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# Indians, Wolves, and Colonists: How Colonial Power Left an Incomplete Framework for Wolf Narratives in the Native Northeast

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Kayleigh Moses

## Introducing the Wolf Conqueror

Mustard yellow words carved deep into a weathered plaque pierce the quiet landscape of Connecticut's Mashamoquet Brook State Park, replacing the yellow eyes of the wolves that once roamed the late Mohegan territory. Visitors pause at the plaque, which is unnaturally incised into the side of a large rock, and pose for photos, rarely pondering the intricacies of this historical moment frozen in time. The plaque reads: "This tablet is presented...to preserve memory of an act of courage and of public service by a young farmer, who was in later years to win fame a...leader, a brave fighter, and a national hero."<sup>1</sup> In 1742, Connecticut's own Israel Putnam became valorized for killing the "last" wolf in the state. Applauded for his heroic efforts to defeat the nasty "marauder," Putnam's last wolf story has become a well-known element of wolves' ecological history in the Northeast and remains a defining feature of Windham County's history today.<sup>2</sup> A small cave that once functioned as a natural marker of wolf territory has been transformed into the "Israel Putnam Wolf Den," a place name drenched in colonial savior rhetoric. It now serves to mark colonial territory in Connecticut's ecological and historical narratives.

Why this plaque remains a prime destination for park visitors is unclear. Putnam's act of irreversible colonial cruelty is commemorated in this space, acting as a replacement narrative consistent with Jean O'Brien's "lasting" tropes.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as contemporary thinkers begin to reintroduce wolves into areas of previous decimation, we are left wondering why a plaque celebrating wolves' extermination is memorialized. More so, what insight does this plaque's



Figure 1. Israel Putnam Wolf Den in Mashamoquet Brook State Park, CT<sup>4</sup>

placement in the landscape provide about the larger discourse surrounding Indians, wolves, and colonists in the Native Northeast? Israel Putnam's Wolf Den epitomizes how discreet colonial narratives of wolves' ecological history have misconstrued and masked Indigenous perceptions of the changing environment. Consequently, the ecological record prioritizes non-Indigenous perceptions of wolves, which happen to capture an almost entirely negative outlook. These differ from Indigenous perspectives that, when pieced together by analytic techniques that read against the grain and beyond the direct diction of colonial documents, embody more positive, neutral, and reverent positions toward wolves.

This paper concentrates on Windham County, Connecticut, following the story of Israel Putnam's wolf den and how it exists as a singular type of wolf narrative constructed by colonial thought. It simultaneously recognizes brief instances of positive wolf rhetoric throughout colonial records, which notably only occur when Indigenous perspectives are discussed (still through the lens of colonizers). Drawing on scholarship from Jean O'Brien, Lisa Brooks, and Jon T. Coleman, I highlight the persistence of Native ecological thought throughout time – particularly that of Mohegans and Mohawks – by analyzing its framework in colonial records.

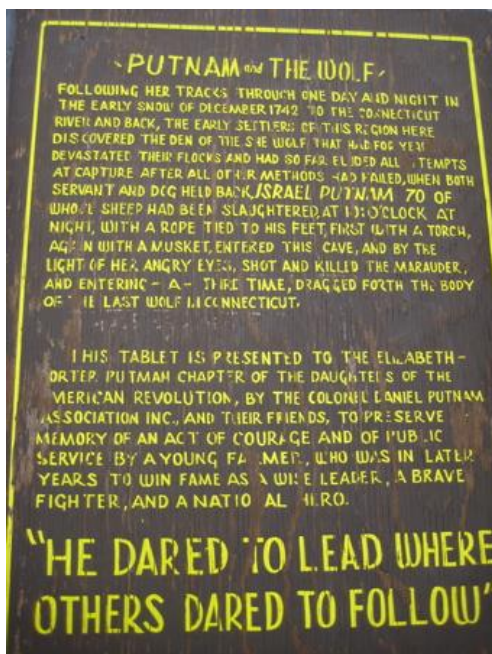


Figure 2. Plaque found on Israel Putnam Wolf Den depicting story of “Putnam and The Wolf.”<sup>5</sup>

