

In “Philip of Pokanoket,” Washington Irving sympathetically presents a noble warrior facing unbelievable hardship and the destruction of his people. This paper focuses on “Option 2: When Cultures Collide: The arrival of Europeans in North America: How would it have felt to be a Native American with the arrival of Europeans to your homeland? How would it have felt to be a European settler, making a new home on the edge of the forest?” through an original diary by King Philip, Metacomet, and based on Irving’s work.

A Call to Arms: Foreword

King Philip, also known as Metacomet, was a Native American tribal leader of the Pokanoket tribe and the Wampanoag nation which once included all 67 distinct tribal communities of Southeastern Massachusetts and Eastern Rhode Island. King Philip is known for leading the Wampanoag and their allies in the fight against the English during King Philip’s War. Metacomet lived in Mount Hope at Pokanoket in Rhode Island near Bristol. His father was the tribal leader who helped Mayflower Pilgrims in Plymouth Colony in 1621. Without his help for the first year, they could not have survived in the severe New World. Metacomet had two brothers, an older brother named Wamsutta and a younger brother named Takamunna, or Suconewhew. Metacomet married Wootonekanuske, whose father was the chief of the Pocasset tribe and whose sister was Weetamoo, who married Metacomet’s older brother, Wamsutta. Metacomet and Wootonekanuske had four children. When Metacomet’s father Messasoit died around 1660, his older brother Wamsutta succeeded him. Before his death, he asked the Plymouth leaders to grant English names to his two sons as a means of seeking lasting peace. They gave the name Alexander to Wamsutta and Philip to Metacomet. In 1662, the Plymouth colonists started to suspect that the native Americans were planning to attack so they requested that Alexander visit the headquarters of the colony. As soon as he arrived, he was forced to attend a trial to prove his loyalty. He signed a contract swearing his allegiance and was released, but he became very sick and before arriving home, he died. His wife Weetamoo and others believed Alexander had been poisoned by the colonists. In 1662, after Alexander died, Philip succeeded his brother the age of 24. Soon he too was requested at the court of Plymouth colony for suspicions of a plot against the English. It would seem that no trust and no peace could ever be found.

After experiencing so much death and disrespect, the native tribes were being beaten down by the settlers, yet King Philip refused to submit. Irving's text states that King Philip was "possessed of the native talents of a statesman" (Perkins 49). He tried to passionately rally the support of the Mohawks and bring them to arms. Although he failed in this attempt, this diary is a record of King Philip preparing to convince the Mohawks to join him and rise up against the settlers. In the diary he will detail a record of all of the atrocities suffered by his people and the neighboring tribes at the hands of the settlers. His entry will serve as the notes for his speech or negotiation with the Mohawk elders to persuade them to join his cause.

A Call to Arms: On the Eve of Battle

Some of you talk of making "peace" with the white invaders. I too desired earnestly to continue the friendship that formerly existed between the Governor of Plymouth and my father and brother. I promised to faithfully keep the peace even though they have repeatedly taken advantage of our goodwill and generosity. To honor my father's wishes and avoid fighting, I agreed to their terms, but no more. There is a limit to how much they can take from us, a limit to how many they can kill before we say no more.

Do you not remember how they arrived on our lands full of arrogance and disrespect? They were like children upon their arrival, unable to even feed themselves. My father showed them which crops to raise and gave them meat when they were starving. If not for his efforts, the ungrateful invaders would have perished during their first winter here on our shores. My father wanted a lasting peace between our two peoples, going so far as to have English names granted to his sons. Yet, his pleas were ignored and dismissed by the whites. It is now clear that the English have no honor and they will never make peace. We must come together and show our pride as warriors to protect our homes and families, or we will not survive.

Do you not remember Alexander? My older brother and son of our righteous father, he was seized for just thinking to defend these lands, our home rightfully passed down to us by our great ancestors. The forest provides us with all we need. When we are hungry, we hunt. When we need shelter, we fashion wigwams from the trees. When we are thirsty, we drink from the rivers. We do not take more than we need, and mother nature continues to provide for us. However, the invaders claim they own our lands, having "bought" them by presenting a few trinkets upon their arrival.

What just court would say this transaction occurred in good faith and our neighboring tribes were given fair value for their lands? None. Now I have pledged a contract to not sell land to the colonists for seven years. We need to keep our precious land or we will not survive. When I wrote to the Governor of Plymouth, Mr. Thomas Prince, it was clear that their idea about land is different from ours. Basically, for us, land is not something to be sold. It is given freely by nature and shared with everyone like our clean air. However, the invaders see our philosophy as a weakness and have taken advantage of our kindness and generosity since the beginning. Now they continue to desecrate the lands of our ancestors. They take and take, not stopping at what they need. They clear the forests to make great forts. They hunt deer until there are none left. They dirty the water with their waste. First, they took our land and now they destroy it. This atrocity must not be allowed to continue or all hope for the future will be lost.

Do you not remember my dear friend and counsellor? We were betrayed by Sausaman the Snake, weak in his heart and no brother of ours. He ran to the whites at the first signs of trouble and charged us, who are only trying to live, with plotting against the invaders. I do not know who deservedly struck the Snake down, but three of our own, including my dear friend, were executed for a crime they did not commit. Again, is there justice in their courts? None. They don't care for the truth or for what is right, they only seek to make an example of those that they mistakenly see as a threat. The invaders use their institutions as tools of their evil enterprise. Their paranoia has made any attempts at peace impossible.

Do you not remember how we were driven from our home at Mount Hope? We were rightfully angry at the loss of our brothers, who were killed just to send us a message that the English must be obeyed. They suspected us of inciting violence and planning a full-scale uprising. Yes, we were angry, but we had not yet steeled our resolve to bloody our hands. Although I did not think it then, I know it now. We must fight to survive. The whites took the initiative and drove us from our home and now we are relegated to the depths of the forest. Although we can survive in these thick forests where they cannot, this is not the home of our ancestors at Mount Hope. We lived there since the beginning and now the English act like they own the rights to even our homes. I fear the day when all nations and all tribes will lose their homes to the white invaders. We must take this chance to make our stand and fight for our homes before it is too late.

Do you not remember our wives and children screaming as the wigwams burned? Driven from our home at Mount Hope and in need of assistance, the faithful Canonchet, chief Sachem of all the Narragansetts, gave us respite. We crossed the swamps and gathered our people in the fortress, knowing the English would eventually attack us out of greed and misguided fear. Not only did we gather our fighters here, but also our loving women, precious children, and wise elders. Guided by another betrayer, the invaders found our location and set out to destroy us, despite the fact that we would have been content to live there in peace without interfering in their affairs. But when attacked, we had no choice but to defend our kin. We fought to the last warrior, losing so many of our veterans to the onslaught. In the end, Canonchet and I were driven from the fort with a handful of survivors. It was then that we bore witness to a great evil, a crime that can never be forgiven. Fort in hand and with no further resistance from the women, children, and elderly, the English showed their true nature. They set fire to our wigwams and burned our families alive. The screams of the women and children will never be forgotten by those who witnessed that atrocity. It was an unforgiveable crime.

Canonchet has already laid down his life to make the English pay for their sins. He fought valiantly to take revenge against those who do not see us as fellow humans or see our lives as having any value. Canonchet successfully destroyed several settlements in Connecticut and showed us that it is possible to hurt our oppressors. Now is the time for us to continue the fight. We must never submit to those who cannot be trusted, to those who do not value nature, to those who see us as animals. Join me, my brothers, or we will be lost forever...