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Colonialism Through the Fallacies of Plymouth Colony: Understanding Cultural Hegemony in an Era of Indigenous Reparations

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In his time as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill underscored the profound impact wielded by victors on historical narratives, thereby elucidating the stark reality that history reflects the viewpoint of winners.¹ Despite his tenure postdating the Pilgrims' arrival in 1620, Churchill's views are applicable to centuries of English coloniality in America. The course of nations is influenced by their history, therefore, dismissing the past would be regrettable.

Benedict Anderson, author of *Imagined Communities*, states that "if nationalness has about it an aura of fatality, it is nonetheless a fatality embedded in history."² He contrasts nationalism's ties to historical context with racism's purity concerns, noting, "nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contamination."³ In doing so, he argues that bias is promoted through cultural hegemony. English coloniality utilized racist undertones towards Indigenous communities that condoned systematic marginalization in the New World. In embodying colonialist perspectives, imagined communities adopt racist frameworks to personify the dominance of racist identities. Consistent with this concept, America has formed its legacy into

a racist and manipulative narrative, fearing the dilution of its historical perspective to be an incriminating truth told.

Since Plymouth, Massachusetts, became a historic district in 1973, it has enabled a biased view of its early settlers that overshadows the experiences of Indigenous communities.⁴ This manufactured nationalism, evident in colonial narratives of the First Thanksgiving in 1621, has contributed to a national identity steeped in racism. This legacy persists today, exemplified by instances of Confederate recidivism such as the January 6, 2021, Insurrection and the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women.⁵ The uprising, sparked by Donald Trump's defeat in the 2020 election, underscores deep-seated "racism and a fear of growing diversity in the United States," as explained in Austin-Hillery and Strange's response piece.⁶ The riot presented nooses and racial epithets, symbolizing the persistent yearning

¹ Phelan, Matthew. "History Is Written by the Victors' Was Not Written by the Victors." *Slate Magazine*. Last modified November 8, 2019. Accessed April 25, 2024. <https://slate.com/culture/2019/11/history-is-written-by-the-victors-quote-origin.html>.

² Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, 145. (New York: Schocken, 1982.)

³ Anderson, 149.

⁴ The Wampanoag, alternatively known as Wôpanâak, are an Indigenous people of the Northeastern Woodlands. They are situated in southeastern Massachusetts and are native to eastern Rhode Island. Their historical lands encompassed Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket islands.

⁵ Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis." *Bureau of Indian Affairs*. Accessed November 17, 2024. <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>.

⁶ Nicole Austin-Hillery and Victoria Strang. "Racism's Prominent Role in January 6 US Capitol Attack." *Human Rights Watch*. Last modified January 10, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/05/racisms-prominent-role-january-6-us-capitol-attack>.

for the continuation of a racial hierarchy and exposing America's antiquated national identity point blank. Amid ongoing Confederate nostalgia, attempts to rewrite history from marginalized perspectives have emerged in opposition.

In simultaneous contemporary discourse, efforts such as the renaming of the Washington Redskins to the Washington Football Club and the removal of numerous Confederate statues across the United States have aimed at fostering a nuanced understanding of historical memory. These initiatives are highlighted by Mitch Landrieu's believed "difference between remembrance of history and reverence of it" during a period marked by a concerted effort to incorporate marginalized perspectives.⁷ America's enduring manipulation of history raises questions about the lack of attention given to the memorialization of Plymouth Colony. Despite this, curricula and memorials related to American colonization have seen minimal alteration, maintaining the status quo. The presence of Plymouth Colony as an antiquated symbol of America's national identity emphasizes a historical narrative in need of more diverse perspectives. As historians work to rewrite this narrative, acknowledging the complex realities of Plymouth Colony, the failure to fully accept these truths perpetuates the marginalization of Indigenous perspectives. Until the nation collectively embraces the full historical truth of Plymouth Colony, sites like Plymouth will continue to perpetuate the erasure of Indigenous voices and experiences.

