

Lisa Brooks. *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip's War*. Yale UP, 2018. 448 pp. ISBN: 9780300244328.

<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300244328/our-beloved-kin>

What makes Lisa Brooks' *Our Beloved Kin* so engaging (and essential for scholars of Early American and Indigenous Studies) is the studied manner in which it extracts new narrative light from an old forest, disentangling Indigenous stories, concerns, and agendas from the mire of colonial documentation and religious orientation that has, up until this point, shaped and defined the way the 1675-77 colonial conflict known as King Philip's War has been understood. Having sifted through many of these primary materials myself, I know this is no small task. Settler-colonial history has a way of snowballing, beginning in a neatly packed ball of claims and assumptions but gaining mass and momentum as it rolls, becoming an engine of its own making. While it might be constantly added to, it remains difficult to get out of its way, or to trace the impression it has left back to the top of the hill and ask "what if we had rolled the ball this way instead?" In a sense, this is the project of decolonization - to devise strategies for recovering Indigenous lives and histories from the accumulated mass of colonial documentation and placing before us a path, a history, a world that we have essentially been denied as a result of the racial biases so firmly packed into the known historical archive.

Drawing upon many of the strategies and critical interventions used in her first book, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (2008), Brooks' study covers the events surrounding King Philip's War from an Indigenous-centered perspective. For Brooks, who is Abenaki herself, the key to gaining entry into this newly configured network of stories and landscapes is the notion of kinship. Most histories of the war struggle to take into account the bonds, obligations, and extended familial relationships that informed Indigenous lives in the seventeenth-century Northeast. By beginning to trace the threads of those relationships, one also begins to apprehend the geographical connections and commitments by which Native space was ordered and defined. To acknowledge and honor these connections allows for a narrative that stands largely in opposition to the claims forwarded in the opaque and spiritually dense parcel of colonial documentation by which the war has been known.

At the center of Brooks' narrative are not the familiar cast of characters - the self-fashioned frontier hero Benjamin Church, Puritan preacher to the Indians John Eliot, or even, for the most part, the Wampanoag leader King Philip himself, although certainly they all play a part. Brooks is more interested in understanding the lives of Indigenous figures who, until very recently, stood at the furthest margins of the historical narrative; figures such as the Nipmuc James Printer who was "indentured" into the colonial printing trade as a young boy but later becomes part of the resistance, his brother Job Kattenanit who found himself thrust into the role of colonial spy in order to ensure the safety of his family, and the *saunkskwa* of the Pocasset, Weetamoo, who must find a way to protect and preserve her community through the trials of war. Although Weetamoo's influence as a leader of her people was only vaguely understood by Puritan chroniclers of King Philip's War (and even less so by later historians), she was recognized by the Wampanoag sachem Ousamequin (more popularly remembered as Massasoit) as the "true heir" to the Pocasset sachemship, "our beloved cousin" and "kinswoman," the "Beloved Kin" of the book's title (4).

Brooks is able to trace some of this history by paying close attention to the names and relationships outlined on treaties, petitions, and land transactions struck between the colonists and their Indigenous neighbors. From these documents we see how certain colonial agents, who in past histories appear animated by a public-spirited cry for self-defense, turn out, perhaps not surprisingly, to be stakeholders in aggressive Puritan landgrabs (115-118). But Brooks' reading of these documents also helps clarify the way Indigenous leaders were also attempting to shape and interpret the nature of these agreements. For seventeenth-century Natives, treaties were beginning to complement the traditional practice of wampum exchange to seal and record diplomatic agreements. In their proceedings with the colonists, Native leaders followed traditional wampum protocols, as Brooks tells us, explicitly "invoking bonds of kinship" which also "drew bounds around the land," marking the territories to which they lay claim and those recognized as belonging to others within the larger kinship network. Transactions that colonial brokers broadly interpreted in their own favor, were understood differently by Natives such as Ousamequin who reproaches the Puritans at one point, for wrongly claiming land on Pocasset Neck belonging to one Namumpum. Namumpum, Brooks informs us, was the name by which Weetamoo went prior to the outbreak of war. Ousamequin cautions, "I Never did nor intended to put under plimoth [Plymouth Colony] any of my kinswomans land but my own inheritance and therefore I do disallow of any pretended claime to this land" (29).

Ousamequin, like other Indigenous leaders of the time, exerted what control he could over these difficult and coercive processes, but it's small wonder that such interventions often go overlooked in an archive where names are either frequently changing, misspelled or misidentified, Native women leaders are not recognized as powerbrokers, and the documents themselves are meant to provide legal cover for fraudulent claims. Bad faith practices like the one referenced above were a staple of colonial interactions with the Natives and were a large reason why war between the two groups became inevitable.

