better to look at the “uses” of literacy than at its “consequences.”<sup>7</sup>

So we find ourselves today in a new realm of understanding about oral, literate, and “inarticulate” people. Or do we? In a recent anthol-

ogy, *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, editor Calvin Martin identified the “problem” as Western-bred historians’ failure to fully understand Native Americans’ intriguing “metaphysics,” “their astounding ability to annul time, their remarkable capacity to repudiate systematically time and history.” According to Martin, white historians writing Indian history have underestimated the importance of myth in Native American societies and have imposed their own Western perceptions of historical reality onto their Indian subjects.<sup>8</sup> Put simply, Martin has proposed that Anglo-Americans think in terms of history while Native Americans think in terms of myth. Unfortunately, this romanticized distinction between the “thoughtworlds” of contemporary white historians and historical Native Americans takes us back to the so-called “great divide” theories all over again. As a result, many scholars continue to labor under the assumption that either the acquisition of literacy inevitably leads to the recording of history or, if it does not, that this is the result of the persistent power of myth for non-Western peoples. Clearly, pieces of this assumption are often correct, which partly explains its great staying power. Still, it usually obscures a much more complicated relationship between a people’s literacy and their ability to pass down rich sources to eager historians—a relationship, I would like to argue, that is always mediated by culture and by the conditions under which literacy is acquired and the uses to which it is put.

In seventeenth-century New England, many Indians were literate, yet none of them wrote an account of perhaps the most devastating conflict in their history, King Philip’s War, which nearly destroyed the native population in Southeastern New England and set in motion the extinction of the Massachusetts language. The English colonists suffered dramatic wartime losses as well: twenty-five of their towns burned to the ground and more than one in ten colonists died. Puritan minister Increase Mather was not alone in calling the war “the saddest time with New England that ever was known.”<sup>9</sup> (In proportion to population, King Philip’s War has the distinction of being the most fatal war in American history.) Unlike their Indian neighbors, however, literate English colonists were quick to pick up their pens to write about the war; their letters, news reports, sermons, and histories all survive in startling abundance. Many of these writings were brief, personal notes, but a significant number of lengthier accounts, including Mary Rowlandson’s famous captivity narrative, was published and widely

distributed. In all, nineteen different English stories about King Philip's War were printed in London, Boston, and Cambridge, many in more than one edition, for a total of no fewer than thirty separate printings. Even with a conservative estimate of press-run size, a minimum of fifteen thousand copies of books about King Philip's War descended on the very small Anglo-American book market in the span of seven years.

Yet none of these books was written by any of the many literate Indians in New England, several of whom were ministers and at least one of whom even worked as a printer at the press in Cambridge. Clearly, literacy is not an uncomplicated tool, like a pen or a printing press. Instead, literacy is bound, as it was for New England's Indians, by the conditions under which it is acquired—in this case, at great cost. In order to become literate, seventeenth-century Indians had first to make a graduated succession of cultural concessions—adopting English ways and English dress, living in towns, learning to speak English, converting to Christianity. But these very concessions made them vulnerable. Neither English nor Indian, assimilated Indians were scorned by both groups, and they were even subject to attack. Because the acquisition of literacy, and especially English-language literacy, was one of the last steps on the road to assimilation, Indians who could read and write placed themselves in a particularly perilous, if at the same time a powerful, position, caught between two worlds but fully accepted by neither.

The predicament of literate Indians in seventeenth-century New England raises a few more questions about the “consequences” and “uses” of literacy and its relationship to the recording of history.<sup>10</sup> If literacy is employed as an agent of assimilation, can one of its uses be the devastation of a society's political autonomy and the loss of its native language and culture? Can literacy destroy? And, in the context of a broader cultural conflict, can one of the consequences of literacy be the death of those who acquire it? Can literacy kill? Perhaps most importantly, if literacy can be wielded as a weapon of conquest and can effectively compromise a native culture, what then remains of that culture's history? And who is left to tell it? If the very people most likely to record their story, those who are so assimilated that they have become literate, are also the most vulnerable, does it then make sense to explain that culture's lack of written history by simply pointing to its attachment to mythical thinking?

Many different stories could be told that might answer these

questions, but few are as dramatic as the tale of John Sassamon, a highly literate New England Indian who died in 1675. Within his brief biography is contained the story of the encounter between seventeenth-century New England colonists and the Massachusett, Narragansett, and Pokanoket Indians, an encounter that ultimately compromised the political and cultural autonomy of these native peoples. Native political sovereignty began to erode with the arrival of the first English settlers, but attempts to assimilate Indians by converting them to Christianity and teaching them to read and write greatly expedited this process. There is perhaps no better example of an assimilated seventeenth-century Indian than John Sassamon. As one Puritan minister reported, Sassamon “was observed to conform more to the English Manners than any other Indian.”<sup>11</sup> Sassamon may also have been the most educated Indian in all of New England; he was probably the most hated. As a scribe, translator, and interpreter, Sassamon provided valuable services to English and Indian leaders, many of whom probably resented their dependence on him. Someone hated Sassamon enough to murder him, and it was his death that most immediately led to King Philip’s War, in which thousands of Indians, both literate and nonliterate, were killed or sold into slavery.

Sassamon’s story, however small and particular, provides a vivid and dramatic illustration of the “fatal consequences” of cultural conflict and of the role that literacy can sometimes play in accelerating that conflict. The backdrop of Sassamon’s life, seventeenth-century New England, was a world in which literacy was intertwined with efforts to convert Indians to Christianity. In the end, John Sassamon’s story suggests that we must look at all of literacy’s uses and should not forget that, in the context of a broader cultural encounter, literacy, in the past, may have had devastating and perhaps fatal consequences for non-Europeans.

\* \* \*

In the post–World War I era, John Sassamon has been called the Archduke Ferdinand of King Philip’s War. Like the infamous heir to the Austrian throne, Sassamon’s death led quickly and directly to the outbreak of a major war, which left generations of historians to scramble for available “like-a-spark-to-a-powder-keg” clichés to describe the precipitous course of events. In December 1674, Sassamon, a Christianized or “praying” Indian, traveled to Plymouth to confide to

Governor Josiah Winslow that Philip, leader of the Pokanokets, was plotting a war against the English. Sassamon confessed to Winslow his fear that Philip would surely murder him if his betrayal were discovered. Winslow, however, neither heeded Sassamon's warnings nor assuaged his fears; instead, the injudicious governor dismissed Sassamon's information "because there was but this one testimony of an Indian, and therefore of a *suspected* original." As Cotton Mather would later lament, "before the truth of the matter could be inquired into, poor John was barbarously murdered."<sup>12</sup>

Within a week of his meeting with Winslow, Sassamon mysteriously disappeared. Solicitous neighbors soon found his bloated body under the ice of Assawampsett Pond and buried it without delay. Meanwhile, rumors abounded. In Rhode Island, one observer noted that "sum English suposed him throne in [while] sum indians . . . did think he fell in and was so drowned."<sup>13</sup> The dispute was conveniently resolved when a praying Indian named Patuckson appeared on the scene claiming to have witnessed three of Philip's men violently murder Sassamon and then conceal their crime by casting the body through a hole in the ice.<sup>14</sup> In March 1675, these three Indians—Wampapaquan, Tobias, and Mattashunnamo—were formally accused of the crime.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, many English "believed that [Philip] was the Author of [the] murder" and the accused merely "the Actors."<sup>16</sup> Three months later, the Plymouth court (including a jury of twelve Englishmen and six praying Indians) tried and convicted the alleged murderers. The execution took place on June 8.<sup>17</sup> In just three days, on June 11, Pokanokets were reported arming outside Plymouth; by June 29, Philip's men attacked and nearly destroyed the town of Swansey in the first battle of King Philip's War.<sup>18</sup>

And so it is that the unfortunate Sassamon, like the equally unfortunate Archduke Ferdinand, is better remembered for his death than for his life.<sup>19</sup> Before that fateful day in the winter of 1674 when he sat uncomfortably in the governor's house and nervously whispered that "Philip was undoubtedly indeavouring to Raise new troubles; and was Indeavouring to engage all the Sachems round about in a warr,"<sup>20</sup> John Sassamon had entered the historical record only a handful of times—and most of these were brief appearances indeed. The abundance of contemporary and historical accounts of John Sassamon's death stand in stark contrast to the scarcity of references to his life; this makes any reconstruction of his biography necessarily speculative.

