

Reviving Manhood: Algonquian Masculinity and Christianity Following the First Great Awakening in Southern New England

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On what he described as a “stormy and very uncomfortable day” in September of 1772, Mohegan minister Samson Occom stood before a crowd of thousands at the First Congregational Church in New Haven, Connecticut and delivered the execution sermon for Moses Paul, a Wampanoag man slated to be hanged later that day. Preaching on the “wages of sin” and the “gift of God” found in the sixth chapter of the book of Romans, Occom addressed the multicultural flock that had come to witness the hanging as a sinful people before God and as needful of the gift of redemption. Effectively leveling the racial hierarchy and social divisions that marked the colonial world in which he lived, Occom charged that all “impenitent sinners,” whether “rich or poor,” “bond or free,” or “Negroes, Indians, [or] English” all “must go to hell together, for the wages of sin is death.” Refusing to leave the crowd at a place of spiritual despair, Occom went on to offer his listeners, along with the condemned man, the gift of salvation made possible by Jesus Christ, whom the Mohegan minister insisted “has the power to save, and to give life.”

Identifying Moses Paul as the “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh,” Occom not only beseeched the Wampanoag man to make this “the day of salvation” and to “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” but he also called on the crowd of witnesses to recognize their own role in bringing Paul to this place of execution. While castigating Paul for the drunken behavior and “abominable sin” that had led him to commit murder, Occom charged Euro-American colonists as complicit in the intoxication and social breakdown riddling Native communities throughout the region, proclaiming, “we find in sacred writ, a wo [sic] denounced against men, who put their bottles to their neighbors mouth to make them drunk, that they may see their nakedness.” Concluding his message with a final entreaty to Paul to

“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” Occom appealed to the wider crowd to “reform [their] lives” and to remember their accountability to God (Brooks 2006:162, 176–195).

As Occom stood before the diverse crowd of listeners in New Haven on that late summer morning in 1772, he in many ways embodied the changing expressions of masculinity that had emerged in Algonquian society in the preceding decades as customary activities such as hunting and warfare declined and were replaced by itinerant labor and exchange with surrounding colonial communities. Among Algonquian peoples in southern New England, masculinity traditionally derived from a spatial division of labor that distinguished masculine tasks from feminine ones, and from the political and ceremonial roles that Native men performed in their villages and beyond (Bragdon 1996b:575–579). While manhood was rooted in hunting, warfare, and other mobile labor apart from the village in the early colonial period, by the eighteenth century such activities had become increasingly circumscribed by colonial dictates and law.

Following the outbreak of evangelical revivals in the 1730s and 1740s known as the “Great Awakening,” Algonquian peoples who were previously isolated from or resistant to the Gospel message came into increasing contact with itinerant preachers and their offers of salvation. While Native groups such as the Mohegans, Narragansetts, and Pequots had largely fallen beyond the perimeters of the early Puritan missionary endeavors in New England, by the mid-eighteenth century a renewed zeal among their Euro-American neighbors exposed First Peoples to Christian teachings and formal schooling, both of which aimed to bring about their “civilization.” As Euro-American ministers visited and preached at Algonquian settlements in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and on eastern Long Island, and welcomed Native congregants at their church revivals, they proclaimed to their listeners that eternal life was made possible by a “new birth” and direct relationship with the Christian God. Many Algonquians responded to the teachings of “New Light” evangelicals and the call to confess their sins and receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and as one observer noted, became “stirred up to seek after eternal Life” (Prince 1744:209). As Native communities incorporated evangelical Christianity into their lifeways, a number of Algonquian men used this new spiritual power to assume the roles of ministers and teachers within their villages and beyond.

Scholars of the Great Awakening and colonial religion have increasingly recognized the participation and influential roles of First Peoples in the religious landscape of the eighteenth century. Seeking to redress the nearly exclusive focus on Euro-American society found in traditional narratives of the Great Awakening, a number of ethnohistorians have brought to light the presence of Native Americans at revival meetings, church gatherings, and on the paths of itinerant preachers. Following William Simmons' writing on the emergence of a Native-led church at Narragansett in the Awakening period, historians and literary scholars such as Jane Merritt, Laura Murray, David Silverman, Joanna Brooks, and Richard Pointer have emphasized that First Peoples represented an integral component of the changing religious world in the northern colonies, and often took a leading role in expressing and defining the Christian message. As Joanna Brooks recently noted, the "Great Awakening sparked a distinctive culture of Christian Indian separatism in Southern New England," which enabled Algonquian faithful to create their own churches and to "exercise their spiritual gifts and powers without white supervision" (2006:13). Echoing Brooks' sentiments, Richard Pointer has urged scholars to recognize that "Europeans were not alone in promoting or defining the Christian message in early America," and has argued that Native American Christianity "was simply too compelling for the Euro-American Christians around them to ignore, dismiss, or fully control" (2007:123–24).¹

Despite the increasing attention scholars have paid to the participation of Native Americans in the Great Awakening and colonial religion more broadly, few historians have considered the complex ties between evangelical Christianity and Algonquian manhood. Historians of Britain and colonial America have begun to outline the links between masculinity, class, and religion in their studies of Christian movements, and have suggested that the emergence of new concepts of manhood often reflected evangelical teachings and Christian ideals. Pamela Walker's scholarship on the Salvation

1. For examples of Great Awakening literature which largely excludes Native Americans, see Miller (1956), Heimert (1966), McLoughlin (1978), and Bushman (1979). For works that examine the response and involvement of Native Americans in missions and the Great Awakening, see Simmons (1983), Szasz (1988), Dowd (1992), Szasz (1994), Merritt (1997), Peyer (1997), Murray (1998), Silverman (2005), Wheeler (2008), and Fisher (2009).