In the same way that Brooks allows for a rereading of treaties by mapping them out on the ground, and through hard-to-divine kinship ties, she teases out a fresh interpretation of the ensuing war, drawing upon narratives such as Mary Rowlandson's 1682 *Sovereignty and Goodness of God* in a way that privileges the epistemological worldview of the Natives who accompanied the captive Puritan goodwife on her famous "removes." Rowlandson was led by her Wampanoag, Narragansett and Nipmuc captors deeper and deeper into what seemed to her a "howling wilderness." For the Natives, however, this was 'a valley of horticultural hamlets, long inhabited by 'mobile farmers' who cultivated some of the most fertile fields in the world" (271). Understanding an Indigenous archive of the land itself helps the reader break through the forest *primaeval* conjured by the distressed Rowlandson in her narrative and become witness to a transformed landscape with a deep storied history of occupation and usage. The stories, themselves, offer a framework for comprehending how Native people understood their relationship to the land and the obligations they sought to bring the Puritan colonists in line with as humans sharing this space. Rowlandson's worldview, shaped by cosmological Puritan extremes of perceived good and evil, projected biblical language upon her environment that helped feed the cultural imaginations of future generations of settlers. As Brooks, however, comments, "although Rowlandson imagined she 'wept' by the "river of Babylon," she remained on the central Indigenous highway of Kwinitekw [the Connecticut River] but she could see only "Wilderness and Woods" (279).

Jill Lepore, Neal Salisbury, Michelle Burnham and others have unpacked the reversal of gender roles encountered by Rowlandson, as well as the misreadings of Indigenous motives and incentives relayed by Rowlandson and others, but few have managed to ground them so persuasively in a world of Indigenous logic, memory, and custom. By bringing these misunderstood or poorly interpreted impulses to life, Brooks also heightens our notions of the human drama of these events, what was at stake for Indigenous peoples swept up in the conflict of King Philip's War, and how much was lost. For many, like James Printer and Job Kattenanit, the war was one in which brother fought brother. Native individuals newly converted to the Christian faith were asked to prove their loyalty in unimaginable ways and exercised agency under the most dire of circumstances in trying to safeguard their war-dispersed families. Some of these Natives, because of religious training administered by their settler neighbors, were able to read and write and so left a scattered trail of documents detailing their trials and interventions. Even in these traces, Brooks notes, Native authors were aware of having to demonstrate "fidelity to multiple relationships and to each other in order to renew the trust among them and achieve the possibility of peace. They also had to demonstrate their trustworthiness . . . that they would convey messages with integrity and accuracy . . . to demonstrate that they would act like kin" (297).

Finally, Brooks helps to clarify certain events that have appeared mysterious or difficult to interpret as the war began to grind down. Her research suggests that Indigenous leaders began to broker a truce in May of 1676 and proceeded under the assumption that both the settlers and Natives would return to their homes in time to plant for spring. Mary Rowlandson's release from captivity was one of the terms of that truce. But the colonists, sensing that their Native neighbors had let their guard down, betrayed the terms of that negotiation, attacking a Native fishing village of mostly women and children at Peskompscut, a location known today as Turner's Falls, Massachusetts, after the colonial captain who led the ensuing massacre. With this vicious betrayal, the war was back on and, although both Philip and Weetamoo would be killed in the months ahead, Brooks argues that the war actually raged for another year at least, as Abenaki and other Natives north of the Massachusetts border continued to fight for their territory and their way of life.

Our Beloved Kin brings these dramas to life with both rigor and imagination. Brooks' ability to retain focus on Indigenous lives, despite the colonial packaging of these archival events always seeking to intrude and take over the narrative, is in itself a remarkable accomplishment. At times Brooks offers passages that attempt to take us into the perceptual worlds of some of the historical figures, cultivating, as she says, a "sense of embeddedness" that helps situate the reader within the world of her Indigenous subjects (15). Such brief interludes are punctuated, however, by new scholarly revelations and, most importantly, new interpretive frameworks that will assist general readers and scholars in their attempts to extricate themselves from a history that has been too long colonized. It should also be noted that Brooks has developed a website which serves as companion to the book, offering high resolution maps, deeds, and images that bring the reader directly to the source material and help them visualize the world Brooks has so generatively (and lovingly it might be said) labored to recreate and reclaim on the printed page.

<https://ourbelovedkin.com/awikhigan/index>

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