Yet only in the reconstruction of his biography can we hope to find the answer to the key question in this mystery: Why was John Sassamon killed? At first blush, the answer seems clear: dead men tell no tales. In other words, Philip had Sassamon killed either as punishment for his betrayal or to prevent further leaks of information to the English. Boston merchant Nathaniel Saltonstall wrote to a friend in London that, "King Philip suspecting he either would divulge or had already made known this Secret to the English, took Council to kill this Sosoman."<sup>21</sup> Increase Mather said of Philip's men that "the main ground why they murdered him seems to be, because he discovered their subtle and malicious designs, which they were complotting against the English."<sup>22</sup> In Rhode Island, John Easton remarked, "it was reported Sausimun before his death had informed of the Indian Plot, and that if the Indians knew it they wold kill him."<sup>23</sup>

This motive seems simple enough, yet each of these three observers—Saltonstall, Mather, and Easton—suggested other, broader reasons behind the murder. First among these was Sassamon's religion. According to Mather, "no doubt but one reason why the Indians murdered John Sausaman, was out of hatred against him for his Religion."<sup>24</sup> Before he revised his story, Saltonstall claimed that Wampapaquan, Tobias, and Mattashunnamo killed Sassamon because they were annoyed at his preaching: "not liking his Discourse, [they] immediately Murthered him after a most Barbarous Manner."<sup>25</sup> Others claimed Philip had Sassamon killed because he himself was tired of Sassamon's proselytizing. And Sassamon's death was also attributed to his greed. In Rhode Island, the Pokanokets John Easton interviewed said Sassamon had cheated Philip: "king Philop got [Sassamon] to write his will and he made the writing for a gret part of the land to be his but read as if it had bine as Philop wold."<sup>26</sup>

Was Sassamon killed because he betrayed Philip, because he cheated him, or because he tried to convert him? The surviving reports conflict so greatly that it is impossible to determine with any certainty the exact motive for Sassamon's murder. But the exact motive may not matter. Although the shape and size of the possible motives vary, they cast an identical shadow; behind each of them lies the spectre of John Sassamon's position as a cultural mediator. For Sassamon, the ability to act as a mediator was predicated on his bilingualism and his literacy—his skill at speaking, reading, and writing English was intricately intertwined with his loyalty to the colonists, his conversion to



Christianity, his betrayal of Philip, and even his ability to cheat Philip in the writing of his will. To fully understand the shades and shadows of cultural conversion, and of literacy's role within it, we must start at the very beginning of the story of John Sassamon's life.

\* \* \*

When the first English settlers arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1630, John Sassamon's parents might have welcomed the newcomers warmly. Among the few survivors of the epidemics that plagued the coastal Indians between 1616 and 1618, Sassamon's family perhaps looked to the English for protection against hostile inland neighbors.<sup>27</sup> Sassamon's parents saw fit, at any rate, to remain among the English in Dorchester and to convert to Christianity. While later chroniclers, such as Cotton Mather, would casually note that Sassamon "was the son of Christian Indians,"<sup>28</sup> earlier observers—such as Cotton's father, Increase—specified that Sassamon's "father and mother liv[ed] in Dorchester, and they both *died Christians*."<sup>29</sup> This may seem a minor distinction, but it provides an important clue, for the elder Mather implies that Sassamon's parents converted *only at the time of their deaths* and, thereby, suggests that they were among the numerous Indian victims of a 1633 smallpox epidemic, many of whom converted to Christianity on their deathbeds. Interpreting the epidemic as supernatural evidence of the power of the Puritans' God, many Indians in Massachusetts Bay were thus dramatically and hastily converted.<sup>30</sup>

At their deaths, many of these converts left their orphaned children in the care of English families. "But now," said one dying man, "I must die, the God of the English is much angry with me, and will destroy me; . . . yet my Child shall live with the English, and learne to know their God when I am dead." Describing this state of affairs, one Puritan related how "Divers of the Indians Children, Boyes and Girles we have received into our houses, who are long since civilized, and in subjection to us." These children, he boasted, "can speak our language familiarly; divers of whom can read English, and begin to understand in their measure, the grounds of Christian Religion."<sup>31</sup> Throughout their upbringing, Indian children undergoing anglicization were judged in the context of the twin processes of conversion to Christianity and acquisition of literacy. Although only a few of these adopted children survived into adulthood, John Sassamon may well have been among them. If so,

he would have learned to speak English at a relatively young age, for he was probably in his early teens when his parents died. At that point, Sassamon would have entered the ranks of a very small group of seventeenth-century New England bilingualists, the vast majority of whom were Indian.

By 1637, Sassamon had evidently demonstrated his command of English and his loyalty to the Puritans well enough to serve as an interpreter and to fight on the colonists' side during the war against the Pequot Indians.<sup>32</sup> "Sosoman, the Indian" served with Richard Callicott of Dorchester and was very likely to have been the Indian interpreter mentioned by John Underhill in his account of the war.<sup>33</sup> "We had an Indian with us that was an interpreter," Underhill wrote. One day, the enemy Pequots noticed this man, who was "in English clothes, and a gun in his hand," and called out to him, "What are you, an Indian or an Englishman?" "Come hither," he shouted back, "and I will tell you." As soon as the curious Pequots came within range, the interpreter "pulls up his cock and let fly at one of them, and without question was the death of him."<sup>34</sup> When confronted with a question about his identity, the young Sassamon, if indeed it was he, answered with startling violence, with an act outside even the standards of warfare.

After the war had ended, Roger Williams, who negotiated with Callicott for Pequot captives, briefly hosted Sassamon at his house in Providence in August 1637.<sup>35</sup> Soon after, Sassamon and Callicott, in whose home Sassamon may well have been living since the death of his parents, returned to Dorchester along with their own Indian captives; Sassamon brought a Pequot woman who may have later become his wife, while Callicott returned with a Montauk Indian named Cockenoe, who was to become an interpreter for John Eliot, a minister in the adjacent town of Roxbury and the first Englishman to make a serious effort to learn a southeastern New England Indian language.<sup>36</sup>

Consistent with Puritan attitudes about native culture, most English settlers found Indian languages barbaric and even satanic. Cotton Mather once remarked that Indian words were so long he thought they must have been growing since the confusion at Babel.<sup>37</sup> The Puritans' disdain for native languages was not lost on their Indian neighbors, one of whom told a missionary it was no use for an Indian to pray "because Jesus Christ understood not what Indians speake in prayer," since He had "bin used to heare English man pray" and "was not acquainted with [the Indian language], but was a stranger to it."<sup>38</sup> From the time of their

arrival, English settlers were baffled by the Indian languages they heard, but few bothered to learn them; they relied instead on Indian interpreters such as the famous Squanto. In 1634, William Wood observed that “the language is hard to learn, few of the English being able to speak any of it, or capable of the right pronunciation, which is the chief grace of their tongue.” Although Wood had noticed that the Indians “love any man that can utter his mind in their words,”<sup>39</sup> most communication must have been aided by gestures, interpreters, and the Indians’ use of pidgin English.<sup>40</sup>

Matters had not improved much by 1643, when Roger Williams wrote his *Key to the Language of America*, a pragmatic phrasebook designed to aid travelers and settlers. That distrust and misunderstanding characterized communication between the English and the natives can be seen in Williams’ many translations for phrases such as, “I cannot speake your language,” “I lie not,” and “Wee understand not each other.”<sup>41</sup> But if Williams attempted to use his ill-fitting key to unlock the Indian language, John Eliot hoped to swing the doors wide open. Hailed as the great “Apostle to the Indians” for his missionary work, Eliot has also been revered for his contributions to Native American linguistics.<sup>42</sup> It was Eliot who first began to understand the Massachusetts language on its own terms and not simply in relation to European or Asian languages, and it was Eliot who translated the Bible and numerous other religious texts into the Massachusetts language, a set of works collectively known as the “Indian Library.”<sup>43</sup>

Yet Eliot did not act alone in his linguistic and missionary work; instead, he relied to a great extent on Indian translators, interpreters, and teachers.<sup>44</sup> Over the course of his lifetime, John Sassamon would serve Eliot in each of these capacities; there is, in fact, an almost uncanny parallel between the careers of the two men. Like Eliot, Sassamon was well known both for his linguistic and his missionary skills. He was typically described as “a very cunning and plausible Indian, well skilled in the English Language.” Increase Mather wrote that, “being of very excellent parts,” Sassamon had “translated some part of the bible into the Indian language.” This “Indian Schollar and Minister” might have worked with or known Eliot for forty years or more. Eliot himself noted Sassamon’s death in his diary with sorrow and called him “a man of eminent parts & wit.” One contemporary reported that Eliot “had known [Sassamon] from a Child.”<sup>45</sup> And, even if John Sassamon’s parents survived the 1633 epidemic, it is clear that

John spent some portion of his childhood or adolescence living in or near Dorchester, perhaps in the home of an English family (the Callicotts?) and, as all evidence indicates, in close proximity to John Eliot, who lived in nearby Roxbury.