Army in nineteenth-century Britain emphasizes the “new manliness” that religion offered working-class men that centered on personal holiness and the salvation of others (1991). Along similar lines, Janet Lindman’s study of “evangelical masculinity” in revolutionary Virginia explores the competing ideals of manhood that emerged as Anglo-American men participated in the Christian revivals of the mid-eighteenth century. Lindman contends that men who embraced the Gospel message also embraced a new masculinity expressed in spiritual words, knowledge of doctrine, and new roles in the church (2000:405–411).

Among scholars of colonial America, however, few have tackled the ties between evangelical Christianity and Native concepts of masculinity. Nathaniel Sheidley’s writing on the “politics of masculinity” that emerged in Cherokee communities in the second half of the eighteenth century highlights the growing tensions that marked relations between younger and older Native men. As village leaders ceded large tracts of land to encroaching colonists to circumvent conflict, younger Cherokee men found their ability to hunt and define themselves as men increasingly circumscribed (Sheidley 1999:168–171, 176–177). Hilary Wyss’ study of Algonquian Christianity and the founding of the community of Brotherton in the years surrounding the American Revolution represents one of the few attempts to outline the intertwining of spiritual beliefs and Native manhood in the eighteenth-century religious world. Examining the efforts of Algonquian men from southern New England such as Samson Occom and Joseph Johnson to create a new settlement on Oneida lands, Wyss argues that they “reconceptualised the meaning of a Native community along deeply masculinist lines” by emphasizing “personal agency, action, and control” rather than their subordination to Anglo-American missionaries. While Wyss’ work provides insight into the ways in which Algonquian men used Christian teachings to reject colonial control, she also suggests that masculine empowerment in forming the new community came at the expense of Native women, as Algonquian men adopted a “rigid gender hierarchy” similar to their Anglo-American neighbors (2000:126, 130–139). By emphasizing the adoption of patriarchy and the subordination of women, Wyss misses the significant cultural continuities that marked the gender roles of both the Algonquian men and women who helped to form the Christian community of Brotherton.

Algonquian men such as Occom who accepted the salvation of Jesus and became ministers of the Gospel created new masculine identities

based on their relationship to God and the power of the Holy Spirit.² As they preached in Algonquian villages, led worship services, and received revelation and guidance from the Holy Spirit, Algonquian ministers renewed and revived traditional male roles of directing communal worship and exercising geographical mobility based on a new spiritual power. Their efforts to create and lead village churches and to direct communal affairs also placed a number of ministers in conflict with the political leadership of their sachems. By opposing the compliance of the sachems at Mohegan and Narragansett with colonial designs for Native lands, Native ministers created alternative forms of political authority through which they mobilized community and church members to defend their homelands and tribal autonomy. Perhaps most significantly, Algonquian ministers extended their Christian manhood beyond the boundaries of their villages and carved out new positions of spiritual and political influence in the wider colonial world. Preaching in front of multicultural crowds and challenging the religious and political authority of their Euro-American neighbors, Algonquian ministers not only rejected colonial efforts to remake their manhood according to Anglo-ideals, but they also demonstrated the new sacred power they wielded as Christian men which enabled them to counsel and criticize their colonial peers.

Before the arrival of Europeans in present-day New England and throughout much of the colonial period, Algonquian men occupied positions of spiritual and political authority within their villages and communities. All Algonquians lived in a powerfully gendered world that was spatially divided into masculine and feminine places, and practically demarcated by male and female tasks (Bragdon 1996a:123, 129). Algonquian women primarily lived

2. The conditions through which Algonquian men became ministers varied. While men such as Samson Occom and Joseph Johnson received an “official” ordination or license to preach from English denominational bodies (but also preached before being licensed or ordained), others such as Narragansett Samuel Niles received their ordaining and authority from their Native adherents—in Niles’ case, from “three Brethren Indians” who visited or attended the church he led in Charlestown. In the case of Samuel Ashpo, the Native minister preached for several years at Mohegan and was affiliated with “Separate” evangelicals before he received an “official” license to “preach among the Indians” from a group of local ministers convened in Hartford in 1763, which he obtained in order to serve as a missionary among the Mohawks. See Murray (1998:241); McCallum (1932:40); Brooks (2006:255); Dexter (1901:232–233).

and worked in the space of the wigwam and planting fields and focused on crop-raising, child-rearing, and food preparation. In villages along the coast, European observers noted the role women also played in digging for and collecting shellfish, which provided food for their families and material for the production of wampum (Williams 1973:182, 207). According to Trudie Richmond, in early colonial New England “women’s power and status were based on their control over land and agricultural production” (Richmond and Den Ouden 2003:180). Women’s power also stemmed from their reproductive abilities, and during their period of menstruation Algonquian women sequestered themselves in separate wigwams known as *wetuomemese*, apart from the rest of the community (Bragdon 1996a:107; Williams 1973:117). Masculine tasks, in contrast, traditionally covered a broader landscape of hunting, deep-sea fishing, warfare, and diplomacy. Often spending several months of a year away from central villages based on seasonal subsistence strategies, Algonquian men moved across a landscape of fields, forests, and waterways as they provided food for their families and maintained relations with neighboring groups and the animal spirits they hunted (Bragdon 1996a:116–123). According to Roger Williams, Narragansett men possessed extensive knowledge of the lands surrounding their villages stemming from their hunting expeditions and visits to other towns to share news and engage in gaming and trade (1973:134–135, 151, 215–217; Bragdon 1996a:120–121). Men and women came together to share in tasks of clearing fields and constructing wigwams, but crafted specific items such as baskets, mats, spoons, and dishes separately, which they used in their households and for trade (Williams 1973:117, 128,170; Gookin 1972:11).

