

“Curs, Conquest, and Cullings:
Dogs as Symbols and Actors in the Conquest of New England”

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By
Strother E. Roberts
Assistant Professor
History Department
Bowdoin College

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In the year 1600, New England was home to tens of thousands of indigenous dogs, perhaps as many as 100,000 domesticated canines or more. This population suffered severe losses over the following two centuries. Indeed, all evidence, both historical and that gathered by genetic researchers, suggests the extinction of New England's indigenous dogs probably occurred sometime in the nineteenth century.¹ Of course, the possibility that some descendants of this original population of New England dogs still survive cannot fully be ruled out. It is entirely possible that some portion of the indigenous genome has survived through interbreeding with dogs of primarily European and Asian heritage. But at the very least, the past four centuries have seen the creation of a canine "neo-Europe," to borrow a term that Alfred Crosby coined to refer to regions outside Europe where the genetic descendants of Europeans now form a majority of the population. The story of how this came to be true is one of tragedy – for both dogs and humans alike. European dogs did not simply out-compete New England's indigenous dogs, except, perhaps, in the competition for a place in the hearts of the Euro-Americans who came to politically dominate the region. The destruction of New England's indigenous dog population is not a story of "the survival of the fittest," in any meaningful way. Rather, it is the result of English imperialism, of the diseases spread by colonizers, and of colonial policies that targeted indigenous dogs and dogs with indigenous genes/characteristics for death at the hands of English settlers and, sometimes, of Native Americans themselves. Driven by their own cultural prejudices, the English chose to eradicate indigenous dogs as a means to control Native

¹ Although, the possibility that some part of the indigenous genome has survived to the present-day cannot be definitively ruled out. Barbara van Asch, et al., "Pre-Columbian Origins of Native American Dog Breeds, With Only Limited Replacement by European Dogs, Confirmed by mtDNA Analysis," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 280 (10 July 2013); Marion Schwartz, *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 164; Allen, "Dogs of the American Aborigines," 465; Eva M. Butler and Wendell S. Hadlock, "Dogs of the Northeastern Woodland Indians," *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society* 10, no. 2 (January 1949), 27.

American communities and tame what they perceived as a threatening wilderness dominated by savage human beings and their wolfish companions.

Indeed, perception played an out-sized role in the approaches that English colonizers would take in interacting with the domesticated dogs of Native New England. So, it is worth beginning by considering how the early modern English perceived of the human-canine relationship more at home, before considering how these cultural prejudices played out when exported to North America. The fact is that the English in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries took a somewhat ambiguous view of dogs. Keith Thomas, in his book *Man and the Natural World*, identified the early modern era as the period in English history that saw dogs transformed from “unsentimental” utilitarian creatures to the beloved and celebrated companions that they would become in modern England and Anglo-America. This transformation stretched, in Thomas’ telling, from roughly the mid-sixteenth century until its culmination in the eighteenth. This cultural shift was, however, largely influenced by class.

My favorite anecdote recounted by Thomas is the story of a seventeenth-century Bishop of Salisbury, who one night, while visiting the country house of a “Gentleman” of his acquaintance, felt the urge to make a nocturnal visit to the “Necessary House” located at the back of the estate’s gardens. On his way there, the unfortunate bishop encountered his host’s mastiff, set loose in the night to guard the grounds. Having detected an intruder, the mastiff attacked and a tussle ensued in which the bishop, quite literally, came out on top. Pinning the large dog to the ground, the bishop found himself at an impasse. Releasing the dog meant facing its renewed onslaught, while continuing to lay prostrate upon the beast to hold it down likely brought its own discomforts (the bishop’s biographer states quite clearly that the churchman was heading *to* the necessary house when intercepted). Eventually, the bishop’s cries for help roused the house and

someone familiar with the dog was able to come to his aid.² This anecdote lays bare the ambiguity inherent in dogs' role within human society: they are at once utilitarian and dangerous; they are protectors of property as well as threats to life and person. Even a gentleman's dog, performing the function assigned it, could run afoul of human social norms and end up physically assaulting a revered guest.

This ambiguity only intensified farther down the socio-economic ladder. Dogs fought in the streets, chased passersby, menaced children, destroyed property, worried and killed livestock, left their waste in the streets, and spread disease. Even their virtues were turned to vices. Dogs served human communities by disposing of organic waste, much in the same way as pigs, and, as a result, earned along with pigs, a reputation for being gluttonous and slovenly. They guarded homes and livestock, barking out warnings of strangers and predators, and in the process became noise nuisances. They appeared in many texts and depictions as the very epitome of loyal servants, but also served as metaphors for fawning self-debasement. Dogs were often hailed as brave guardians and hunters, but – depending on the circumstances – calling someone a dog usually evoked either viciousness or cowardice.³

Although this tension between the positive and negative metaphorical value of dogs existed up and down the social hierarchy, it was perhaps most marked in elite perceptions. The sentimentalization of dogs over the course of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries was led by elites – royals, aristocrats, and those wealthy enough to imitate their conventions. While artisans and laborers continued to view dogs as utilitarian tools – although within a relationship

² Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 102; Walter Pope, *The Life of the Right Reverend Father in God Seth, Lord Bishop of Salisbury...* (London: William Keblewhite, 1697), 137-138.

³ Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 112-115; Karen Edwards, "Milton's Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary: D-F," *Milton Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (May 2006), 104-109;

that often was mediated by some degree of affective attachment – it was the elite classes that led the way in ascribing nobility, loyalty, and other positive character traits to dogs. Not all dogs, however, were seen as deserving of elite adoration. Just like their owners, dogs were distinguished by class and elites deemed their own companions and helpmates as superior to the “curses” and “mungrells” of the artisanal and working classes. As Harriet Ritvo has observed, there may have been little or no genetic or physiological difference between the whippets raced by wagering coal miners and the greyhounds kept by nobles for hunting, but in the mind of the elite literary class the difference in character between the two kinds of canines could not have been more different.

Elites extended their class prejudices onto the dogs of those they deemed to be socially inferior. (Artisans and the laboring class likely harbored ill will towards elite dogs as well, but their thoughts on the matter are less well represented in the written record.) To paraphrase Keith Thomas: The beloved hunting dogs of the elite were “noble, sagacious, generous, intelligent, faithful and obedient,” while the “mongrels” of subordinate classes were “lecherous... filthy, and truculent... snarling, angry, peevish and sullen.”⁴

Swift death could await dogs who transgressed their human-appointed place in the biological hierarchy of English society. Editions of Aesop’s Fables, popular in England from the late sixteenth-century forward told the story of a shepherd’s dog who turned on a member of his flock and, failing to hide the crime, was dispatched by his master.⁵ Local laws and custom ensured that real-life assailants of livestock faced the same fate. Meant to protect property, dogs who instead defied the social order by threatening livestock often faced the fate as humans

⁴ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 106.

⁵ Mary Fissell, “Imagining Vermin in Early Modern England,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (Spring 1999), 16.

condemned to capital punishment. The prevalence of the phrase “hang dog” or “hanged dog” in early modern English proverbs speaks to the frequency with which ill-behaved dogs faced the rope.⁶

Besides their reputation for “snarling, angry, peevish” aggression, the popular perception of dogs as “filthy” animals also contributed to their deaths, especially during epidemics. In 1636, during a plague outbreak in London, city officials hunted down and killed 3,720 loose and masterless dogs in the month of May alone. During the 1665 plague, Daniel Defoe tells us, approximately 40,000 dogs were culled from the city. In both cases, the number of animals killed hints at the total canine population of just the city of London, a metropolis that likely boasted somewhat over 300,000 human inhabitants at the outbreak of the 1665 epidemic. The cullings likely fell heaviest on ownerless dogs and the curs of the laboring class. The orders for 1636 explicitly targeted masterless animals and those left to roam the streets. The Lord Mayor’s orders for the plague years of 1665-1666 at first called for the destruction of all dogs within London, but were then revised to apply only to animals “permitted to pass up and down in Streets.” Elites could best afford to remove their dogs to the countryside, or to shelter and feed them in the city without loosing the dogs to scavenge in the streets. Non-elites, who depended on the ready availability of organic urban garbage to keep their dogs fed, were much more likely to lose their companions to governmental cullings. Ownerless dogs were left with no refuge when the officially appointed “Dog-killers” made their rounds.⁷

⁶ Laurie Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakesperean Locales* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 228-229; Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 95.

⁷ London (city), Court of Aldermen, “Orders Conceived and Published by the Lord Major and Aldermen of the City of London, Concerning the Infection of the Plague...,” (London: James Flesher, 1665); The National Archives Education Service, “The Great Plague 1665-1666: How Did London Respond to It?” accessed 06 June 2018, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/education/plague.pdf>, 6-7; Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 111-112; Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Years* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 118.

Even relatively well-behaved dogs who escaped death in a spree of ill-directed mania over public sanitation could draw the invective of both master and neighbors for their tendency towards what I will rather anachronistically term “noise pollution.” For instance, Edmund Spenser, in his *The Sheperdes Calender* (1579) extolled in verse the tireless work of shepherd dogs, christening the dog in his narrative “Lowder,” a play on words that emphasized the value of a good guard dog capable of raising the alarm when he finds his flock under threat. The author of the introduction to Spenser’s *Sheperdes Calender*, on the other hand, took a less charitable view of the English dog’s tendency towards loud barking, comparing literary critics unflatteringly to “the dogge in the maunger, that him selfe can eate no hay, and yet barketh at the hungry bullock... whose currish kind... cannot be kept from barking.”⁸ Indeed, complaints about barking dogs were fairly commonplace among early modern English writers interested in both urban and rural life in their country. Indeed, the needless, and annoying, barking of dogs served as a common metaphor for obnoxious human blatherers, or any unremitting loud noise.⁹

Such canine metaphors commonly conveyed explicit assumptions about class and behavior. A bit of doggerel (no pun intended) published by peer-of-the-realm and literary wit Edward Ward, Baron of Dudley in 1724 neatly sums up the early modern view of the relationship between the character of a dog and that of its owner:

For e’ery mortal that is prone to
Keep a dog, will pick out one
Whose qualities are like his own.¹⁰

⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Sheperdes Calender...* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579).