With an annual influx of over one million visitors, Plymouth has continuously captivated impressionable tourists since its establishment centuries ago as a former colony.⁸ Plymouth has emerged as a prominent tourist destination, attracting visitors from diverse geographical locations in North America and Europe. Its historical significance has strengthened the claim that Plymouth is the birthplace of the globally acknowledged leading nation. Despite the rhetoric praising the United States for its diverse culture, strong economy, technological prog-

ress, and geographical blessings, there remains a noticeable residue of an outdated national identity that masks deeper internal conflicts.⁹ As the realities of America's past come to light, instances emerge wherein historical accounts were manipulated to bolster a favorable national narrative.

The commemoration of Plymouth as an emblematic American icon neglects to interrogate the veracity underlying the arrival in New England, thus inherently sustaining the prejudiced colonial narrative of the Pilgrims. After their sixty-six-day voyage from England to America, the early settlers anchored their ships off Cape Cod, contrary to the widely circulated myth that they anchored off Plymouth. In the locality of Provincetown, to be precise, the Pilgrims commenced the cultivation of the land that had served as the ancestral home of the Wampanoag people for centuries. Over the course of five weeks, the Pilgrims maintained their anchorage off Cape Cod, during which time they exploited the available food supply. During their time on Cape Cod, in Bob Seay's words, "Pilgrims did not exactly make themselves welcome to the Native Americans" following their appropriation of Indigenous homes and desecration of numerous graves.¹⁰ The inherent abuse of Indigenous resources resulted in a brief skirmish in 1670 between the English and the Wampanoag people, manifesting the even deadlier King Philip's War 55 years later. Given imperial beliefs of the Pilgrims, unsurprising conflict quickly arose with the Indigenous people. The Pilgrims' Calvinist beliefs in predestination and visible sainthood shaped their interactions with Indigenous peoples by fostering a sense of religious superiority, driving their efforts to convert Native Americans to Christianity, and justifying their colonial mission as part of God's divine

⁷ "Mitch Landrieu's Speech on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans." *The New York Times*. Last modified May 23, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/opinion/mitch-landrieus-speech-transcript.html>.

⁸ "Plymouth Rock." See Plymouth Massachusetts. Accessed April 26, 2024. <https://seeplymouth.com/listing/plymouth-rock/>.

⁹ Hartig, Hannah. "Majority of Americans Say U.S. is One of the Greatest Countries in the World." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 14, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/29/majority-of-americans-say-us-is-one-of-the-greatest-countries-in-the-world/>.

¹⁰ Seay, Bob. "Here's Where In Massachusetts The Pilgrims First Landed In 1620 — And It Wasn't Plymouth." *WGBH*. Last modified November 12, 2020. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2020-11-11/heres-where-in-massachusetts-the-pilgrims-first-landed-in-1620-and-it-wasnt-plymouth>.

plan.¹¹ Though no physical harm befell either party, this incident accentuates the Pilgrims' subsequent, abbreviated voyage to Plymouth, during which they leveraged obscure colonial legal frameworks to intensify their exploitation of local resources.

Early settlers employed imperial legal principles to rationalize their domestic activities, yet neglected to address their biased interpretations regarding the scarcity of Indigenous life. It is not widely known that when the Pilgrims anchored off of Plymouth, there were no signs of active community life. In fact, upon anchoring off Plymouth, the Pilgrims encountered a conspicuous absence of perceivable human activity. Penned by Edward Winslow and William Bradford, *Mourt's Relation* delves extensively into the observation that there was a notable absence of human activity spanning "five or six miles," indicating that they encountered only remnants of past inhabitants.^{12, 13} During their explorations, discovered remains were determined to be considerably aged, providing clear evidence of the region's uninhabited status for an extended period. Although accounts of minimal signs of Indigenous habitation were significant, a widely held belief attributes the substantial decline in native populations to diseases introduced by European colonizers in the years leading up to the Mayflower's expedition.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the lack of habitation allowed the Pilgrims to begin establishing their settlements, which was legally justified by English law. The Enclosure Acts, renowned for their transformative impact on the English economy, facilitated the privatization of formerly com-