European observers noted that men often, although not exclusively, filled the roles of political and spiritual leaders in Algonquian villages. The hereditary position of the sachem in most cases fell into male hands among groups in southern New England, and men belonging to established lineages wielded rights and responsibilities concerning land, diplomacy, justice, tribute, and warfare. As Richmond notes, male sachems, and their female counterparts, described by Europeans as *sunksquaws*, did not wield “dictatorial power,” but rather demonstrated their ability to “resolve disputes” and to “maintain and strengthen alliances,” and based their leadership on principles of reciprocity (Richmond and Den Ouden 2003:180). Special counselors and advisors, whom one European colonizer described as “wise

men,” bolstered the office of the sachem and functioned as collectors of tribute, leaders in warfare, and recipients of powerful visions from the god of the underworld (Williams 1973:201–202; Simmons 1986:40).

European observers also described the prominence of Algonquian men in serving the ceremonial needs of local villages. While all Algonquians sought to obtain spiritual power through dreams, vision quests, and encounters with other-than-human beings, those who received special and unsought visions of *Manitou* and spirit beings became councilors and religious specialists, known as *powwows*, within their communities (Simmons 1986:41–42; Bragdon 1996a:203–206). Euro-American colonists described the presence of *powwows* in Algonquian villages, who served as communal physicians and directors of worship and who were revered for their powerful visions and contact with unsought *Manitou*. According to Roger Williams’ seventeenth-century observations among the Narragansett, *powwows* served to “performe [sic] and manage their Worship” as well as make “solemne [sic] speeches and Orations” concerning “Religion, Peace, or Warre [sic],” while other “wise” and “well descended” men assumed the role of preparing the dead for burial (1973:192, 248). Beginning their “services” by invoking many gods, Williams described how Algonquian priests engaged in “strange Antick Gestures, and Actions” which they also called upon to heal sick villagers (1973:192, 245). Daniel Gookin’s observations of First Peoples in Massachusetts also emphasized the healing function performed by spiritual leaders. While noting that “certain men and women” could assume the role of *powwow*, Gookin related how these “physicians” made use of “herbs and roots, for curing the sick and diseased” (1972:14).

By the early eighteenth century, however, colonial surveillance and control had become increasing realities for Algonquian groups living in Connecticut and Rhode Island, as well as on Long Island. As Euro-American colonists whittled away Algonquian homelands, they increased their efforts to reform and manage Native lands and culture by assigning overseers, schoolmasters, and ministers to Algonquian settlements to teach them to be both “civilized” and “Christianized.” As a part of this plan, colonial officials aspired to remake Algonquian men and women according to their own gender norms, and envisioned Native men as sedentary farmers living on small tracts of land and presiding over nuclear families, while women would occupy a domestic role limited to the household. In 1717 Connecticut Governor Gordon Saltonstall outlined measures to “wean” the colony’s

Algonquians from the “Rude and barbarous usages of their Heatenism” which included the regular reading of English laws and efforts to encourage sedentary living in the “English manner” (Indian Papers [IP] I,I:88). Several years later, colonial officials in Connecticut passed an act which aimed to control the movement of First Peoples in the areas surrounding New Milford, Farmington, and Lockfield. Restricting the hunting times and locales available to Native men, the act also required Algonquian leaders to provide officials with lists of the male inhabitants living in their villages, and to keep track of their movements and whereabouts (IP I,I:113).

Euro-American missionaries likewise embraced the goals of remaking Algonquian gender roles and village life, and joined in the efforts to evangelize and educate the “savages” living in New England. John Sergeant, who worked among the Mohican people of western Massachusetts, described his plans to change the “whole Habit of thinking and acting” of the Native children he hoped to educate, which would involve various forms of agricultural labor for Native boys to instill “industrious” behavior (Sergeant 1743:3–4). Congregational minister Eleazar Wheelock, who opened an “Indian Charity School” in Connecticut by the mid-eighteenth century, likewise embarked on a mission to recreate the cultural and gender practices of the Native boys and girls who attended his school. Seeking to instill piety, cleanliness, and order into his Native flock, Wheelock’s laborious regimen endeavored to transform Native boys into “good farmers” by teaching them “the Affairs of Husbandry” while Native girls learned the “Arts of good Housewifery” through subservient roles in English households (Wheelock 1763:33–34; Axtell 1985:211). In recounting his efforts to educate a boy of Delaware descent who attended the school in the early 1760s, Wheelock reflected on the “pains” he had taken to “purge all the Indian out of him,” but admitted that “after all a little of it will sometimes appear” (Eleazar Wheelock Papers [WP] 1764:764560.1).

The outburst of evangelical Christianity in southern New England in the late 1730s offered Algonquian men a new source of power with which to revive and maintain traditional masculine roles of spiritual leadership and geographical mobility. As Algonquians protested growing interference and encroachments upon their land and lifeways, a number of men drew on the message of salvation and new life proclaimed by Euro-American revivalists to reinvigorate their authority as spiritual leaders based on new spiritual power. The emphasis that revivalists placed on the word of God, spiritual

revelations, and the sacred experience of the “new birth” in many ways complemented Algonquian understandings of power and authority. While Algonquian counselors, “wise men,” and *powwows* traditionally derived their status and position from special encounters with *Manitou* or other deities, men who became ministers rooted their new authority in the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Years before preaching the execution sermon at New Haven, for example, Samson Occom came under a spiritual conviction that altered the course of his life. Describing the “trouble of mind” he experienced after attending revival meetings near Mohegan in the late 1730s, Occom recounted that the “Distress and Burden” of his mind was removed only after he placed his trust in Christ “alone for Life & Salvation.” As he discovered “the way of Salvation through Jesus” at the age of seventeen, Occom trusted in a new spiritual power that brought him both eternal life and “Serenity and Pleasure of Soul.” Almost immediately after accepting the gift of salvation, Occom became burdened for his “poor Kindred” and began to frequently “talk with our Indians Concerning Religion” before assuming the role of minister and teacher among the Montauketts on Long Island (Brooks 2006:53–54).

