

# Wampanoag Homeland

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The original territory of the Wampanoag Nation spanned what is now southeastern Massachusetts and eastern Rhode Island. The northern boundary was approximately at Marshfield and Pembroke, Massachusetts, going west toward Plainville at the corner of present-day Rhode Island. The western boundary followed the state line between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but included the eastern parts of Providence; also Tiverton, Little Compton, and Aquidneck Island (the eastern side of Narragansett Bay). To the south and east the territory included Cape Cod, the Islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Islands.

Within this area, there were 69 Wampanoag villages that ranged in size from one or two hundred people up to two thousand. The size of a village and the structure of life was purposefully based on what a given land area could support. Each village had sufficient area to contain the permanent winter dwelling area where everyone lived together, the individual family summer planting areas, and the hunting, fishing and gathering (food and materials) areas. Often the latter was shared by one or more villages. People had the understanding, the knowledge and the skill to fulfill all of their needs from the natural world in a manner that not only created a successful culture, but was also both respectful and highly sustainable.

The word Homeland implies much more than the place where people lived (or live). It speaks of the attitude toward the land and the relationship with it. Hunting, fishing, or farming, for example, were not just activities that were done *on* the land, but were rather interactions with it, in the same sense that one would interact with a beloved relative. The Wampanoag language conceptualizes this attitude in words that refer to the speaker (or others) and the earth as one being, or parts of one being.

## Early History of Colonization

While the history of this country is purported to be one of the founding of the greatest nation on Earth, there are volumes, generations, decades and centuries of events, circumstances, occurrences, and other realities that have been omitted, trivialized, misrepresented or otherwise distorted. Many people are not aware of this, or upon learning of it, are not able to accept it. Some of these events are indeed extremely difficult to accept.

Everyone knows the story of the brave and hardy Pilgrims that left England to flee religious persecution, suffered many hardships, but persevered to arrive in the “New World” and create a new nation of freedom and justice for all. Everyone in America learns very early the stories of Squanto, the friendly Indian, and the “First Thanksgiving,” after which everyone, Pilgrims and Indians, lived in peace and happily ever after. For generations of children, this was *all* they learned of the first interactions with the indigenous peoples of this land, particularly of the 17th-century time period.

Unfortunately, while there are obviously elements of truth to these stories, they are largely mythological. They are mythological because they have been altered to create a different “history” than the events that actually happened. When such alterations occur, it is for a purpose. The purpose is to perpetuate all the myths as truths, enabling the victors and the oppressed to retain their respective positions.



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Here are a few examples of things that have been largely omitted from the telling of history, in the interest of “peace,” and “happily ever after”:

There was the European-originated plague of 1616–1618 that swept down the coast from Maine and affected four indigenous nations, killing 50% – 90% of the Wampanoag in the areas that it struck. William Bradford referred to this “clearing of the land for English settlement” as “God’s providence.” While this plague is widely thought by some to be inadvertent, it did set the precedent for dealing with Native peoples across this country, as many were purposely given small-pox infected blankets for the express purpose of “clearing” the land for white settlement.

Also at this time, Native people along the eastern seaboard were being kidnapped by European sea captains. People were whisked away from home and family never to be seen again, and were either exhibited as novelties or sold into slavery in Spain or England.

Most people are very aware of African slavery in this country, but far, far fewer are aware of the existence of the Native counterpart that trafficked in at least an equal numbers of human beings.

Native people were subjected to religious conversion as the English perceived that we either had no religion or worshipped the devil.

Universities such as Harvard and Dartmouth were founded as Indian Schools “to reduce to civilitie” primarily young Native men. Curricula intended to teach Wampanoag people English were structured to also give messages of Native inferiority. One result was that by the late 19th century, the Wampanoag language was almost lost as adults chose not to teach their youngsters so they wouldn’t be laughed at or humiliated by others.

Laws were instituted by the colonial government that were designed to control every facet of Native life. This included dress and housing, consumption of alcohol, ownership of guns, hunting and fishing, land transactions, performing traditional religious or healing ceremonies, indebtedness and indentured servitude.

The intent of all this was to change Native peoples from being who they were created to be, and to make them as the English.

What is it that creates the thinking in one group of people that they have the right to control other nations and force them to be other than they are?

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