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## PROLOGUE

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*October 29, 2012*

I was living in Brooklyn, writing this book, when the Atlantic Ocean made an unexpected visit. It came in the form of a tropical system that gathered south of the West Indies in late October 2012. After ripping roofs off houses and flooding streets across Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Cuba, Tropical Storm Sandy became Hurricane Sandy and veered north. On the night of October 29, 2012, it slammed New York City with a thirteen-foot wall of water. The surge shredded boardwalks, flipped cars on their sides, and lifted beach houses off their foundations. As avenues became filthy estuaries, a flooded power substation on the East River exploded and lit up my apartment with a sputtering, eerie flash. A third of Manhattan's twinkling skyline went dark. On Staten Island, people drowned in their living rooms. Fires raged across whole blocks of the Rockaways in Queens. All told, Sandy killed a hundred and forty-eight people across the Northeast, contributed to the deaths of a hundred more, and left tens of thousands homeless.

Over the next few days it felt like the city was slipping out of the modern world and into a postapocalyptic future. Subways shut down and traffic onto bridges stretched for miles, effectively severing the borough's lifelines to the mainland. Having no way to get to the research library on the Upper West Side that was sponsoring my year of leave, I spent time walking around my neighborhood. Near my building a tangle of branches and downed wires blocked the sidewalk. Snapped trees leaned lazily against brownstones, while entire metal-frame store awnings had fallen dejectedly onto the

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pavement. Unlit buildings across the river created the illusion that the heart of the metropolis had been abandoned. As the days wore on, ATMs started to run out of cash. Gasoline rationing, a wartime relic I had never seen in my lifetime, went into effect. I started getting nervous when I noticed that the shelves of my corner bodega were becoming alarmingly bare.

It was as though Sandy had opened up a brief tear in space-time. Soon it became a cliché for commentators to suggest that the storm's aftermath was an ominous preview of the century of global warming to come. But it seemed to me more like a peek at a century long gone. I was realizing, in a way I had not truly grasped before, that I was on an island next to other islands. Stripped of its modern infrastructure, Gotham revealed its origins as a group of settlements oriented around the sea—and at its mercy. Flooding on Manhattan exposed the island's long-lost face, as the high waterline traced the contours of the seventeenth-century coastline. Near my apartment, the Gowanus Canal similarly tried to reclaim its irregular, marshy course. It was soon clear that those hit hardest were also economically marginalized: some were uninsured folks unable to recoup their losses, others were elderly or infirm and thus isolated in a crippled city. Parts of the coast were without power for weeks, forcing people in the most stricken areas to cook over fires and get their water by the bucket. I heard more than one reporter compare the storm-ravaged districts of the Tri-State area to the Wild West. It seemed like my own titular conceit, “the saltwater frontier,” had leapt from the page.

Obviously, the trials of modern urban people facing climate change in the twenty-first century are vastly different from the events discussed in this book, which reexamines how coastal Algonquians from the Hudson River to Cape Cod faced the colonial invasion in the seventeenth century. Indeed, these events may appear to have little in common other than bringing death and dislocation to the same corner of North America. But when seen together in a long view of this region's history, the seemingly dissimilar processes of global warming and European colonization draw our attention to some of the same things. They remind us that we all live on a single ball of rock that is mostly covered with water. They illustrate how profit-seeking activities often create unintended and lasting consequences for people and