A number of Algonquian men experienced similar spiritual revelations and visions as they accepted the Christian message. At the Narragansett settlement in Rhode Island, Samuel Niles became a prominent leader and minister in the community based on the visions and dreams that underscored his faith. As one Euro-American minister noted with disgust, Niles not only exhibited great fluency of speech, but he also received powerful signs and visions from Christ and angels, and drew on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide his preaching (Simmons and Simmons 1982:5, 94). Another minister described with patronizing concern the “idle dreams” and “whims and imaginations” in which Niles grounded his Christian faith (Simmons and Simmons 1982:11). Recounting the church service during which “three Brethren Indians” ordained him as minister of the Narragansett church, Niles claimed that “such a Spirit was outpoured and fell upon them . . . that many others of the Congregation prayed aloud and lift[ed] up their hearts . . . to God” (Dexter 1901:232–233). Mohegan Joseph Johnson likewise experienced powerful dreams and spiritual revelations before assuming the role of minister in southern New England. On a winter night in 1771, Johnson endured a “Strange dream” in which the “Earth was on fire, and the moon and the Stars were dropping [sic] from the heavens.” Recalling

his own dismay and fear at the imminent return of Christ, for which he “was unprepared [sic],” Johnson interpreted the dream as a “timely warning” and resolved to “Seek Christ while he may be found.” Nearly a year later, while serving as schoolmaster at Farmington, Connecticut, Johnson again made note of the visions and spiritual interventions that shaped his everyday life. Following an evening of hunting squirrels with boys from the community, Johnson woke up the next morning to the “likeness of a lamb that had been Slain, Standin[g] at the foot of my Couch.” Identifying the lamb as Jesus Christ, the “only Object” of his love, Johnson “followed the Blessed Lamb out, and there I worshiped him” (Murray 1998:124–125, 161–162).

Flush with the power and salvation that flowed from their visions and encounters with God, Algonquian men revived traditional roles of directing worship and communal gatherings in their villages under new Christian authority. Although many Algonquians initially attended Euro-American churches and revival meetings in southern New England, by the mid-eighteenth century a cadre of Native ministers emerged who directed worship services and the creation of churches within their own villages. At Mohegan in Connecticut, while a number of Natives attended the Congregational Church in nearby Montville, men such as Samson Occom, Samuel Ashpo, Henry Quaquaquid, and John Cooper by the 1750s began to lead Sabbath worship, prayer meetings, and hymn-gatherings in local homes. Noting in a letter to a friend the power of God he witnessed at work at Mohegan, Occom described his own role as a spiritual leader and divine mouthpiece, claiming, “I have Preached abundantly amongst them, and I hope I shall go on preaching by Gods help” (Brooks 2006:101). During a worship gathering in November 1771, three Mohegan men took turns in calling their community to accept and obey Christ. While Henry Quaquaquid opened the service by celebrating God’s plan of redemption in sending Jesus into the world, Samuel Ashpo and John Nanepome offered their Native listeners a more somber message by calling them to “set their mind[s] heaven ward” and to live in fear of sin (Murray 1998:101).

Algonquian men directed members of the community in forming a church and worshipping God at the Narragansett Reserve in Rhode Island as well. In the early 1740s, a number of Narragansetts began to attend Joseph Park’s Congregational Church in Westerly, following the visit of a group of Pequot Christians who “stirred up” the Narragansetts to “seek after Eternal life” (Prince 1744:209). Within a few years, however, nearly one

hundred Natives abandoned Park's church after he censured Samuel Niles and others for exhorting during his services. Under the leadership of Niles, the Narragansetts built their own meetinghouse where they gathered to sing hymns, pray, and exhort one another (Simmons 1983). Esteeming Niles as a minister of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, one Euro-American observer described the Narragansett preacher as "[well] acquainted with the Doctrines of the Gospel" and an "earnest zealous Man" who "has very great Influence over the Indians" (Dexter 1901:233). While Niles led the congregation in regular communion and worship, other church leaders such as John Shattock hosted spiritual gatherings at their homes. Serving at Narragansett alongside Niles and Shattock, Pequot minister James Simon also offered spiritual leadership and direction to Native believers in Rhode Island. Overseeing a group of Narragansett Christians who met in a private home separate from Niles' congregation, Simon received praise from observers such as Baptist minister Isaac Backus, who applauded the spiritual refreshment and stirring that occurred among those who listened to the Pequot minister preach (McLoughlin 1979:360–361, 370–371). On Long Island, men such as "Indian teacher" Cyrus Charles, Samson Occom, David Fowler, and Peter John wielded new authority as preachers and teachers, and helped to build a meetinghouse at Montauk and to encourage the learning of Christian doctrine at villages across the island (Dexter 1899; Brooks 2006; Eells 1991).

The call many men received to preach the word of God and to teach in the power of the Holy Spirit led them to travel between communities and renew inter-village ties. Building on long-standing male traditions of diplomacy and trade, such movement broke down colonial boundaries and reaffirmed ties between Algonquian settlements across southern New England. According to Amy den Ouden, in early eighteenth-century Connecticut Native populations "were subject to stringent laws that were intended to confine them geographically and that cast those who transgressed designated boundaries as 'enemies'" (Den Ouden 2005:78). In Rhode Island, colonial officials also enacted laws throughout the mid-eighteenth century which designed to monitor the movement and activities of First Peoples, which included "laws and orders for the better regulating of . . . Indian dances" and limitations on the rights and mobility of Native servants and slaves (Bartlett 1968:IV, 425–426; V, 320–321). Jean O'Brien's scholarship on Native communities in colonial New England emphasizes the growing

constraints and adaptations that Algonquians made to their traditional gender roles and subsistence practices in the face of colonial control and their “divorcement” from their lands. As land and resources declined, Algonquian women increasingly relied on craftwork to survive, while men adopted new patterns of movement by participating in colonial wars or joining whaling expeditions, which drew them away from villages for longer periods of time, or permanently (O’Brien 1997:150, 153–154).