Eliot had emigrated to New England in 1631 and became a minister in Roxbury in 1632. He probably knew both Sassamon and Callicott before the Pequot War, but he certainly knew them by the time he began working with Cockenoe. Later, Eliot would recall that Cockenoe was “a pregnant witted young man, who had been a servant in an English house, who pretty well understood his own language, and hath a clear pronounciation: Him I made my interpreter.”<sup>46</sup> Eliot probably began working with Cockenoe in the early 1640s; by 1646, the assiduous missionary was able to preach his first sermon in the Massachusetts language. Cockenoe, however, had left Eliot by 1649 and returned to Long Island, where he began a long career as an interpreter between the Montauk Indians and the English.<sup>47</sup> Sassamon was a convenient replacement, but he, too, would eventually abandon Eliot. Throughout his life, Sassamon, ambivalent about Puritan society, alternately embraced and rejected it. It is tempting to imagine that he was the Indian boy mentioned in one early Puritan tract “who for some misdemeanour that laid him open to publique punishment, ran away; and being gone, God so followed him, that of his owne accord he returned home, rendred himselfe to Justice, and was willing to submit himselfe, though he might have escaped.”<sup>48</sup> If so, it may well have been Eliot who received the errant Christian back into the fold, for William Hubbard, minister of Ipswich, noted that Sassamon was subject to “the frequent Sollicitations of Mr. Eliot, that had known him from a Child, and instructed him in the Principles of our Religion, who was often laying before him the heinous Sin of his Apostacy.”<sup>49</sup>

Eliot himself probably taught Sassamon to read. It is also possible, of course, that Sassamon learned from a member of the English family with whom he lived or that he attended an Indian School in Dorchester.<sup>50</sup> In any case, Sassamon was very likely taught with methods similar to those Eliot would later describe:

When I taught our Indians first to lay out a word into syllables, and then according to the sound of every syllable to make it up with the right letters, viz. if it were a simple sound, then one vocall made the syllable; if it were such a sound as required some of the consonants to make it up, then the adding of the right consonants either before the vocall, or after it, or both.

They quickly apprehended and understood this Epitomie of the art of spelling, and could soon learn to read. The men, women, and up-grown youth do thus rationally learn to read. . . .

In future years, Indian students learning to read would have benefitted from the Indian catechisms and primers that Eliot and his assistants (including Sassamon) would soon translate, but Sassamon's acquisition of literacy preceded their publication. At about the same time that Sassamon was learning to read and write English, Eliot was himself learning the Massachusetts language. Eliot's description of his methods of learning the language are remarkably similar to those he used to teach Indian students:

Such as desire to learn this language, must be attentive to pronounce right, especially to produce that syllable that is first to be produced; then they must spell by art, and accustom their tongues to pronounce their syllables and words; then learn to read such books as are printed in their language. *Legendo, scribendo, Loquendo*, are the three means to learn a language.<sup>51</sup>

At this point, then, in the early 1640s, Eliot and Sassamon were engaged in similar projects. Syllable by syllable and word by word, both were mastering new languages, pulling letters apart and pushing them back together again, making familiar meanings out of unfamiliar sounds. If Eliot did in fact teach Sassamon, then Sassamon also taught Eliot—their relationship would have been in some important ways reciprocal.<sup>52</sup> But once Eliot's linguistic apprenticeship ended, the power would have shifted dramatically in the Englishman's favor. Eliot's mission, after all, was to eradicate native cultural practices and replace them with Puritan ones.

Beginning in 1647, Eliot was involved in the publication of a set of promotional tracts designed to solicit funds for the propagation of the Gospel in New England; from this time on, Eliot's reigning passion was the conversion of the Indians to Christianity; for this reason, and this reason above all, he had painstakingly learned the Massachusetts language. His missionary work was cultural as well as religious. As one historian has recently noted, "in teaching Indians how to live a full Christian life, they were actually teaching them to act like Englishmen."<sup>53</sup>

It was for the twin purposes of converting and anglicizing Indians that Eliot established the first "praying town" in nearby Natick in 1650. Before his death forty years later, Eliot would have aided in the establishment of fourteen praying towns and the conversion of some

3,600 Indians.<sup>54</sup> Praying towns were to provide settings in which Christian Indians could live and worship like Englishmen, free of the cultural influences of their non-Christian peers.<sup>55</sup> Like Eliot, Sassamon was engaged in this project from the start; he literally helped build the town where he would soon become a schoolmaster. In his accounts for the year 1651, Eliot recorded distributing tools to several Indian and English assistants, including two axes to “John Sosoman.”<sup>56</sup> The same year Eliot gave thanks that:

it hath pleased God to stir up the hearts of many of them this winter to learn to read and write, wherein they do very much profit with a very little help, especially some of them, for they are very ingenuous. And whereas I had thought that we must have an Englishman to be their School-Master, I now hope that the Lord will raise up some of themselves, and enable them unto that work, with my care to teach them well in the reason of the sounds of letters and spelling. . . .<sup>57</sup>

Five years later, Eliot recorded a payment of £30 to “Sosaman, Monequason, and Job,” whom he records in his ledger as “three Indian Interpreters & Schoolmasters.”<sup>58</sup> Daniel Gookin, a colleague of Eliot’s, explained why Indians, rather than Englishmen, served as teachers:

Their teachers are generally chosen from among themselves,—except some few English teachers,—of the most pious and able men among them. If these did not supply, they would generally be destitute: for the learned English young men do not hitherto incline or endeavour to fit themselves for that service, by learning the Indian language.<sup>59</sup>

Or, as Eliot himself noted, “I find few English students willing to engage in to so dim a work as this is. God hath in mercy raised up sundry among themselves to a competent ability to teach their countrymen.”<sup>60</sup>

In describing the Indian schools at Natick during the time when Sassamon was either becoming a schoolteacher or already teaching (1651), Eliot wrote:

we have two men in some measure able to teach the youth with my guidance, and inspection. And thus we order the school: The master daily prayeth among his scholars, and instructeth them in catechism, for which purpose I have compiled a short catechism, and wrote it in the master book, which he can read, and teach them; and also all the copies he setteth his scholars when he teacheth them to write, are the questions and answers of the catechism, that so the children may be the more prompt and ready therein: we aspire to no higher learning yet, but to spell, read, and write.<sup>61</sup>

Eliot's careful attention to the techniques used to teach reading and writing merits further investigation—here the question necessarily arises as to why the missionary placed so much emphasis on literacy. If he simply wanted to convert Indians, why did he pursue the laborious task of teaching them to read? The answer lies in part in the fact that the Puritans were Protestants for whom becoming a Christian meant first acquiring the ability to read the Bible. As James Axtell has shown, the Puritans' attempts at conversion were slowed because of their efforts to teach Indians to read. By contrast, the Jesuits in Canada used their own literacy as a magical tool of intimidation to gain converts. As Axtell argues:

The ability to read and write was awe-inspiring to the Indians largely because it duplicated a spiritual feat that only the greatest shamans could perform, namely, that of reading the mind of a person at a distance and thereby, in an oral context, foretelling the future. . . . every European who could read a handwritten note from a distant correspondent could, in effect, read the writer's mind. Small wonder that the natives who first witnessed this amazing feat regarded the literate Europeans as "greater than all mankind."

Puritans failed to capitalize on this mystical "power of print," according to Axtell, partly because the novelty of literacy had worn off by the time they began their missionary work. Moreover, Axtell argues, Puritan missionaries such as Eliot were "culturally inflexible" and unable to assume the role of shaman. Finally,

the Protestant belief in the priesthood of all believers and the need for each Christian to confront the scriptural message directly led the English missionaries to translate their religious writings into native languages as quickly as possible and to open schools to teach Indian children to read and write. This, of course, diminished the mystery of the foreign language and the exalted status of the priestly caste of literate guardians and interpreters of God's Word.<sup>62</sup>

Accordingly, education available in praying towns stressed literacy above all. As Eliot boasted to his benefactors in England, "we have schools; many can read, some write, sundry able to exercise in publick."<sup>63</sup> Eliot's claims may have been a bit exaggerated; a survey conducted in 1664 revealed rather low literacy rates for Indians living in the fourteen praying towns. Of 462 converted Indians, 142 (31 percent) could read the Massachusetts language, 72 (16 percent) could write, and 9 (2 percent) could read English.<sup>64</sup> These numbers are

decidedly lower than the literacy rates among the English; in 1660, 61 percent of English men and 31 percent of English women were literate.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, even those Indians who could read and write were probably less skilled than Englishmen classified as “literate.” Surviving documents in the Massachusetts language consist largely of land deeds used to supplement verbal agreements. According to the two linguists who translated them, these documents are most appropriately understood “as aids to memory, rather than as independent forms of communication” and thus suggest that most native literacy was of a “restricted” type that relied heavily on oral formulas and rhetorical styles.<sup>66</sup>

John Sassamon—who could speak, read, and write both English and Massachusetts—was surely among the elite of praying Indians, especially in the 1650s, ten years before this survey was taken when there were fewer literate Indians. Evidently, Sassamon was, at this time, one of Eliot’s favorite students because by 1653 Eliot had arranged for the Natick schoolmaster to attend Harvard College.<sup>67</sup> (Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison found this troubling indeed and noted that “one would be inclined to discount the story of Sassamon’s Harvard affiliation” were it not for the conclusive records in the college steward’s accounts.<sup>68</sup>) As Eliot had written in 1649, “there be sundry prompt, pregnant witted youths, not viciously inclined, but well disposed, which I desire may be wholly sequestered to learning and put to school for that purpose.”<sup>69</sup> Although Sassamon was in fact “put to school,” we have no information on what he studied there and for how long. Still, we do know that, for at least one semester in 1653, John Sassamon was a classmate of the fortunate sons of Massachusetts Bay, among them John Eliot, Jr., Samuel Bradstreet, Thomas Shepard, Samuel Hooker, and a very young Increase Mather.<sup>70</sup> (Soon after Sassamon left Cambridge, a special Indian College was opened at Harvard. Although a college specifically for Indians had been proposed as early as 1635, no concrete arrangements were made until 1651, when Harvard President Henry Dunster began soliciting funds for the Indian College to be built. It was finally erected in 1655.)

