

**THE NAME OF WAR: KING PHILIP'S WAR AND THE
ORIGINS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY¹**

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"When I came to the place, i found an house burnt downe, and six persons killed, and three of the same family could not be found. An old Man and Woman were halfe in, and halfe out of the house neer halfe burnt. Their owne Son was shot through the body, and also his head dashed in pieces. This young mans Wife was dead, her head skined." The young woman . . . "was bigg with Child," and two of her children, "haveing their heads dashed in pieces," were found "laid by one another with their bellys to the ground, and an Oake planke laid upon their backs." The three missing family members . . . had been taken captive.³

Part murder mystery, part historical inquiry, and part anthropological thesis, *The Name of War* examines the colonial era war between New England Indian tribes and colonists, known as King Philip's War.⁴ The author, Jill Lepore,⁵ theorizes that King Philip's War was caused in part by the colonists' attempt to subjugate the Indians culturally, not only out of a desire to Christianize them, but also because of the colonists' own fear of

1. JILL LEPORE, *THE NAME OF WAR: KING PHILIP'S WAR AND THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY* (1999).

2. United States Marine Corps. Written while assigned as a student in the 52d Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

3. LEPORE, *supra* note 1, at 74-75 (quoting an unabridged letter from George Ingersol to Leif Augur (Sept. 10, 1675)).

4. King Philip's War was a bloody struggle between many, although not all, of the New England Indian tribes and the New England colonists. *Id.* at 69-121. The war lasted fourteen months, from the early summer of 1675 to the late summer of 1676. *Id.* at xxv-xxviii. Although the stakes were high for both sides, the Indians' early successes nearly exterminated the colonial presence in New England. *Id.* at 69-121. "In proportion to population, [King Philip's War] inflicted greater casualties than any other war in American history." *Id.* at xi.

5. Jill Lepore currently teaches history at Boston University. *Id.* at Pre-Title Page. She previously taught history at the University of California, San Diego, from 1995 to 1996, and served as a fellow at the Charles Warren Center, Harvard University, from 1996 to 1997. *Id.* Jill Lepore received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Tufts University, Master of Arts degree from University of Michigan, and Doctor of Philosophy degree from Yale University. *Id.*

losing their Christian souls and *Englishness*.⁶ Colonists believed the abhorrent influence of Indian culture had corrupted their *Englishness*.⁷

To show how King Philip's War affected the American identity, Lepore recounts how contemporary authors described the war and how those descriptions influenced later American generations.⁸ Lepore analyzes the injuries caused by King Philip's War and history's interpretation of those injuries. She theorizes "the acts of war generate acts of narration, and that both types of acts are often joined in a common purpose: defining the geographical, political, cultural, and sometimes racial and national boundaries between peoples."⁹ Lepore ultimately suggests the political and cultural boundaries conceived during King Philip's War shaped the American identity.¹⁰

Lepore organizes her thesis by buttressing the four parts of her analysis—Language, War, Bondage, and Memory—between a lengthy introduction and prologue, and an epilogue. The introduction and prologue lay out her analytical framework,¹¹ while the epilogue ties her thesis to the plight of Indians who live in New England today.¹² Between these two ends, Part I "Language"¹³ and Part II "War"¹⁴ establish the core of Lepore's thesis and propel that thesis with her most thought provoking analysis. In contrast, Part III "Bondage"¹⁵ and Part IV "Memory"¹⁶ meander to some degree and provide only ancillary support for the thesis established in Parts I and II.

Lepore's four-part analysis begins in Part I "Language" by explaining the linguistic underpinnings of contemporary reporting on the war.¹⁷ Lepore argues that language was the primary tool used to influence the colonists' self-perception and later views about the war.¹⁸ Colonists, the sole recorders of the war's written history, tried to minimize the perception of

6. *Id.* at 5-7, 11.

7. *Id.*

8. *Id.* at xxii-xxiii.

9. *Id.* at x.

10. *Id.* at iv.

11. *Id.* at ix-xxviii, 1-18.

12. *Id.* at 227-40.

13. *Id.* at 19-68.

14. *Id.* at 69-121.

15. *Id.* at 123-72.

16. *Id.* at 171-226.

17. *Id.* at 19-68.