The first section of the paper skips ahead in time to illustrate how New England's Indigenous voices perceive wolves in the contemporary era. These current attitudes express reverence for wolves as a part of the ecosystem, while neither demonizing nor valorizing them. This section also analyzes the secular position of western science in its current portrayal of Northeastern wolves' ecological history, reflecting a biased colonial history. The second section then reflects upon how Mohegans valued wolves in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, illustrating the presence of historical veneration. Since Northeastern Indigenous reverence towards wolves persists in contemporary literature, I

argue that it has been hidden under the guise of a colonial lens throughout written accounts of history. Hence, the third section deeply analyzes these colonial lenses through primary and secondary sources that portray wolves in an adverse light throughout the Native Northeast. I ask why colonial and Indigenous perceptions differ and how one perspective came to dominate the historical landscape in written narratives about wolves.

Finally, I offer an overview that stands in contention with the colonial lenses of history, namely those that obscure Indigenous perceptions of wolves in the Northeast. Readers are encouraged to recognize that Indigenous relationality to and grounded knowledge of wolves have persisted over time. The final section thus entertains the possibility of learning beyond colonial documents as a complementary endeavor to dissecting tropes and assumptions embedded in ecological histories. Ultimately, the primary undertaking of this paper is critical dissection. I theorize that colonists' hatred of Indians and wolves stems from the threats both posed to colonial powers, thereby prompting colonists to apply "lasting" rhetoric in attempt to extinguish non-colonial power from written historical records.

## **1. Contemporary Perceptions of Wolves**

### **a. The Portrayal of Ecological History in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park has been a hot topic for environmentalists over the past two decades. Growing up in an outdoorsy family, I inevitably became fascinated by the alteration of trophic balances and geological features from simply reintroducing a keystone species.<sup>6</sup> As a New Englander, I have wondered why wolf reintroduction has not been happening here in the Northeast. Although I have spoken to scholars who speculate about possible futures for wolves in the region (one philosopher, Roger S. Gottlieb, says wolves could replace hunters in New England), most reintroduction efforts seem to lie out West. However, this does not mean that the Native Northeast faced any lesser version of wolf extermination in its history. In fact, wolf eradication campaigns were apparent in the region as early as 1642, when the Massachusetts Bay Colony ordered

citizens to nail the heads of dead wolves to the meeting house of the town of Ipswich. Those who did not comply would be fined one shilling each month.<sup>7</sup>

Today, wildlife scholars acknowledge secular ecological histories that bluntly acknowledge the end of wolves' presence in the Northeast. Some accounts even leave out the detail that wolf *disappearance* is more accurately wolf *decimation*. For example, Geoffrey A. Hammerson's *Connecticut Wildlife: Biodiversity, Natural History, and Conservation* includes a measly paragraph dedicated to Connecticut's Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*); using the least amount words written about a species in this chapter, Hammerson's paragraph reads: "[Gray wolf] no longer occurs in Connecticut; deliberately exterminated by early settlers and negatively affected by decimation of its food supply (mainly deer) in 1800s; now basically replaced in ecosystem by coyote."<sup>8</sup> This simplified account reflects the typical story contemporaries hear about wolves: colonizers killed the wolves and now the wolves are gone.

What these portrayals fail to detail is that wolves existed in the Native Northeast during human occupation far before colonial settlements. In turn, this modern scientific discourse contributes to the masking of Indigenous presence in ecological history. Such an absence risks enabling the inaccurate trope that prior to settlers, Indians lived in peaceful, utopian, harmonious relationships with nature. Moreover, this absence creates the narrative that only white settlers could substantially alter the ecosystem. These problematic thoughts pervade colonial narratives about wolves, which primarily emphasize wolf-colonist interactions. These types of accounts persist in contemporary scientific discourse by neglecting to acknowledge Indigenous presence in wolf history. Despite its absence from written ecological histories, Indigenous relationality to and grounded knowledge of wolves remain present in the contemporary era.