Whatever his successes or failures at Harvard, it seems Sassamon may have fallen from Eliot’s favor in 1654. As part of his plan for praying Indians’ full participation in the Puritan religious community, Eliot had scheduled a day of examination for members of the Natick church. Unhappily for Eliot, about ten days before the examination,



three Natick Indians became obnoxiously drunk and, to make matters worse, forced liquor on the young son of a more pious Natick resident. Eliot lost heart:

The tidings sunk my spirit extreamly, I did judge it to be the greatest frowne of God that ever I met withall in the work . . . : I knew not what to doe, the blacknesse of the sins, and the Persons reflected on, made my very heart faile me: *For one of the offenders (though least in the offence) was he that hath been my Interpreter, whom I have used in Translating a good part of the Holy Scriptures;* and in that respect I saw much of Satans venome, and in God I saw displeasure. For this and some other acts of Apostacy at this time I had thoughts of casting him off from that work, yet now the Lord hath found a way to humble him. But his Apostacy at this time was a great Triall, and I did lay him by for that day of our Examination, I used another in his room.<sup>71</sup>

Although there is no unequivocal proof that this sinning interpreter was Sassamon, he is clearly the most likely convert to have committed the shameful sins and acts of apostacy that so disappointed Eliot.<sup>72</sup>

Nonetheless, Sassamon was still in Natick in 1656. After that time, whether because of a gradual or sudden falling out with Eliot, Sassamon disappears from the historical record until 1662. That year, the Pokanoket sachem Massasoit died and his eldest son, Alexander, succeeded him. Sassamon's presence at a treaty signing between Alexander and Rhode Island authorities suggests that Sassamon had switched sides and was now working for Alexander as a scribe and translator.<sup>73</sup> Soon after the treaty signing, Alexander died under suspicious circumstances and Philip, Alexander's younger brother, assumed the sachemship.<sup>74</sup> Later that same year, Sassamon set his signature down as witness to Philip's oath of loyalty to the English.<sup>75</sup> William Hubbard claimed that Sassamon had "upon some Misdemeanour fled from his Place [at Natick] to Philip, by whom he was entertained in the Room and Office of Secretary, and Chief Councillor."<sup>76</sup> Whether as scribe, interpreter, secretary, counselor, or some combination thereof, Sassamon assumed a role of considerable influence and importance to Philip because, in 1664, 1665,<sup>77</sup> and 1666,<sup>78</sup> Sassamon's name appeared again and again as a witness to Philip's land transactions. Cotton Mather would later report that Sassamon "apostatiz[ed] from the profession of Christianity, [and] lived like an heathen in the quality of a Secretary to King Philip; for he could write, though the King his master could not so much as read."<sup>79</sup>

The same skills that had made Sassamon valuable to Eliot now made

him almost indispensable to Philip: the ability to speak, read, and write both English and Massachusett. There can be no doubt that Sassamon used his literacy skills as a tool in acquiring status and prestige in the Indian community. And, in gaining a position of intimacy with Philip, Sassamon certainly exploited the “power of print” the way the Puritan missionaries could and did not. Still, it is difficult to know if Sassamon’s work for Philip at this time represents a genuine change of heart in relation to the English or whether, essentially acting as a spy for Eliot, he infiltrated Philip’s council in order to convert him. That Eliot wanted passionately to convert Philip is clear. Most missionaries believed that “When a sachem or sagamore is converted to the faith, and yields himself up to embrace the gospel, it hath a great influence upon his subjects.”<sup>80</sup> Philip, however, apparently had no desire to be converted. An anecdote recorded by Cotton Mather told of how

Eliot made a tender of the everlasting salvation to that king [Philip]; but the monster entertained it with contempt and anger, and after the Indian mode of joining signs with words, he took a button upon the coat of the reverend man, adding, That he cared for his gospel, just as much as he cared for that button.<sup>81</sup>

Nonetheless, Eliot, at one point, rejoiced with an indication that Philip was finally succumbing. In 1664, at the very time when Sassamon was working closely with Philip as a scribe and witness to treaties, Eliot asked the Commissioners of Plymouth Colony “to give encouragmt to John Sosaman, who teacheth Phillip and his men to read.” Eliot claimed that Philip, “did this winter past, upon solicitations and means used, send to me for books to learne to read, in order to praying unto God, wch I did send unto him, and presents with all.” Sassamon, Eliot believed, was “a means to put life into the work.”<sup>82</sup>

Apparently neither Sassamon’s work nor the books Eliot sent were successful in converting Philip because Eliot, making the same attempt all over again, sent even more Indian missionaries to visit Philip seven years later. In formal instructions dated August 1, 1671, the Natick church declared, “we do send these our two brethren, Anthony and William [Nahaton] . . . and we request John Sausiman to join them” to go and preach to the Indians at Plymouth.<sup>83</sup> But still Philip was not converted, and Eliot may well have blamed Sassamon for this failure. Later in 1671, Eliot published a tract called *Indian Dialogues*, a set of conversion conversations, which he claimed were “partly historical, of

some things that were done and said, and partly instructive, to show what might or should have been said, or that may be (by the Lord's assistance) hereafter done and said."<sup>84</sup> In one lengthy, imaginary dialogue, two barely fictionalized praying Indians, "Anthony" and "William Abahton," speak with "Philip Keitasscot," sachem of "Paganoehek." That Eliot left Sassamon out of his *Indian Dialogues* suggests either that Sassamon left the company of Anthony and William Nahaton and never made it to Plymouth to preach to Philip or that Eliot considered Sassamon's contributions unworthy.

*Indian Dialogues*, however, remains interesting, if only for how much it reveals about Eliot's frantic desire to convert Philip. In one scene, "Philip" expresses his "serious thoughts of accepting the offer, and turning to God, to become a praying Indian" but is concerned about whether his conversion would mean a diminishment of his authority as a sachem. The eloquent and persuasive Indian missionaries assuage his every fear and soon a very humbled "Philip" confesses, "I am drowned and overwhelmed with the weight of your reasonings." Much of the dialogue concerns the goodness of the Bible, to which "Philip" meekly and gratefully responds, "Your discourse doth breed in my heart an admiration at that excellent book." Again and again, "Philip's" objections to conversion are defeated by the wisdom of Anthony and William: "Who can oppose or gainsay the mountainous weight of these arguments?" a helpless "Philip" asks. Finally deferring to the missionaries' superior knowledge he proclaims, "I am more than satisfied. I am ashamed of my ignorance, and I abhor myself that ever I doubted."<sup>85</sup>

Yet, in spite of the shipment of books, the visits by William and Anthony Nahaton, and Eliot's richly detailed fantasies, neither Sassamon, Eliot, nor any other missionary ever converted Philip to Christianity. But the missionary work continued. During the late 1660s and early 1670s, Eliot continued to expand the Indian Library and translated and printed first the new testament and then the full Bible, of which 1,500 copies were printed in the first edition. Eliot and his assistants also produced Indian catechisms, primers, grammars, and psalm books and Massachusetts versions of Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety* and Richard Baxter's *Call to the Converted*. During this time, Sassamon apparently left Philip's employ to return to the Christian fold (or was told by Eliot to give up trying to convert Philip) and became minister in the praying town of Namasket (present-day Middleboro) sometime in the early 1670s. In 1673, he was given a tract of land to induce him to stay, and,

the same year, he deeded this land to his daughter Betty and her husband Felix.<sup>86</sup> The next year, Sassamon was either working for Philip or spying on him when he found out about Philip's plans to attack the English and passed them on to the governor of Plymouth. Just four years after Eliot published his fictional dialogues, Philip, instead of peaceably and humbly converting to Christianity, waged war against the English settlers.

