

A photograph of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, a large, smooth, light-colored rock formation stands in shallow water. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the surrounding rocks. In the background, a steep, layered cliff face rises, showing distinct geological strata. The overall scene is serene and natural.

**Indigenous Narratives: Excluded Stories**  
By: Heather Wright

## Introduction

Indigenous people of North America are stereotyped and excluded from American history because White Christian males developed American narratives to the exclusion of all others

## 17th-19th Century

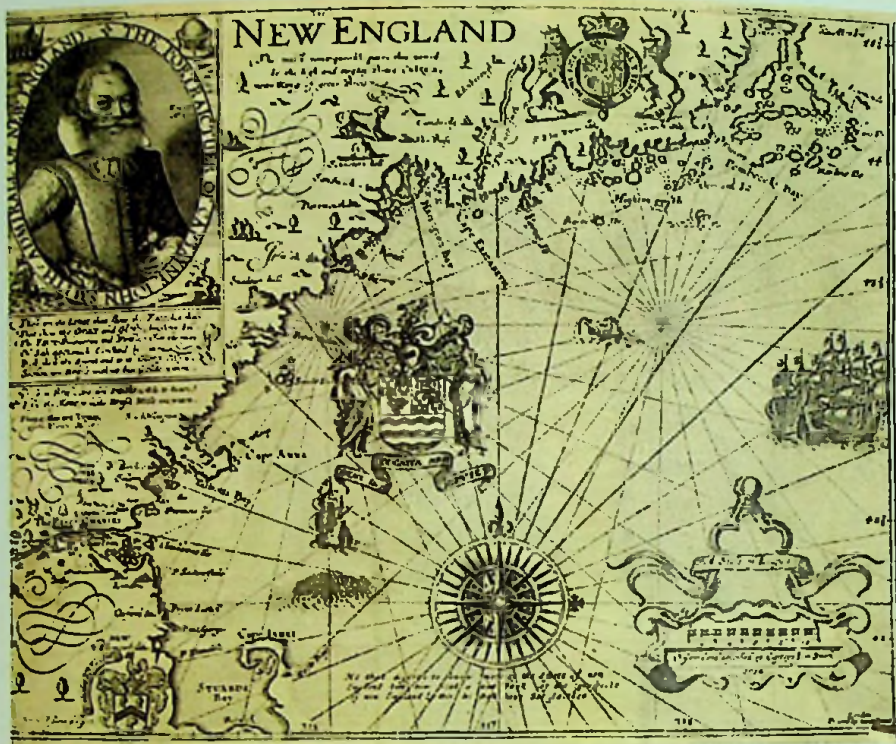
One of the earliest maps of New England, made by Englishman John Smith, imposes English names and Christian architecture over Indigenous and Wampanoag land. This map offers a minimal indication that the Indigenous/Wampanoag people belonged in the region. In the American artwork "Fireboard: The Landing of the Pilgrims," the white male narrative reflects the white colonization story as the visual center of focus and portrays Indigenous people in the margins. This marginalization exists in most stories about the discovery of America. In American history, the narratives of Indigenous people, like Handsome Lake's "How America was Discovered," are not represented. Handsome Lake depicts how the sudden influx of a white Christian culture destroyed the Indigenous way of life. Even though Handsome Lake tells of the Indigenous culture under attack, it is far more common to see Indigenous people stereotyped as violent. The children's story "The Indian Chief and The Little White Boy" exemplifies the white vilification of indigenous people. This narrative makes it easier to justify their erasure from history.

## Early 21st Century

To counter the narratives of violence and history of erasure, in 2012 the Wampanoag people (one of the first tribes of North America to have contact with Europeans) cultivated a site at the Plimoth Plantation to educate people on the lifestyle and traditions of their people. These Wampanoag stories provide insight into the community as it would have existed at the arrival of the white man 400 years ago. By learning of Indigenous history, we include the Wampanoag narrative as an active parallel to standard historical narratives. The inclusion of Indigenous histories is critical to acknowledge their contributions to our modern culture.