munal lands even away from the British Isles.¹⁵ Consequently, any land remaining unenclosed ceased to retain its status as communal property, thereby providing the Pilgrims with a legal basis to validate their establishment of Plymouth Colony.¹⁶ Despite initial successes, the Pilgrims soon discovered that numerous Indigenous communities still inhabited the surrounding region, underscoring the contentious nature of their settlement in Plymouth. Hence, the Pilgrims experienced a startling awakening, underscoring their profound integration into a broader world, primarily one shaped by Indigenous cultures.¹⁷ Furthermore, the continued reverence of Plymouth Rock perpetuates these inaccuracies about America's origins.

Many celebrate Plymouth as the birthplace of America, though it falls short considering that Plymouth Rock was not the actual landing site. The establishment of Plymouth Rock as a quintessential emblem of Americanism has fostered a skewed national identity with far-reaching consequences. Thomas Faunce formally founded the monument, yet his commemoration 121 years after its discovery merits skepticism. Faunce's father arrived in Plymouth Colony three years after the Mayflower's landing, fostering a close friendship with William Bradford.¹⁸ Despite lacking direct familial ties to a Mayflower passenger, Faunce grew up with survivors of the voyage, gaining first-hand exposure to their historic accounts. Throughout his life, Faunce nostalgically recounted a specific rock, allegedly marking the Pilgrims' initial landing site.

¹¹ The Pluralism Project, *First Encounters: Native Americans and Christians*, Harvard University, last modified August 15, 2020, <https://pluralism.org/first-encounters-native-americans-and-christians>, 2.

¹² Written between November of 1620 and November of 1621 by Edward Winslow and William Bradford, *Mourt's Relation* provides a comprehensive account of the events unfolding from the arrival of the Mayflower Pilgrims at Cape Cod in Provincetown Harbor, tracing their exploration endeavors and eventual establishment of Plymouth Colony.

¹³ Morton, George. *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*, George Morton, 1622, 1.

¹⁴ Marr, John, and John Cathey. "New Hypothesis for Cause of Epidemic Among Native Americans, New England, 1616–1619." *Journal of Infectious Diseases* 205, no. 6 (2012): 865–868. *PubMed Central (PMC)*. Last modified February 2012. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2957993/>.

¹⁵ The Enclosure Acts of England, spanning from the 16th to 19th centuries, authorized wealthy landowners to enclose common lands, altering rural landscapes and displacing small farmers and communities.

¹⁶ Fairlie, Simon. "A Short History of Enclosure in Britain." *The Land Magazine*. Last modified 2009. <https://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/articles/short-history-enclosure-britain>.

¹⁷ Wulf, Karin. "Why the Myths of Plymouth Dominate the American Imagination." *Smithsonian Magazine*. Last modified November 24, 2020. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-myths-plymouth-dominate-american-imagination-180976396/>.

¹⁸ Sargent, Mark. "Plymouth Rock and the Great Awakening." *Journal of American Studies* 22 (1988): 249–255. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27555007?seq=2>, 250

Despite the absence of written documentation validating its existence, Faunce cherished its significance. Upon learning of plans to obscure the rock, Faunce passionately advocated for its preservation, seeking to instill “the precious relics of our forefathers” as reverence among the community.¹⁹ In his memorialization, Faunce emphasized the rock’s symbolic significance as a cornerstone of American values.²⁰ These tributes often overlook the dark aspects of colonization, including the displacement of Indigenous peoples in both Plymouth and modern-day Cape Cod. Today, millions of visitors digest a simplified narrative of Plymouth Rock’s significance, reflecting broader tourism trends throughout the township.