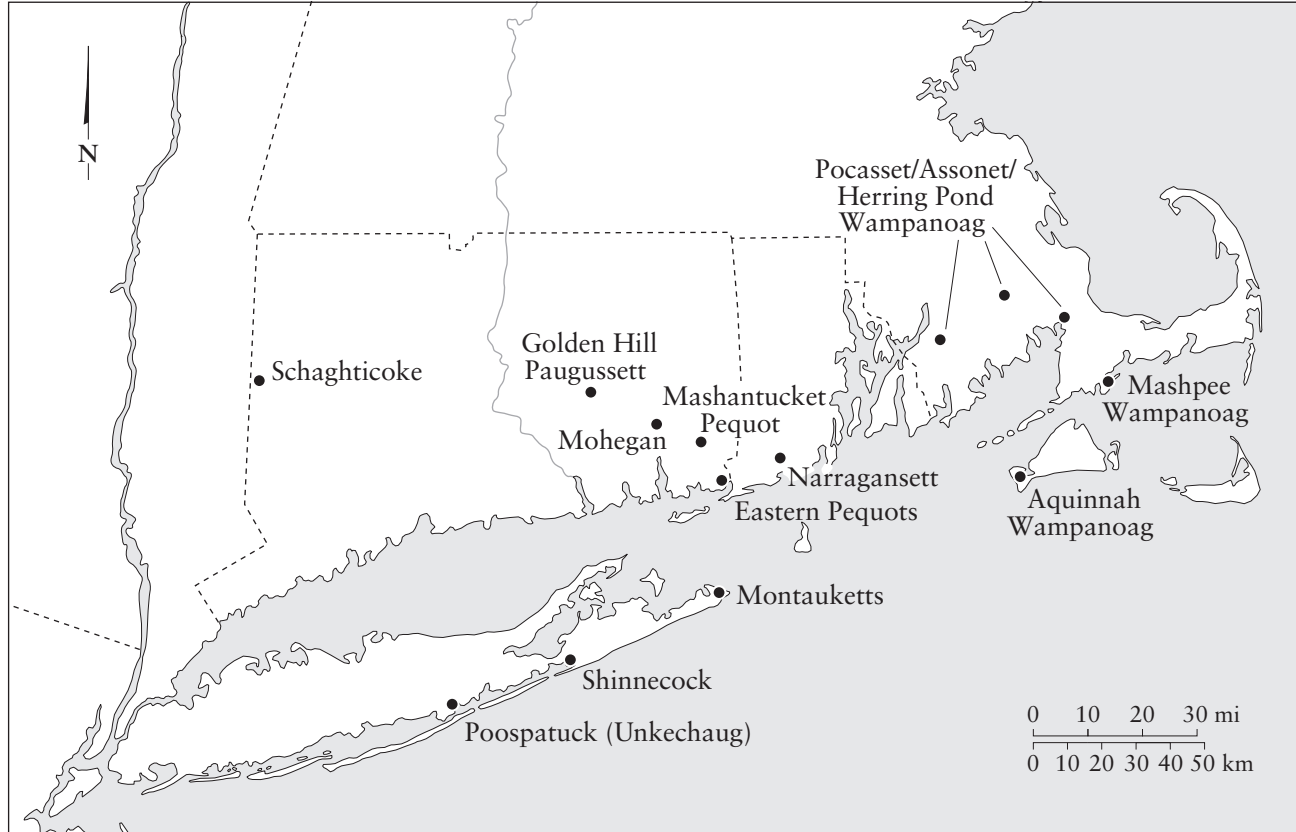
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the environment. They reveal that political boundaries are mostly an illusion and offer little protection from troublesome planet-wide trends. And they demonstrate that so much of what appears permanent is in fact precarious.

We share more than we think with the Native, English, and Dutch people whose stories fill the following pages. Like us, they lived in an age of environmental crises, exploitive global trade, far-reaching wars, and frightening pandemics. They also believed storms could be powerful omens or the dire consequences of human actions. Witnessing a dramatic transformation of this coast and thinking of more catastrophic changes to come certainly convinced me that events in our rearview are closer than they appear. My intent is not to draw overly simple parallels to the colonial period but to point out its surprising immediacy in a region that seldom wants to dwell on its violent past or the global processes that created its current boundaries.

In American popular culture the shore from Manhattan to Nantucket seems quite remote from the bloody realities of the seventeenth century, as it is so often depicted as a placid place defined by leisure. The congested western side features the country's richest city while the bucolic eastern side is perceived as an exclusive playground for elites. Though in truth much of the coast—home to some twenty million people—is now a densely packed swath of modest-sized houses and car-friendly retail strips, with impoverished factory towns perched at the falls of retired rivers. F. Scott Fitzgerald fittingly described the region's largest bay, Long Island Sound, as “the most domesticated body of salt water in the Western Hemisphere.”

But even suburbanized, deindustrialized places can remain contested. Between the brick and cement grids of New York City and the precious clusters of gray-shingled beach houses there are Native villages standing. Not as many as in 1600 but probably more than you think. Thousands of people from the region belong to over a dozen indigenous communities. Some live on soil that their ancestors never ceded in federal- and state-recognized reservations, others live among the vast non-Native population. Thousands more people whose ancestors came from this coast now belong to tribal nations located deep in the American and Canadian interior. These



Modern tribal communities.

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communities need no reminders of the frontier's modern relevance. While all sides long ago laid down their weapons, Indians from the region are still entangled in fraught cultural and political negotiations with their neighbors. For them, the colonial period is far from over.

This book returns to the years in which catastrophic Atlantic arrivals first ruptured the social fabric of this shore. It is not just a narrative of devastation but also one of navigation. For although those indigenous people lost most of their lands, in the process they discovered an ocean.

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Land looms large in the American Indian past. The continent itself is a document for indigenous peoples, a vast page with a deep concentration of stories. Colonial historians study how Natives shared ground and lost it, fought for ground and held on to it. Still, land was not the only setting for Indian history or its sole defining issue.<sup>1</sup>

This book covers territory that we Americans might think we know all too well: the Northeast in the seventeenth century. It is safe to say that the history of Indians in this region is well-trodden ground. The English and Dutch invasions of the coast were, by the colonists' own admissions, aggressive and brutal. Yet today, the same region that witnessed multiple colonial-led massacres that literally scorched the earth is now home to one of the densest concentrations of Indian reservations on the eastern seaboard. Why was this first century of colonization so violent? And how did some indigenous peoples survive the onslaught and remain in their homelands for centuries to come? This book argues that the answers to both those questions can be found simply by flipping our traditional westward-facing picture around. What if we considered this contested region not just as a part of the continent but also as part of the ocean?