### **b. Indigenous Reverence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* affirms that today, Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast still attribute reverence, respect, and power to their "other-than-human kin."<sup>9</sup> In particular, Maurice Kenny of Mohawk People, wrote numerous poems that spoke of wolves before his death. In his piece, "Wild Strawberry," Kenny writes about knowing how the seasons

change “when wolf will drop winter fur.”<sup>10</sup> Here we encounter a neutral – as opposed to colonists’ negative – acknowledgement of wolves’ place in the environment. Furthermore, in “They Tell Me I am Lost,” Kenny composes, “my chant is the wolf in the dark.”<sup>11</sup> This line ascribes wolves with a confident presence that goes beyond simply respecting the creatures; because chanting serves as a way in which people can assert their presence in a space, Kenny illustrates the power of Indigenous voices through the power of the wolf’s voice. Overall, these poems evoke the sense that wolves are not only appreciated as a part of Lisa Brook’s Common Pot,<sup>12</sup> but they also promote Mohawk power and pride.

Furthermore, in his book, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, Jon T. Coleman affirms that “wolves howl for several reasons,” but most predominantly as a form of communication.<sup>13</sup> In bridging these two works, Kenny might be alluding to the communities many Indigenous Peoples find in their relationality to each other and their other-than-human kin. This line can be interpreted to reify Brooks’ assertions that all components of the Common Pot are equal in their dependency upon one another for stability and survival.<sup>14</sup> In his poem, “Moccasin,” Kenny writes, “wind howls like a wolf on the hill.”<sup>15</sup> Again, we attain the sense that the wolf holds a powerful place in nature, as howling wind is typically equated with immense vigor. In addition to that, the wolf’s positioning on a hill furthers his sense of dominance within the ecosystem. By dictating the connection between wind and wolf, Kenny illustrates that wolves are an integral part of interspecies relatedness in the Northeast.

Ultimately, these reverent and empowering contemporary accounts illustrate how the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and wolves in the Northeast are viewed under a sanguine semblance. Despite the presence of these Indigenous narratives, wolves are rarely discussed with enthusiasm in the colonial record. Even the neutral Indigenous positionalities stand in direct contradiction to the vile, hate-filled colonial narratives. Before exploring these demonizing colonial perceptions, the next section highlights primary sources written by colonists discussing Northeastern Indigenous Peoples’ appreciation of wolves in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Such a discussion reaffirms that Indigenous knowledge of wolves has always been

present, has persisted throughout time, and has been masked by dominant hate narratives imposed by colonizers.

## 2. Mohegan Valorization of Wolves in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

Although quite rare, two primary historical sources describe wolves with optimism: *New England's rarities discovered in birds, beasts, fishes, serpents, and plants of that country 1630-1675* by John Josselyn and "The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1678-1689" by J. Hammond Trumbull. It is imperative to recognize that both sources evaluate somewhat esteemed Indigenous relationships with wolves. I have found no sources, nor have I found any scholars who can attest to sources in which colonists are directly associated with positive perceptions of wolves. In fact, Coleman asserts that even though colonists wrote substantially about Indians in the Northeast, "the perspective of the sources makes gauging the Indians' reaction impossible... They based their reports on appearance, not understanding. The reports tell us more about the Europeans' biases and assumptions than about the Indians' thoughts and feelings."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, all readers must be wary of tropes when analyzing colonial documents that discuss Indigenous Peoples' relationships with wolves.