\* \* \*

We have come full circle and arrived once more at Sassamon's death. Here we must ask yet again, why was John Sassamon murdered? Was he killed simply because he betrayed Philip's plans to the English? Remember, Increase Mather was convinced that

No doubt but one reason why the Indians murdered John Sausaman, was out of hatred against him for his Religion, for he was Christianized, and baptiz'd, and was a Preacher amongst the Indians, being of very excellent parts, he translated some part of the bible into the Indian language, and was wont to curb those Indians that knew not God on the account of their debaucheries.<sup>87</sup>

Eliot's colleague Daniel Gookin agreed and claimed that "this John Sasamand was the first Christian martyr of the Indians; for it is evident he suffered death upon the account of his Christian profession, and fidelity to the English."<sup>88</sup> And Nathaniel Saltonstall, the Boston merchant, argued that Philip's men killed Sassamon because they did not wish to be converted. According to Saltonstall, Sassamon "was by the Authority of New-Plimouth sent to Preach . . . to King Philip, and his Indians: But King Philip (Heathen-like) instead of receiving the Gospel, would immediately have killed this Sosomon, but by the Perswasion of some about him did not do it, but sent him by the Hands of three of his Men to Prison." On the way to "prison," Sassamon preached to his three captors who, "not liking his Discourse, immediately Murthered him after a most Barbarous Manner" and returned to tell Philip of their deed.<sup>89</sup>

Clearly Philip was tired of listening to missionaries and angry that so many of his people had become Christians. When John Easton asked Philip and his counselors to list their grievances against the English, they responded "that thay had a great fear to have ani of ther indians should be Caled or forsed to be Christian indians. thay saied that such

wer in everi thing more mischivous, only disemblers, and then the English made them not subject to ther kings, and by ther lying to rong their kings." Easton admitted, "we knew it to be true."<sup>90</sup> The Indians whom Easton interviewed provided a good example of this kind of duplicity; they claimed that, instead of converting Philip, Sassamon was cheating him: "report was he was a bad man that king Philop got him to write his will and he made the writing for a gret part of the land to be his but read as if it had bine as Philop wold, but it Came to be knone and then he run away from him."<sup>91</sup>

This last explanation provides perhaps the most unequivocal instance of Sassamon's exploitation of his literacy. Pretending to write down what Philip dictated, Sassamon instead substituted his own words and then, when asked to read the document aloud, read as though he had written what Philip requested. This was the power that Sassamon wielded, "for he could write, though the King his master could not so much as read."<sup>92</sup> While it may or may not be true, this particular story about the writing of the will, told to Easton by a group of Pokanoket Indians, suggests that it had special significance for them. To the Pokanokets, at least, Sassamon's literacy was mysterious, potent, and dangerous. It marked him as a man who could not be trusted.

But it was not his literacy that made Sassamon untrustworthy; it was how he got that way in the first place. Learning to read and write—and especially learning to read and write English—were among the very last steps on the path to cultural conversion. Steps taken earlier along this same path were considered not nearly as corrupting. Many New England Indians were bilingual; speaking English was useful for trading, among other things, and did not necessarily signify any particular loyalty to the English. Dressing as an Englishman and worshipping the Christian God were of course much less ambiguous; those practices clearly marked an Indian as having a compromised relationship with the English. Still, many Indians lived and attended church in praying towns simply because they needed the food and shelter, and then only temporarily; they took off English clothes as easily as they had put them on. Literacy, however, was a special kind of marker, one that branded its possessor, perhaps most especially in his own eyes, as an Indian who had spent years and years with the English; his very "Indianness" was thus called into question.

When, in 1637, the Pequots who spied John Sassamon asked him, "What are you, an Indian or an Englishman?" they were quite some

distance away. As soon as they were close enough to see for themselves, he pulled out his gun and fired. No doubt he was demonstrating his loyalty to the English by providing abundant proof of his readiness to kill Indians in cold blood. But perhaps he could think of no other answer to the question, a question he must have asked himself each day. He was a very young, and probably a very angry, man. Not necessarily yet literate when he fought the Pequots, Sassamon was certainly already bilingual and bicultural. As the years went on—as he became more Christianized, more anglicized, more literate—his position would only become more and more difficult. “Passing” as an Englishman was never really an option for any Indian born in the early seventeenth century, except at a distance. And, as he became more immersed in English society, Sassamon probably also lost his ability to blend in with Indians.

If the native community considered a literate, Christian Indian too English, the English probably considered him too educated and, ultimately, still too Indian. Josiah Winslow, after all, paid no attention to John Sassamon’s warning about Philip’s plans for war. Even though Winslow knew Sassamon was a minister in Namasket, his word was still only “the testimony of an Indian and therefore of a suspected original.”<sup>93</sup> Just how little the English trusted praying Indians can be seen in how badly they treated them when the war broke out. Unconvinced of the converts’ loyalty, the colonists quickly shipped hundreds of praying Indians to Deer Island in Boston Harbor, where they were interred for the war’s duration and left with neither food, shelter, nor adequate means to obtain them. During the bitter winter, many of these Indians died from starvation or exposure.<sup>94</sup> Joseph Tachuppoullan, an Indian minister in the praying town of Hassanomessit, managed to escape from Deer Island to John Eliot’s house, where he spoke of his impossible position, as a man hated by Indians and English alike.

Oh Sir [said Tachuppoullan] I am greatly distressed this day on every side, the English have taken away some of my estate, my corn, . . . my plough, cart, chaine, & other goods. The enemy Indians have also taken a part of what I had, & the richest Indians mock & scoff at me, saying now what has become of your praying to God. The English also censure me, & say I am a hypocrite. In this distress, I have no where to look, but up to God in Heaven, to help me.<sup>95</sup>

Like John Sassamon, Tachuppouillan was a man who had mediated successfully between two very different cultures, but only for a time. Eventually, their mediating status, putting men in danger, left Sassamon dead and Tachuppouillan a fugitive. It is impossible for us to judge the exact cultural position of men such as these. Although Sassamon "was observed to conform more to the English Manners than any other Indian," the facts of his life are by no means clear on the question of whether his primary attachment was to one people or the other.<sup>96</sup> He may well have been a devout Christian and servant of Eliot's cause who experienced brief and minor crises of faith. If this were so, he probably was acting more or less as a spy for Eliot when he worked for Philip and therefore was, in many ways, a traitor to his own people. But who were his own people? Sassamon had apparently been raised by an English family from a relatively young age. No doubt this caused him significant confusion. Rather than being unequivocally loyal to the English, it seems most likely that Sassamon remained troubled and confused about to whom he most owed his allegiance. Serving as secretary to Alexander and Philip may have been a genuine embracing of the native community from which he recoiled only as rumors of war began. Or, as the most cynical interpreter might read the facts, Sassamon switched sides according to the potential for personal and pecuniary gain.

Whatever their motivations in doing so, Sassamon and others like him were able to switch sides with such facility because of their linguistic abilities. Sassamon had skills to offer both Eliot and Philip. As a child, he learned to read and write in a religious context; whoever taught him meant to convert him. Sometimes, he used his linguistic skills to further Eliot's missionary program: he helped Eliot translate religious works into English, became a teacher at Natick, and proselytized to Philip. At other times, Sassamon used his linguistic skills to help Philip: he served as scribe, witness, translator, interpreter, and clerk. Sassamon also used his skills and position to acquire land for himself and his family and, possibly, to steal from Philip.

But these same skills, and the untenable cultural position they put him in, would eventually lead Sassamon to his death, a death that signaled the failure of the English and native cultures to live together peaceably, the gradual loss of native political autonomy, and the eventual extinction of the Massachusetts language. Immediately after King Philip's War, thousands of captured Indians were sold out of the

country as slaves; this ensured the impossibility of another large-scale insurrection and further restricted the political power of the remaining, unconverted Indians. And converted Indians, left to suffer and starve on an isolated island, were no less immune to the war's devastations.<sup>97</sup> By the time the war ended in 1676, the Christian and non-Christian native population of southeastern New England had been dramatically reduced. King Philip's War, often referred today as "Metacom's Rebellion," was the last concerted effort of a federation of New England tribes to oust the English settlers; Philip's defeat ushered in a new era of accommodation with the colonists, one that interspersed with more limited warfare.

But the war also marked the decline of English attempts to convert and educate the Indians; in some ways, Eliot's missionary program died with Sassamon. As Neal Salisbury has remarked, "the war brought not only the defeat of the hostile Indians but the end of the missionary program as conceived by Eliot."<sup>98</sup> At Harvard, the building erected as an Indian College was soon put to other purposes. By 1677, two years after the war ended, its only use, ironically, was to house the Cambridge Press, where the colonists' many accounts of their version of the story of King Philip's War were printed.<sup>99</sup> Few praying towns survived King Philip's War, and most of the Indian Bibles that Sassamon helped translate and Eliot printed were destroyed during the fighting, some maliciously, no doubt. Dutch traders who ran into Eliot three years after the war asked him for an Indian Bible, but Eliot apologized that "in the late Indian War all the Bibles and Testaments were carried away and burned or destroyed, so that he had not been able to save any for himself; but a new edition was in press, which he hoped would be much better than the first one, though that was not to be despised."<sup>100</sup>

Despite the new printing, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel became more and more reluctant to publish any more works in the Indian language; instead, they urged missionaries to teach the Indians English. While a handful of praying towns, including Natick, survived into the eighteenth century, they soon lost first their religious zeal, then their political autonomy, and finally their ability to preserve their native language. In 1698, the church membership at Natick had dropped to seven men and three women; by the 1720s, the largely secular community was no longer self-governing. The Massachusetts language also languished. By 1720, the paucity of books written in Massachusetts made the preservation of the language impossible even



for literate Indians.<sup>101</sup> In 1745, one observer claimed that there were fewer than twenty families of Massachusetts speakers, “and scarce any of these can read.” Of the Indian Bible, he would ask, “*Cui bono?*”<sup>102</sup>

\* \* \*

King Philip’s War did not destroy the native population in southeastern New England; today, there are some 25,000 Native Americans living in the area. Nor did the war end all of the colonists’ efforts to learn Indian languages and to educate and convert Indians; those efforts, though radically diminished, continued well into the eighteenth century, most notably through the work of Josiah Cotton and Experience Mayhew. But King Philip’s War made a difference, the kind of difference that makes it difficult to reconstruct the history of the native peoples of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England. Like John Sassamon, many of those Massachusetts, Pokanoket, Narragansett, and Pequot Indians who acquired literacy in the course of converting to Christianity were killed before they had the chance to write their histories. And it was in no small part their literacy, and their cultural and religious conversions, that led to such conflicts as that which began in 1675.<sup>103</sup>