For Algonquian men who became preachers and teachers, the itinerant nature of their activities offered another way to sustain traditions of masculine movement linked to hunting, warfare, and inter-village diplomacy, and helped to undermine the isolating nature of the colonial reserve system and the circumscribed mobility of Natives dictated by colonial law. Samson Occom’s journals and correspondence are filled with descriptions of the extensive preaching networks he traveled and of the growing Christian connections that he and other ministers forged across space. While serving as a teacher and minister at Montauk in the 1750s, Occom not only journeyed across Long Island to minister at other Native villages such as Shinnecock and Seetauket, but he frequently visited family and friends at Niantic and Mohegan on the mainland for Sabbath services as well (Brooks 2006). On a late summer day in 1760, Occom, along with Montaukett David Fowler visited the Native community at Farmington, Connecticut to share in worship and singing. Noting how he and Fowler found several “Friends” present at the gathering, Occom preached in front of a crowd comprised of “Some from Mohegan Some from Nahantuck, and Some from Groton” (Brooks 2006:258).

Occom’s skill and renown as a preacher took him far beyond New England in 1765, as the Mohegan man journeyed to England alongside another minister to participate in a fundraising tour that would last more than two years. Seeking to raise money for Eleazar Wheelock’s Indian Charity School, Occom’s travels brought him before large and small congregations in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and presented the Mohegan minister with a forum to spur British believers on in their faith as well as to promote the cause of Native education in New England (Love 2000:130–151; Brooks 2006:19–20). After returning home in 1768, Occom continued to note the journeys he made across New England to preach and teach at Native villages. Writing in a 1772 letter that “I might preach every Day I have So many Calls,” Occom related his most recent journey which took him to

“Stonington Indian Town,” where “a great number of People” attended “a Solemn Meeting” at which “ye Lord was there” (Brooks 2006:100).

Native ministers followed Occom’s example and expended similar efforts in renewing intertribal connections across the expanse of southern New England. Traversing many of the same preaching paths, Mohegans John Cooper, Samuel Ashpo, and Joseph Johnson journeyed sometimes distances of more than fifty miles to visit, instruct, and preach at Algonquian villages. In the fall of 1770, John Cooper visited the Narragansett settlement and exhorted his Algonquian brethren at a large gathering. According to local Congregational minister Joseph Fish, nearly “200 Indians, as was judgd [sic]” flocked to hear the Mohegan preach, whereas only four Natives attended Fish’s lecture the following day (Simmons and Simmons 1982:68). Mohegan minister Joseph Johnson described his own travels and attempts to visit “several Towns of [his] Indian Brethren” and to preach the “Gospel of our Lord Jesus” in villages across the region (Murray 1998:253). While teaching at Farmington, Connecticut in the early 1770s, in addition to instructing his native students in reading, writing, and Christian doctrine, Johnson also directed hymn-gatherings and prayer meetings among his Tunxis and Sepos hosts. Samuel Niles often left his Narragansett flock in order to visit, encourage, and exhort believers living at Mohegan and Mashantucket in Connecticut. On a cold February night in 1772, for example, a group of Narragansetts, most likely accompanied by Niles, traveled across the Pawcatuck River and “About candle lite . . . arrived and held a Conferance [sic]” at Mohegan (Murray 1998:133). Montaukett preacher David Fowler often attended conferences and hymn-singing services at Mohegan as well. Traveling across Long Island Sound in the fall of 1771, Fowler joined a diverse crowd gathered at Mohegan and assumed the role of “Chief” singer, and was accompanied by “Some of the young women belonging to Stonington” (Murray 1998:105). David’s younger brother Jacob operated a school among the Pequots at Mashantucket in the early 1770s, and also journeyed throughout southern New England to visit other Algonquian communities and share the word of God. Described by Samson Occom as “warm in Religion,” Occom also recounted Jacob’s efforts to “expound the Scriptures in [his] meetings among the Indians” and the favorable responses he received (Brooks 2006:101, 108).

As they revived patterns of male mobility and diplomacy across their communities, Algonquian ministers forged new political ties and authority

that rivaled those of their sachems. While offering spiritual direction and counsel to the men and women who attended their preaching and prayer meetings, ministers also became increasingly involved in the political debates and struggles for autonomy that characterized a number of Algonquian villages by the mid-eighteenth century. In his writing on Christianity among the Wampanoags on Martha's Vineyard, David Silverman argues that Natives used their new Christian beliefs and the institution of the church to bolster their local communities and the Wampanoag tribe itself. Rather than "colonial impositions" engineered by English missionaries, Silverman contends that Native churches became "vigorous bulwarks" of "Indian interests and culture" by helping the Wampanoags to protect their land and rights throughout the colonial period. Most significantly, Silverman notes that churches provided Wampanoags with "alternative leaders to the[ir] sachem[s]" as Christian ministers and congregants actively battled hereditary figures for political leadership and control of their lands (2003:266–267, 272–275, 285). Susan Neylan's study of Protestant missionaries among the Tsimshian on the northwest coast in the nineteenth century similarly highlights the emergence of new forms of power and authority within Native society. While Christianity in many cases reinforced and strengthened the existing spiritual and political roles of chiefs and shamans, Neylan contends that the missionary endeavor also produced "new identities" among the Tsimshian by extending the possibilities of a "transformative experience" and spiritual power to Natives located beyond the perimeters of traditional leadership (2000:55–56).