These two accounts, in particular, emphasize a reciprocal relationship between Indians and wolves, as wolf skins were deemed both economically and medically beneficial. While describing the boundaries of Mohegans and Wabaquassut country, Trumbull details how Mohegans paid tribute to others with white deer skins, bear skins, and black wolf skins for about 45 years.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, Richard Bayles', *History of Windham County, Connecticut* provides some detailed context for this example. After the Pequot War, Mohegan leader, Uncas, displayed his allegiance to Pequot chieftain, Sassacus, by paying "him homage and obligations and yearly tribute of white deer skins, bear skins and black wolf skins."<sup>18</sup> Although this colonial document does not acknowledge Mohegans' relationality to wolves in the same sense that Brooks' Common Pot acknowledges nonhumans and humans as equally dependent upon one another, it does assert that wolves can be of value to Indians. This assertion subsequently implies a working relationship between Indians and wolves that seems to be nonexistent in wolf-colonist relationships.

Though small and incomplete, this minor acknowledgement of wolves as a beneficial commodity speaks to the value Mohegans likely placed on the canid during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Consistent with Coleman's idea that such a document tells us more about colonists than about Indians themselves, we can recognize that colonists noticed some sort of Indigenous reverence towards wolves – at least enough to compel them to include a positive attribute about a creature they despised.

Furthermore, Josselyn's *New England's rarities* continues this uncommon and brief notion that wolves upheld a certain value in the colonial Northeast. After describing wolves as killers who move in groups, Josselyn turns to how New England Indians utilized wolf skins as a remedy for aches. Under a small section titled, "For old Aches," Josselyn writes, "A black *Wolfs* Skin is worth a *Beaver* Skin among the *Indians*, being highly esteemed for helping old Aches in old people, worn as a Coat; they are not mankind, as in *Ireland* and other Countries, but do much harm by destroying of our English Cattle."<sup>19</sup> Similar to Connecticut's Public Records, *New England's rarities* displays how Indians utilized wolves for medicinally beneficial purposes. Though these recognitions are essential for formulating my argument that reverent Indigenous perceptions of wolves have persisted over time under the fog of written colonial bias, this discussion would be incomplete without acknowledging the essential nature of Josselyn's final statement regarding cattle. As the next section demonstrates, livestock farming stood as the turning point that distinguished Indigenous perceptions of wolves from colonists' unforgiving, relentless hatred.

### **3. Relying on the Lens of the Colonizer**

#### **a. "Lasting" in Colonial Documents**

While Indigenous Peoples in New England endured physical displacement on their lands during and after European colonization, scholars like O'Brien assert that they were also displaced in written accounts of history. This sort of written "displacement" comes primarily in the form of what O'Brien calls "extinction narratives," which render Indigenous Peoples as "persistently ancient" and "mired in the static past."<sup>20</sup> By implementing this rhetoric, colonizers could assert their "modernity" to enact a hierarchical power dynamic in which they occupied the highest level. In turn, they portrayed Indigenous Peoples as



lesser and incapable of becoming “civilized.” Similar to this problematic way of conceptualizing Indigeneity, “lasting” rhetoric was certainly applied to Connecticut’s wolves in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In fact, wolf extinction narratives mirror those of Indians by describing the distressing, dreadful wolves in juxtaposition to civilized society. In colonists’ terms, wolf extinction was more than palatable – such a dream of demolition was irresistible. Therefore, in colonial writing, scholars almost only encounter wolves being portrayed as demons and monsters. Such dark rhetoric overshadows the impression of wolves as valuable equals, like Indigenous Peoples perceived them to be. This section explores how “lasting” and extinction narratives came to dominate historical documents about wolves in the Northeast. I also ask why colonial and Indigenous perceptions differ, while attempting to contextualize how one perspective came to control the historical landscape in written narratives about wolves and ultimately determine the fate of the canid’s presence in the Northeast.