Contrary to the theories proposed by anthropologists two decades ago, the story of John Sassamon suggests that literacy, when acquired at the expense of cultural autonomy, might sometimes make history *impossible*, at least temporarily. When John Sassamon learned to read and write, he did not magically cross an invisible boundary between orality and literacy; he did not spontaneously abandon mythological concepts and begin to think historically. But with his acquisition of literacy came an extraordinarily complicated and tenuous cultural position as a mediator between two very different cultures. And Sassamon exploited this position in ways that had fatal consequences. The first casualty was the Pequot man killed in 1637 by Sassamon, who was furious at being asked the question that haunted him, “What are you, an Indian or an Englishman?” The unanswerableness of this question would eventually kill Sassamon too. Still, his liminal cultural position is probably best understood as an allegory for the tensions dividing Indians and English in seventeenth-century New England, tensions that would prove fatal to the thousands of Native Americans who died in King Philip’s War. Those deaths interrupted the continuity

of the native population and in a sense broke the New England tribes from their cultural and political moorings. It was not until 1836 that a New England Indian writer, Pequot William Apess, emerged to write the history of King Philip's War. If Sassamon had survived the consequences of literacy, he might have written such a history a century and a half earlier.

On the other hand, he might not have. Even though literate, Sassamon might never have thought to write a history of his life, his people, or their calamitous war. Because little evidence survives to tell us how he thought, it remains a possibility that Sassamon did in fact lack the kind of "historical sensibility" anthropologists have commonly attributed to literate peoples. Frustratingly, we will never know. And, as sketchy as Sassamon's life story is, it is much more complete than most. Of the four other Indians who attended Harvard's Indian College in the seventeenth century, all that we really know is that three fell victim to the fatal consequences of extended contact with the English: one died of consumption, one died of unknown causes, and one was killed by other Indians.<sup>104</sup> Yet, certainly several New England Indians *did* survive the consequences of literacy. Still, none of them has left a diary or a series of letters about their lives, at least not that has ever been found. Neither, of course, did all the colonists involved in the war take the time to write about it. Murder may have silenced John Sassamon but something else silenced John Eliot. In his diary at the end of 1675, Eliot looked back at the year's devastations, "the history whereof," he wrote helplessly, "I canot, I may not relate."<sup>105</sup> Much later, after the war had ended, Eliot recalled, "I desisted fro[m] this work of recording p'ticular matters," partly because "I thought not my selfe so fitting." Moreover, "knowing that it was comited to others" (including powerful Puritan divines like Increase Mather and William Hubbard), Eliot explained, "I declined it."<sup>106</sup>

Eliot was silenced, perhaps, not only by the pain of remembering and recounting the war but also by the censorship that awaited any account sympathetic toward the Indians. As Eliot's missionary colleague Daniel Gookin leafed through the pages and pages written about the war by his fellow colonists, he cynically remarked, "Forasmuch as sundry persons have taken pains to write and publish historical narratives of the war, between the English and Indians in New England, but very little hath been hitherto declared (that I have seen) concerning the Christian Indians, who, in reality, may be judged to have no small share in the

effects and consequences of this war.” Boldly, Gookin decided to remedy the situation and to tackle the job himself. “Therefore,” he resolved, “(through divine assistance) I shall endeavour to give a particular and real account of this affair.”<sup>107</sup> It probably did not occur to Gookin that he might instead have encouraged one of the literate Indians he knew to write such an account; in fact, he did not so much notice the absence of accounts written *by* Indians as the lack of discussion, in English accounts, *about* Indians, and here he referred only to Christian Indians. Still, Gookin’s sympathy with any Indians at all may have been subversive enough—his “Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in New England,” a manuscript presented to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in London and clearly written for immediate publication, was put aside to gather the dust of a hundred years.<sup>108</sup>

Second to John Sassamon, James Printer would seem to have been the most likely New England Indian to write a history of the war. Yet Printer, who had betrayed the English and fought with Philip during the war, had trouble enough already. Taking advantage of a brief period of amnesty declared by the English at the end of the war, Printer was allowed to resume his position at the Cambridge Press only by bringing with him “som of the enemies heads” on his return.<sup>109</sup> Any further act of disloyalty, such as writing an account of the war sympathetic with Philip’s cause, would surely have put Printer in great danger and would most likely have resulted in his execution. Moreover, while setting the type for such works as Increase Mather’s *Brief History of the Warr with the Indians*, Printer probably learned quickly that his own version of that same story would not be a welcome addition to the press’s output.

With a diminished population, a dying language, and dwindling political power, it is no surprise that seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England Indians left few written records. This absence, unfortunately, makes it impossible for us to resolve the question of whether the acquisition of literacy affected how they thought about their history. We simply do not know enough about Indians such as John Sassamon to fully answer that question. But his story can suggest to us that refocusing our attention on the context of literacy—especially the conditions under which it is acquired and the uses to which it is put—can help us to understand such cultural encounters as that between English and Indians in seventeenth-century New England better. Sassamon’s is a small, highly allegorical tale, but it suggests that

the acquisition of literacy acting in tandem with conversion to Christianity can be a dangerous, even fatal combination.

But do dead men nonetheless sometimes tell tales? Cotton Mather believed they did. Looking back at Sassamon's death nearly thirty years after the fact, Mather claimed that Sassamon's dead body had issued a message to the Plymouth Court during the murder trial. When one of the accused Indians approached the decaying body, it began "a bleeding afresh, as if it had been newly been slain; . . . albeit he had been deceased and interred for a considerable while before."<sup>10</sup> This providential act of God, Mather believed, demonstrated the guilt of the accused. It is strange irony that to Mather, one of America's earliest and most prolific historians, John Sassamon wrote his story, not with words, but with his very blood. This irony was not entirely lost on the colonists themselves, one of whom remarked that, through the wounds he inflicted on English bodies, the war was Philip's only chance to be "found in print now drawing [hi]s own reportt in blud not Ink."<sup>11</sup>

### NOTES

1. Ives Goddard, "Eastern Algonquian Languages," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C., 1978), 15:70–77.

2. Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge, 1968), 34. See also M. I. Finley, "Myth, Memory, and History," *History and Theory* 4 (1965): 281–302; and Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982).

3. Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Cambridge, 1990); also Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, 1983); and Robert Borofsky, *Making History: Pukapukan and Anthropological Constructions of Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1987).

4. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985); and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978). On popular perceptions of history, see David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).

5. For a discussion of this convergence of anthropological and historical theory, see Rappaport, *Politics of Memory*, 10–14.

6. As Brian Street has argued, "faith in the power and qualities of literacy is itself socially learnt and is not an adequate tool with which to embark on a description of its practice" (Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* [London, 1984], 1). See also Harvey Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987); and Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford, 1988).

7. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*.
8. Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York, 1987), 3–34.
9. Increase Mather, *Diary of Increase Mather, March 1675–December 1676*, ed. Samuel Green (Cambridge, Mass., 1900), 43.
10. It is important to note that while colonial historians have recently become interested in the “uses of literacy” in Puritan New England, these studies have focused primarily on how English men and women read. David Hall, “The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600–1850,” in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William Joyce, et al. (Worcester, Mass., 1983), 1–45. Research on native literacy has been conducted by anthropologists, most notably Kathleen Bragdon, whose dissertation, “‘Another Tongue Brought In’: An Ethnohistorical Study of Native Writings in Massachusetts” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1981), is superceded only by the impressive volumes of *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, ed. Ives Goddard and Kathleen Bragdon (Philadelphia, 1988).
11. William Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England*. . . (1677; Albany, 1862), 61.
12. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, the History of New England* (1702; Hartford, 1855), 559–60.
13. John Easton, “A Relacion of the Indyan Warre, by Mr. Easton, of Roade Isl., 1675,” in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675–1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York, 1913), 7.
14. David Pulsier, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England* (1861; New York, 1968), 5:167–68 (hereafter cited as *PCR*). Easton relates an Indian version of the story that claims that Patuckson had been bribed and that Philip’s men were actually framed for a murder that was never committed since Sassamon had actually drowned. From the evidence available, it is probably impossible to determine with certainty whether Sassamon was murdered and by whom. Although most of the surviving clues indicate a violent death, we must remember that these are clues recorded by the English. Nonetheless, my strong suspicion is that Sassamon was in fact murdered, especially given that no water issued from his mouth when he was pulled from the pond and that bruises found on his neck indicated strangulation. As Increase Mather reported:
- The Governour of Plymouth ordered the Constable of Middlebury . . . to cause John Sausamans body to be taken up again, and to empanel a Jury as a Coroners Inquest, to make enquiry how he came by his death: And they found he had been murdered, for his neck was broken by twisting of his head round, which is the way the Indians some times use when they practice murther; also, his head was extreemly swollen, and his Body was wounded in several parts of it, and when it was first taken out of the pond, no water issued out of it, which argued that the Body was not drowned, but dead before it came into the water. (Increase Mather, *A Relation of the Troubles which Have hapned in New-England* [Boston, 1677], 74–75)
15. Att this Court three natiues were araigned, viz, Tobias, & Wampapaum, and Mattushamama, for that being acused, that they did with joynt consent, vpon the 29 of January, anno 1674, att a place called Assowamsett Pond, wilfully and of sett purpose, and of mallice fore thought, and by force of armes, murder John Sassamon, an other Indian, by laying violent hands on him and striking him, or twisting his necke, vntill hee was dead; and to hide and conceale this their said murder, att the time and place aforesaid, did cast his dead body through a hole of the icyce into the said pond. (*PCR*, 5:167)
16. Roger Williams to John Winthrop, 25 June 1675, Roger Williams Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Daniel Gookin also re-

marked that “Philip was vehemently suspected to be the contriver of this murder, though executed by others” (Daniel Gookin, “An Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in New England in the Years 1675, 1676, 1677,” *Collections of the American Antiquarian Society* 2 [1836]: 440).