When towering ships first appeared off North America, the coast and sea became a space that Natives had to share and fight for. Tens of thousands of Algonquian-speaking people made their homes on the sandy margin between the later sites of Plymouth and New Amsterdam. Though the coast was divided



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into more than twenty independent polities, its chain of bays served as a cohesive, connecting space. After years of brief visits to these waters, English and Dutch colonists built their first settlements at the eastern and western ends of the coast in the 1620s. They eventually converged along Long Island Sound as the century wore on. In fact, at no other spot on mainland North America did two competing empires place so many villages so close together. The foreigners audaciously renamed this region as part of New England and Nieu Nederlandt, each claiming the entire shore belonged to them.

The beginnings of these twin colonial intrusions are fabled events in Americans' national memory. We see the colonial arrival as a heroic act of *Mayflower* passengers striding on Plymouth Rock or we remember it slightly more cynically in the legend that Dutchmen bought Manhattan on the



Michel Felice Corné, "The Landing of the Pilgrims." Courtesy of Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts.



Jennie A. Brownscome, "The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth." Courtesy of Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts.



Alfred Fredericks, "The Purchase of Manhattan Island by Peter Minuit."

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cheap for mere baubles. These myths are primarily about colonists' initial seizure of land, zeroing in on the instant Native dispossession began. They celebrate the uncanny luck of the fair-skinned folks in buckled hats, offering little concern for the fates of the people with feathers on their heads lurking at the edge of the frame. The fact that these tales are misremembered only seems to add to their longevity—the very act of debunking falsehoods requires repeating them. Images of colonial destiny have a more sticky hold on the public consciousness than scholars' depressing, nitpicky claims of complexity.<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully there are other versions of this past that are not so triumphant—Native and non-Native historians have been telling them for quite a while. But even nuanced accounts can share the same blind spots as the legends. Too often we suppose that the story started when colonists left their ships. We forget that Indians met Europeans as fellow mariners. We allow colonists' artificial borders to stand to this day, telling two unrelated English and Dutch stories. And we therefore assume that colonization was a process that happened only on soil.<sup>3</sup>

By looking toward the sea rather than the land, this book offers a new way of thinking about Indian history and a new way of understanding this all-too-familiar region. Throughout this retelling, the physical shore plays a formative role. Its geological quirks, economic resources, and ecological changes all shaped the fates of those who inhabited it in the seventeenth century. Early New England and New Netherland should be seen as overlapping maritime zones with a shared history rather than as discrete territories with separate pasts. Colonial bounds were shifting and porous, unable to contain either people or events. Over the seventeenth century, Algonquian *sachems* (chiefs) and colonial governors engaged in a multidirectional struggle for control of the coast. This contest was a fight for waters and territories, a fight between European seaborne empires, and a fight for Native independence. It also was a complex meeting of maritime cultures that would transform the region and its people. And in some ways this contest is not over.

The following pages offer a novel explanation of how the English came to dominate the region in part by emphasizing the intentions of Indians and Dutchmen. The book argues that neither group of colonists were solely

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responsible for their colonies' fates, as Native decisions and opinions were crucial at every stage of conquest. Viewing the overlap of two empires through a single frame uncovers curious similarities and differences between these abutting colonial projects. The meeting of indigenous and foreign seafaring traditions drove many physical changes along the shore, while rivalries between Native leaders and between the English and Dutch seaborne empires spurred its political realignments. However, the *saltwater* in this book's title is not strictly literal. After all, territory *is* a key part of this story, especially in the later chapters. Instead, *saltwater* refers to the many kinds of maritime and Atlantic connections—cultural, political, martial, ecological, and material—that formed this borderland that was not entirely based on land.<sup>4</sup>

This is also a history that focuses on the use of deadly force. Our sunny pictures of Europeans and Indians gathering by calm seas to swap goods or dine on turkey are not entirely wrong—these folks did sometimes trade and feast in peace. But an honest view of this shore's past must also feature darker scenes of captive taking, shipboard stabbings, attempted piracy, intentional drownings, mass incinerations, and ritual dismemberments. Not incidentally, most of these acts of mayhem and bloodshed occurred on the water or at the water's edge. European soldiers would kill several thousand coastal Indians over the century, while tens of thousands more would die of introduced diseases. Still, Natives were not mere passive victims. In resisting the English and Dutch invasions, they would slay as many as a thousand colonists—no small toll but far fewer than the number they lost. Algonquian peoples in conflict with each other would also kill a considerable but hard-to-quantify number of their neighbors, totaling over a few hundred more dead.<sup>5</sup>

The dueling nations of foreigners did not settle this shore: they *unsettled* it. In the grimmest moments of the century, parts of the once-thriving indigenous shoreline would become a nightmarish landscape of death, pocked with freshly dug graves and the charred remains of entire towns. Many combatants likened the sporadic bursts of violence to sea squalls. One veteran compared the bravery it took to fight Indians to the courage of sailors, summing up his narrative of a frontier war with the wry aphorism “more men would goe to Sea, if they were sure to meet with no stormes.”

