Where the English Colonists Guilty of Genocide? (NO)

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Issue Introduction

Colonization

• France, Spain, and England all tried to colonise the New World throughout the seventeenth century.
• Both the French and Spanish posed a low level of threat, as their numbers were limited, and their government seemed content with extrapolating resources, as opposed to settling the New World.
• Immigration from England posed the greatest threat to the survival of Native Americans.
• As larger numbers of English settlers arrived, confrontations between land soon occurred.
• The Natives understood little of the European values, and vice versa for the Europeans.
• The misunderstandings led to both Natives and English being killed.

Pequot War

• The first of many wars between Whites and Native Americans took place in 1637
• Fought between New England Settlers and the Pequots.
• Pequots had been centred around the Thames River in southern Connecticut.
• Up until 1630, they had been moving west towards the Connecticut River.
• Numerous quarrels arose between Pequots and English, eventually leading to the murder of John Oldham on July 20th 1636.
• On May 26th 1637, John Mason and John Underhill led New Englanders and attacked the Pequot stronghold near present-day New Haven, Connecticut where they burned the village and killed 500 men, women, and children.

Were English Colonists Guilty of Genocide? (NO)

The Causes of Pequot War

• Steven T. Katz contends that the Pequot War was not a premeditated genocide carried out by New Englanders.
• Because the English formed alliances with other native tribes-the Mohegans, the Massachusetts and River Tribes, and the Mohawks, the war does not suggest that the English possessed the intention to destroy all things Indian.
• Although the murder of Oldham had sparked the events leading to the war, he was not the first English to be killed by the Pequots. Others include two English Captains in 1634 and six colonists over the next two years.
• English leadership was furious that the Pequots had taken no initiative to persecute the guilty that had broken the treaty they had signed.
• Fear among the colonists began to rise.
• English colonists had reason to fear. Their numbers were relatively low, and memories of the Virginia uprising were still fresh.
• The Colonists chose to punish and to warn the Pequots on Block Island, who had sheltered the murderers, and had become guilty themselves of his blood.
John Endecott, commander of the raid on Block Island was ordered “to put to death the men in Block Island, and to spare the women and children.” However, only one Pequot was killed, even though the village was burnt, property was damaged, and homes looted. Suggested that the colonists did not intend to make war, but instead to do justice. Pequot retaliated by raiding homes and killing 30 settlers in Connecticut. Negotiated with the Narragansetts to destroy settlement in Connecticut. However, Narragansetts denied. Settlers did not fight for Indian blood, but for their very existence. English initially fought a defensive war.

_Battle at Mystic Fort_  
Although the battle at Mystic Fort killed nearly all of the Pequots, the English had no “genocidal intentions”  
With inexperienced colonial forces, combined with a strong enemy camped a mere five miles from Mystic Fort, the English did what was necessary to block the Pequot attack. Although some suggest that the English attacked a village mostly of women and children, there is evidence that 150 Pequot warriors had assembled as reinforcements the day before. All accounts state that the non-combatants were massacred; there was no evidence to support a premeditated plan to do so.

_The Hunt for the Pequots_  
English, along with Indian allies pursued the surviving Pequots. About 200 Pequots were captured shortly after the battle. Only about 22 or 24 were male warriors. The remaining women and children were parceled up and dispersed among the victorious Indian allies. On July 14th 1637, Sassacus, the Pequot chief, and the remaining number of Pequots were surrounded near Southport, Connecticut. The 80 warriors fought to the death, while the remaining 80 percent were captured and divided among the various Indian tribes in the area. Those that survived were no longer known as Pequots, but as members of other tribes. Although these actions were a form of cultural genocide, there were certainly no attempts to commit physical genocide.

_Aftermath_  
Sherburne Cook gave an estimate on the amount of Pequots killed. “If the initial population was 3000, and 750 were killed, the battle loss was twenty-five percent of the tribe.” Despite the force used by the colonists, they would continue to die at the hands of the Indians. In April 1644, a second uprising (Virginia being the first) would claim the lives of about 500 whites. And in 1675, 300 more colonists were killed. The colonists feared the New World, for it posed many risks and uncertainties. The colonists needed to limit the threat to their survival, and although the response was excessive, their fears were not unfounded.
After the Treaty of Hartford was signed, no Pequots were physically harmed. By 1650, four towns were created to house them. And in 1675, the government established permanent reservations for the Pequot. Suggests Americans did not have the intention of committing genocide.