⁹ Karen Edwards, “Milton’s Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary: D-F,” *Milton Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (May 2006), 107-109; Mary Fissell, “Imagining Vermin in Early Modern England,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (Spring 1999), 16;

¹⁰ Quoted in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 106.

Elites not only believed that artisanal and laboring class dogs were possessed of inferior moral characteristics when compared to their own hunting dogs, they believed that this same inferiority of morality and sensibility extended to those dogs' lower class owners. It is little surprise that the mania for breeding dogs, for tracing bloodlines and ensuring their purity as a means of propagating a superior animal of refined temperament, first developed among an aristocratic class that emphasized pedigree as defining characteristic of its own membership. Spaniels, greyhounds, and similar hunting lineages were the aristocrats of early modern English canine society (a class to which could also, grudgingly, be admitted toy lapdogs). The rest were "mungrells," fit only for companionship with the baseborn of the realm. This canine metaphor cut both vertically and horizontally through the human-animal hierarchy. It established elite dogs as superior to "curs," while at the same time lending a patina of the natural to aristocratic political authority. Insolent and insubordinate laborers could be dismissed as sub-human "curs", while those who proved themselves useful/entertaining and willing to accept commands might earn the favor of their social betters. The traits that made a good hunting dog mirrored those that made a good servant, and those that defined a bad dog could be employed as metaphors to psychically degrade those among the subordinate classes who refused to accept their assigned roles within the social hierarchy.¹¹

When turning their attention towards the Indian societies which neighbored their own settlements, the English of New England shied away from any ambiguity: Indian dogs lacked value and were represented as an obstacle to the civilizing of the landscape. The honors which English writers bestowed on their own nation's hunting dogs were quite pointedly denied to the dogs that accompanied Indians in the hunt. Rather, English explorers and settlers took an instant

¹¹ I am, I believe, faithfully paraphrasing/summarizing Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 16-20.

dislike to indigenous dogs. This poor opinion had more to do with cultural chauvinism on the part of the English than any observed behavior of indigenous dogs. The “civilized” peoples of Europe, with their multiple forms of domesticated livestock, no doubt expected the “savages” of the Americas to associate only with wild beasts. For the English, as Harriet Ritvo has put it, “the extent of canine servitude was an index of the advance of civilization.”¹² Convinced of the inferiority and savagery of American Natives, most English thus *expected* Indians to raise wild dogs, or wolves. And that is exactly what they saw... or, at least, what they thought they saw.

John Brereton, who explored the eastern seaboard in 1602, mentioned “wild dogs” among the “beasts” that inhabited New England. James Rosier, who explored the Maine coast in 1605, wrote that the Abenakis of the Pemaquid River took to war both dogs and “wolves which they keepe tame at command.”¹³ Captain John Smith associated indigenous dogs strongly with New England’s wolves, writing that “their dogs... are like their wolves and cannot bark but howl.”¹⁴ Edward Johnson, writing in the 1650s, believed that Indian dogs were wolves captured as pups and then brought up tame.¹⁵ John Josselyn, from the perspective of the 1670s, insisted that indigenous dogs were “begotten 'twixt a *Wolf* and a *Fox*” (a biological impossibility, for anyone who might be wondering) and that Indians caught these hybrids in the wild for use in hunting.¹⁶

¹² Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 20.

¹³ James Rosier, “A True Relation of the Most Prosperous Voyage Made This Present Yeere 1605,” in *Sailors Narratives of Voyages Along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*, ed. George Parker Winship (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1905), 127.

¹⁴ Quoted in Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36.

¹⁵ Edward Johnson, *A History of New-England...[Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour...]* (London: Printed for Nath. Brooke, 1654), 106, 141.

¹⁶ John Josselyn, *New-England's Rarities Discovered...* (London: G. Widdowes, 1672), Huntington Library, Rare Books Collection, #9771, 14; John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England...* (London: Printed for Giles Widdowes, 1674), 94.

If early English explorers and settlers had a hard time telling dog from wolf when encountering canines side-by-side with Indians, they seem to have been even more confused when encountering loose indigenous dogs ranging about on their own. One much cited example comes from *Mourt's Relation*, the earliest history of the Plymouth Plantation:

“The 19. day [of November 1620]... This day in the evening, *Iohn Goodman* went abroad to vse his lame feete... having a little Spannell with him, a little way from the Plantation, two great Wolues ran after the Dog, the Dog ran to him and betwixt his leggs for succour, he had nothing in his hand but tooke vp a sticke, and threw at one of them and hit him, and they presently ran both away, but came againe , he got a paile bord in his hand, and they sat both on their tayles, grinning at him, a good while, and went their way...”¹⁷

Jon Coleman in his award-winning *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* highlights this encounter as the moment “the wolves of southern New England chased their first domesticated European.”¹⁸ In fact, all of the details that Goodman supplied to the author of *Mourt's Relation* suggest that the creatures that he and the Plymouth spaniel encountered that winter's day were not wild wolves at all. Put simply, this is not wolfish behavior. As Coleman himself notes elsewhere, wolf populations that are actively hunted by humans (various contemporary accounts make clear that northeastern Indians were wolf hunters) are understandably wary of people and will, as a rule, retreat from their company.¹⁹ The two canids encountered by Goodman – with their sitting and grinning – were more likely what I refer to as “widowed” dogs, left masterless to shift for themselves following the mysterious epidemic that devastated native communities in

¹⁷ *Mourt's Relation, or Journal of the Plantation at Plymouth*, ed. Henry Martyn Dexter (Boston: John Kimball Wiggin, 1865), 77.