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Another Englishman poetically referred to the same confrontation as “the Ocean of Troubles and Trials wherein we saile.” And in at least one coastal language, Indian fighters would “wittily speake of” conflicts as “*Chépewess & Mishittâshin*,” or the “Northerne storm of war,” associating warfare with the bad weather created by a malicious spirit.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all this turbulence, coastal Algonquians encountered Europeans in ways that were constructive, inventive even. Looking at exchanges between ships and canoes, one discovers that soon after they met, the locals and invaders began a cross-cultural trade in seagoing skills that would further bind the region together. Colonists eagerly followed the advice of Native mariners, hired them as ferrymen and couriers, and adopted their canoes as everyday vessels. Indians also bought, borrowed, and stole colonial boats and became talented sailors of European-style craft. The coast remained a central setting for frontier interaction well into the century. Abundant local clams and whelks became the raw material for the sacred shell beads known as *wampum* that doubled as trade currency through much of the colonial Northeast. These shells were just one resource of many that made nearshore waters a shared commons, as seafood was a staple of daily meals fixed in both wigwams and cottages.

At the same time, this region was also becoming part of a grand imperial contest that spanned the ocean. By midcentury the civil competition between the two European neighbors was turning into a hostile showdown between emerging global powers. The rivalry between England and the Netherlands started to overshadow frontier dealings throughout the region. It was soon apparent that the fates of all villages along the shore were tied to the outcomes of distant naval battles in the Caribbean and North Seas and of domestic upheavals in London and Amsterdam. And American events could have consequences in Europe, too. The English and Dutch long feared the other would ally with coastal Indians to overwhelm their colonial competitors; their mutual suspicions would only heighten in the years before James, Duke of York, first seized New Netherland and renamed it in honor of himself. Sensing their neighbors’ shared fear of conspiracies, Native sachems would traffic in rumors to use the Europeans’ quarrels for their own gain. The constant specter of conquest gave the shore a paranoid

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character. That famous wall that once stood where Wall Street is today was one of several dozen wooden stockades raised near European and Algonquian villages, as all braced for the seemingly inevitable Atlantic tempest headed their way.

The rise of a single empire over the coast was a fitful but bloodless process, at least from the colonial perspective. Starting in 1664 the English and Dutch traded possession of Manhattan and its hinterlands three times in ten years. Each handoff was swift and never escalated into a full-on war. But just a year after the final Dutch surrender, Indians who were furious at overreaching English authorities began a conflict in 1675 that would become the deadliest conflict ever fought on these shores. We know it as King Philip's War, so-named after the Wampanoag sachem Metacom, whom the English called Philip, who acted as the symbolic head of the Indian campaign. Historians often describe the fighting as Natives' last attempt to drive colonists back into the sea. That common summary of indigenous motives ignores the fact that the English victory ultimately pushed Indians, not colonists, toward the ocean. During the fighting, hundreds of Native captives were sold as slaves on distant tropical islands and in European cities, joining the larger diaspora of Indians across the Atlantic rim.

Other Algonquians set sail willingly, turning to seafaring as a living. Low-paying, risky jobs in maritime industries were hardly romantic or easy, but the work let Native men become acquainted with a changing watery world. Even as workers their actions would have far-reaching consequences, as indigenous whalers played a role in the boom-and-bust cycles of the American whale fishery. And as Indian communities formed links to the port towns of New York, Sag Harbor, New London, Newport, New Bedford, Nantucket, and Boston, they often intermarried with freed and enslaved black people, forming enduring multiracial families that are the core of the modern tribal communities along this shore. A few of these seasoned travelers would become well known on both sides of the ocean during the revolutionary era and early republic for their advocacy of Christianity, Native rights, and the abolition of slavery.

Ultimately, viewing saltwater as the primary stage of cultural encounters changes our simple narratives of colonization. The sea, unlike territory,

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could never quite be won or lost. Entering the Atlantic economy would transform Native societies, but Natives would likewise alter the history of the larger ocean. Despite the physical perils of engaging with ships that carried horrific diseases and hostile invaders and the threats to their cultural and political independence that came with remaining inside colonial bounds, coastal peoples did not retreat from the surf. Just as Europeans stood awestruck on their decks surveying the mysterious green continent before them, Indians faced an expanding blue horizon.

### The Frontier, the Atlantic, and Natives

European vessels could cross the ocean and indigenous ones could not. That simple fact goes a long way toward explaining why some scholars, to this day, view Natives as spectators rather than actors in maritime and global history. But there are other reasons we erased Indians from the sea, reasons that are rooted in the old ways we used to think about geography, indigenous people, and the writing of history. Americans have a long national tradition of imagining the oceans around us as a protective moat and assuming our past is always grounded. This terrestrial habit of thinking was ascendant in the nineteenth century, the century that saw the birth of history as a proper academic field and the spread of those misleading myths that fetishized the moment colonial feet touched dirt. The single best articulation of this idea came in a talk given by a mustachioed young professor named Frederick Jackson Turner on a Chicago summer evening in 1893.