As a consequence of initial protests in the 1970s, the United States established the National Day of Mourning. This observance directly addresses the discrepancies in the history of Plymouth Colony while also reflecting nationwide beliefs. The annual demonstration aims to educate the public about Native American history, highlighting the ongoing struggle to preserve their culture even in contemporary times. The holiday came to fruition amid tensions between Native Americans and government officials, in which Indigenous people grew tired of promoting a history that failed to adequately educate the public about the ongoing struggles of Indigenous communities.²¹ Although nationally recognized, the holiday specifically targeted the historical narratives of Plymouth Colony and the educational efforts of institutions like the Plimoth Patuxet Museum, prompting a reevaluation of their presentations. Three years after the inception of the National Day of Mourning, the Plimoth Patuxet Museum formally incorporated exhibits portraying the history of the Wampanoag people. The added exhibit, named the Historic Patuxet Homesite, features a traditional Wetu, traditional cooking areas, corn fields,

and canoe carving activities²². Although technically a positive step for the Plimoth Patuxet Museum, the addition of Wampanoag exhibits without revising the existing curriculum proved unhelpful to the goals of the National Day of Mourning, leading to further backlash in the area.

Recent urges to boycott, driven by Wampanoag concerns about the removal of Indigenous history at Plimoth Patuxet, reflect broader national movements advocating for Indigenous representation. These efforts have not yet resulted in significant and effective changes. Despite high historical participation from the Wampanoag Tribe in the cultivation of exhibits at the Plimoth Patuxet Museum, Indigenous employment numbers have severely dwindled following its alleged “erasure” of Indigenous history.²³ Although the Wampanoag tribes have been incredibly active in recent decades, there seems to be a stark contrast between the wishes of the tribe and the directive of the museum. Tia Pocknett, a former employee of the museum and current Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe member, emphasized the differences by stating that “they wanted to move in a way where they were making money... they wanted to be the Wampanoag Pilgrim Disney.”²⁴ A combination of ongoing protests, which have extended to numerous historic monuments in the Plymouth area, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a significant decline in tourism to the museum. In response, the museum has taken proactive

¹⁹ Jehle, Paul. “Thomas Faunce: ‘The Man Who Saved Plymouth Rock,’” *Plymouth Rock Foundation*, last modified February 19, 2020, <https://plymrock.org/thomas-faunce-the-man-who-saved-plymouth-rock/>.

²⁰ Jehle, “Thomas Faunce,” <https://plymrock.org/thomas-faunce-the-man-who-saved-plymouth-rock/>.

²¹ Hill, Jessica. “Not All Native Americans Celebrate Thanksgiving. Find Out Why.” *Cape Cod [MA] Times*. Last modified November 19, 2020. <https://www.capecodtimes.com/in-depth/news/2020/11/19/national-day-mourning-1970-coles-hill-plymouth-frank-james/6187076002/>.

²² “Historic Patuxet Homesite.” Plimoth Patuxet Museums. Last modified November 2, 2020. <https://plimoth.org/plan-your-visit/explore-our-sites/historic-patuxet>. A Wetu is a type of domed hut utilized by certain Native American tribes in the northeastern region, such as the Wampanoag. The Wetu served as shelter for families living near the wooded coast, often for seasonal or temporary purposes, facilitating hunting and fishing activities.

²³ Howard, Brooke L. “Native Americans Have Had Enough of This Pilgrim History Museum.” *The Daily Beast*. Last modified August 11, 2022. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/wampanoag-native-americans-blast-massachusetts-plimoth-patuxet-history-museum>.

²⁴ “Tribal Members Urge Boycott of ‘tone Deaf’ Plimoth Patuxet Museums — Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe.” Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. Last modified September 1, 2022. <https://mashpeewampanoagtribe-nsn.gov/2022-september-mit-tark-blog/2022/8/30/wampanoag-tribe-severs-ties-with-plimoth-patuxet-museums>.

measures to address the situation and restore its appeal, such as the alleged alteration of harmful dialogue within the museum.

