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Puritan New England

As we've seen, the Chesapeake's settlers, sponsored by the Virginia Company of London, were single young men, frequently gentry's sons. They hoped to get rich quick and return to England as wealthy men who could then re-establish themselves as gentlemen on large country estates.

However, they lacked the training and skills to succeed and Jamestown's survival was always hanging in the balance.

The second outfit, the Virginia Company of Plymouth also embarked on settling people. Its efforts were more successful. There are several reasons why:

New England's settlers were not committed to discovering wealth, but rather, sought to develop society based on their religious convictions.

They were not single young men, but stable families, who planned to remain in America

They had skills. They were not wealthy or poor, but of the "middling" class who were skilled in farming, commerce, and as artisans.

How did they end up in America?

Puritans

England in the 1600s was very volatile. The century had two civil wars and one King lost his head (literally), while his heir was later deposed.

Much of the crisis was political, and revolved around the power relation between the Monarch and Parliament. One group that actively challenged the King was the Radical Puritans. For our purposes there were two different groups:

1) Pilgrim Separatists – The pilgrims believed that the Anglican Church was corrupt and that their association with it threatened the prospect of salvation. Rather than reforming it from within, they decided that it was not salvageable and they fled England and settled in Holland. Holland was one of the most tolerant countries at that time, but the Pilgrims still faced economic discrimination. So that they wouldn't compete with the Dutch, the English were forced to take unskilled jobs. Additionally, their children grew up not as Englishmen, but as Dutch.

They decided to leave Holland at about the same time that the Virginia Company of Plymouth was looking for settlers. Some of them sailed in 1620 on the Mayflower and landed at Plymouth Rock. Of the 102 aboard the ship only 1/3rd were Pilgrims, however, because of their education and literacy, they

would dominate the new colony. Also, they had some concern about where exactly they had landed. Was the area within the region controlled by the Virginia Company of Plymouth? To perpetuate a sense of legitimacy, they created the Mayflower Compact. This document is commonly viewed as an early example of American self-government. In truth, the Pilgrims gave voting rights only to those that were official church members, also known as “Saints” or the “elect.”

Like Jamestown, the first years, especially the first winter, were difficult and many people died from disease and starvation. However, under William Bradford, the settlers worked hard and, with the assistance of local native Americans, learned the intricacies of farming the land.

2) Non-Separatists - These Puritans, unlike the Pilgrims, sought to reform the Anglican Church from within. Both groups were Calvinists. John Calvin was a French reformer who, as part of the Protestant Reformation, established the Calvinist religion, initially in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin believed literally in the Bible and that all humans were depraved and damned to Hell for eternity. There was absolutely nothing a person could do, no amount of good deeds or pious lifestyle could change this. According to Calvin, though, God was merciful and had, through his grace, predestined some (the saints or elect) to salvation in Heaven. A person was predestined from the beginning of time, so again, there was nothing you could do. Either you were or you weren't.

The right to vote and decide events depended on church membership, and membership depended on being elect. So, puritan settlers had to somehow document that they were one of the elect (by the way, Calvin believed that the Bible literally said only 144,000 people were elect!).

How could you do this? Only God truly knew and so a person could never really be sure. But, again, it was necessary to good government that people became church members so they could participate. The result was a process by which a person created something along the lines of a portfolio. Even though good deeds and clean living were definite qualifiers, they might be evidence of election. After all, people suspected that God would not have chosen sinners.

Basically then, the Church board would review people and those that passed were denoted as “Saints” and became members with various rights. The irony is that if a person really let this go to their head, they might think, “Heck, I'm elect so I can do whatever!” But, you were never really sure. And, it was after all, fellow men that made the decision.

As you might expect, this was not a very satisfying arrangement. If only a small number of people were elect, those that weren't might decide, “If I'm not a Saint,

I might as well do whatever I want, it doesn't matter." Imagine the impact on a society that was supposed to be "Christian."

Some rejected the Calvinist belief on predestination. They believed that salvation was the result of good works and deeds and that God would reward these efforts. Called Arminians, these Protestants thought that hard work, and various successes in life, whether in business or family, were a sign of God's grace. This view inspired people to work hard and if they became successful, this likely was evidence of God's grace.

New England's settlers then all believed that they were on a mission or an errand. They had a strong sense of history, and believed that they were starting a new chapter in human progress. As the leading minister, John Winthrop said, "We must consider that we shall be as a city upon an hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."

Winthrop

Winthrop strongly believed in this mission. He had been a prominent landholder and lawyer in England, but had seven sons that he hoped to provide for and so decided to settle in New England.

He asserted his control over the Massachusetts Bay Colony by holding stockholder meeting in Massachusetts, not London. Like the two Virginia Companies, the Massachusetts Bay Company had a corporate charter that specified how the company would be run for the stockholders benefit. A regular meeting was required. However, the charter didn't specify where the meeting should take place. Probably most assumed London, but Winthrop appropriated the meeting and held it in Massachusetts, away from the potential interference of company or government officials. This meeting evolved into the colonial government, supported by local town meetings.

As you might expect, Winthrop asserted his authority over the colony and believed that his "city on a hill" could thrive only if there was harmony and consensus. Thus, any dissent was squelched immediately. Even some rules seemed restrictive. For example, on Sundays you could not work in Public, play games, sing (except in church), walk in a garden, or kiss in public!

The first generation of settlers did work hard and the Massachusetts colony and the other early New England colonies thrived. Some, however, opposed Winthrop's dictatorial style.

"Hiving Out"

Many who disliked the controlled environment fled or were forced out like bees from the hive.

Roger Williams – Initially Williams supported Winthrop’s ideals, but overtime saw the settlers as thieves who stole Indian land. He was banished and purchased Indian land and set up Rhode Island. Rhode Island became the most tolerant colony and Williams is credited with developing the doctrine of “Separation of Church and State.”

Anne Hutchinson – Hutchinson was a midwife and healer (two things that would have made her suspicious to Winthrop). She has 13 children and developed a mystical view of the Holy Spirit and grace. She challenged the role ministers played in the salvation process. She was banished.

Thomas Hooker – Hooker led a group of disaffected settlers to Connecticut and, through his “Fundamental Orders,” allowed all male property holders (not just elect) to vote.

The impact of the “hiving out” also had negative effects. Contact and conflict with Native Americans increasing occurred as English settlers spread in land.

New England Life

New England Life was characterized by the following:

Very high life expectancy and natural growth

Low disease (after the first year)

Longer marriages and many children

Strong family units

Paternalism (male control)

Religion

Civil Government and legal system to protect property and maintain order

Because people lived very long, into the 80s was common, many male children were into their 50s and 60s before they inherited their father’s wealth. This kept them tied to their father and they were, even as adults, forced to abide by his wishes for fear of offending him and risking the inheritance!



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