To understand our nation's origins, Turner told a crowd of well-fed faces, we had to face inland, toward a space he called the frontier. His term described a westerly moving "wave" of progress, a near-unstoppable flood of conquest and innovation that made America America. Each advance into the "free land" of the "wilderness," each triumph over its "uncivilized" aboriginals would force Euro-American pioneers to reinvigorate their democratic institutions and come together as a people. Though Turner acknowledged that "at first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast" making it "the frontier of Europe in a very real sense," he also insisted that "the true point of view in American history . . . is the Great West." In the years after Turner finished

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his speech, his “frontier thesis” would become a dominant, long-lasting interpretation of the nation’s past, not because it was so original but because it was such an elegant synthesis of so many things that white scholars and citizens wanted to believe were true.<sup>7</sup>

Turner was born in Portage, Wisconsin, a town only one generation removed from its former life as a fur-trading outpost. He had been trained at the first American university to offer doctoral degrees in history, The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. His tendency to see land as the defining feature of the American past was personal and political. Like so many of his countrymen from the Revolution onward, he subscribed to the popular small-*r* republican idea that farming was the nation’s truest occupation. Anglo-Saxon writers like Turner loved to valorize their forefathers who broke sod with humble plows, but they were less comfortable talking about the ones who funded grand ships, engaged in high-risk, high-profit gambles of trade, and became ensnared in debt and foreign affairs. The sea brought luxuries and the temptation to form a global empire. It needed to be deemphasized, depicted as a barrier between continents. By favoring ground over water, these historians actively created the myth of American exceptionalism. Once colonists untethered themselves from the aristocracies and miseries of Europe, the story went, they would craft a society that was fundamentally more free than the ones they left behind, thanks to all their abundant land. And should America expand its territory after its continental frontier was closed, the nation’s pioneer origins could keep its intentions pure.<sup>8</sup>

Modern historians consider Turner problematic. Some find the very word *frontier* so distasteful, so easily conflated with justifications for white supremacy, Native dispossession, and American imperialism that they jokingly call it the *f*-word. An early critique came from one of Turner’s own students, a fellow Wisconsinite named Herbert Eugene Bolton. Unlike his mentor, Bolton actually spent part of his childhood in a covered wagon as his family headed out to a plot in the Nebraska prairie, only to soon retreat to the wooded upper Midwest. In his research Bolton saw that the concept of a westward-moving wave implicitly privileged the perspective of English-speaking peoples over all others, effectively vanishing the Native peoples and rival empires who came before them. He memorably described the



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region north and west of the Gulf of Mexico as a zone of *borderlands*, contested by Native, Spanish, French, and American powers.<sup>9</sup>

Bolton's ideas have enjoyed a renaissance in the past two decades, as historians discard those textbook maps that showed rigid, Anglo-drawn lines expanding into blank space. This shift is in part due to American scholars finally admitting to their blatant East Coast bias, dropping their Anglo-centric blinders, and starting to study non-English colonists in depth. And this new picture of the past also comes thanks to an explosion of research on Natives that has turned cigar-store caricatures into splinters. We are reimagining the American old world, mapping the medieval continent's landscape of farming villages, far-ranging hunting peoples, monumental earthworks, and trading towns. We keep learning more about the stunning diversity of Native experiences in the colonial period, when indigenous people were pioneers and refugees, slaves and slaveholders, evangelical Christians and traditional revivalists, anti-imperial fighters and perhaps even architects of their own empires. Historians now see the continent during the colonial advance as a worn and messy patchwork: crisscrossed with uncertain borders, ripped in many spots. And we use the word *frontier* more thoughtfully, redefining it to mean the combative and collaborative spaces that formed between Indian country and European colonies. The break between Turner the teacher and his student Bolton seems to have been resolved, and the *f*-word can once again be uttered in polite company. Still, even scholars who would never dream of reviving his moribund thesis share Turner's fondness for land, using territorial metaphors to frame their studies.<sup>10</sup>

Other thinkers challenge Turner from the opposite angle. Maritime and imperial historians have long pointed out that the Atlantic Ocean was actually a connector of continents, not a partition. To a cohort writing after the Second World War, including a few men coming straight from the services into universities, the winning alliances of the last two wars demonstrated a profound bond between the United States and Western Europe. Following the urgings of the American journalist Walter Lippmann and a number of French and British scholars, they looked to affirm the shared values of the emerging anti-Communist partnership by writing a history of the "Atlantic Community" that emphasized links between continents' political and

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cultural evolutions. They saw the United States not as a uniquely superior nation but as part of an exclusive team of wealthy, white-majority, Christian nations that together were better than all others.<sup>11</sup>