¹⁸ Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 37.

¹⁹ Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 9.

coastal New England from 1616 to 1619. Perhaps, these dogs were even former residents of Patuxet, the depopulated Wampanoag village on whose site Plymouth Plantation was built.

Morphological and behavioral clues offered by other early English chroniclers suggest that they may indeed have had difficulties telling the native dogs of New England from the region's wild wolf population. William Wood, writing in the 1630s, stated that "The Woolves [of New England] bee in some respect different from them of other countries...[t]hey be made much like a Mungrell, being big boned, lanke paunched, deepe breasted, having a thicke necke, and head, pricke eares, and long snoute, with dangerous teeth, long staring haire, and a great bush taile."²⁰ Laying aside the question of Wood's previous experience with "the Woolves... of other countries," it is striking that his most immediate comparison is with the "mongrel" breed of dogs common (if not completely ubiquitous) in England at the time. His description of an animal that was "lank-paunched...with pricked ears, and long snout, with dangerous teeth, long staring [straight or bristled] hair, and a great bush taile" could apply to either a wolf or a dog, although it is true that wolves do have longer teeth than even large dogs and all wolves sport bushy tails while this is true of only some dog breeds. On the other hand, "being big boned...deep breasted [broad chested]," and "having a thicke neck" are all morphological signs of large dog breeds in contrast to wild wolves which tend to have thinner bodies and legs and to be narrower through the chest.²¹

²⁰ William Wood, *New-England's Prospect...* (London: Printed by Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1634), 23.

²¹ Western Wildlife Outreach, "Signs of Wolves," *Gray Wolf Outreach*, accessed 8-27-2014, <http://westernwildlife.org/gray-wolf-outreach-project/signs-of-wolves>; Western Wildlife Outreach, "Wolf Identification," *Gray Wolf Outreach*, accessed 8-27-2014, <http://westernwildlife.org/gray-wolf-outreach-project/library-2>; "Wolf Facts," *WolfCountry.net*, accessed 8-27-2014, <http://www.wolfcountry.net/information/WolfObserved.html#tracks>; PBS, "River of No Return: Gray Wolf Fact Sheet," *Nature*, accessed 8-27-2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/river-of-no-return/gray-wolf-fact-sheet/7659>; Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, "Canid Identification: Wolves, Dogs, Coyotes," last revised 11-4-2013, <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/wolf/identify.html>; Yamnuska Wolfdog Sanctuary,

John Josselyn, writing in the 1670s, informed his readers that New England was home to two different kinds of wolves: “one with a round ball'd Foot... in shape like mungrel Mastiffs; the other with a flat Foot, these are liker Greyhounds.” Rather than presenting his readers with two different wolf species, however, it seems likely that Josselyn is offering, like William Wood, a description of feral or loose native dogs, alongside a description of wild wolves.²² Like Wood, Josselyn describes his first category of wolves as being doglike by comparing them to large English mongrels similar to the great mastiffs used as guard dogs and for bear- and bull-baiting. The toes of modern large dog breeds splay out much more than do those of wild wolves, allowing dogtracks to be distinguished from wolf footprints by their more rounded appearance—perhaps accounting for Josselyn’s reference to “a round ball’ed Foot” contrasted with the “flat” profile of wolftacks. By contrast, the second type described as “liker Greyhounds,” sound more like wild wolves with their long legs and slender bodies.²³

But, despite repeated English assertions, indigenous dogs were *not* wild wolves and likely intermixed with wolves no more often than did the dogs of Continental Europe (which is to say, almost never at all). Indigenous dogs were certainly not the offspring of wild foxes, as John Josselyn suggested. They were allowed to roam loose most of their lives in order to supplement their diets by scavenging human refuse and hunting small game (like mice or rabbits) independently. The same, however, could be said of most English dogs at the time. Virginia DeJohn Anderson, in her influential environmental history *Creatures of Empire*, suggests that the English viewed Indian dogs with such great disdain because these indigenous canines failed to

“Physical Differences Between Wolves and Dogs?” *Wolf to Woof*, accessed 8-27-2014, <http://yamnuska-wolfdogsanctuary.com/resources/wolf-to-woof/physical-differences-between-wolves-and-dogs>.

²² *C. lycaon* debate?