Returning to the story of Connecticut’s final wolf kill, we can acknowledge the high frequency at which Putnam’s irreversible interaction with the “last wolf” has been retold (i.e., through town histories, social gatherings, and folk tales). Ellen Douglas Larned’s *History of Windham County, Connecticut: 1600-1760* regards “Putnam’s wolf” to be a hunt “legend.”<sup>21</sup> This naming, which recognizes Putnam as the defining feature of this wolf’s life, asserts a kind of ownership over the land and its natural elements. Such ownership is characteristic of Christianity, a religion embedded in the roots of western colonization that preaches both human stewardship and dominion over nature. The concept of possession over the natural world dominates the narrative of the Israel Putnam Wolf Den at Mashamoquet Brook State Park. But why ascribe this area with a place name that demands such proprietorship?

### **b. How Colonial Accounts of Wolves Pervade the Historical Record**

In attempt to address this complex question, I turn to the religious values upheld during the colonial period. When colonizers came to the “New World,” they brought Christianity with them. With Christianity came the concept of dominion. Genesis 1:26 reads: “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the

heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps the earth.”<sup>22</sup> This Christian colonial concept juxtaposes certain Indigenous origin stories that uphold an equal interconnectedness between all beings. For example, Algonquian stories about Sky Woman illustrate how reciprocal interactions between humans and non-humans embody the foundation of creation. Brooks details the story of Sky Woman:

In the traditional Haudensaunee (Iroquois) creation story of Sky Woman, only a mass of water exists beneath the sky, and the water animals are its only inhabitants. When they see a woman falling from a hole in the Sky World, the animals gather in “council together...to devise a way to provide for her.” Each animal dives to the bottom of the sea, grasping for mud. Each returns, gasping for air, empty-handed. Finally, muskrat, it is said, dives deep down into the water until he can go no farther, grasps a handful of earth in his paw, and rises to the surface. He gives up his life, but in his last breath, he releases the mud onto turtle’s back. Geese fly up to catch Sky Woman in their wings, and, as they lay her on turtle’s back, the woman releases a seed she had carried from the Sky World, and the earth is born.<sup>23</sup>

The story of Sky Woman suggests that the earth exists “only through the interrelated activity of its inhabitants,” requiring “all members of the group to solve the problem at hand.”<sup>24</sup> This Iroquois belief that human and non-human relatives work together to sustain the environment directly contrasts the Christian belief that humans are meant to dominate the land and its nonhuman inhabitants. Christianity is known to have exerted its authority transnationally, converting people (usually forcefully) across the world. This dominion-wielding power structure can help us to conceptualize why the wolf killed by Putnam is known in town histories as “Putnam’s wolf” and why the site of the kill is named after Putnam. The anthropocentrism of colonialism is reflected in this wolf narrative.

Putnam was believed to be upholding his moral duty to society by killing the last wolf in Connecticut, as he was asserting his rightful ability (according to the Christian Bible) to contribute to the eradication of the demonized nuisance. Thus, memorializing his name in association with the wolf prompted colonists to valorize Putnam, as he was truly thought to be a hero. If the roles were reversed and Algonquian beliefs held authority over Christian values, might this historical discourse be altered? Since Algonquians prioritize equal relations with other-than-human kin, would “Putnam’s wolf” become “the

wolf”? Would the “Israel Putnam Wolf Den” become the “Wolf Den”? These questions force us to contemplate the drastic effects of power structures in the documentation of historical landscapes and texts.

