

**A LETTER REGARDING
RELATIONS
WITH THE INDIANS
1700**

-----*Samuel Sewall*-----

Samuel Sewall was a judge and Puritan leader in Massachusetts in the late 17th century. His letter reflects the tensions and issues that arose between Puritan settlers and local Native American tribes as settlers migrated west, seeking better farmland.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Motives

What are some of the reasons Sewall wanted to provide the benefits he outlines to the Native Americans?

May 3, 1700

Last fall, I had notice of my being entrusted with a share in managing the Indian affairs, and presently upon it, the Commissioners were pleased to appoint me their secretary. As I account it an honor to be thus employed, so according to my mean ability, I shall endeavor faithfully to serve the Corporation and Commissioners, as I shall receive instructions from them.

I have met with an observation of some grave divines, that ordinarily when God intends good to a nation, He is pleased to make use of some of themselves to be instrumental in conveying of that good unto them. Now God has furnished several of the Indians with considerable abilities for the work of the ministry, and teaching school. And therefore I am apt to believe that if the Indians so qualified were more taken notice of in suitable rewards, it would conduce very much to the propagation of the Gospel among them. Besides the content they might have in a provision of necessary food and raiment, the respect and honor of it would quicken their industry and allure others to take pains in fitting themselves for a fruitful discharge of those offices.

One thing more I would crave leave to suggest. We have had a very long and grievous war with the Eastern Indians, and it is of great concernment to His Majesty's interests here that a peace be concluded with them upon firm and sure foundations; which in my poor opinion cannot well be while our articles of accord with them remain so very general as they do. I should think it requisite that convenient tracts of land should be set out to them; and that by plain and natural boundaries, as much as may be—as lakes, rivers, mountains, rocks—

upon which for any Englishman to encroach should be accounted a crime. Except this be done, I fear their own jealousies, and the French friars, will persuade them that the English, as they increase and think they want more room, will never leave till they have crowded them quite out of all their lands. And it will be a vain attempt for us to offer Heaven to them if they take up prejudices against us, as if we did grudge them a living upon their own earth.

The Savoy Confession of Faith, English on one side and Indian on the other, has been lately printed here; as also several sermons of the president's [of Harvard, Increase Mather] have been transcribed into Indian and printed, which I hope in God's time will have a very good effect. To see it and be employed in giving Your Honor an account of it would be a very desirable piece of service to [me].

Source: Samuel Sewall, *A Letter on Conduct Toward the Indians*. Reprinted in *The Annals of America*, vol. I (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1976), p. 315.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Students may answer that Sewall wanted to encourage Protestant Christianity among the Native Americans. Toward that end, Sewall suggests that Native Americans who became educated in the English manner and took up missionary work should be recognized and rewarded. He also urges that the Crown strengthen its peace treaties with the Native Americans and that Native Americans be given tracts of land that were legally their own. Sewall also suggests that if these measures are not taken, Native Americans may ally themselves with the French and convert to Catholicism.