

**THE HISTORY CHANNEL® PRESENTS:  
10 DAYS THAT UNEXPECTEDLY CHANGED AMERICA™**



***Massacre at Mystic***  
**(MAY 26, 1637)**

When English settlers arrived on the North American continent to start their lives anew, many of them gave little thought to the native peoples who had long inhabited these lands. The Puritan colonists who arrived in the Connecticut River Valley in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century quickly learned the benefits and necessities of trade and co-existence with the Pequot and other native groups. An initial period of accommodation and cultural mixing, however, turned bitter as the groups clashed over conflicting views of property, nature, division of labor, and the principles of warfare. *Massacre at Mystic* traces relations between these groups through the lens of a single day. On May 26, 1637 the English retaliated against the murder of one of their own by viciously attacking a Pequot encampment. As this documentary explores this massacre, it captures the fateful consequences of these divergent worldviews and the tragic legacy left in its wake.

*Massacre at Mystic* is a dramatic retelling of the development of Puritan and Pequot relationships. Historians and Pequot descendents offer thoughtful commentary based on primary research and up-to-date historical interpretation. While there may have been a period of time in which Europeans and Native Americans could have built a cooperative society together, *Massacre at Mystic* uses this smaller story as a gripping example of why violence and force prevailed rather than co-existence. Rather than a simple tale of defeat, this program follows the present day Pequot as they have reconstructed a community based on new business enterprises and cultural endeavors. This program is an excellent historical lesson in understanding the development of the early colonies, the devastation of Native American peoples, and the patterns set during these formative years of contact.

**Curriculum Links:**

*Massacre at Mystic* would be an excellent addition to any middle school or high school class on American History, European History, World History, Environmental Studies, the History of Agriculture and Science and Technology. It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Civilization, cultural diffusion, and innovation, (2) Conflict and cooperation, and (3) Human interaction with the environment.

**Key Terms :**

*Students should identify the following terms. Visit [www.miriamwebster](http://www.miriamwebster.com) for definitions.*

Colonist  
Wampum  
Quahog  
Providential  
Co-existence  
Tentative  
Concessions  
Diplomatic  
Subjugated  
Espouse  
Reservation

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. How would you describe relationships between the Puritan settlers and the Pequot before the Pequot War? Why do you think these relationships changed so quickly?
2. Before the arrival of the British, what was the status of the Pequot in the Connecticut River Valley? How would you describe their relationships with other Native American tribes?
3. Why did the Puritans travel to the New World? What were their intentions upon arrival?
4. Compare and contrast Puritan and Pequot ideas about the following: land and property, division of labor and gender, and warfare? Give examples to back up your discussion.
5. In this program, one commentator suggests that the Dutch colonists favored trade, while the British prioritized land. How did the difference in focus shape their interactions with Native Americans, and their goals in the New World?
6. Why were British settlers unhappy with the way Pequot organized their economy and relationship to the land? Do you think there was any validity to their concerns? Who do you think, if anyone, ultimately had the right to decide who should control the land?
7. Why do you think the Narragansett and Mohegan tribes fought with the Puritans against the Pequot? Were you surprised by their actions? Discuss.
8. One commentator, Tall Oak, ponders how the early colonies would have been different if the Puritans had come in peace. How would you answer this question? Do you think a different outcome in relations between the Pequot and the Puritans was possible?

9. How did the Pequot manage to resurrect their community hundreds of years after the massacre? How do you think it would feel to go from devastation to prosperity?
10. Describe the details of the 1638 Treaty of Hartford, which ended the war. Why was the treaty considered to be cultural genocide for the Pequot?
11. What sources do you think historians used in order to recount the story of the massacre at Mystic? What sources might you use if you were trying to create a documentary about the early colonies? Do you think this documentary offers a balanced and informed view of the massacre? Discuss.
12. How did the massacre at Mystic changed the United States?

### **Extended Activities:**

1. This documentary traces the history of the English settlement of the Connecticut River Valley. Ask students to research this region during the period covered in the documentary. Break students up into groups of four or five. Ask students to create maps of the Mystic area during this era. Students should also pinpoint the location of other European settlements in North America before 1700. These maps can be on poster-board, construction paper, or using a computer program. Students can use images from books and web sites to decorate their maps.
2. The Pequot War officially ended with the Treaty of Hartford. Online or at the library, research the Treaty of Hartford and discover its provisions. Write a short synopsis of the treaty, or describe its contents using bullet points. Then, write a letter either from the perspective of a Puritan or a Pequot, describing your reactions to the treaty. Include references to the actual terms of the treaty in your letter. Share these letters with the larger class or group.
3. Throughout this documentary, several tribes other than the Pequot are mentioned. In small groups, ask students to research the Narragansett, the Mohegan, or any other Native American group in the Americas before 1700. Students should create visual or written presentations depicting their findings and share them with the larger class or group. If possible, students should include a map, and relevant details on the trading patterns and cultural characteristics of their chosen group.

### **Primary Source Exploration:**

**In 1630, Puritan John Winthrop led a fleet of eleven ships to the New World to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In a famous sermon entitled “A Model of Christian Charity,” Winthrop described what he saw as the Puritan compact with God. The excerpt below captures many of the fundamental Puritan beliefs shared by the colonists at Mystic. Ask students to read this excerpt and respond to the questions that follow.**

*“We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body...For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God*

*in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.”*

1. How would you describe the Puritan community envisioned by John Winthrop? Do you think this kind of community is possible?
2. What do you think Winthrop means by the term “city on a hill”? Who do you think he expected would have their eyes upon the Puritans?
3. Do you think Winthrop considered Native American groups when he delivered this sermon? Do you think the Puritans upheld Winthrop’s vision in their dealings with Native Americans? Discuss.

### **Resources:**

#### **Books**

Cave, Alfred. *The Pequot War*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

Cronin, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, (Hill and Wang, 2003).

Karr, Ronald Dale, ed. *Indian New England 1524-1674: A Compendium of Eyewitness Accounts of Native American Life*, (Branch Line Press, 2004).

Vaughn, Alden. *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675*, (Hill and Wang, 2003).

#### **Web sites**

The Mashantucket Museum and Research Center:

<http://www.pequotmuseum.org/>

Background information on the Pequot tribe:

<http://www.foxwoods.com/TheMashantucketPequots/History/>

A helpful site on Native American history from the Smithsonian:

<http://www.si.edu/RESOURCE/FAQ/nmai/start.htm>