While protests have shed light on the contemporary narrative of Indigenous people, it is evident that changes at the Plimoth Patuxet Museum actively strive for greater inclusivity. In June of 2020, the museum underwent a significant name change, transitioning from the culturally insensitive “Plymouth Plantation” to the more respectful “Plimoth Patuxet Museum.” While this change intended to promote sensitivity from museum curators, it unfortunately resulted in decreased support from native Wampanoags, who perceived the franchise’s actions as continuing to demonstrate tone-deafness.²⁵ Furthermore, in discussions with former educational coordinators, the museum and its guides have taken proactive steps to cease the use of culturally insensitive terms such as “savages.” The continued emphasis on historically biased primary sources within the museum’s educational materials, however, have alluded to a lack of devotion to change.²⁶ Finally, former museum officials have disclosed ongoing fundraising efforts for a multi-million-dollar Wampanoag exhibit building, aiming to establish a year-round contemporary exhibit and performance space that bridges past and present narratives. Despite extensive collaboration with native Wampanoag people to enhance Indigenous exhibits, the addition of educational content without a formal revision of the past curriculum creates a problematic dichotomy. While efforts to promote inclusivity among the Wampanoag Tribe are evident, it is crucial to recognize that inclusivity does not fully address the rewriting of

history that was requested, thus highlighting the juxtaposition between remembrance and reverence in the museum’s ongoing journey towards reconciliation.

Plimoth Patuxet Museum stands as a beacon of historical interpretation, offering a nuanced exploration of Plymouth Colony and Indigenous heritage. Its emphasis on colonial history, though, perpetuates biased narratives that reinforce perceptions of national identity. Throughout the museum, a myriad of opportunities for deepening historical understanding are available, yet conspicuous variations between the colonialist and Indigenous narratives within the exhibits create stark contrasts. While the Pilgrim exhibits enjoy consistent upkeep, maintaining a pristine appearance, the Wampanoag exhibits have regrettably experienced neglect and damage in the relatively brief period since their inclusion in the museum’s offerings.²⁷ Moreover, numerous museum staff members, particularly those who identify as native Wampanoag, have raised concerns about the inferior working conditions they face in comparison to their colleagues assigned to the Pilgrim exhibits. Former staff members, a significant portion of whom have since departed from their positions at the museum, have highlighted disparities in the presentation of living history portions. They assert that while the Pilgrim staff are accurately attired, no such traditional attire existed for the Indigenous exhibits, contributing to the perceived imbalance. The museum has recently encountered scrutiny due to its recruitment approach, which involves engaging various Native American communities to represent the Wampanoag Tribe in their exhibits. This practice has led to accusations of “treating different Native American tribes as a monolithic group,” prompting discussions about cultural authenticity and representation within the museum’s narrative framework.²⁸ While the primary reason for the departure of Indigenous staff members

²⁵ Associated Press. “Plimoth Plantation Changing Its Name to ‘Plimoth Patuxet,’ in Honor of Wampanoag Name for Region.” *Masslive*. Last modified July 11, 2020. <https://www.masslive.com/news/2020/07/plimoth-plantation-changing-its-name-to-plimoth-patuxet-in-honor-of-wampanoag-name-for-region.html>; Seay, Bob. “Here’s Where In Massachusetts The Pilgrims First Landed In 1620 — And It Wasn’t Plymouth.” *WGBH*. Last modified November 12, 2020. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2020-11-11/heres-where-in-massachusetts-the-pilgrims-first-landed-in-1620-and-it-wasnt-plymouth>.

²⁶ Zibrak, Arielle. “Back to Plimoth Plantation.” *The Millions*. Last modified March 2, 2023. <https://themillions.com/2023/03/back-to-plimoth-plantation.html>.

