

FRANK JAMES SPEAKS OUT

WAMPANOAG LEADER DECLARES "A NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING"



FRANK "WAMSUTTA" JAMES, an Aquinnah Wampanoag, spoke out yesterday to mark the 350th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims, *writes our chief reporter, November 27, 1970.*

James addressed a group of supporters gathered on Cole's Hill near Plymouth Rock, close to a replica of the *Mayflower* and a statue of the 17th-century Wampanoag leader Massasoit.

James had first been asked to write his speech by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a 350th anniversary celebration of the supposedly friendly relationship between the early English settlers and the Wampanoag.

When the event organizers read James's speech they thought its critical testimony of the mistreatment of the Wampanoag was inappropriate. James was asked to deliver a revised version, but he refused.

Our reporter was on Cole's Hill to hear James deliver his original speech on the anniversary of what his supporters are now calling a "National Day of Mourning."

"I speak to you as a man—a Wampanoag Man. I am a proud man, proud of my ancestry, my accomplishments.

"It is with mixed emotion that I stand here. This is a time of celebration for you—celebrating an anniversary of a beginning for the white man in America. It is with a heavy heart that I look back upon what happened to my people.

"Even before the Pilgrims landed, it was common practice for explorers to capture Indians, take them to Europe, and sell them as slaves for 220 shillings apiece. The Pilgrims had hardly explored the shores of Cape Cod for four days before they had robbed the graves of my ancestors and stolen their corn and beans.

"Massasoit, the great sachem [leader] of the Wampanoag, knew these facts, yet he and his people welcomed and befriended the settlers of the Plymouth Plantation.

"This action by Massasoit was perhaps our biggest mistake. We, the Wampanoag, welcomed you, the white man, with open arms, little knowing that it was the beginning of the end; that before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoag would no longer be a free people.

"And so down through the years there is record after record of Indian lands taken and, in token, reservations set up for him upon which to live. The Indian, having been stripped of his power, could only stand by and watch while the white man took his land and used it for his personal gain.

"History wants us to believe that the Indian was a savage, illiterate, uncivilized animal. Let us remember, the Indian is and was just as human as the white man. The Indian feels pain, gets hurt, and becomes defensive, has dreams, bears tragedy and failure ... He, too, is often misunderstood."

IN 1976, two years after the Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs was created, Governor Dukakis signed a proclamation giving state recognition to three Massachusetts tribes—the Wampanoag at Gay Head, the Mashpee Wampanoag, and the Nipmuc tribe based in Grafton, MA. The Commission on Indian Affairs continues to represent these tribes and act as a liaison between the state and Indian Peoples.