## 2020

The emotional collision of belonging and being excluded is a product of the contemporary Indigenous poet Kimberly Blaeser. Her poem "Poem on Disappearance" expresses pride for Indigenous culture while relating the pain of annexation from land and history. As a modern approach to address the disappearance of Indigenous stories, the Pilgrim Monument & Provincetown Museum partnered with an Indigenous creative group to produce an exhibit about the complexities between the Wampanoag people and the pilgrims. These steps towards reassessing and filling in missing stories in our history are critical to the understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of Indigenous people, such as the Wampanoag.



## Marginalized

John Smith's 17<sup>th</sup> Century "Map of New England" supports the white Christian male perspective of newly discovered land. Even though the land was inhabited by Indigenous people, it was superimposed with English town names like "London," "Oxford" and "Cambridge" and it displayed English style architectural drawings of Christian churches as a means to display familiarity and ownership. The English did not have ownership, the land had been occupied by the Wampanoag for 11,000 years. Yet still in Smith's map, the Wampanoag were minimally recognized by only three wetu structures (Smith).

## A Familiar Story

"Fireboard: Landing of the Pilgrims" depicts a widely accepted narrative of the discovery of America. The central line of vision falls on a boat full of men "discovering" America, yet in the shadowed margins of the painting (along the bottom and lower right) there are indications that Indigenous people and Indigenous settlements already existed. While this painting recognizes the presence of Indigenous people, it portrays an intentional white male centered narrative that literally marginalizes the presence of Indigenous people in America (Bartoll).





## A Parallel Narrative

"How America was Discovered" offers a narrative told through the oral tradition of the Seneca leader Handsome Lake. This narrative is an Indigenous perspective of the arrival of the pilgrims. Handsome Lake tells, "a great flock of ships came over the ocean, and white men came swarming into the country bringing with them cards, money, fiddles whiskey and blood corruption" (Handsome Lake 6). These items represent the drastic influx of the white man's culture Handsome Lake's history indicates that white men were sent by the devil and that even the devil recognized that "he had made a great mistake (Handsome Lake, 6).

## Untold Stories

The Wampanoag Homesite Tour offers an example of parallel narratives that exist in America. The Indigenous Wampanoag people identify as having belonged to the coastal land of New England for more than 11,000 years while John Smith map proposed English settlements just over 400 years ago. Even though Indigenous people are historically disregarded, this video redirects that myth by showing the lifestyle of the Wampanoag people as told by the Wampanoag tribe members. It reflects that for 11,000 years prior to the landing of the pilgrims, the Wampanoag lived comfortably lived off of the land in well-coordinated family centered communities (Plimoth).





## Dangerous Narratives

"The Indian Chief and The Little White Boy" 1855 is an early American narrative intended for young children. It perpetuates that Indigenous people "consider themselves the true owners" of the United States (Peck,5). It also depicts Indigenous people as violent .They "burnt the villages, and murdered the white women and children, as well as men (Peck, 11)".This story reflects a theme in children's literature from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century that stereotype Indigenous people as violent in order to exclude them from American culture.

## Poem on Disappearance

(excerpt...)

By:Kimberly Blaeser

Beginning with our continent, draw 1491:  
each mountain, compass point Indigenous;  
trace trade routes, languages, seasonal migrations—  
Don't become attached.  
Yes, reshape by discovery, displacement  
move your pencil point quickly now as if pursed—  
a cavalry of possession that erases  
homelands: we shrink shrink—in time-lapse  
of colonial barter. . .disappear

## Narratives Today

This poem is a powerful example of the pain caused by the continual construction of false narratives built to exclude and oppress Indigenous people. The words ask us to redraw the truth of American history without mirrors and false narratives that have become the default (Blaser)..




## Lessons for Today

This video is part of a new exhibit at the Pilgrim Monument & Provincetown Museum.. This is a modern example of the Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers creating authentic representations of their culture. It includes cultural elements of song and dance to show the ceremony and dress of the Wampanoag people as it would have been when the settlers arrived 400 years ago. An Otter.Clan Mother, Carol Wynne, along with other Wampanoag elders, invite people of the modern era into their cultural song and dance “so that we can all understand each other” by finally hearing their story (Wampanoag).

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