Like work on the frontier, in recent decades Atlantic history has grown far beyond its beginnings as a triumphant project designed to flatter the powerful and justify their expanding rule. The field is no longer about elite intellectual links or simple diagrams of Triangle Trade. Rather, Atlantic historians are creating a kaleidoscopic picture of how the ocean connected the histories of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. Bridged by several entangled empires, crossed by millions of enslaved and free peoples, habitat for fishermen, sailors, merchants, and pirates, the ocean would become the main stage for the ages of revolution and abolition and ultimately for the rise of the nation-state and industrial capitalism. Yet in most Atlantic studies indigenous Americans are still landbound onlookers with little reach beyond their immediate shores.<sup>12</sup>

Historians are only slowly breaking the habit of leaving Natives high and dry. Quite recently research on the ocean and continent has started to blend together into a new, amphibious genre of “surf and turf” histories. Scholars argue that the sudden linkage of Indians’ exchange networks to global ones could transform distant parts of the world at the same time. Some studies of the Atlantic World now range far inland; others trace Native stories all the way to Europe. Native maritime history is becoming a genuine subfield. An overlapping group of scholars pays close attention to coastlines, islands, even offshore banks, pointing out that in periods of Western expansion from antiquity to the present these seemingly peripheral places were often the center of the action. It is getting harder for scholars to ignore the prominent role indigenous peoples played in the larger epic of how this wet planet became connected and how the modern era began.<sup>13</sup>

Though this book owes much to this cutting-edge work, its most basic idea is actually almost as old as the frontier thesis. Just five years after Turner gave his talk in Chicago, a historian named Olivia Bush-Banks proposed that the Native past could be seen as a sea story. Bush-Banks was born Olivia Ward in 1869 in Sag Harbor on Long Island. Both of her parents were Montaukettts of African ancestry, and her father, Abraham, was likely a fisherman. Bush-Banks would go on to become the tribal historian for the

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Montaukett nation, where she met with elders and worked in the archives of Long Island's east end to recover the story of her ancestors. She joined a cohort of other indigenous writers publishing in the nineteenth century, whose narratives defied the ongoing erasure of Indians' past and presence on the continent. Later in life she also became a minor but respected figure in the Harlem Renaissance. But back in the 1890s, at the same time her contemporary Professor Turner achieved national prominence, she was a divorced woman struggling to raise her two daughters while looking for work as a seamstress in New England's gritty port cities.<sup>4</sup>

It was then she wrote what would become her most famous poem, "Driftwood." Her verses articulated the idea that the ocean was a frontier—a simultaneously destructive and generative space—for indigenous cultures. To Bush-Banks, Turner was correct in imagining the colonial advance as a wave, but in her eyes the wave was not a civilizing flood: it was a hurricane-force surge that carried off her ancestors' property, tore their communities apart, washed away their languages, stripped them of their political independence and personal freedom. It was an especially fitting metaphor given that her ancestors used storms as metaphors for violence.

"Driftwood" opened with an image of poor children collecting worn timbers off a beach to use as firewood. The following stanzas suggested that the histories of Natives and African Americans resembled the fate of a ship smashed to pieces in a storm. The essence of this and other lost vessels lived on in battered fragments that could still heat humble homes and light the way for passing voyagers. Driftwood was a source of hope to the Montaukett poet, not despair:

Within my mind there dwells this lingering thought,  
 How oft from ill the greatest good is wrought,  
 Perhaps some shattered wreck along the strand,  
 Will help to make the fire burn more bright,  
 And for some weary traveller to-night,  
 'Twill serve the purpose of a guiding hand.

Ah yes, and thus it is with these our lives,  
 Some poor misshapen remnant still survives,

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Of what was once a fair and beauteous form,  
 And yet some dwelling may be made more bright,  
 Some one afar may catch a gleam of light,  
 After the fury of the blighting storm.

Written in the absolute bleakest decade of American Indian history, when tribal populations and power were at their lowest, “Driftwood” was nonetheless an ode to cultural persistence. Even the most dissonant line, the reference to a “poor misshapen remnant” that echoes how most white writers insultingly described Indians in the 1890s, is countered by the following verses that recast the surviving elements of Native traditions as glowing beacons.<sup>15</sup>

Bush-Banks’s imagery was also subtler than most coastal metaphors of cultural contact. She avoided the easy Turnerian cliché of likening her Indian forebears to the weathered margin of the continent and colonists to the dissolving sea. She chose a ship, a human-made structure that operates under human command, to represent the towering civilizations of her ancestors, while using natural imagery to evoke the Euro-American onslaught. Ships brought more than just the devastation wrought by first encounters or the Middle Passage. They could also be vessels of economic opportunity, structures that fostered new connections between people of color in a white-dominated society. The world of her ancestors now existed only in fragments, but the pieces retained their buoyancy. Even in flames, lost watercraft lived on as aids to navigation. In just eleven stanzas that long predated many reams of scholarship, Bush-Banks offered a maritime version of frontier history that neither ignored the violence Natives faced nor condemned them to drown in the currents of modernity.<sup>16</sup>

### Methods, Limits, and Terms

This book draws evidence from English and Dutch letters, diaries, laws, administrative minutes, estate inventories, travel accounts, war narratives, and court records as well as from Native traditions, archaeological site reports, maps, and historic images of vessels and forts. These sources offer valuable quotations, and they also draw our attention to compelling artifacts, in both