In Algonquian settlements in southern New England, several Native ministers used their new inter-village authority as spiritual teachers to offer their communities alternative leadership to that of the sachem in dealing with colonial encroachment and village governance. At Mohegan, the prolonged land dispute known as the "Mason Case," which pitted the Mohegans against the Connecticut government over the rights to their lands, also created internal divisions within the Native community. Split into factions known as "Ben's Town" and "John's Town," members of the former group supported sachems Ben Uncas II and Ben Uncas III, and their compliance with colonial officials regarding Mohegan lands. Members of John's Town rejected both the colony's claim to their lands and the leadership of both sachems. While ministers such as Samson Occom, Henry Quaquauid, and Samuel Ashpo belonged to prominent Mohegan families and served as

councilors throughout the 1730s and 1740s, all three men began to oppose and challenge the sachem's leadership by mid-century, which they believed undermined Mohegan autonomy and land rights.³

In their efforts to protect Mohegan lands, ministers such as Occom and Ashpo created a new sphere of masculine authority by combining political protest with their prominence as preachers and teachers. In 1764, Occom sent a letter to Sir William Johnson, the superintendent of Indian Affairs, on behalf of the Mohegan tribe which outlined the factionalism riddling the community stemming from land loss and leadership disputes. Complaining of the Euro-American overseers who "want to root us out of our land, root & Branch" and of their sachem's compliance with colonial plans, Occom beseeched Johnson for advice on how to "Proceed in these Matters," and the possibility of eradicating the sachemship altogether. Depicting sachem Ben Uncas III as a "Tool" used by their overseers, Occom challenged the sachem's leadership and disregard for traditional Algonquian forms of decision making through political council: "Ben Uncas was to do nothing With out [sic] his Council While he was our Sachem . . . and he has now Cast of [sic] his Council." Explaining that "Deacon Henry Quaquaquid" would "Relate the Whole Matter" when he delivered the letter to Johnson Hall, Occom beseeched the superintendent for advice as to how he and his supporters might interfere with the sachem's policies (Samson Occom Papers [OP], Mohegan Tribe to Sir William Johnson, 1764). When Ben Uncas III died in 1769, Occom continued to demonstrate his opposition

3. In her writing on Joseph Johnson, Laura Murray points out that conflict at Mohegan was "often played out between Christians." Pointing to the fact that members of both factions, including Ben Uncas and his lineage, professed Christianity, Murray complicates the picture of tribal politics in the mid-eighteenth century with the common faith that linked many enemies. In 1736, upon his profession of Christianity, Ben Uncas II received lavish gifts from Connecticut officials which included a coat and hat, and a gown for his wife. Furthermore, while men such as Occom, Ashpo, and Quaquaquid strove to create a Native-led church at Mohegan and emphasized evangelical beliefs, the sachem and his family remained closely affiliated with the Congregational Church in New London, where several children in the Uncas family received their baptism. Murray (2000:166–67); Ecclesiastical Affairs, I, V:3; Connecticut Church Records, New London First Congregational Church Records, 1670–1916, Vol. 1, reel #29: 40, 41, 44, 48, 50. For a more detailed account of the Mason case, see Den Ouden (2005).

to the sachem's rule and ties to the colony by leaving the funeral midway through the ceremony. As an observer in attendance related, during David Jewett's funeral sermon, "Sampson Occum withdrew & went of [sic], and was soon followed by others of . . . [the] Tribe," which left few Mohegans to assist in carrying the late sachem's remains to their traditional burial site. The colonist further noted the growing agitation among the Mohegans regarding colonial interference in traditional governance: "The Tempers of a Number of ye Indians, is Worked up, to the highest pitch of Jealousy, & Distrust of ye Govermt [sic] and also, of any Dependance [sic] on them" (IP I,II:286).

Algonquian ministers and teachers at the Narragansett Reserve in Rhode Island created alternative forms of tribal leadership to those provided by the sachem as well. Paralleling the divisions occurring at Mohegan, by the mid-eighteenth century the Narragansetts had split between the "sachem's party" and those affiliated with minister Samuel Niles. While Niles and church leaders such as Ephraim Coheis belonged to prominent Narragansett families and served as councilors to the sachem, by the 1760s they increasingly directed members of their congregation and community in opposition to their sachem's policies.⁴ Opposing what they believed were actions destructive to preserving their homelands, Niles along with a number of prominent men from the local church set up an alternative "Council of Indians" which opposed the sachem's faction and spurred the Narragansetts to defend their reserve (Simmons and Simmons 1982). Niles and his supporters actively petitioned colonial officials to protest sachem Thomas Ninigret's "extravagant" lifestyle and his unrestrained sale of the community's land to absolve his debts. In 1764, for example, Niles and Ephraim Coheis pleaded before the Rhode Island Assembly on behalf of the Narragansetts, insisting that their people had been "brought into Danger of their Lives" as Ninigret continued to sell tribal lands, "tak[ing] away their fields of Grain, and dispos[ing] . . . them to others." According to

4. Similar to the divisions that formed at Mohegan, members of both factions at Narragansett professed Christianity as their religion. While the sachem's family and supporters had long-standing ties with the Church of England, Niles and his followers adhered to evangelical teachings and identified with the "New Light" movement of the Great Awakening. For a more detailed account about the conflict over land sales and authority at Narragansett, see Simmons, 1983.

the petitioners, the sachem believed “all the Lands in said Country are his . . . and that he will do what he please with those Lands,” which would “set a Starving” the rest of the Narragansett people (Office of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Vol. 1825:197–198).

Finding the colony reluctant to enact any restrictions against Ninigret, that same year Niles and three men from the Coheis family petitioned Sir William Johnson in hopes that the superintendent of Indian Affairs would “interpose, not only on our behalf, but on behalf of the whole Tribe.” The petitioners again outlined their opposition to Ninigret’s policies of land sales and expensive living, “which hastens on their Ruin.” Pointing to the fact that the Narragansetts had “always been true friends to his Majesty King George,” and that in “this last War sent out many of their Young men . . . and most of them have died in that service,” these tribal representatives concluded that their “wives, and Children are now likely to starve at home by [his] Extravagance, and obstinacy (Office of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Vol. 1825:199–200).” When Thomas Ninigret died in 1769, Niles along with a number of Narragansetts petitioned the assembly to allow an “Indian Council of nine men” comprised of the Narragansett minister and other leading Christian men to oversee tribal business and to prevent the accession of another sachem, which the assembly failed to implement (Simmons and Simmons 1982:67; Record of meeting of Indian tribe 1769).

