

POLITICALLY CORRECT OVERCORRECTION IS INCORRECT

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An open letter to Louis Cataldo,
honorable as a longtime unofficial educator about Cape Cod Indian history, &
promoter of race amity on Cape Cod

Dear Louis:

My high appreciation of you & of your efforts leading up to today's unveiling of the model for the Iyanough statue is clear in my preface to this open-letter response to our conversation today. Given the amicable tone & major agreements in that conversation, I'm assuming you won't object to this manner of widening the conversation, in the interest of clarifying matters of misunderstanding & minor disagreement.

1 We are sometimes unfair without consciously intending to be. My letter to the editor could be read as accusing you of intending to be unfair to the Europeans--an idea that hadn't occurred to me, else I'd've guarded against that reading by explicit denial, such as, "Knowing Mr. Cataldo's irenic spirit & commitment to fairness, I am not accusing him of conscious anti-European spin." Thank you for asserting that in your series of three excellent, well-researched articles, you intended no such twist.

2 You are right that it's difficult to nuance in newspaper articles, as--I add, above--in a letter to the editor! Yet I claimed in my letter & our conversation that in the article my letter was responding to, you were unfair in the sense of giving an **unbalanced** account. My plea (nothing personal in this) is to move the historical & contemporary discourse *beyond both old & new PC*.

We agree on this aim, & disagree only on whether your article measured up to this criterion.

3 The newspapers carrying my letter heightened, by their titling, the matter of fairness. My use is less blaring. E.g., I don't accuse you of unfairness, but limit myself to expressing "some doubt" about the way you've told the story. I now have no doubt as to your intention to tell the story fairly, & write in hope of your removing, as you tell the story, the possibility that you are understood, wrongly, as intending unfair spin--as in §1 I indicate how I could have removed the false reading of my letter as accusing you of conscious, deliberate unfairness.

4 The title of this open letter states a fact & makes a judgment. The fact is that **advocates** always & everywhere are *in hubris*—

LET'S TELL THE STORY FAIRLY

Craigville

To the Editor:

You conclude your recent excellent editorial with these wise words: "Only the radical left and right put orientation ahead of reason."

Now that Sachem Iyanough is getting some long-due recognition in the village-city named after him, I hope his story gets told fairly. Louis Cataldo's telling of it in your paper gives me some doubt.

As diplomacy is war by another means, historical story-telling can be politics by another means. The old PC told the Indian/European story unfairly: good whites, bad Indians. The new PC tells that story unfairly: good Indians, bad whites. When the story is told without spin ("orientation ahead of reason"), the false moralizing is removed.

In Mr. Cataldo's version, bad whites "massacre" good Indians because of "the wrath of the white man." No inkling as to what the white man was wrathful about, or whether wrath was an appropriate response to whatever it was.

An honest, fair telling the story should include these elements:

1. When two very different people occupy the same land, tragedy is inevitable — from misunderstandings due to ignorance, and from the build-up of understandable resentments arising from abuses on both sides. Tragedy: good guys and bad guys on both sides.

2. The notion that the Europeans should have stayed home is as unrealistic as the notion that Plymouth Rock should have landed on the Pilgrims. Historically, peoples don't stay put. The truth is so obvious that one may almost say that peoples-flow is the heart of history. When we see romantic-utopian nonsense, we should name it.

3. Both sides were armed and, understandably, wary. Mr. Cataldo speaks of Indians who "stood aloof with their bows and arrows," and indirectly refers to European arms in using the term "massacre." Both sides had had experiences teaching them the need to be armed: Indian violence against Indians, European violence against Europeans. The myth of the peaceful Indians and the myth of the peaceful Europeans cancel each other.

4. Today's multiculturalism ^{tries} ~~tries~~ to obscure the superiorities/inferiorities of peoples. The Indians were technologically inferior, so couldn't compete. That is a dismal fact they must live with, and not try to obscure by moralism.

Iyanough was an honest, fair man. Let's tell his story, and the wider story of the European/Indian encounter, fairly.

^s
William Elliott

(correctly attributed
when printed in the CAPE COD REGISTER)

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danger of overreaching, going too far, unfairly exaggerating their case. Stupidity is anything extended too far in a straight line, & it's stupidly self-canceling to abuse truth (& to that extent also one's opponents). Making the temptation insidious is the collusion of (1) one's passionate commitment, subverting reason, (2) attentional excess (your perspective becoming myopic to your cause), & (3) communal confirmation (your "crowd" giving you strokes-encouragements in your devotion to your cause). It's a slippery slope with few bushes (like me) to brake your slide. I speak as a righteous sinner: sinner, for I've often committed this hubris; & righteous, because (I think!) it's not a current sin of mine.

Fact, & judgment: For reasons stated & surmisable above, I consider it incorrect, wrong, to overcorrect--in an overworked metaphor, to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Overcorrection is a double crime of politicization: (1) The accuser's us/them thinking demonizes them & angelizes us; & (2) The demonized accused exorcize by purity-claims (i.e., reverse us/them). On both sides, truth is victimized. My first ¶ describes this dismal process as putting "orientation ahead of reason." Orientation, even polarization, is sometimes necessary in the interest of justice; but justice is not served by the abuse of truth, fairness, love.

5 When I spoke of Christian realism here, that we're all sinners (Europeans, Indians, all) in need of God's grace & of forgivingness toward one another, you heartily agreed. But your article hasn't a breath of that balance; it's in the Indian-as-victim new-PC spirit. Your thinking is only right/wrong, with no sense of the **tragic** dimension that transcends moralizing & enables balanced, fair dealing with facts & peoples.

6 I repeat my intention to help you tell the story more fairly. That is the purpose of my list of "**elements**" in "an honest, fair telling of the story." The better we serve truth in this matter, the better our position to serve justice, justice to history & to Cape Cod's present Indians (I prefer "Amerind," to put the fact of their being Americans ahead of the 16th-century illusion that they were Indians).