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physical and written evidence that evokes the material world. Looking closely at physical objects helps create as vivid a picture as possible of the watery setting that Natives and colonists shared. Particular attention is given to watercraft, shell beads, wartime trophies, and forts, as the changing uses of these artifacts redefined relations between frontier neighbors. Anthropologists have long been interested in “the social life of things,” that is, following the path of objects from person to person or from one society to another to uncover ideas held by the people who touched them.<sup>17</sup>

Biographies of things in contested regions can reveal the dense entanglements of societies in conflict, the strange ways in which seemingly opposing technologies, economies, and politics ended up overlapping. And there is no better way to understand an abstraction like a frontier than to envision how it really looked, to picture colonists hungrily eating freshly cooked meals served by Native women, coveting their stores of shell beads, and solemnly accepting grisly wartime trophies from their allies. Or to imagine Algonquians raising the walls of their own European-inspired forts, sewing shell jewelry onto imported woolen cloth, and placing their hands on the tillers of colonial vessels. Archaeological evidence also lets one peek behind the shoulders of elite Native men to catch glimpses of the larger indigenous communities they spoke for. The first two chapters in the book also rely on other methods borrowed from anthropologists: sidestreaming, which means combining evidence from neighboring culturally akin peoples, and upstreaming, that is, compressing accounts from different times. Despite the obvious perils of these slippery methods, they are helpful for discerning trends that crossed boundaries and for making informed guesses about how Indians perceived European actions.<sup>18</sup>

The following narrative is intended to be concise and provocative rather than magisterial or definitive. It is primarily about how three things—seafaring, violence, and Atlantic geopolitics—shaped one place. My use of such a tight focus to survey an entire region over a whole century inevitably leaves some peoples, problems, and events in the blurry background. For example, maritime encounters on freshwater lakes and rivers are seldom discussed, as the book is explicitly not about following colonists’ inland creep but about tracing the processes that moved in the opposite direction.

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Furthermore, the Dutch further up the Hudson at Fort Orange and the English north of Boston and south by Chesapeake Bay are only minor figures in this telling because they were peripheral to the chain of maritime events that connected the fates of New England and New Netherland. The same is true of many neighboring Iroquoian and Algonquian peoples as well as nearby French and Swedish colonists. Readers seeking biographies of major Native and colonial figures, histories of specific sachemships and colonies, and studies of the region that focus on gender, slavery, religion, communication, trade networks, and ecology can turn to the endnotes for a long reading list.<sup>19</sup>

Another limit of this book comes from using just one language to write about a place where more than seven were spoken. Snippets of Algonquian dialects and Dutch appear throughout, reminders of the many tongues that coexisted along this coast. Rather than chase the impossible goal of ridding American English of its colonial legacies, the aim is to acknowledge complexity but favor clarity. Sometimes indigenous peoples appear generically as *locals*, *Natives*, and *Indians*, but whenever possible they appear with the names they called themselves, such as Raritans, Wampanoags, Hackensacks, Montauketts. Naming the people from the eastern side of the Atlantic is also complicated. The use of terms like *foreigners*, *invaders*, *Europeans*, and *colonists* is straightforward; slightly trickier is the occasional use of *Christian*, which was their preferred generic term to differentiate themselves from locals. It becomes problematic later in the seventeenth century as some Algonquian people would also become followers of Jesus Christ. Not every English-speaking colonist was a hardline Calvinist who wished to purify the Church of England; nonetheless, *Puritan* is an accurate descriptor of most of those colonies' elites, especially those of Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Haven. Calling the New Netherland colonists *Dutch* is a stretch in the same way *Puritan* is for New England: it is the correct term for most authorities but not the ordinary people, as the colony's population was a diverse mix of various European and African ethnicities.