The authority and influence that Algonquian ministers developed through their involvement in communal politics spilled over into the wider colonial world, as Native men counseled and preached to their non-Native neighbors. Such preaching efforts, while continuing masculine patterns of mobility and diplomacy, represented a significant innovation in the roles of Native men within colonial society. By exhorting, instructing, and praying for people who stood beyond their village and kin connections and who often occupied positions of social, economic, or political power relative to themselves, Algonquian ministers extended their spiritual leadership beyond its traditional confines and presented their Christian teachings as relevant to all who would listen—regardless of kinship, ancestry, or ethnicity. Traveling to communities and churches across southern New England, Algonquian ministers often brought diverse groups of Euro-American colonists, Native Americans, and people of African descent together to listen to their words, and in so doing broke down the “racial” boundaries that colonial officials increasingly sought to erect and maintain. Many years before preaching

to the multicultural crowd gathered at New Haven, for example, Occom recorded his efforts to minister to a gathering of “negroes and Indians” at Shelter Island Harbor. Recalling how a “number Cam [sic] together to hear the word of god,” Occom used the opportunity to give a “Short Discourse” in a local home (Brooks 2006:259). Several years later, Occom appeared before a congregation of Euro-Americans gathered for a Sabbath service at the Congregational Church in Lebanon, Connecticut. Delivering his sermon to “a full assembly” and to “good acceptance,” the church’s regular minister, Eleazar Wheelock, described the occasion as “a rare Sight and Such an one as was never seen in Connecticut before” (WP 1761:761304.1).

Such “rare sights” occurred with increasing frequency as Native ministers preached at multicultural gatherings and churches throughout New England. In the summer of 1767, a diverse crowd of nearly 200 flocked to Narragansett church leader John Shattock’s house, which included “Indians, Negro’s and White people.” Most likely gathered for an intertribal celebration known as the August Meeting, which included dancing, feasting, and games, the event was held near the Narragansett church and would have provided ample opportunity for men such as Niles and Shattock to preach and exhort (Simmons and Simmons 1982:40–41). Euro-American observers also remarked on the spiritual authority and power evident in Pequot minister James Simon’s preaching before multicultural audiences. Simon frequently preached in both English and Native homes, and often convicted his listeners to examine their lives and draw close to God. Baptist minister Isaac Backus’ description of Simon’s visit to his community in Massachusetts and his own spiritual renewal revealed the authority with which the Pequot man beseeched the diverse crowd: “Some sinners were under deep concern [sic] and several saints Brought into liberty: and my Soul was much drawn forth towards God, and in exhortation [sic] to Souls round. A season to be remembered” (McLoughlin 1979:370–371). Joseph Johnson and Jacob Fowler also used their status as preachers and teachers to present their spiritual convictions before non-Native listeners. By the winter of 1774, both men had begun speaking before and instructing Euro-American and Native audiences, and according to one observer, “were Well receivd [sic]” (Brooks 2006:109).

Finding non-Native audiences receptive to their words, Algonquian ministers challenged the gender prescriptions and subordination they faced in colonial society by asserting their new spiritual and political authority

as ambassadors of the Gospel. Not only defying the geographic boundaries imposed on Natives to limit their movement and render them sedentary, Algonquian ministers defied the efforts of colonial officials to infantilize male authority under the leadership of Euro-American overseers, teachers, and ministers. While colonial officials increasingly sought to remake Algonquian men into docile supplicants before their wise and paternal authority by mid-century, a number of Algonquian ministers turned these goals on their heads as they preached with authority before non-Native crowds, and articulated criticism and opposition towards Euro-American political and religious leaders. When Occom bluntly criticized colonists who contributed to the drinking and social breakdown in Native communities in his execution sermon, he was not alone in leveling censures against colonial policies and religious authority. Joined by other ministers and spiritual leaders at Mohegan, men such as Occom, Samuel Ashpo, and Henry Quaquaquid opposed the Euro-American overseers assigned to their community, whom they claimed in a petition wanted “to root us out of our land root & Branch,” as well as the efforts of schoolmaster Robert Clelland to teach their children. In a 1764 petition drafted by Occom, the Mohegans complained of Clelland’s infrequent hours in keeping school, the growing numbers of English children who “take Room from Indian Children,” and his failure to pray with his students (OP, Mohegan Tribe Against Robert Clelland, 1764). According to one account, by the summer of 1764 only three students attended Clelland’s teaching at the Mohegan schoolhouse, and by the end of the year he had been dismissed.

At the same time, Native ministers at Mohegan began to challenge the teaching and authority of Congregational minister David Jewett, who served at the church in nearby Montville. Opposing Jewett’s efforts to preach and instruct the Natives because he supported Connecticut’s claims to Mohegan lands, ministers such as Occom and Ashpo discouraged Native men and women from attending his sermons and condoning his ministry. According to one report, only a few Mohegans attended his lectures by the mid-eighteenth century, while the majority formed their own separate gatherings under the teaching of Occom and others. In a petition to the Connecticut Assembly, the Mohegan sachem complained of the efforts taken by Samuel Ashpo and Henry Quaquaquid against himself and Jewett, relating how “[these] said Indians . . . wont attend Revd Mr Jewetts Lectures amongst us” and tried their “utmost” to discourage others from attending (IP I,II:103). Several

years later, another observer noted how the “breach” between Occom and Jewett continued to grow, as Occom’s preaching at Mohegan drew listeners away from the Montville congregation as well as other churches. As the observer relayed, “Mr. Jewett’s People and a great Number from other neighbouring Parishes flock to hear Mr. Occom on Lord’s Days at Mohegan” (WP 1764:764560.2).

