

Patuxet Ancestors

Over the last four centuries, in the telling of the Pilgrim story, the Wampanoag have been almost completely left out. The parts that have been left in (Squanto, Treaty, First Thanksgiving) are fraught with error and distortion. This is of extreme importance as this type of omission and distortion is what creates the historical erasure of a people. The Wampanoag are part of the “Pilgrim story” in that the English did land and settle in Wampanoag territory. While it is true that Patuxet (Wampanoag name of the village that became Plymouth) and other villages along the coast were devastated by the plague of 1616-1618, many other Wampanoag villages were not, and there were still tens of thousands of Wampanoag people – contrary to the myth that everyone was wiped out. So part of the Pilgrim story is the story of what was going on with the Wampanoag and other Native people in what is now southern or northern New England around the time of English settlement; of English interactions with the Wampanoag; the changes that the coming of the English brought to the Wampanoag; and how the Wampanoag reacted to all of this.

The “Story of the Pilgrims” coming here, settling, and beginning a new nation is not the whole story of this time period of American history. It is incomplete without the pieces involving all the (Native) people they came into contact with.

The last that is usually heard about the Wampanoag is King Philip’s War of 1675-1676. This is the point in time where the Wampanoag people fall off the side of the Earth – not because we died out, went away, or disappeared as myth (erroneous but popular history) would have it, but because that is the history that has been written. Wampanoag people live with this fact everyday, because many people have never heard our name; and are completely unfamiliar with this part of the early colonial history because it is not told.

Why are there such distortions and omissions in the telling of the history? What purpose does this serve? Why do the stereotypes of the Wampanoag (or any other peoples) perpetuate? What is the purpose? Distortions, omissions, and stereotypes allow all the myths and inaccuracies of history to continue, which in turn has its own set of consequences in all the inequalities that exist in today’s society.



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