The Sovereignty of Transmotion in a State of Exception: Lessons from the Internment of ‘Praying Indians’ on Deer Island, Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1675-1676

Deborah L. Madsen
University of Geneva
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/03/tm.113
Keywords: Metacom’s War, American Exceptionalism, sovereignty, rhetoric, internment

ABSTRACT

Settler colonialism is a structure rather than an event, according to recent theorists such as Patrick Wolfe, a process marked by the clearing of colonial space through the “logic of elimination”: the separation, dispossession, removal, and disappearance of indigenous peoples from their homelands. Metacom’s War, a forcible Christianization, and the loss of tribal jurisdiction. These grievances represent two major dynamics of later US settler colonialism: dispossession and coercive acculturation. However, at the outset of hostilities, the settler colonies employed a further strategy of Native confinement, culminating in the internment of so-called “Praying Indians” on Deer Island in Boston Harbor. Atrocities committed against Christian Indians have a special resonance: as subjects of the English Crown, a fact acknowledged by Metacom in his negotiations with Easton, these “friendly” Natives should have enjoyed the protections accorded English subjects. The denial of such protections through the suspension of English sovereign law suggests that this internment represents an instance of Giorgio Agamben’s “state of exception.” The legacy of this history is twofold: first, insight into the discursive workings of settler colonialism and, secondly, the possibilities for indigenous resistance highlighted by Vizenor’s concept of “transmotion,” “that sense of native motion and... active presence, [which] is sui generis sovereignty” (Fugitive Poses).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Deborah L. Madsen, University of Geneva
Professor of American Studies
Department of English
University of Geneva

PUBLISHED
2015-04-13

HOW TO CITE


ISSUE

Vol 1 No 1 (2015)

SECTION

Articles

Copyright (c) 2015 Deborah Madsen

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Authors who publish with this journal agree to the following terms:

a. Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.

b. Authors are able to enter into separate, additional contractual arrangements for the non-exclusive distribution of the journal’s published version of the work (e.g., post it to an institutional repository or publish it in a book), with an acknowledgement of its initial publication in this journal.

c. Authors are permitted and encouraged to post their work online (e.g., in institutional repositories or on their websites) prior to and during the submission process, as it can lead to productive exchanges, as well as earlier and greater citation of published work (See The Effect of Open Access).