Congregational minister Joseph Fish’s attempts to preach to the Pequots living at Stonington and among the Narragansetts in Charlestown throughout the mid-eighteenth century met with similar frustration as both groups often ignored his overtures or challenged his spiritual authority. In 1762, Fish complained of the absence of Pequot congregants at his lectures due to their preference for “Indian Teachers . . . from the Narragansetts” who “constantly” appeared “in the Neighbourhood, the same day of My Lectures” (Letter to Andrew Oliver, 15 November 1762). Fish also faced opposition from Narragansett church leaders Samuel Niles and Ephraim Coheis, who refused to attend his preaching and spoke against his practices and theology as a minister. On various occasions Fish noted that Niles and his followers claimed that he was not a “true Minister of Jesus Christ” because he took “Money of [his] Own people” and failed to “Preach in the power of the holy Ghost” (Simmons and Simmons 1982:57, 91, 105–106). By the early 1770s, most of the Narragansett community affiliated with Niles’ church opposed both Fish and local schoolmaster Edward Deake, and only a handful of Native children attended Deake’s schoolhouse on the reserve. To express their discontent, Niles and John Shattock drew up a formal complaint for the Boston Commissioners of the New England Company in which they criticized Deake’s teaching methods and the lack of control the Narragansetts had over the schoolhouse and surrounding lands (Simmons and Simmons 1982). Three years later, under mounting opposition from members of the Narragansett church, both Fish and Deake resigned from their work among the Natives.

Montaukett teacher and spiritual leader Silas (or Cyrus) Charles issued similar critiques regarding the ungodly and intrusive behavior of the English living at East Hampton, Long Island. In 1764, Charles used his growing familiarity with the English language to petition the lieutenant governor of New York concerning Montauk lands. Introducing the thirty families then residing at Montauk as “civilized” and “Christianized,” Charles’ petition emphasized that his people had “discontinued their ancient barbarian way

of living” and had become “peaceable [and] orderly.” Complaining of the encroachment and outright hostility his community faced from their English neighbors at East Hampton, Charles explained how the colonists “den[ie]d them necessary fuel” and intruded on their settlements by “fencing in more [and] more of the Indian Lands.” Beseeking the lieutenant governor to protect the Montauketts and to confirm their rights to their lands, Charles insisted that otherwise his people would be “crowded out of all their ancient Inheritance,” and “rendered Vagabonds upon the Face of the Earth.” Charles’ petition not only emphasized the Montauketts’ difficulty in living as Christians and in forsaking “the Idolatry of their fathers” so long as their lands lay at risk to greedy English neighbors, but he also earnestly demonstrated the need for a “Royal Grant [and] Confirmation” in order that future generations of Montauketts would have “competent Protection against all Trespassers” (Office of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Vol. 1825:338–339; O’Callaghan 1850: 236–237; Strong 2001:72–74).

Drawing on their authority as ministers and teachers to complain about specific abuses and encroachments, Algonquian men in some cases invoked their Christian beliefs to critique the overall character of their Euro-American neighbors. In a 1772 letter written to Moses Paul before his execution at New Haven, for example, Mohegan Joseph Johnson articulated his opposition to the ungodly attitudes he witnessed among Euro-Americans in southern New England. Intertwining his calls for Paul’s repentance and salvation with a censure of the society in front of which he would suffer execution, Johnson warned the convicted man of the colonists “who have a prejudice against the Indian nations, and wish no better of your soul, than to endure GOD’s eternal wrath.” While identifying himself as Paul’s “fellow traveller into a vast eternity,” Johnson in turn distinguished himself from the Euro-American Christians who “rejoice” in the destruction of “devilish Indians,” and know “little of GOD, or have never had GOD’s love shed abroad in their hearts; and therefore are liable to endure GOD’s eternal wrath.” Calling on Paul to “be born again, or never enter into the kingdom of GOD,” Johnson challenged Euro-American assumptions about the Wampanoag man’s “devilish” and “savage” nature and instead authoritatively offered him salvation and favor under the name of Jesus (Murray 1998:144–145).

It was only months after Johnson’s letter reached the New Haven jail that Samson Occom stood poised before a diverse crowd of onlookers and spoke the final words to Moses Paul before his execution. Preaching

plainly and with conviction, Occom's sermon did more than simply "stir" and "awaken" those listening to his words, and more than offer eternal life and a saving power to a man condemned to die. His presence before the crowd of Euro-American, African American, and Native American spectators that day represented the adaptations and new spiritual power that a number of Algonquian men had wrestled with and incorporated into their lifeways in the preceding decades, and their refusal to conform or submit to colonial designs to control their lands and lifeways and to infantilize their leadership. By preaching in the Spirit's power and emphasizing the saving and sacred power found in Christ, Occom demonstrated the spiritual authority he and a number of Algonquian men shared as ministers of the Gospel that empowered them to preach and sing, to travel and teach, and to receive visions and dreams. Occom's thundering call to the Wampanoag man and his wider audience to receive the gift of God and find eternal life also indicated the profound failure of colonial efforts to "civilize" and Christianize Algonquian men according to Euro-American expectations. By reviving and reaffirming male authority and spiritual leadership within Algonquian communities, and extending this authority to the wider colonial world, men such as Occom and others rejected assumptions about their inferiority and savagery as "wandering" hunters or dying remnants and used their evangelical beliefs to instruct and even criticize Euro-American colonists. In calling his listeners to take heed and "awake to righteousness," Occom's concluding words powerfully demonstrated the persistence and new authority of Algonquian "wise men" in a world that sought their demise, and the new spiritual power they drew upon which made their words possible.

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