17. *PCR*, 5:167. Actually, Tobias and Mattashunnamo were hanged on June 8, but Wampapaquan was either reprieved “on some considerations” or the rope by which he was hanged unexpectedly broke. In any event, he was “afterwards shott to death within the said month.” Some reports indicate that Wampapaquan confessed after the rope broke. Cotton Mather, for instance, wrote that “though they were all successively turned off the ladder at the gallows, utterly denying the fact, yet the last of them happening to break or slip the rope did, before going off the ladder again, confess to that the other Indians did really murder John Sausaman, and that he himself, though no actor in it, yet a looker on” (C. Mather, *Magnalia*, 559–60).

18. On the extent and magnitude of the destruction of King Philip’s War, see Douglas Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip’s War* (New York, 1958).

19. Not inappropriately, the single article on Sassamon is entitled, “The Death of John Sassamon.” See James P. Ronda and Jeanne Ronda, “The Death of John Sassamon: An Exploration in Writing New England Indian History,” *American Indian Quarterly* 1 (summer 1974): 91–102. This article analyzes the inconsistencies among the various versions of the story of Sassamon’s death.

20. *PCR*, 10:363.

21. Nathaniel Saltonstall, *A Continuation of the State of New England*. . . (1676), in *Narratives of the Indian Wars*, 54–55.

22. Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians*. . . (1676; Albany, 1862), 49.

23. Easton, “Relacion,” 5.

24. Mather, *Brief History*, 48–49.

25. Nathaniel Saltonstall, *The Present State of New-England with Respect to the Indian War*. . . (1675), in *Narratives of the Indian Wars*, 24–25.

26. Easton, “Relacion,” 7. This “will,” if it existed, was more likely a treaty or a land deed.

27. Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (New York, 1982), see especially 176 on the English settlers’ reception at Dorchester.

28. C. Mather, *Magnalia*, 559–60.

29. I. Mather, *Relation of the Troubles*, 74 (emphasis added).

30. Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 191.

31. *New England’s First Fruits* (1643), in Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), 423.

32. My guess is that Sassamon was in his mid-teen years when he participated in the Pequot War. In 1673, Sassamon had at least one daughter who was grown and married, and I would estimate he was in his mid-fifties the year he died. This estimate is not inconsistent with Samuel Eliot Morison’s claim that Sassamon was “a man of forty-five to fifty years old” by 1670 (Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* [Cambridge, Mass., 1936], 353).

33. Describing the group of Indian captives he was sending to Massachusetts, Captain Israel Stoughton wrote to the governor of the colony in 1637, “there is one . . . that is the fairest and largest that I saw amongst [the group of some 50 captives], to whom I have given a coate to cloathe her. It is my desire to have her for a servant. . . . There is a little squaw that steward Culacut desireth, to whom he hath given a coate. . . .

Sosomon, the Indian, desireth a young little squaw, which I know not" (Samuel Drake, *The Book of the Indians of North America: Biography and History of the Indians of North America*, 5th ed. [Boston, 1837], 2:107). John Underhill, *News from America; or, A New and Experimentall Discoverie of New England* (1638), in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 3d series, 6 (1837): 9.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Sr., 20 Aug. 1637; and Williams to Winthrop, 30 June 1637 and 9 and 12 Sept. 1637 all in *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, ed. Glenn W. LaFantasie (Providence, R.I., 1988), 113, 88, 119, 121. Although the editors claim that "it is doubtful that this Indian was John Sassamon," I have found no evidence to contradict my theory about Sassamon's age (see note 32). On Williams' hosting Stoughton and his troops, see Roger Williams to Major John Mason, 22 June 1670, in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st series, 1 (1792): 277.

36. Sassamon may later have been present at a treaty signing in Boston in 1645 when "Serjeant Callicutt & an Indian his man being present" (*PCR*, 9:49).

37. Cotton Mather, *The Life and Death of the Renown'd Mr. John Eliot*. . . (London, 1691).

38. John Wilson, "The Day Breaking, if not the Sun-Rising of the Gospell with the Indians in New England" (1647); in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 3d series, 4 (1834): 5.

39. William Wood, *New England's Prospect* (1634; Amherst, Mass., 1977), 109–10. On Wood's linguistic work, see George F. Aubin, "Towards the Linguistic History of an Algonquian Dialect: Observations on the Wood Vocabulary," *Papers of the Ninth Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, 1978), 127–37.

40. Kathleen Bragdon, "Linguistic Acculturation in Massachusetts: 1663–1771," *Papers of the Twelfth Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, 1981), 121–32; Ives Goddard, "Some Early Examples of American Indian Pidgin English from New England," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 43 (Jan. 1977): 37–41; Ives Goddard, "A Further Note on Pidgin English," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 44 (Jan. 1978): 73.

41. Roger Williams, *A Key to the Language of America; or An Help to the Language of the Natives in that part of America called New-England* (1643), in *Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society* 1 (1827): 17–166.

42. C. Mather's *John Eliot*, is only the first in a long hagiographic tradition in which Eliot is revered by evangelicals and linguists alike. See, for example, Stephen A. Guice, "Early New England Missionary Linguistics," *Papers in the History of Linguistics*, ed. Hans Aarsleff, Louis G. Kelly, et al. (Amsterdam, 1987): 223–32. For a useful evaluation of the contributions of Wood, Williams, and Eliot, see William Cowan, "Native Languages of North America: The European Response," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 1 (1974): 3–10.

43. Guice, "Early New England Missionary Linguistics," 223–24, 228–29. James Constance Pilling remains the authority on works published in the Massachusetts and other Algonquian languages. Pilling, *Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages* (Washington, D.C., 1891). See also J. Hammond Trumbull, "The Indian Tongue and Its Literature as Fashioned by Eliot and Others," *The Memorial History of Boston . . . , 1630–1880*, ed. Justin Winsor (Boston, 1880), 1:465–80.

44. Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (Jan. 1974): 43; Margaret Connell Szasz, *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607–1783* (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 1988), 114–15.

45. Hubbard, *Narrative*, 60; I. Mather, *Brief History*, 49; Saltonstall, *Continuation*, 54–55; “Rev. John Eliot’s Records of the First Church in Roxbury, Mass.,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 33 (July 1879), 297.

46. John Eliot, *The Indian Grammar Begun*. . . (Cambridge, Mass., 1666), 66. See also William Wallace Tooker, *John Eliot’s First Indian Teacher and Interpreter, Cockenoe-de-Long Island* (New York, 1896), 11. See also Szasz, *Indian Education*, 111–13.

47. Tooker, *John Eliot’s First Indian Teacher*, 18. See also 54; one of Cockenoe’s last entries in the historical record is from signing a petition during King Philip’s War, as counselor to a Long Island sachem, begging for the English to return their guns (taken during the war). The request was denied.

48. *New England’s First Fruits*, 423.

49. Hubbard, *Narrative*, 60.

50. In 1649, Eliot recorded giving five pounds to the schoolmaster of Dorchester where “the Children of those Indians that lived thereabout went, with a like good successe, if not better, because the children were bigger and more capable.” Eliot himself visited the Dorchester school: “I take my constant course of catechising them every Lecture day” (John Eliot, 13 Nov. 1649 in Edward Winslow, “Glorious Progress of the Gospel,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 3d series, 4 [1834], 88).

51. Eliot, *Indian Grammar*, 4, 6.

52. See David Murray who uses Eliot as a case study “to represent a characteristic white approach, which is to emphasize translation as an issue only when whites choose, or are forced, to do it, and to ignore it otherwise. Apart from the representation of speeches and oratory. . . . In other words they are doing something culturally more sophisticated than the whites can manage, but it is being used as evidence of their lack of civilization” (David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* [London, 1991], 7–8).

53. Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, eds., *John Eliot’s Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction* (Westport, Conn., 1980), 36.

54. Samuel G. Drake, *Biography and History of the Indians of North America from its First Discovery* (Boston, 1851), 178.