²³ John Josselyn, *New-England's Rarities Discovered...* (London: G. Widdowes, 1672), Huntington Library, Rare Books Collection, #9771, 14-15; Western Wildlife Outreach, “Signs of Wolves;” and Yamnuska Wolfdog Sanctuary, “Physical Differences.”

live up to European standards for domesticated behavior.²⁴ However, it is hard to escape the fact that English dogs set a rather low bar with respect to civilized behavior: running loose along urban streets and rural lanes, worrying and killing livestock, stealing food, and threatening passersby.²⁵

More than their behavior, it was the appearance of indigenous dogs, coupled with the unfamiliar environment in which English colonizers encountered them, that led the English to confuse indigenous dogs with wolves. Early European explorers and settlers viewed Native American dogs through the lens of their own cultural experiences and prejudices. Drooping ears and shortened snouts served little purpose but were a secondary evolutionary trait (accompanying the submissiveness necessary for domestication) that seems by random genetic chance to have become nearly universal among early modern British breeds. Even modern British breeds which are now commonly seen with erect – or “prick” – ears likely sprang from early-modern progenitors who had ears that were, at most, “semi-prick” –that stood erect from the skull but folded over at the top.²⁶ Relatively short, broadened snouts also seem to have been a rule among the larger British breeds and offered early modern Britons a clear point of physical difference by which to distinguish their own dogs’ snouts from the more pointed and toothsome snouts of wolves. It is little surprise, then, that it was the “pricke ears” and “sharpe and long noses” of indigenous dogs that stood out to early English observers, putting them in mind not of

²⁴ Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 34.

²⁵ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 101-105, 112-113.

²⁶ In collies, for example erect ears are very common today, but semi-prick and even pendulous ears were likely the norm among this breed’s sheepdog ancestors. It was only through the active selection of prick-ear genes by nineteenth-century breeders that the collie’s appearance was transformed. Among modern terriers, the Scottish Terrier (“Scottie”), West Highland Terrier (“Westie”), Cairn Terrier (think of Toto from the *Wizard of Oz*), and Skye Terrier (immortalized by the Greyfriars Bobby statue in Edinburgh) all sprang from a common ancestor in which semi-prick ears were the norm, with erect ears becoming more common thanks to the artificial standards imposed upon these breeds by nineteenth-century dog fanciers.

their own dogs back home but of the sharper features of foxes, the only wild canids that could still be found in England, and wolves.²⁷ Nor is it surprising that the colonial agents of France – where wild wolves could still be found and many shepherd dogs sported erect ears and longer snouts (think of the modern Alsatian/German Shepherd) – seem to have had a much easier time telling indigenous dogs from wild canids and never suggested that Indian dogs were merely tamed wolves. This Anglo-American prejudice actually persisted well into the nineteenth century to be carried west by later generations of explorers and settlers.

This prejudice would have dire consequences for the indigenous dogs of New England. Colonists throughout New England began complaining very early on of the threat to livestock that they perceived from indigenous dogs. The English husbandmen who turned their livestock loose to forage in Indian hunting grounds and near the boundaries of Indian villages took surprisingly little responsibility for the safety of their own animals, choosing instead to place the onerous on neighboring Indians to keep their dogs from harming livestock. For example, in 1637, the two-year old colony of Connecticut – many of its towns founded at the explicit invitation of local Indian communities and its population greatly outnumbered by neighboring Indian villages – saw fit to pass a law complaining of Indian dogs' depredations on English livestock which had been turned loose on the countryside, and threatened the dogs' Indian

²⁷ These quotations come from Wood, *New Englands Prospect...*, 23 and Martin Pring, "A Voyage Set Out From the Citie of Bristol... for the Discoverie of the North Part of Virginia," in *Sailors Narratives of Voyages Along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*, ed. George Parker Winship (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1905), 60. Similar descriptions and comments on the wolfish or vulpine appearance of indigenous dogs can be found in John Brereton, *A Briefe and True Relation of the Discoverie of the North Part of Virginia...* (London: George Bishop, 1602), 13, 44; James Rosier, "A True Relation of the Most Prosperous Voyage Made This Present Yeere 1605," in *Sailors Narratives of Voyages Along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*, ed. George Parker Winship (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1905), 150; Pring, "A Voyage," 54; Josselyn, *New-England's Rarities*, 14. Drooping ears, especially, continued to be pointed to as a key distinction between indigenous and Euro-American dogs into the nineteenth century. See, for example: Benjamin Smith Barton, *The Medical and Physical Journal*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J. Conrad & Co., 1804-1808), 1: 13.

masters with imprisonment.²⁸ Numerous localities went a step further by endorsing the killing of any Indian dogs suspected of harassing livestock.²⁹ In 1657, the colony of New Haven demanded that a neighboring community of Pequot Indians kill all of their dogs in order to retain access to land they needed for farming.³⁰ In 1661, the town of Providence, Rhode Island, warned neighboring Narragansett villages to restrain their dogs or have them killed by colonists eager to protect their cattle.³¹ In 1677, several Abenaki sachems drafted a letter to the Governor of Massachusetts to complain of the ill-treatment they were suffering at the hands of settlers. The insults received included instances of Abenakis being forced from their homes, having their arms stripped from them, and the tendency of English settlers to shoot any Indian dog that they caught sight of.³²

Dogs also fell victim to the violence that all too often characterized Anglo-Indian relations. Both Indian communities and the English used dogs as sentries to alert them of the enemy's approach. The English also employed dogs as trackers, combatants, and, most reprehensibly, executioners.³³ It is unclear which, if any, of these three latter roles dogs may have played alongside Indian combatants. Not surprisingly, enemy dogs became targets of both Indian and English violence during times of conflict. For example, early in the Pequot War, John Endecott led a band of soldiers from Massachusetts in a raid against a large Pequot town on

²⁸ Connecticut (Colony), *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, From April 1636 to October 1776*, 15 vols. (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1850–1890), 1:14.