In addition to words on a plaque, the domination of colonists’ perspectives remains clear in historical papers. O’Brien asserts that “stories about “last” Indians shared the stage with other “lasts”” such that “vanishing or vanished creatures [like wolves]” embody stories about “lasts” that, similar to Indians, “participate in the degeneracy narrative implied in the temporalities of race.”<sup>25</sup> Hence, when writing about beings that posed threats to their livelihoods (i.e., both Indians and wolves), colonists employed dreadful rhetoric that illustrated a biased consensus for extermination as the sole option. For example, on top of Putnam’s power-reflective wolf rhetoric, both “Histories of Windham County” offer insight into local discourse pertaining to wolves in the area; they recount the devastation caused by Putnam’s wolf, the fear she instilled within the colonial community, and how wolf infestations were becoming more prominent in colonial towns.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, one century after Putnam’s “last” wolf kill, the story was still being glorified and retold at Windham County’s town meetings. This occurrence is exemplified in “Putnam and the Wolf: or, the monster destroyed,” an address delivered at a meeting of the Windham County Temperance Society in Pomfret, Connecticut, on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1829. This document applauds Putnam for killing the “last wolf” and employs the common anti-wolf rhetoric of “demons,” “evil,” and “intolerable nuisance.”<sup>27</sup> Notably, this document, which is a written version of a speech celebrating Putnam’s wolf kill, briefly glazes over Indigenous presence in the space at the time, saying, “and first, we are met by a body of men who tells us that ardent spirit is useful.”<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, however, the prevailing discourse falls in line with hunting a “terrible monster, whose destruction will require Putnam[’s] courage.”<sup>29</sup> Despite the brief acknowledgement that Indians were a part of this story, their presence is never elaborated upon and they are swept to the side without tribally-specific recognition. This sort of dismissive politics is characteristic of most colonial documents regarding wolves and resembles a lesser version of O’Brien’s extinction

narratives. It seems that even if Indians were mentioned in these documents, their sovereignty and place in the Common Pot were rarely elaborated upon.

Some primary sources even go so far as to assume that Indians had adverse relationships with wolves, similar to those of colonizers. While the trope that Indians lived in precolonial utopian harmony with all creatures is inaccurate, most sources – both historical and contemporary – support the notion that Indians did *not* harbor hatred toward their other-than-human wolf kin. Given this, I am skeptical about the accuracy of the following colonial documents. In *A Key into the Language of America*, Roger Williams portrays wolves as “robbing” Indians and institutes the idea that Indians want “revenge.”<sup>30</sup> This portrayal opposes everything scholars have learned about Indigenous relationships of reciprocity with the environment and its inhabitants.<sup>31</sup> This piece even goes further to demonize *both* wolves and Indians because “revenge” and “robbing” carry a destructive connotation. Might this portrayal be linked to the idea that both wolves and Indians posed a threat to colonizers? Might it be true that when the power of colonists was threatened, one response was turning to written language to demonize the “other”?

Hesitantly applying an empathetic view, we can likely understand why colonizers harbored such deep hatred towards wolves during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Colonizers differed from Indigenous Peoples in a way that likely defined the fate of wolves; colonial concepts of ownership and livestock created a sense of responsibility that one must protect their own property. William Cronon, in *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* summarizes this situation:

Indians were not alone among New England’s original inhabitants in encountering new boundaries and conflicts as a result of the colonists’ grazing animals. Native predators—especially wolves—naturally regarded livestock as potential prey which differed from the deer on which they had previously fed only by being easier to kill. It is not unlikely that wolves became more numerous as a result of the new sources of food colonists has inadvertently made available to them—with unhappy consequences for English herds. Few things irritated colonists more than finding valuable animals killed by “such ravenous cruel creatures.” The Massachusetts Court in 1645 complained of “the great lose and damage” suffered by the colony because wolves killed “so great numbers of our cattle,” and expressed frustration that the predators had not yet been successfully destroyed. Such complaints persisted in newly settled areas throughout the colonial period.<sup>32</sup>

If a wild animal threatens the domesticated animals that one values or depends upon for livelihood stability, the demise of that wild animal tends to be much easier to conceptualize. Complementary to Cronon, Coleman utilizes an analogy that rings true to most farmers – historic and present: “Wolves attacked livestock and people attacked wolves with such enthusiasm in colonial New England that a battle to extinction would seem as predictable as the times.”<sup>33</sup>

However, we must also contend with the fact that domesticated livestock were a primarily colonial concept. In the pre-colonial Native Northeast, domesticated livestock were not a part of Indigenous subsistence and agricultural practices. Therefore, in a way, colonizers fueled their hateful relationships with wolves because they believed in ownership of the “other” and dominion over nonhuman beings. Coleman even asserts that wolf extinction could have been prevented: “The English colonists’ concept of territory—the idea that land, animals, and even people were property—ambushed wolves.”<sup>34</sup> With this background, it seems obvious why colonizers harbored hatred towards wolves; their pre-conceived ideas of property, ownership, and livestock fueled conflict with wolves (and Indians). And because contemporary historical studies rely primarily on static written accounts, as opposed to dynamic oral traditions, the Northeast’s ecological history has been shaped by colonial rhetoric that promotes extinction narratives.

