

Early Colonial Ideology



Time Line overview

- 1615 • John Donne, major English poet and theologian is ordained a priest in the Anglican Church at the age of 43 years.
- 1621 • William Bradford becomes leader of Plymouth Colony >Separatists = “Pilgrims”
- 1628 • Thomas Taylor publishes book-length sermon, *Meditations from the Creatures*.
- 1630 • John Cotton delivers sermon, “Divine Right to Occupy the Land”
 - John Winthrop becomes leader of Massachusetts Bay Colony= Puritans
 - Anne Bradstreet, Simon Bradstreet (her husband, future governor), and Thomas Dudley (her father, and another future governor) members of Puritans.
- 1631 • Roger Williams arrives at Plymouth Colony from England
- 1632 • Williams publicly condemns the King’s charters and the right of Plymouth Colony to occupy the land; recants position under pressure
- 1633 • Roger Williams moves to Salem; raises issues regarding the charter again
- 1634 • John Cotton sails to New World
 - Anne Hutchinson sails to New World
- 1635 • Roger Williams flees Salem

Time Line overview

- 1636 • Roger Williams founds Providence Plantation (Rhode Island)
- 1637 • Anne Hutchinson exiled from Massachusetts Bay Colony
- 1643 • United Colonies of New England is formed, one of the first notions of a collected governmental body
- 1649 • Charles I of England beheaded
 - England declared a Commonwealth
- 1652 • Providence Plantation abolishes slavery within its colony
- 1654 • John Donne's poem "Elegy XIX" is published posthumously.

February 1692 / May 1693

- Witch Trials in Salem Village, Ipswich, Andover and Salem Town.

Fast Forward

Jonathan Edwards (October 5, 1703 – March 22, 1758)

- a colonial American Congregational preacher
- lived just before the American Revolution
- followed the same Puritan ideals in his sermons and teachings
- extended the typology method from Biblical exegesis (critical explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text) to explain the spiritual significance of the sensible world of mortal reality.
- the natural world was a key to religion and devotional concepts

Images or Shadows of Divine Things

natural world

> typology <

Heaven/God

(accessible to human comprehension)

(indirect comprehension)

- his notions would be influential for future writing emerging from America
- what Edwards does (and other writers of the period) he presents you with two iconic symbols, tied together; for example, when you see a rose you recognize it for what it is physically in front of you, but in turn you view it as the religious, spiritual aspect of its nature and see the representation likewise.

The two are one.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

The sermon is broken down into ten short sections where he outlines a very bleak concept of life on Earth:

- God might cast wicked men into hell at any moment in time.
- The wicked deserve to be cast into hell.
- They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell.
- They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God that is expressed in the torments of hell.
- Satan stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own, whatever moment God shall permit him.
- God has laid himself under no obligation by any promise to keep any natural man out of hell one moment.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

Jonathan Edward's sermon was a major contribution to the “Great Awakening” period of colonial America—a period when a even higher standard of strong conservative and religious thought were in control of the various colonies.

Edwards ends the sermon with one final appeal: “Therefore let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come.”

Without explicitly saying, Edwards indirectly gives a sense of hope to those currently out of Christ. Only by returning to Christ can one escape the stark fate outlined by Edwards. He says that it is the will of God that keeps wicked men from the depths of Hell; this act of restraint has given humanity a chance to change their ways and return to Christ.

The Puritan Mind-Set

For Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Taylor, and other Puritans—all words were a necessity, even sensuous words, despite their limitations. Unlike the First Americans who viewed only spoken words as a means of achieving a spiritual connection, the Puritans viewed all forms of words (spoken, printed, casual thoughts, prayers) played in the plans for ultimate salvation — because all were created by God and should serve to glorify God.

New England was established as a means of redeeming the sins of Europe—through their actions as English citizens.

- Keep in mind they did not consider themselves as a *new form* of government but an *off-shoot*.

The Puritan Mind-Set

Closer Examination of Early Colonial Puritans

The term “puritan” began as an English connotation—in later centuries it has “morphed” into a New World, *American* connotation. This is ironic due to the fact they considered themselves to be *English* citizens.

In high school textbooks, they tend to paint the Puritans as first religious settlers in a wild, untamed American landscape, as a people wanting to escape religious persecutions from an overbearing government.

However, their *theological* beliefs closely mirrored the Church of England; their studies of God and His relationship to the Universe were the same values stressed in English churches.

The Puritan Mind-Set

The marked distinction between Anglicans in England and the Puritans who chose to colonize Americas is based on their *ecclesiastical* beliefs.

To clarify:

theology: pertains to study of divine things or religious truth

ecclesiastical: pertains to the church's laws or the duties of the clergy

Predestination

The Separatists/Puritans' main break with the Church of England

- they felt a stronger conservative measure was needed
- the English Reformation was still too closely linked to the Church of Rome
- one of the major conflicts, the belief of Predestination

Predestination

- as an omnipotent being, God knows in advance the fate of the Universe
- some humans are already on the salvation list, and others are not
- one cannot escape the pre-determined list
- one cannot save themselves, no matter how hard one tries
- if God has established you are damned to hell, even as a chaste Puritan, you are damned
- however, one should try to avoid sin and fight against its influences.