18. *Id.* at 67-68.

their own cruelty by manipulating the language they used to describe the war.¹⁹ The colonists tried to distinguish their own violence from both the *savagery* of their Indian neighbors and the *cruelty* of their European brethren, the Spanish, during their earlier conquest over Indians in more southern parts of the New World.²⁰ In a war in which New England colonists killed Indian women and children with the same fervor as the Indians employed against colonial *innocents*,²¹ the colonists varnished their own cruel actions with the gloss of “virtue, piety, and mercy.”²²

Lepore argues that colonists were caught in a “Catch-22.” The colonists could either passively lose their cultural identity and allow themselves to become like the Indians, who they regarded as un-Christian barbarians, or wage a war of genocide, like the Indians and Spanish, in an attempt to save their *Englishness*.²³ Ironically, the colonists chose the latter option and fought as savagely and cruelly as the Indians and Spanish ever did.²⁴ To ultimately regain their *Englishness*, the colonists massaged history with the words they used to describe the war.²⁵ Lepore suggests this self-deception formed the core of American identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁶

Despite a normally measured approach, Lepore hits the shoals of hyperbole when she draws analogies between a war of violence and a “war of words,”²⁷ and thereby mistakenly assumes that both the colonists and Indians were aware of, or even cared about, the other’s views about the war.

[T]he war created a world full of distortions, fictions, and confusions. For the colonists, that confusion created a *war of words*. But, whether illiterate or literate, New England’s Indians had little chance to win this kind of war, or even to wage it, since liter-

19. *Id.* at xiv.

20. *Id.* at xiv, 9-13.

21. *Id.* at 7, 87-89.

22. *Id.* at xiv.

23. *Id.* at 11 (“[T]hose ‘true English-men’ who lived in New England found themselves in a very tricky spot. Barbarism threatened them from every direction: if they continued to live peaceably with the Indians, they were bound to degenerate into savages, but if they wage war, they were bound to fight live savages.”).

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 45-68. “If war is a contest of both injuries and interpretation, the English made sure that they won the latter, even when the former was not yet assured.” *Id.* at 68.

26. *Id.* at xiv.

27. *Id.* at 67.

acy itself, and the cultural compromises it entailed, was potentially dangerous In the end, of course, the crucial *rivalry* was not between the competing interpretations [among colonial ministers or differing English newspapers], but between the differing views of the war held by English colonists and Indians.²⁸

Lepore's references to a *war of words* and *rivalry* suggest, without support, that the Indians were making affirmative efforts, through a written or oral history, to counter the colonists' written efforts. Lepore ignores the possibility that the Indians might not have been aware of, or cared about, what the colonists told themselves about the war. It is surprising that Lepore ignores this obvious possibility because other parts of her thesis rest on the Indians' illiteracy.²⁹ Conversely, Lepore suggests, without support, the colonists were aware of, or cared about, what the Indians told themselves about the war. This reference to *rivalry* suggests that colonists wrote with a competitive eye toward how their Indian counterparts might slant their interpretation of the war. Lepore ignores the possibility that the colonists might have written about the war in an unbalanced manner because of either unadulterated hate for the Indians or a sense of moral righteousness toward their cause in keeping both themselves and their foothold colony in the New World alive.³⁰ This critique about Lepore's suggested *war of words* and *rivalry*, however, is not meant to suggest that Lepore frequently rests on hyperbole to support her thesis. Rather, this overstatement is an aberration to Lepore's normally measured approach throughout the book.

Part II "War" examines the cultural differences between the colonists and the Indians and explains how those cultural differences allowed both sides to justify the cruel tactics they embraced.³¹ Lepore examines how each culture's views of property ownership and religion influenced the cause and conduct of the war.³² For example, Lepore argues the Indians targeted the colonists' property during the war not only because it provided physical sustenance and refuge to the colonists, but also because it was

28. *Id.* (emphasis added) (citation omitted).

29. *See, e.g., id.* at 21-47 (arguing the Indians did not produce written accounts of the war because the few literate Indians were more likely than the vast majority of illiterate Indians to be early casualties of the war).

30. *Id.* at 68 ("And even while the English lamented their helplessness against Indian attacks, they took comfort in the knowledge that they controlled the pens and printing presses.").

31. *Id.* at 69-121.