²⁷ Howard, Brooke L. “Native Americans Have Had Enough of This Pilgrim History Museum.” *The Daily Beast*. Last modified August 11, 2022. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/wampanoag-native-americans-blast-massachusetts-plimoth-patuxet-history-museum>.

²⁸ Howard, “Native Americans Have Had Enough,” <https://www.thedailybeast.com/wampanoag-native-americans-blast-massachusetts-plimoth-patuxet-history-museum>.

from the museum continues to be the pervasive bias and inadequate treatment they experienced, it is evident that both the tangible and online curriculum itself harbor inherent shortcomings that warrant critical examination.

While the lived history aspect of the Plimoth Patuxet Museum contributes significantly to the success of the historic site, accuracy became diluted by flaws in its training and education processes, resulting in biased representations of Indigenous people by staff members.²⁹ According to the official museum website, the goal of the organization since its opening is to foster “engaging experiences of history built on thorough research about the Indigenous and European people who met along Massachusetts’ historic shores of change in the 1600s.”³⁰ In discussions with an educational coordinator at the museum, they revealed that all guides undergo rigorous training before assuming their roles as historical narrators within the museum. The training regimen entails the studying of primary sources from the relevant historical period, requiring guides to interpret events through the perspectives presented in these sources. There are relatively few primary sources available for this era compared to other historical epochs, necessitating a deep dive into texts such as William Bradford’s journal, *Mourt’s Relation*, for insights into the period. Due to a lack of texts from this period, pieces containing outdated and derogatory terminology became relied upon by educators at Plimoth Patuxet:

Wednesday, the 15th of November, they were set ashore, and when they had ordered themselves in the order of a single file and marched about the space of a mile, by the sea they espied five or six people with a dog, coming towards them, who were savages, who when they saw them, ran into the wood and whistled the dog after them, etc. First they supposed them to be

Master Jones, the master, and some of his men, for they were ashore and knew of their coming, but after they knew them to be Indians they marched after them into the woods, lest other of the Indians should lie in ambush; but when the Indians saw our men following them, they ran away with might and main and our men turned out of the wood after them, for it was the way they intended to go, but they could not come near them.³¹

The writings of William Bradford hold significant prominence in the educational framework of the Plimoth Patuxet Museum, serving as foundational texts for crafting the narrative of the Pilgrims. In interpreting history, guides willingly embody the prevalent ignorance of the settlement era, including the limited awareness of the existence of the American West. Given the scarcity of Wampanoag perspectives in written historical records, the museum predominantly relies on primary sources authored by William Bradford and his contemporaries. This reliance on sources representing one side of the historical narrative, however, contributes to the perpetuation of a biased and potentially racist perspective throughout the lived history experience provided by the museum. While the museum acknowledges the scarcity of written Wampanoag sources, attributing it to their tradition of oral storytelling, it endeavors to present a narrative that portrays the Wampanoag people in a favorable light alongside the Pilgrims without substantiating evidence. In doing so, the museum inadvertently distorts the historical reality for impressionable children eager to learn about the founding of America.

The virtual curriculum developed by the Plimoth Patuxet Museum, notably the game titled *You are the Historian* propagates a troubling narrative that diminishes the challenges faced by the Wampanoag people in adapting to English settlerism.³² The game, tailored for fifth through eighth graders, aims to transport students to Patuxet, the pre-European homeland of the Wampanoag, immersing them in a narrative of cultural evolution

²⁹ The lived history model is an interpretive approach that seeks to immerse visitors in the historical experience through interactive demonstrations and authentic reenactments. At Plimoth Patuxet Museum, interpreters inhabit the roles of 17th-century English colonists and Indigenous peoples, offering insights into their daily lives, customs, and interactions.

³⁰ “Commemorating 400 Years, Reflecting On Our Mission.” Plimoth Patuxet Museums. Last modified July 6, 2020. <https://plimoth.org/news-press/commemorating-400-years-reflecting-on-our-mission>.