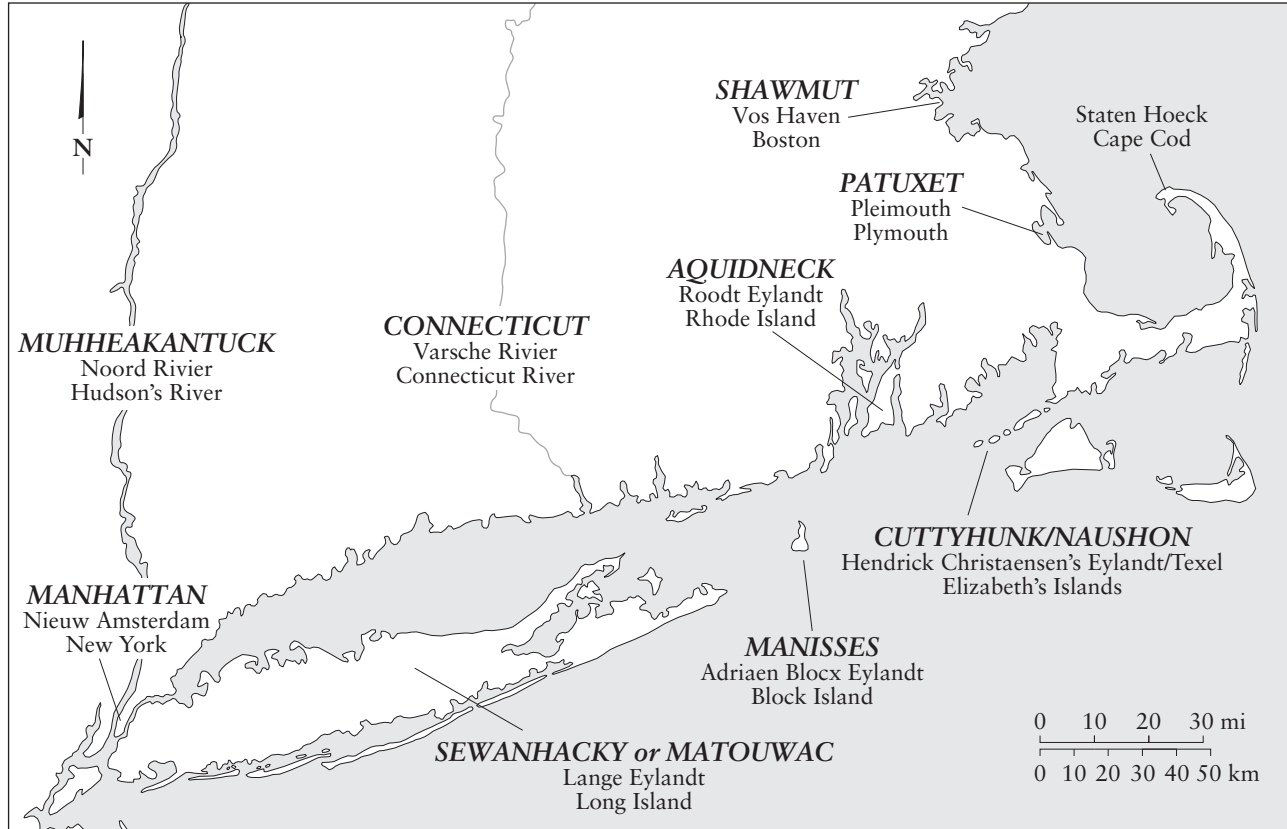
When it comes to describing physical American geography, the present-day place-names sometimes used serve to keep the reader oriented.

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Native names for this shore are surely the most intriguing, as they represent the most ancient, detailed map but also the most difficult to get right. Typically rendered in multiple spellings by colonists with varying degrees of familiarity with Native languages, Algonquian place-names were themselves changed by encounters with Europeans or corrupted by generations of English and Dutch speakers, then often given spurious etymologies by well-meaning local historians. Even experts in Algonquian dialects find the task of translating place-names difficult. Still, the dominant theme in Native names is intensive description of the usefulness and variety of this coast. For example, *Sewanhacky*, a name for Long Island, referred to the island's reputation as a place rich with shells and apt for bead making; *Connecticut*, a place on both the island and mainland, referred to a settlement by a long tidal river. Algonquian place-names could function as a set of detailed directions and a travel guide, evoking the shore as it looked from the hold of a canoe. Natives' geographical imagination was not the same as Europeans', so labels do not always match up tidily, the invaders coining new terms for major features while retaining local words for smaller ones.<sup>20</sup>

Dutch explorers often described terrain in the simplest, most functional adjectives, as in '*t Lange* (The Long) *Eylandt*, *Varsche* (Fresh) *Rivier*, *Noord* (North) *Rivier*, *Oost* (East) *Rivier*, *Roodt* (Red) *Eylandt*, while the English also liked to adopt Native names or include slightly more poetic references to local wildlife, such as *Oyster Bay*, *Buzzards Bay*, and *Cape Cod*. Both were apt to litter their maps with references to European peoples and locales, as in *Adriaen Bloex Eylandt*, *Elizabeth's Island*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, and *Plymouth*. Even some seemingly Native-inspired place-names were pretty much colonial inventions. *Tappan Zee*, for instance, is a Munsee-Dutch mash-up: Tappans were the people who lived near this wide point in the Hudson that Netherlanders likened to a sea. *Narragansett Bay*, another hybrid term, was more English than Algonquian, as Indians did not see that particular confluence of estuaries as one feature, and the bay was divided almost equally between Wampanoags and Narragansetts. For that matter, even the colonists who named it could not agree on where it ended and began.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the following chapters there are plenty of reminders that we should think of Indian sachemships, English colonies, and Dutch colonies



Indigenous and colonial place-names.



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as porous, elastic realms rather than as concrete parts of the continent. Colonists and Indians alike would experience many moments of being unsure of where exactly they were and who was in control. All knew that names and borders could change suddenly. Perhaps we should, like mariners, become accustomed to constant motion and mind the things beneath the surface that cannot be seen. Then we can start to explore this coast in the seventeenth century.