

Guns, germs, and gravy on everything

By **Jim Cornelius**
News Editor

It has become a family tradition in my household during the Thanksgiving weekend to gather before the electronic hearth to watch the PBS American Experience documentary “We Shall Remain — After the Mayflower.” In it, the saga of the first Thanksgiving unfolds from the point of view of the Wampanoag, who greeted the arrival of the Pilgrims as an opportunity to forge an alliance in the face of destruction.

The film well captures an aspect of the story that generally escapes mainstream history: The people of the Wampanoag Confederacy were living in a post-apocalyptic world. A scant few years before the Pilgrims landed, this numerous and prosperous people was ravaged by a series of disease outbreaks lasting about two years. Half or more of the Wampanoag died. In some villages, mortality approached 100 percent. The village of Patuxet was abandoned. Here was the site of New Plymouth.

The diseases, which were probably a strain of plague, were likely acquired through glancing or indirect contact with European sailors, traders and fishermen, who were poking along that coast (and in the case of the French, exploring the north country) for many decades before the Pilgrims ventured there. The Indian populations had little to no resistance to these diseases, and the result was like something out of Stephen King’s “The Stand.”

Jared Diamond’s “Guns, Germs, and Steel,” promotes the thesis that a variety of variables, often seemingly minor in themselves, combine to shape the success or destruction of societies throughout history. Weather and crops, domestication of certain animals, the development of certain technologies (steel and writing) and the ability or inability to cope with or resist disease are the true hinges of fate. The website for the PBS series based on Diamond’s work notes:

“Much of the credit for European military success in the New World can be handed to the superiority of their weapons, their literary heritage, even the fact they had unique load-bearing mammals, like horses. These factors combined, gave the conquistadors a massive advantage over the sophisticated civilizations of the

Aztec and Inca empires.

“But weapons alone can’t account for the breathtaking speed with which the indigenous population of the New World were completely wiped out.

“Within just a few generations, the continents of the Americas were virtually emptied of their native inhabitants — some academics estimate that approximately 20 million people may have died in the years following the European invasion — up to 95 percent of the population of the Americas.

“No medieval force, no matter how bloodthirsty, could have achieved such enormous levels of genocide. Instead, Europeans were aided by a deadly secret weapon they weren’t even aware they were carrying: Smallpox.”

Smallpox probably wasn’t the culprit in the case of the Wampanoag, but the point remains valid: The land was cleared for the Pilgrims and other European settlers in large part by germs. The Pilgrims, as was their wont, attributed this to God. The Wampanoag, no less metaphysical in their orientation, may have done the same.

Of course it is important to recognize that there is no agency here. Although there were later plots to infect Indian populations with smallpox deliberately, the massive destruction wrought by germs was biological happenstance. As the Black Plague reshaped Europe, killing a third of its population, so germs reshaped North America. Lack of resistance to European diseases doomed the native peoples, greatly reducing their populations and weakening their base of resistance before the intruders even arrived in force.

The Pilgrims and the Wampanoag did, in fact, forge a viable friendship and mutually beneficial alliance — for a time. That moment of friendship we celebrate in our Thanksgiving iconography was real enough.

“We Shall Remain — After the Mayflower” documents the gradual — and probably inevitable — breakdown of that Puritan/Wampanoag alliance, which ended in King Philip’s War in the 1670s — the bloodiest conflict in American history. Per capita casualties were not equaled even in the American Civil War.

The path established in the “First Thanksgiving” was a path abandoned.

The Nugget Newspaper Crossword

By **Jacqueline E. Mathews**, Tribune News Service

- ACROSS**
- 1 Residences
6 Junk email
10 ___ around; look for a good buy
14 Travel ___; hired trip planner
15 Theater award
16 Combine
17 Refrain start
18 Bump ___; meet unexpectedly
19 Greek liqueur
20 Rubio and McConnell, e.g.
22 At the ready
24 Tea containers
25 Totally innocent
26 Boulevard
29 NASA's realm
30 Classic gift for Father's Day
31 Tailor, for one
33 Build
37 To boot
39 Valleys
41 Shoe part
42 Outfit
44 Sparkle
46 Convent dweller
47 Endeavors
49 ___ hound; tracking dog
51 Forgives
54 No longer here
55 Small sailboats
56 Get knots out of a necklace
60 Toy that goes up and down
61 “___ boy!”; new parents' cry
63 Like melted caramels
64 Scorch
65 Count calories
66 Uneven
67 Holbrook and Linden
68 Make ___ meet; eke out a living
69 Log floats
- DOWN**
- 1 Miters & fezzes
2 Intend
3 Inhumane
4 Intertwine
5 Museum pieces
6 Mixes in a bowl
7 Opera star
8 Crawling bug
9 Inability to see clearly in the distance
10 Overindulgent grandparents
11 On the ___; free to the customer
12 Seeps out
13 Trudges
21 ___ for; chose
23 ___ more; again
25 Shopping ___; spending binge
26 Male deer
27 Flooring piece
28 Relaxation
29 Peddles
32 Earnings
34 Very long periods
35 Helpful hint
36 Tepee, for one
38 In the fresh air
40 Wooden shoe

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Created by **Jacqueline E. Mathews**

11/25/15

— Last Week's Puzzle Solved —

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- 43 ___ up; support from beneath
45 Supervisor
48 Turn ___ out; invert
50 Hombre's wife
51 ___ oneself up; prepare mentally
52 Maui farewell
53 Fit for a king
54 Pesky insects
56 Like hand-me-downs
57 Err
58 In case
59 Needle holes
62 Rin Tin ___

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