²⁹ David J. Silverman, "'We Chuse to Be Bounded': Native American Animal Husbandry in Colonial New England," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (July 2003), 528.

³⁰ New Haven (Town), Connecticut, *Ancient Town Records*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter, 2 vols. (New Haven: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1917-1919), 1:309.

³¹ Providence (Town), *The Early Records of the Town of Providence*, 21 vols. (Providence: Snow & Farnham, 1892-1915), 3: 7.

³² Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 110.

³³ Mark. A. Mastromarino, "Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks: The English Mastiff and the Anglo-American Experience," *The Historian* 49, no. 1 (November 1986), 10-25; Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley, Including the Early History of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst and Granby, Massachusetts* (Northampton, MA: Metcalf & Company, 1863), 146-7, 167, 272, 332.

Block Island. Finding the town abandoned, Endecott and his men “burnt their houses, cut downe their corne, [and] destroyed some of their dogges in stead of men, which they left in their Wigwams.”³⁴

The loss of their dogs would have been highly detrimental to a native communities’ ability to maintain itself. Dogs played critical roles in the subsistence strategies of New England’s Native American communities: dogs were important partners in the hunt for game, they protected Indian fields and food caches from vermin, and they served as mobile storehouses of calories and protein (much like the new domesticated species that the English introduced to the region). Attacks on indigenous dogs not only showed a blatant disregard for Native sovereignty, not only struck at the heartstrings of Indian masters who often felt an affective connection to their most favored of their dogs, but also served to undercut the food security of Indian communities. The loss of dogs would have only exacerbated the challenges faced by New England’s Indians in an era when other pressures – dispossession through English aggression and the diminution of game populations through environmental change and competition from European livestock – were already making it increasingly difficult for Native communities in the region to maintain their autonomy and subsistence.

Aware of the value that large English breeds had in war, Connecticut, New Haven and a number of Long Island towns from passed, from 1650-1660, laws that made it a crime to sell or give dogs to Indians. Connecticut included its proscription within a paragraph otherwise dedicated to banning the sale of guns to Indians, emphasizing the martial potential of dogs.³⁵ It is

³⁴ John Underhill, *Nevves from America...* (London: Printed by J.D. for Peter Cole, 1638), 8.

³⁵ Connecticut (Colony), *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, From April 1636 to October 1776*, 15 vols. (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1850–1890), 1: 529; Eva M. Butler and Wendell S. Hadlock, “Dogs of the Northeastern Woodland Indians,” *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society* 10, no. 2 (January 1949), 19; Alden T. Vaughan et al., eds., *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789*, 20 vols. (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1979-2004), 17: 404.

unclear how effective such laws would have been at keeping English dogs out of Indian hands. Unlike the English, who seem to have universally maligned indigenous dogs, many Indians showed an active interest in possessing English dogs. In the 1650s, the Nantic sachem Ninigret purchased a mastiff to guard his lodge from a Rhode Island settler. John Josselyn in 1670 of New England's Indians that "since the *English* came amongst them they have gotten store of our dogs," which Josselyn suggested the Indians found "much better for their turns than their breed of wild dogs."³⁶ Moreover, the vast majority of English dogs, just as indigenous dogs, were allowed to roam loose most hours of the day to scavenge amidst refuse, hunt small game, and to generally make nuisances of themselves. Indeed, English colonists often complained of their own English dogs' depredations on livestock at the same time (and occasionally in the same legislative acts) that they were denigrating indigenous dogs, begging the question of just how certain English husbandmen could be about the identity of troublesome dogs. While Josselyn's assertion that Indians found European dogs "better for their turns" than indigenous animals is likely a symptom of his own cultural chauvinism, it is not impossible that New England Natives recognized the value of keeping dogs with European characteristics since these might have been more likely to escape the canicidal efforts of the colonizing English.