Theocracy

- No one is pure. Everyone is stained with Original Sin.
Everyone is equal in God's Eyes due to the Fall of Man.
- Despite this, the American Puritans did *not* establish a democratic system.
- Colonial Separatists and Puritans established religion controlled the politics, creating a theocracy.

Theocracy: a form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler, the God's or deity's *laws being interpreted by the ecclesiastical authorities.*

- The social order followed a rigorous system of order.
- No other religion was tolerated.
- No other form of Puritanism were allowed within individual colonies.

Cultural Expectations

- Ironically, in England they were actually more tolerant of other denominations of faith.
- Within the Separatists/Puritan communities, plays, gambling, and may-pole dances were banned.
- Some music was permitted outside of church, but not dancing.
- Self examination is important. Conscious prayer and meditation of self control keeps the individual on track.

Clash of Cultures

- With Predestination, the expectation was that the Puritans themselves would be on the selected list.
- They arrived in the “wilderness” of North America their acts were sanctioned by God.
- Native Americans were savages, primitive heathen akin to devils.
- These indigenous people would not be on the saved list, even if they converted.
- The plagues of European diseases (small pox) which decimated the Native population only proved to be a sign of the *Puritans’ right to claim the lands*.
- It has been estimated that 90% of the Native Americans in New England were wiped out by the time of the Puritans’ *arrival*.

Clash of Cultures

- The settlers found a somewhat controlled environment of cultivated fields and organized forests.
- The landscape was not a completely vast hostile wilderness.
- As early as 1634, John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony knew of the epidemics wiping out the Native populations.
- In a letter he wrote to a friend in England, he states that plagues was “miraculous”— “But for the natives in these parts, God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by the smallpox which still continues among them. So as God hath thereby cleared our title to this place, those who remain in these parts, being in all not 50, have put themselves under our protection...”

Clash of Cultures

- Consequently, during the first fifty years no elaborate threat arose from the Native Americans.
- The number of deaths among the people seemed sanctioned by Divine Law.
- William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts, also mentions this:

For it pleased God to afflict these Indians with such a deadly sickness that out of 1,000 over 950 of them died, and many of them lay rotting above ground for want of burial.

Contrast—John Donne

- Another example of contrasting thought is a poem by John Donne:
“Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed”
- It is important to compare the writings of colonial America against the writings in England—helps establish a stronger understanding of the Puritan/Separatist mind-set by showing what they opposed.

John Donne || Elegy XIX

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
Until I labour, I in labour lie.
The foe oft-times, having the foe in sight,
Is tired with standing, though they never fight.
Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening 05
But a far fairer world encompassing.
Unpin that spangled breast-plate, which you wear
That th'eyes of busy fools may be stopped there:
Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime
Tells me from you that now 'tis your bed time. 10
Off with that happy busk, whom I envy
That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
Your gown's going off such beauteous state reveals
As when from flowery meads th'hills shadow steals.
Off with your wiry coronet and show 15
The hairy diadem which on you doth grow.
Off with those shoes: and then safely tread
In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.
In such white robes heaven's angels used to be

John Donne || *Elegy XIX*

Received by men; thou Angel bring'st with thee 20
A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; and though
Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
By this these Angels from an evil sprite:
They set out hairs, but these the flesh upright.
License my roving hands, and let them go 25
Behind before, above, between, below.
Oh my America, my new found land,
My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my Empery,
How blessed am I in this discovering thee. 30
To enter in these bonds is to be free,
Then where my hand is set my seal shall be.
Full nakedness, all joys are due to thee.
As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be
To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use 35
Are as Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,
That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem
His earthly soul may covet theirs not them.

John Donne || Elegy XIX

Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
For laymen, are all women thus arrayed; 40
Themselves are mystic books, which only we
Whom their imputed grace will dignify
Must see revealed. Then since I may know,
As liberally as to a midwife show
Thyself; cast all, yea this white linen hence. 45
Here is no penance, much less innocence.
To teach thee, I am naked first: why then
What need'st thou have more covering than a man.

John Donne

(Jan. ?1572— March 1631)

- In 1615 was ordained a priest when 43 years old
- honest and frank about his passions and his intellect and his personal life
- wrote numerous poems on large variety of subjects
 1. men chasing women / fertility poems / worship of women
 2. personal love poems to his wife
 3. metaphysical interpretations of life in Jacobean England
 4. and divine or holy poems
 5. numerous satyres and songs

He is considered a metaphysical poet, writing on somewhat obscure themes and mystical notions of the soul and interpretations of private life in the London.

John Donne

- “Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed” is a heavily decorated poem, which makes strong allusions about contemporary times. Heavily erotic, even for its time. Published in 1654.
- Most important to this poem is the allusion to America. In lines 27-32 he compares the woman to the lands overseas.
- Embodies her as a full unexplored continent and land of possibilities for adventure.
- This is a very successful metaphor on numerous levels.
 1. sums up the Jacobean mind-set of discovery and journeys to new lands
 2. connects sexual conquest with territorial conquests overseas
 3. by making the mistress his America, his personal territory, then he “possesses” her as a King owns his territory

John Donne

- Donne captures the basic patriarchal stereotype of man-female relations.
- What saves this from drowning in too much “machismo” is the closing couplet:

“To teach thee, I am naked first: why then

What need'st thou have more covering than a man.”