³¹ Mourt, 1.

³² *You Are the Historian* is a game authored by the Plimoth Patuxet Museum educational coordinators. The online game is structured as a dialogue between an instructor and a learner. All excerpts in this passage are lines from a predetermined script.

and resilience spanning 12,000 years.³³ Despite efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives by involving an alleged fifty percent of Wampanoag individuals in its creation, the game inadvertently downplays the challenges encountered by the Wampanoag people during the seventeenth century. Throughout the game, presented as a dialogue between a child and an expert, the use of exceedingly vague language to depict Wampanoag conditions effectively obscures the specificity of their struggles, while simultaneously equating their experiences to those of the Pilgrims:

The Wampanoag and the Pilgrims had very different experiences and ways of looking at the world. Many Wampanoag communities - including Patuxet and Pokanoket - struggled after years of encounters with Europeans and deadly sickness. Those who came on the Mayflower struggled too. They hoped for a better life in New England where they could own land and practice their religion, but it was not an easy life.

Both groups had to adapt to living with each other. This was probably hard because the Pilgrims and Wampanoag people had lived with their own unique cultures and traditions for so many years. But, The Pilgrims built English houses and brought farm animals so they could make Patuxet more like England, and that had a big impact on the Wampanoag way of life.

Archaeology shows that the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag lived here alongside each other for generations. Their relationships changed as the colony expanded. Wampanoag people changed the way they lived over time due to climate change, the creation of new types of tools, and the arrival of colonists.

I realized that the Pilgrims risked a lot to change how they lived and adapted to new people, ideas, and places. The Wampanoag also had to face challenges, take risks, and adapt to the Pilgrims

living in their homelands. I still like celebrating Thanksgiving with my family, and now I know the real story of Plymouth and Patuxet is not as simple as I thought.³⁴

Interestingly, “You are the Historian” omits any reference to the subsequent violence that occurred during the era of English settlerism. When questioned about this omission, particularly regarding the absence of mention of King Philip’s War, the creators justified their decision by asserting that providing the full historical context would be overwhelming for young children. Furthermore, the curriculum for other age groups similarly displays a lack of Indigenous acknowledgment. As expected, the narrative promoted by the Plimoth Patuxet Museums garnered significant attention and sparked protests across the nation despite the game receiving numerous awards.³⁵ This recent backlash echoed past protests following the establishment of the National Day of Mourning, which aimed at commemorating Native American heritage and highlighting the ongoing rewriting of history from their perspective.

Notwithstanding the increased amplification of Indigenous voices in recent years, colonial history still maintains a dominant grip, overshadowing all other perspectives. As tensions persist between Indigenous communities and their colonial counterparts, fueled by the ongoing erasure of Indigenous history, efforts are underway to rewrite these narratives from an Indigenous viewpoint. Ned Blackhawk, author of *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History*, discusses the rewriting of history from an oftentimes undermined perspective, stating that “to build a new theory of American history will require recognizing that Native peoples simultaneously determined colonial

³³ “You Are The Historian.” Plimoth Patuxet Museums. Last modified August 17, 2023. <https://plimoth.org/yath>.

³⁴ “You Are The Historian,” *Plimoth Patuxet Museums*, <https://plimoth.org/yath>.