The earliest English dogs available may also have impressed as being ideally suited to certain specialized tasks, when compared to Indian dogs that seem (with some caveats) to have been bred as jacks-of-all-trades. The first English explorers and settlers of New England took care when selecting their canine companions. The 1603 expedition led by Martin Pring, which explored the coast from southern Maine to Cape Cod, included two large mastiffs (a type which the English prized as guard dogs and, occasionally, war dogs). Pring used the dogs to terrorize

³⁶ John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England...* (London: Printed for Giles Widdows, 1674), 192.

the Indian traders and diplomats he encountered during his explorations.³⁷ A mastiff and a spaniel – a hunting dog that could locate, flush, and retrieve game – accompanied the Pilgrims aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620.³⁸ In 1633, John Winthrop, the governor of Massachusetts, imported four “Irish grey-hounds” (wolfhounds) to aid his colony’s efforts at predator control.³⁹ In 1642, the town of Ipswich, Massachusetts, passed an act requiring all householders with some property to maintain a “a sufficient hound or beagle” (scent hunters used for locating and coursing game) to serve the town in wolf eradication; a mandate that suggests either the establishment of these two kinds of dog in New England by the 1640s, or possibly, a regular dog trade with Britain.⁴⁰ Most settlers who brought dogs with them in the early days of English settlement likely preferred specialized types such as these. Transporting animals across the Atlantic could be expensive and the demands of early settlement called for those kinds of dogs which could be most relied upon to contribute in some specific manner to the imperial project. Curs need not apply.

It is entirely possible that some Native dog fanciers, like Ninigret, saw the value of specialized European kinds of dogs, although Indians interested in acquiring English dogs need not necessarily purchase them. Even if Indian masters rarely acquired English dogs outright, the presence of so many loose dogs belonging to communities which, especially in the seventeenth century, often lived in close proximity, would have facilitated (shall we say) numerous opportunities for genetic exchange. Indian communities would have gained dogs with more

³⁷ Martin Pring, “A Voyage Set Out From the Citie of Bristoll... for the Discouerie of the North Part of Virginia,” in *Sailors Narratives of Voyages Along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*, ed. George Parker Winship (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1905), 57, 62.

³⁸ *Mourt's Relation, or Journal of the Plantation at Plymouth*, ed. Henry Martyn Dexter (Boston: John Kimball Wiggin, 1865), 73.

³⁹ John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649...*, ed. James Savage, 2 vols. (Boston: Phelps and Farnham; Thomas B. Wait and Son, 1825-1826), 1:62.

⁴⁰ Joseph B. Felt, *History of Ipswich, Essex, and Hamilton* (Cambridge: Charles Folsom, 1834), 42-43.

European characteristics merely by letting nature take its course. The converse was also true. John Joselyn, for example, bemoaned the fact that English dogs tended to “in time degenerate” in America.⁴¹ This could be a reference to the sort of evolutionary pressures that Joyce Chaplin has pointed to as breeding leaner, meaner, and wilder hogs, cattle, and horses when these species were allowed to forage for themselves in American woodlands. But, just as likely, Josselyn in 1670 was observing, and denouncing, the effect that interbreeding with indigenous canines was having on English dogs.

It is likely that English colonists were responsible for the unintentional destruction of far more indigenous dogs than they destroyed in war or out of revenge for harm they believed done to livestock. If the English feared the toll that indigenous dogs might take on their livestock, they feared the depredations of wolves even more. Consequently, from their earliest days of settlement, English colonists deployed a wide array of wolf-killing strategies that included pitfalls, muskets set on trip-wires, lumps of meat with hooks hidden inside, and fat-soaked sponges. Indigenous dogs, drawn close to English settlements by the promise of scavengeable garbage, would have been just as likely to suffer by these traps as the wolves for which they had been set. (Indeed, it is hard to imagine that numerous English dogs were not also lost.)

English colonies and towns also offered hunters bounties to kill wolves, promising payment for various forms of proof of death that included the animal’s ears, scalp, skull, or pelt. Here too, it seems likely that indigenous dogs often fell victim to a strategy aimed at their wild cousins. As has been noted, English observers found it exceedingly difficult to distinguish between indigenous dogs and wolves, so honest errors could easily have been made.⁴² Some

⁴¹ John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England...* (London: Printed for Giles Widdows, 1674), 94, 192.

⁴² Mark Kerr, *A Dog’s History of America: How Our Best Friend Explored, Conquered, and Settled a Continent* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004), 63.

errors, on the other hand, may not have been so honest. In the early decades of the twentieth century, investigators routinely discovered that hunters in the Midwestern states would turn in dog pelts in order to claim bounties offered for exterminating wolves. The skins of “police dogs” (Alsatian/German Shepherds), newly popular in the U.S., were especially likely to be passed off by fraudsters.⁴³ Indeed, Jon Coleman, in his book *Vicious*, chronicles a number of occasions where colonial fraudsters were found out by authorities who suspected their kills of being domestic dogs, raising the question of just how many such frauds went undetected. Like German Shepherds in the early twentieth century, the more wolfish indigenous dogs and English dogs of mixed heritage would have made for the most likely victims of these bounty killings. Indian hunters often took advantage of these colonial bounties and it is entirely possible, if impossible to prove, that, with the human populations of their communities falling in the face of disease and European aggressions, these hunters exploited excess and semi-feral “widowed” indigenous dogs to fleece English authorities out of a few trade goods.