Summary

- English settlers were in the way of the Pequots who had been moving West towards English settlements.
- Several Englishmen were killed by the Pequots, who did not persecute the offenders
- Many English felt insecure in the New World, and saw the Pequots as a threat to their very survival
- Alliances between English and Native American tribes does not suggest premeditated genocide
- Battle at Block Island was to warn Pequots, and anyone who sheltered the ones responsible for the murders
- Battle at Mystic Fort was due to the strength of the opposing army, and the close proximity they were within
- Women, children and elderly were spared in both battles
- Both battles had reasonable causes, which proves genocide was not the intention

Discussion Questions

1. Did English colonists disregard Native American values when they arrived in the New World?
2. How much influence did stereotypes have on the relationship between colonists and Natives?
3. Do you think Native Americans had the ability to resist or perhaps stop English colonization?
4. Do Native American tribes siding with the English suggest that they had the intention of committing genocide?
5. Do you feel the Pequots were the instigators in the Pequot war?
6. Do you feel the attack on Block Island was justified? Or was it simply an act of overreaction and fear?
7. Were the English justified in attacking the Pequot outside Mystic Fort?
8. What is your opinion on the dispersing of Pequots to other tribes? Was it necessary?
9. Was it necessary to punish and kill almost all the Pequot warriors, just for the acts of a few individuals?
10. Is committing cultural genocide the equivalent of committing physical genocide?
11. Do you think the Pequot war simply fuelled Native American hatred towards the English?
Test Questions (Multiple choice, Fill in Blanks)

1. The Pequot War was sparked by the killing of:
   A) John Mason
   B) A Mohawk warrior
   C) John Oldham
   D) Benedict Holden

2. The battle at Block Island involved:
   A) The village being raided, and the entire population killed
   B) The village being burned, and all the men being killed
   C) The village being captured, and used as a fort
   D) The village was burnt, and only one Pequot life was lost

3. Block Island was attacked mainly because:
   A) It posed a serious threat to the settlers
   B) The people sheltered Pequot murderers
   C) Block Island was a strategic military location
   D) The English were insistent on committing genocide

4. What percent of Pequots were killed during the battle of Mystic Fort?
   A) 2%
   B) 5%
   C) 25%
   D) > 50%

5. Fill in the blanks

   English settlers fought with ____________ in the first of many wars between whites and reds. The two major battles were at _________________ and ________________.
   The English eventually captured all of them and dispersed them to various _____________ tribes. Historians believe the settlers were guilty of _____________ genocide, but not ______________ genocide.
**Glossary**

**Alliances**- An association formed for mutual benefit. Many alliances were being formed between Native Americans and English settlers at the time. Many alliances between Native Americans were also present.

**Colonization**- Establishing a community with settlers in a new territory. Major colonizing during the 1600 and 1700’s in North America. Spain, France and England were establishing colonies on the Atlantic coasts.

**Cultural Genocide**- Genocide involving the extermination of culture (art, music, tradition) instead of the people themselves. Assimilation. The English accomplished this when they dispersed captured Pequots to other Native tribes.

**Defensive War**- A war that is fought where one side reacts to defend itself of the other, usually not the instigator. The English claim they fought a defensive war at first, since they were the victims of Pequot murders.

**Massacre**- a great slaughter, usually in larger numbers. Many historians believed that the English were responsible of mass murdering of Native Americans, although it is not necessarily true.

**Retaliatory**- repay an injury, insult, etc by inflicting one in return. The English retaliated to the murder of John Oldham by attacking Block Island. The Pequots then killed many English settlers in retaliation.

**Pequots**- A Native American war-like tribe that settled near present day Connecticut. They had been moving Westward until English settlements restricted them to do so.
**Pequot War** - A war fought between English settlers and the Pequot Indians in 1637. The first of many wars between the red and whites. The war claimed about 750 Pequot lives.

**Physical Genocide** - Deliberate extermination of a race of people. Historians believed that genocide was carried out by English settlers.

**Premeditated** - Planned beforehand. There were no signs of premeditated genocide through the actions of the English, although some believe otherwise.

**Self Protection** - Defending oneself from other forces through defensive means.

**Stereotypes** - Standardized conventional idea or character. Stereotypes created confusion and sometimes tension between the Native Americans and the English settlers. The English saw Natives as savages, and the Natives could not understand European values.