32. *Id.*

crucial to the colonists' conception of self-identity.³³ The colonists' cattle, crops, and houses not only allowed the colonists to survive New England's harsh winters, but

the clothes [the colonists] wore, the houses they lived in, and the things they owned—were a good part of what differentiated the English from the Indians. These were not simply material differences, they were cultural, for every English frock coat was stitched with threads of civility, each thatched roof rested on a foundation of property rights, and every cupboard housed a universe of ideas.³⁴

Through her seamless use of contemporary writings, Lepore demonstrates the Indians understood the considerable emphasis the colonists placed on property. When the Indians burned down entire colonial towns and laid waste to the colonists' cattle, the Indians were purposely targeting the cultural core of colonists' self-identity.³⁵

Parts III and IV provide ancillary support to Lepore's thesis by exploring other aspects of the war and the war's interpretation by later American generations. Part III "Bondage" delves into the consequences suffered by the war's victims who were not killed—those left in captivity, confinement, or slavery.³⁶ Lepore chronicles the behavior of three individuals—a colonial man and woman, and a Christianized Indian—captured by the warring Indians, and examines how the colonists judged the captives' actions while in Indian hands.³⁷ Then, Lepore addresses the confinement and enslavement of the captured Indians.³⁸ Her analysis seems to wander especially as she chronicles the captivity of the three different individuals. Lepore, however, continues to examine contemporary writings to draw conclusions about cultural attitudes and their affect on American identity. None of these conclusions are as poignant or as significant as those in Parts I and II.

Part IV "Memory" concludes the analysis by jumping forward in time and analyzing two occasions when the war was interpreted by later American generations.³⁹ Lepore focuses on interpretations during both the

33. *Id.* at 71-79.

34. *Id.* at 79.

35. *Id.* at 94-96.

36. *Id.* at 123-72.

37. *Id.* at 123-49.

38. *Id.* at 150-70.

American Revolution and the 1830s when a popular play about King Philip's War was released. Without much explanation about why her analysis leaps forward a hundred years to the American Revolution, Lepore shows how the memory of King Philip's War was used during the American Revolution as a propaganda tool against the British. During the 1830s, King Philip's War again resurfaced in the American conscience with the release of the wildly popular play, *Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampanoags*.⁴⁰ Again, Lepore analyzes the American viewpoint at the time, which had shifted to increased sympathy for the Indians of King Philip's War.⁴¹ Although the substance of Parts III and IV is topically related to Lepore's thesis, Parts III and IV shed less light on how the colonists' actions during King Philip's War generated narration that ultimately helped define American identity vis-à-vis the Indians. In fact, the apparent sympathetic shift in attitude during the 1830s toward the Indians who fought King Philip's War effectively undercuts Lepore's suggestion that contemporary narration about King Philip's War had any specific, lasting effect.

Even though Lepore writes her thesis in a scholarly style, her thesis remains exceptionally readable. Lepore's writing is marked by crisp, declarative sentences that fall within well-structured, disciplined paragraphs that generally follow the respective topic sentence. Lepore's cloudless writing style allows her readers to effortlessly comprehend some weighty and complicated ideas. Lepore obviously cares about her readers; unlike some scholarly authors, she does not abandon her readers in a complicated, tangled knot of ideas. Additionally, Lepore's thesis remains exceptionally readable because of the intriguing historical details she weaves into her thesis. The historical details not only support her thesis, but also captivate her readers' imaginations. Liberally using contemporary sources and retaining the quotes' original grammar and spelling, Lepore gives her thesis an air of authenticity and helps transport her readers to colonial times.

Although Lepore's thesis is exceptionally readable and contains many historical details, *The Name of War* is not meant for readers looking for a comprehensive history about King Philip's War. The book's organization is custom-tailored to support Lepore's analysis, rather than organized to describe the war's systematic progression. Throughout, and in support of,

39. *Id.* at 171-226.

40. *Id.* at 191-226.

41. *Id.* at 191-93. "A century and a half later, when *Metamora* debuted in New York in 1829, Philip finally spoke up. As *Metamora* fell, dying, he cried, 'My curses on you, white men!' . . . and white audiences applauded, rapturously." *Id.* at 193.

her analysis, Lepore freely grabs facts about the war with no concern for the war's chronology. Thus, readers are introduced to the war's details in a largely random order. Lepore's organization also leaves much of the war's actual events unmentioned until Part II.⁴² Thus, some readers who are unfamiliar with King Philip's War might be left begging for more general information about the war throughout the book's first quarter to provide context for Lepore's analysis.

Although *The Name of War*'s organization poses difficulties for readers not familiar with King Philip's War, its thesis teaches lessons that can benefit judge advocates and those interested in the military arts, in general. For instance, Lepore's recognition that words can play as important a role as actual violence in war reinforces Clausewitz's teachings that the "moral elements are among the most important in war."⁴³ As such, one can expect warring nations, at the strategic level of war, to target, with words, their opposing populations' moral elements, such as their will to fight.⁴⁴ Nations might even target their own population's moral elements with words in an effort to garner support at home, and even among allies abroad.⁴⁵ Thus, war reporting can have strategic aims and consequences.⁴⁶

42. *Id.* at 69-121.

43. CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, ON WAR 184 (Michael Howard & Peter Paret eds. and trans., Princeton University Press 1976). "One might say that the physical [elements of war] seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely honed blade." *Id.* at 185.

44. TRUONG NHU TANG, A VIETCONG MEMOIR 211 (1985).

[Tactical losses were irrelevant] because the military battlefield upon which the Americans lavished their attention and resources was only one part of the whole board of confrontation. And it was not on this front that the primary struggle was being played out. . . . [I]t was American public opinion—the minds and hearts of the American people—that had to be motivated and exploited.

Id. at 211-12.

45. See, e.g., Emily Wax, *Arab World Is Seeing War Far Differently; Media, Mistrust of U.S. Help Shape Perspective*, WASH. POST, Mar. 28, 2003, at A33 (reporting on U.S. and Arab medias' attempts to influence the world population through selective reporting about Operation Iraqi Freedom).

46. See, e.g., Michael Dobbs, *America's Arabic Voice; Radio Sawa Struggles to Make Itself Heard*, WASH. POST, Mar. 24, 2003, at Style (reporting on a U.S. funded, Arabic-speaking radio station designed to help "struggle for the hearts and minds of 250 million Arabs" during Operation Iraqi Freedom).

In addition to these lessons, Lepore's thesis implicitly raises profound questions. For instance, King Philip's War, as a case study, demonstrates that societies, such as the New England colonists, can abandon their most deeply held values when physical and cultural attacks push these societies close to extinction.⁴⁷ When sufficiently threatened, the colonists fought as savagely as the Indians—Indian women and children were not immune from colonist attack.⁴⁸ Thus, for us today, is the law of war, as an embodiment of *our* society's values, immutable or relativistic?⁴⁹ If we, as a nation, became sufficiently threatened, would the enemy's families become acceptable, or even fair, targets?

Although one might be tempted to respond categorically that innocent families would never be acceptable targets, what if *not* targeting the enemy's families might ultimately lead to one's death, and that of one's family? Remember, for the colonists, the survival of their families and their colonies were at stake. What if the enemy freely targeted your family, regardless of whether you abided by the law of war? Future enemies may not abide by the law of war,⁵⁰ much like the Indians during King Philip's War. Additionally, what if we felt that the enemy's families were *not* as deserving of protection as our own, if for instance we were at war with space aliens? Although killing alien families may sound absurd, the analogy helps us comprehend today why colonists, who believed the Indians were less than human, so easily killed Indian women and children. And today, could the lives of a *human* enemy's families be similarly discounted through the effective use of words? Lepore's thesis suggests, "yes." Thus, when sufficiently tested, the original categorical response may not provide such an intellectually complete answer.

Overall, Lepore's thesis generates some beautifully nuanced insights and interpretations of cultural war. Lepore's intellectual honesty shines when she concedes such an analysis is not so straightforward, particularly with a war fought over two hundred years ago and revealed only through the writings of one party to the conflict.⁵¹ Despite this admitted difficulty,

47. LEPORE, *supra* note 1, at 87-89.

48. *Id.* at 88.

49. *See, e.g.*, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 3 (stating, "Civilian objects shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals").

50. *See, e.g.*, John Pomfret, *China Ponders New Rules of 'Unrestricted War,'* WASH. POST, Aug. 9, 1999, at A1 (discussing a new book on Chinese military strategy that advocates ignoring the law of war because it is a fundamentally Western concept that provides countries like China "no chance" of victory).

Lepore crafts a sound and intellectually intriguing thesis that deserves all of its critical acclaim.⁵²

51. LEPORE, *supra* note 1, at xi.

52. *The Name of War* won the Bancroft Prize in 1999. See Columbia University, *The Bancroft Prizes*, available at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eguides/amerihist/bancroft.html> (last visited Nov. 17, 2003). Columbia University awards the Bancroft Prize annually to distinguished works in either American History or Diplomacy. *Id.* *The Name of War* also won the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award in 1998. See The Phi Beta Kappa Society, *Book Awards*, available at <http://www.pbk.org/scholarships/books.htm> (last visited Nov. 17, 2003). The Phi Beta Kappa Society awards the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award annually “for scholarly studies that contribute significantly to the intellectual and cultural condition of humanity.” *Id.*