All of these factors – the loss of their Indian partners/protectors/providers, persecution in war and in the name of livestock preservation, and death as collateral damage in the colonial war on wolves – would have placed considerable, and in some cases unique, pressure on dogs of indigenous heritage. Although, it would be incorrect to suggest that European dogs I anyway “bred out” indigenous dogs, English policies would certainly have provided evolutionary pressures that disadvantaged canines with indigenous genes. Still, all of these factors seem inadequate to account for the seemingly total genetic elimination of indigenous dogs from New

⁴³ Richard P. Thiel, *The Timber Wolf in Wisconsin: The Death and Life of a Majestic Predator* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 69-75; Rick Bass, *The Ninemile Wolves* (New York: Mariner Books, 2003), 145; Peter Steinhart, *The Company of Wolves* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 38; Le Roy Barnett, “Michigan’s War With Mammals: Bounties, Hunters, and Trappers Against Unwanted Species,” *Michigan Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 82 note 12.

England (and, indeed, most of North America). The *coup de grâce*, I would argue, likely came with increasing efforts at regulating dogs in the nineteenth century. Massachusetts led the way with a 1797 act that laid a tax on all dogs (with a moderate tax on a household's first dog and much steeper assessments on subsequent dogs). Registered dogs were required to wear collars bearing their owners names and to always remain in the company of their masters, unless restrained. The act provided for the immediate destruction of all unregistered dogs and of all registered dogs discovered loose and/or without a collar. Various localities had passed similar laws at different times, usually in response to an outbreak of epidemic disease, but the 1797 Massachusetts forged a new legal path by centralizing control of canines at the state level to a degree never before attempted. The Massachusetts act also stands out for its lethally effective enforcement. A year after its enactment, a traveler from New Hampshire on a tour of New England commented that: "In general as you travel the country you have a dog barking at you from every house you pass but here in Massachusetts it is very still... Scarcely a dog to be seen."⁴⁴

The other New England states eventually followed suit. In 1798, Connecticut passed an act that was similar to, if less strident than, the 1797 Massachusetts dog tax. The measure proved unpopular, however, and the state repealed the tax on dogs just a few months after it was implemented, retaining only the requirement that all dogs wear a collar bearing their owner's name and place of residence. As in Massachusetts, authorities and concerned citizens were charged with immediately destroying any dog found without a collar. Elsewhere in New England, canine control remained an erratically addressed local concern. Even in Massachusetts, enforcement of the dog tax waxed and waned with public concerns over rabies outbreaks and

⁴⁴ Henry Ashley Diary, 1778-1829, Acc. # 1984-55, New Hampshire Historical Society, Manuscript Section, 47-50.

livestock depredations. It was not until the 1840s, and a new regional rabies scare, that New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine joined Connecticut in passing dog taxes that mirrored the 1797 Massachusetts law in their severity. This period also marked the beginning of the sustained enforcement of canine licensing and population control policies that has continued into the twenty-first century.⁴⁵ This original Massachusetts dog tax, and the subsequent canine control efforts that followed, presumably fell most heavily on English curs and dogs with indigenous characteristics, since the “wolfish” traits of pointed ears and long snouts were still seen as suspicious and signs of canine degeneracy well into the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

In fact, the passage of Massachusetts’ dog tax roughly coincided with historian James Sullivan’s lament over the fate of the indigenous dogs of New England. In his *History of the District of Maine* (1795), Sullivan wrote that even in New England’s relatively remote northeast corner “there has been none of this mongrel species of animal found lately in the woods”.⁴⁷ It is entirely possible that Sullivan’s declaration of the final death of indigenous dogs was somewhat premature. Numerous scholars in recent years have pointed out the tendency of late eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and even twentieth-century historians to overlook the persistent Indian presence in New England; preferring narratives of the “vanishing Indian” that neatly culminate in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. It is entirely possible that Sullivan, and others who noted the disappearance of indigenous dogs in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were guilty of a similar lapse with regards Indian dogs. However, in the twenty-first century, over two hundred years after he wrote, geneticists have largely confirmed what Sullivan

⁴⁵ Connecticut (state), *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut...*, ed. Charles J. Hoadly, 15 vols. (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1894-1922), 9: 181-182, 263; Maurice H. Robison, “A History of Taxation in New Hampshire,” *Publications of the American Economic Association* 3, no. 3 (August 1902), 191-192.

⁴⁶ Joshua Abram Kercsmar, “Wolves at Heart: How Dog Evolution Shaped Whites’ Perceptions of Indians in North America,” *Environmental History* 21, no. 3 (July 2016), 518.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Kercsmar, “Wolves at Heart,” 530.

suspected: New England's indigenous dogs are gone (or all but).⁴⁸ The destruction of Native American societies by European disease and military aggression combined with English cultural myopia to destroy them and replace them with breeds of foreign origins, turning New England into a canine neo-Europe.

⁴⁸ Jennifer A. Leonard, et al., "Ancient DNA Evidence for Old World Origin of New World Dogs," *Science* 298, New Series, no. 5598 (Nov. 22, 2002), 1614; Barbara van Asch et al., "Pre-Columbian Origins of Native American Dog Breeds, With Only Limited Replacement by European Dogs, Confirmed by mtDNA Analysis," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 280, no. 20131142 (10 July 2013), *passim*.