### **c. Bounties for Extermination**

Finally, this paper would be incomplete without recognizing the plethora of wolf bounties instituted by colonizers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the “Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, May 1679 – June 1689,” Trumbull writes of an act highly encouraging the murder of all wolves in Connecticut (Fig. 3).<sup>35</sup> Declarations such as this were plentiful throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, employing common words like “destroy” and “dominion” to assert extinction narratives and combat the wolf enemy. In fact, some bounties offered compensation for killings wolves, demonstrating colonial desperation. This Act, in particular, is unique in its inclusion of Indians. Boston’s Council Chamber asserts that it will pay Indians half of what colonists would receive if they were to kill a wolf in

their county. By offering incentives to kill wolves and extending these incentives to the Indigenous community (though the pay gap still illustrates the unequal power structure), these narratives reveal not only hateful anti-wolf rhetoric, but also colonists' despair.

Relying on Indians was not a dependence colonists promoted. Sure, reliance was essential in some respects, such as the adaptation of Indigenous snowshoe technology,<sup>36</sup> but dependence upon Indians indicated a deficiency in colonial power. Therefore, this bounty's inclusion of the Indigenous community reflects how dire and destructive the relationship between colonists and wolves became, such that colonists were willing to admit weakness. Ultimately, such bounties demonstrated the interplay between wolves, Indians, and colonists, and created the illusion of an overgeneralized human v. wolf conflict. However, as we have learned from previous sources, Indigenous relationships with wolves are far more complicated. And though wolf decimation across the landscape was documented by kills like that of Putnam, I have yet to find any accounts regarding Indians killing wolves for bounties, which certainly calls the framework of this umbrellaed version of a conflict into question.

(9.)

**An Act for the Destroying of Wolves.**

For the encouragement of persons to destroy Wolves, Be it enacted by the Governour and Council, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, that whosoever shall at any time hereafter kill or destroy any grown Wolf, in any county in this Dominion, he shall be paid and allowed at the public charge of the county within which the same is or shall be killed, the sum of twenty shillings per head, and for a Wolf whelp half so much : And if any Indian shall in like manner kill or destroy any grown Wolf, he shall be paid and allowed at the public charge of the county within which the same shall be killed, the sum of ten shillings per head, and for a Wolf whelp half so much : And that the sum be raised by the order of the justices of the peace at their Quarter Sessions in each respective county, with other county charges, and duly paid and satisfied accordingly.

Council Chamber in Boston, the 11th of May, in the 3d year of his Majesty's reign, Annoque Domini, 1687.

Examined per JOHN WEST, Deputy Secretary.

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Figure 3. An excerpt from "Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, May 1679 – June 1689," detailing "An Act for the Destroying of Wolves."<sup>37</sup>

## Concluding Unfinished Thoughts

Concluding this conversation proves challenging because analysis of these sparse records remains incomplete. Scholars will always be finding new holes in biased historical records, and methodological approaches to Native American and Indigenous Studies will continue working towards refinement. For now, I can only reflect upon the questions I have raised (even those that are unanswerable) and reify my main assertions. For starters, Coleman composes the idea that,

Writing is not the only form of communication that withstands time, it is merely the form with which historians feel most comfortable. Europeans dominated the transcribed record of the past, but other timeframes impinged on history. Both European and Native American humans preserved narratives and rituals in folklore, and wolves exchanged information through gestures, scents, and sounds that adhered to a time regime far slower than those of folklore or history.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, the “lasting” narratives that pervade these long-standing accounts were produced by colonists who felt threatened by the power of wolves and Indians in the landscape of the Native Northeast.