³⁵ “Plimoth Patuxet Museums Announces 2023 NEMA Awards.” Plimoth Patuxet Museums. Last modified December 12, 2023. <https://plimoth.org/news-press/plimoth-patuxet-museums-announces-2023-nema-awards>. ³⁶ Blackhawk, Ned. *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023, 18.

economies, settlements, and politics and were shaped by them.”³⁶ As new voices emerge with fresh perspectives, it becomes evident that solutions to the colonial perspective have existed all along, yet they became suppressed. The Mashantucket Pequot Museum, founded in 1998, serves as a tribally owned research center and museum dedicated to educating visitors about the diverse and vibrant history of Indigenous peoples across North America. Although the Mashantucket Pequot Museum holds the distinction of being the largest institution dedicated to the study of Native Americans, its annual visitation numbers, hovering around 250,000, represent only a fraction of those received by the Plimoth Patuxet Museum.³⁷

Despite the widespread popularity of both museums, there persists a prevailing prioritization of colonial narratives throughout the nation, prompting scrutiny regarding the efficacy of recent protests aimed at challenging this status quo. Karal Ann Marling, a prominent scholar on colonial revivals in American culture, explores the enduring fascination with colonial history in her book *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986*. In her analysis, she leverages George Washington as a central figure to elucidate the significance of colonial symbolism in shaping American identity, stating that “the more modern we become, in fact, the more desperately we cling to our Washingtons, to our old-fashioned heroes, to an imagined colonial past, to the good old days when patriots stood firm on their pedestals.”³⁸ In her explanation, Marling alludes to the impact of social upheavals in America, suggesting that during times of turmoil, there is a tendency to seek solace in the past rather than confront the uncertainties

of the future. This proclivity to retreat into the past can be detrimental for Indigenous reparations, as it perpetuates the promotion of colonial ideologies and narratives.

In Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, it is apparent that national identities were formed through shared experiences and bonded imagination, though it is uncertain how these identities were continually personified. Anderson’s concept of cultural hegemony provides valuable insight into the promotion of historical dominance towards widely accepted historical events. Cultural hegemony emphasizes the fact that specific dominant identities can “manipulate the values and traditions of the society to intellectually dominate the social classes outside the hegemony with an imposed worldview.”³⁹ Indeed, by shaping historical narratives to align with dominant identities, those in power perpetuate their dominance. This manipulation of history serves to reinforce existing power structures and marginalize alternative perspectives.

In the context of Plymouth Colony, manipulation of cultural hegemony shaped history. The Pilgrims crafted a biased narrative of their colonization experience in New England, leaving behind harmful rhetoric that continues to affect Indigenous tribes even after 400 years. This manipulation of historical narratives perpetuates colonial power dynamics and obscures the true impact of colonization on Indigenous communities. The Plimoth Patuxet Museum has both financially and historically benefited from the disenfranchisement of the Wampanoag people since its inception in 1947. It is important to recognize that the history presented throughout Plymouth County has been disenfranchising already marginalized communities for centuries.

The museum’s role in perpetuating this narrative underscores the need for greater awareness and accountability in representing the full scope of history, particularly from the perspective of Indigenous peoples. The extension of this historical narrative inherently gives a home to the recidivism of Indigenous manipulation and encourages xenophobia throughout the nation.

³⁶ Blackhawk, Ned. *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023, 18.

³⁷ Bowles, Adam. “For the Pequot Museum, a Fading Vision.” *The New York Times*. Last modified August 31, 2003. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/31/nyregion/for-the-pequot-museum-a-fading-vision.html>. ³⁸ Marling, Karal A. *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876–1986*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 11.

³⁸ Marling, Karal A. *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876–1986*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 11.

³⁹ Zebell, Timothy. “What Is Cultural Hegemony?” *Forerunners of America*. Last modified December 29, 2020. <https://forerunnersofamerica.com/article/what-is-cultural-hegemony/>.

Despite initiatives by the museum and other public sites to include new perspectives, the lack of revision to the existing curriculum proves to be harmful to Indigenous people. As long as Plymouth County continues to prioritize the positive representation of the Pilgrims at the expense of Indigenous communities, the United States will perpetuate an outdated national identity that fails to acknowledge and address the discrimination furthered by white cultural hegemony. This perpetuation of a biased narrative not only marginalizes Indigenous voices but also undermines efforts towards a more inclusive and equitable society that America bolsters.

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