55. On Natick, see Sarah Jacobs, *Nonantum and Natick* (Boston, 1853); Daniel Mandell, “‘To Live More Like my Christian English Neighbors’: Natick Indians in the Eighteenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 48 (Oct. 1991): 552–79; Harold W. Van Lonkhuizen, “A Reappraisal of the Praying Indians: Acculturation, Conversion, and Identity at Natick, Massachusetts, 1646–1730,” *New England Quarterly* 63 (Sept. 1990): 396–428. On praying Indians more generally, see Salisbury, “Red Puritans”; James P. Ronda, “Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha’s Vineyard,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 38 (July 1981): 369–94; James P. Ronda, “‘We Are Well As We Are’: An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (Jan. 1977): 66–82; Robert James Naeher, “Dialogue in the Wilderness: John Eliot and the Indian Exploration of Puritanism as a Source of Meaning, Comfort, and Ethnic Survival,” *New England Quarterly* 62 (Sept. 1989): 346–68; Elise M. Brenner, “To Pray or to Be Prey: That is the Question: Strategies for Cultural Autonomy of Massachusetts Praying Town Indians,” *Ethnohistory* 27 (spring 1980): 135–52; Kenneth M. Morrison, “‘That Art of Coyning Christians’: John Eliot and the Praying Indians of Massachusetts,” *Ethnohistory* 21 (winter 1974): 77–92.

56. John Eliot, “Letters of the Rev. John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 36 (July 1882): 298.

57. John Eliot, *Strength out of Weakness; or, A Glorious Manifestation of the further*



*Progress of the Gospel among the Indians in New-England* (1652), in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 3d series, 4 (1834): 168.

58. 15 Sept. 1656, accounts of the New England Company in *PCR*, 10:167.

59. Gookin, "Historical Collections," 183.

60. Eliot, *Indian Dialogues*, 59.

61. Eliot, *Strength out of Weakness*, 169–70.

62. James Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1988), 86–99.

63. John Eliot, "An Account of Indian Churches in New-England, in a letter written in A.D. 1673," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st series, 10 (1809): 127.

64. This survey of literacy rates can be found in a letter from Richard Bourne to Daniel Gookin, dated 1 Sept. 1664 and reprinted in Gookin's "Historical Collections," 197–98.

65. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York, 1974).

66. Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, 18–20.

67. In the college steward's accounts for 1653 there is an entry under the debits of John Eliot, Jr., which reads, "By Sasaman" in the amount of 7s 7d 1q. (*Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 31 [1935]: 150). On Sassamon at Harvard, see Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 352–53. On Indian students at Harvard, see Walter T. Meserve, "English Works of Seventeenth-Century Indians," *American Quarterly* 8 (fall 1956): 264–76.

68. As Morison derisively writes:

Therein, it was hoped, Indian youths might acquire a university education, which (through some obscure workings of the academic mind) was confidently expected to qualify them as teachers and converters of their pagan brethren. Although the failure of this enterprise was so complete as to raise among modern readers the suspicion that it was merely a blind to get a new building for Harvard College, there is no reason to suppose it to have been anything but straightforward and sincere. (Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 341)

Subsequent scholars have disagreed with Morison's defense of Harvard's intentions. Szasz has a more positive interpretation of Indian education, but most scholars follow Neal Salisbury's lead in arguing that formal education was a last resort of impoverished Indians. Bobby Wright, for example, argues that "only when war and disease had disintegrated tribal integrity and left Indian communities vulnerable to English domination did Indians embrace Christianity and European culture" (Bobby Wright, "'For the Children of the Infidels'?: American Indian Education in Colonial Colleges," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12 [1988]: 2). See also Szasz, *Indian Education*, esp. 126–28.

69. Letter of John Eliot, 8 July 1649, in Henry Whitfield, *The Light appearing more and more towards the perfect Day*. . . . (1651), in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 3d series, 4 (1834): 121.

70. John Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University* (Cambridge, Mass., 1873), 1.

71. *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England* (1655), in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 3d series, 4 (1834): 274 (emphasis added).

72. We can eliminate two other praying Indians who would otherwise seem likely candidates—Cockenoe had abandoned Eliot at least five years earlier, and the Natick schoolmaster Monequassum was ill at the time of examination (and would soon die). Job Nesuton, another Natick schoolmaster, could have participated in the scandal, but

he, unlike Sassamon, seems to have been always humble and loyal to Eliot (*A Late and Further Manifestation*, 261–87).

73. *Early Records of the Town of Providence* (Providence, R.I., 1892), 5:283. The treaty is dated Providence, 1, 12, 1661/2. Alexander signed with a mark.

74. Alexander died while being brought to be interrogated by the English, even though he claimed he was too ill to travel; the rumor was that he may have been poisoned by the English or treated harshly in the journey. There is no way of knowing whether Sassamon was with Alexander on this fateful journey, though it seems likely.

75. *PCR*, 4:25–26.

76. Hubbard, *Narrative*, 60.

77. Although I have not found the originals, nineteenth-century historian Samuel Gardner Drake claims to have seen documents indicating that Sassamon worked for Philip in 1664 and 1665: “When Philip and Wootonekanuske his wife, sold, in 1664, Mattapoissett to William Brenton, Sassamon was a witness and interpreter. The same year he was Philip’s agent ‘in settling the bounds of Acushenok, Coaksett, and places adjacent.’ Again, in 1665, he witnessed the receipt of £10 paid to Philip on account of settling the bounds the year before” (Drake, *Book of the Indians*, 3:10).

78. *PCR*, 12:237.

79. C. Mather, *Magnalia*, 559–60.

80. Gookin, “Historical Collections,” 200.

81. C. Mather, *Magnalia*, 514.

82. *PCR*, 10:383.

83. “Instructions from the Church at Natick to William and Anthony,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st series, 6 (1779): 201–203. Eliot may even have sent Sassamon to fetch Philip to Boston; in a letter dated 1 Sept. 1671, a Taunton man complains that his messengers could get no positive answer about Philip’s coming to Plymouth, because Mr. Eliot had sent for him to Boston, “which messenger [Sassamon; or, here spelled “Sausiman”] . . . told them that his message was to desire Philip to be at Punkapoge the last day of this week, and at Boston the Tuesday following” (“James Walker’s Letter to Governor Prince,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st series, 6 [1799] 197–98).

84. Eliot, *Indian Dialogues*, 61.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *PCR*, 12:230. On 11 Mar. 1673–4 “old Tuspaquin and William Watuspaquin” allotted Felix, John Sassamon’s son-in-law, fifty-eight and a half acres in Assowamsett. The same year, “old Watuspaquin” granted “John Sassamon; allies Wussasoman twenty seauen acres of land for a home lott; att Assowamsett Necke,” which Sassamon in turn deeded to his daughter and son-in-law: “This abouesaid land John Sassamon aboue Named Gaue vnto his son in law ffelix, in Marriage with his daughter Betty, as appeers by a line or two rudely written; by the said John Sassamons owne hand but onely witnessed by the said old Watuspaquen.”

87. I. Mather, *Brief History*, 49–50.

88. Gookin, “Historical Account,” 440.

89. Saltonstall, *Present State*, 24–25.

90. Easton, “Relacion,” 10. One historian has recently argued that, from the natives’ perspective, Christianity was a “new cult” that “created an alternate social structure, essentially a new path to power within and among bands,” and that “threatened some of the most basic premises of native society” (Lonkhuyzen, “Reappraisal,” 404, 419–21).

91. Easton, “Relacion,” 7.

92. C. Mather, *Magnalia*, 559–60.

93. Ibid.
94. Gookin, "Historical Account"; Salisbury, "Red Puritans."
95. Grafton, Massachusetts Local Records, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. When Tachupouillan was asked whether he had not assisted the enemy in the wars, he answered, "I never did join with them against the English. Indeed they often solicited me, but I utterly denied & refused it. I thought within myself it is better to die than to fight the church of Christ."
96. Hubbard, *Narrative*, 61.
97. Gookin, "Historical Account"; Salisbury, "Red Puritans."
98. Salisbury, "Red Puritans," 53.
99. In 1698, the building was torn down and the press moved to a new location (Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 359).
100. From the journal of Jasper Danckaerts and Peter Sluyter, Dutch traders, who related the story of their calling on John Eliot (c. 1679); see Jasper Danckaerts, *Journal of a voyage to New York* (Brooklyn, 1867), 383.
101. Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, 10–11, 20.
102. Quoted in Nehemiah Adams, *The Life of John Eliot* (Boston, 1847), 242. In this century, Samuel Eliot Morison would call the Indian Library "the most notable—and least useful—production of the press in this period" (Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 345).
103. Lonkhuyzen, "Reappraisal," 404, 419–21.
104. Morison, *Founding of Harvard College*, 161–62; and Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 342–43.
105. "Rev. John Eliot's Records of the First Church," 297.
106. Ibid., 415.
107. Gookin, "Historical Account," 55.
108. In 1836, it was rediscovered and published in the *Collections of the American Antiquarian Society* 2 (1836).
109. Massachusetts Council to Daniel Gookin, 3 July 1676, *Massachusetts Archives, 1662–1799* (microform), 30:207.
110. C. Mather, *Magnalia*, 559–60.
111. Diane Bornstein, ed., "Captan Perse and his coragios Company by Philip Walker," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* 83 (1973): 91.