When relying on these accounts to understand history, we must recognize the content’s serious biases, tropes, and general distaste to acknowledge any perspective beyond that of the colonist. Demonizing and extinguishing diction promote the view of the colonizer, whose livestock was naturally threatened by wolves, and whose power was threatened by Indigenous sovereignty. Extinction narratives written by colonists about wolves and Indians are common, though this paper has primarily focused on those of wolves. Today, these extinction narratives are mirrored in ecological histories of wolves in the Northeast which simply state that their demise occurred after colonial settlement. These accounts do not recognize the history of wolves in the Native Northeast prior to colonialism, illuminating how records written by colonists neglect to acknowledge ecological relationships prior to colonization. The persistence of this bias has infiltrated into what many believe to be secular science and discredits non-western ways of knowing through exclusionary tactics.

The bias of the historical record still pervades the everyday lives of people in the Northeast, usually without conscious intent. Products of our partial education system in a society that continues to mask Indigenous identities, we must work to deconstruct how sense of place and ecological histories have been misconstrued over time. Most importantly, we must recognize the persistence of New England's Native Peoples and their deep ecological knowledges. In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate that despite the domination narratives favored by written colonial wolf histories, Indigenous Peoples' – Mohegans and Mohawks, in particular – grounded knowledge of and relationality to wolves persist in the contemporary age. Therefore, although Israel Putnam's story may invade the historical landscape and institute a celebratory replacement narrative, the knowledge of Mohegans and Mohawks have always existed in the shadows of colonial narratives.

Today, despite the persistence of these narratives throughout time, "unmasking" Indigenous perceptions of wolves may be an inappropriate approach to further research on this topic. Indigenous relationality to wolves has always existed among Indigenous Peoples, as is exemplified in the Mohegan name which translates to "Wolf People."<sup>39</sup> Non-native researchers must be cautious not to exploit this knowledge for purposes of western understanding. Still, this knowledge deserves to be recognized beyond colonial documents. So, the next challenge lies in the navigation of learning and validating non-western ways of knowing while consciously avoiding appropriation. I have demonstrated one way we can recognize this intricate knowledge, which comes in the form of dissecting colonial documents. A complementary possibility is to learn how wolves and other predators have been spoken about throughout Indigenous oral histories and traditions, though it is at the discretion of Tribal elders to share such knowledge. As the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies becomes more prominent in the contemporary Northeast, students and scholars alike should continue prompting ourselves to rethink how ecological histories are portrayed today, and how more inclusive histories can be instituted to recognize Indigenous persistence in the Native and contemporary Northeast.



## Notes

1. “Wolf Den (Pomfret),” CT Museum Quest, accessed May 9, 2021, [https://www.ctmuseumquest.com/?page\\_id=13441](https://www.ctmuseumquest.com/?page_id=13441).
2. Emily Dunnack, “The Last Wolf in Connecticut,” last modified February 1, 2014, <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-last-wolf-in-connecticut/>.
3. Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 107.
4. CT Museum Quest, “Wolf Den (Pomfret).”
5. CT Museum Quest, “Wolf Den (Pomfret).”
6. William J. Ripple and Robert L. Beschta, “Trophic cascades in Yellowstone: The first 15 years after wolf reintroduction,” *Biological Conservation* 145, no. 1 (January 2012): 205-213, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2011.11.005>.
7. Gordon Harris, “Killing wolves,” Historic Ipswich: on the Massachusetts north shore, accessed May 9, 2021, <https://historicipswich.org/2021/04/25/killing-wolves/>.
8. Geoffrey A. Hammerson, *Connecticut Wildlife: Biodiversity, Natural History, and Conservation* (New Hampshire: UPNE, 2004), 390.
9. Siobhan Senier, *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2014). See notes 10, 11, and 15 for further details pertaining to works that reference wolves.
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