He is showing himself in a vulnerable position—he is in the middle of waiting for her reactions and actions; this is not a demanding, controlling situation, rather it is a gentle seduction, a moment of tenderness between two loving characters.

Puritan Plain-Style re-examined

This poem is *exactly* what the Puritans opposed:

- open declarations of affection, even for a husband to wife
- emotional, passionate sentiments
- heavily decorative metaphors
- erotic sensibilities as a basis for literary themes

The Puritan Plain style requires both writing and artistic senses to be under full control of the *author* and in retrospect, the *reader* as well.

Creative works must:

- display a perspective of the wilderness as pagan and untamed
- display Puritan characters without rashness, without color
- always show them as civilized followers of God

Puritan's View of New World

The New World offered an opportunity to set a chaotic wilderness to a sense of Christian order. They were given the opportunity to claim a region of the world, and reinvent, *reform* the landscape in their own controlled, manicured concepts.

In a recent essay, Robert Boschman notes the English Settlers' motivation based itself on the need “to reform the environment, to Anglicize it, as swiftly as possible” (250).

Among the Puritans, the writings of John Winthrop confirm Boschman's view. Winthrop states: “Whatsoever we did or ought to have done when we lived in England, we must do that and more also wherever we go” (114).

Puritan's View of New World

To justify further their actions of claiming the land, even if by force, the English viewed the First Americans as a 'failed' species due to their lack of marketable industry or civilizations.

In a sermon delivered in London in 1630, "The Divine Right to Occupy the Land"

Reverend John Cotton states:

"Where there is a vacant place, there is liberty for the sons of Adam or Noah to come and inhabit, though they neither buy it nor ask their leaves... So that it is free from the common grant for any to take possession of vacant countries. Indeed no nation, is to drive out another without special commission from Heaven, such as the Israelites had, unless the natives do unjustly wrong them, will not recompense the wrongs done in a peaceable fort. And then they may right themselves by lawful war and subdue the country unto themselves."

“*Divine Right to Occupy the Land*”

His sermon achieves multiple purposes:

- emphasizes connections between the Old Testament Israelites wandering in the wilderness and the Puritans wandering the woods of North America
- asserts the English right to plundering the Americas

Consequently:

- between 1629 and 1640, thousands of people, mostly middle class, emigrated to the new country, setting up a new lifestyle in the wilderness
- the common family transformed themselves into representation of Adam and Eve, struggling to produce a semblance of a new Eden in the New World.

John Winthrop || *William Bradford*

John Winthrop wrote the “A City Upon a Hill” sermon

- traditionally believed to have been given when aboard the *Arbella* not long before the Puritan landing in Salem, often used in political speeches even today

Despite the fact that the two materials have different intentions, Bradford’s text is an historical record, Winthrop’s is a religious sermon — and despite the fact that Bradford was a Separatist Pilgrim and Winthrop was an Anglican Puritan, the two texts mirror each other in style and technique.

- Both are using the plain style.
- Both are wanting to promote their campaigns into new territories.

John Winthrop || William Bradford

- Winthrop uses a typical Biblical parallelism for rhythm and cadence
- For example, “we must” phrases repeat, repetitiously in the top sentences.
- Notice how they slowly shift to “we shall” phrases.
- lack of color
- the sermon stresses the hardships ahead
- mentions scripture throughout his sermon as a means of verifying his theme and situation
- theme proposes a sense of warning to the early colonists that their new community would be a “city upon a hill,” watched by the world
- Winthrop believed that all nations had a covenant with God
- because England had violated its religious covenant, the Puritans must leave the country

Pilgrims versus the Puritans

- for this reason, the Puritans were acting as a further confirmation of the Pilgrim's leave taking, a few years previous
The Old World was seeing this action as a repetition of a second movement into the New World, which more or less confirmed preceding actions.
- However, unlike the Separatists (the Pilgrims), the Puritans remained loosely associated with the Anglican church in hopes that it could be purified from within
- Winthrop believed that by purifying Christianity in the New World, his followers would serve as an example to the Old World for building a successful model of a Protestant community as opposed to a successful Church of Rome community

Pilgrims versus the Puritans

Because the Puritans believed their community was ‘specially ordained by God’ Puritan society of New England as a whole was effected.

- breaking such a covenant with God would have dire results
- to avoid incurring God’s wrath by breaking their promise, the Puritans sought to maintain a perfect order in their society
- Their conventions lead them to create an extremely rigid society in New England, in contrast with the other loosely-bound colonies, such as the colony of Jamestown.

Pilgrims versus the Puritans

Both the Separatists and the Puritans wanted the freedom to practice their own religion, but their religious views were very strict and not at all compatible with our contemporary notions of religious freedom.

- the Puritans forced everyone in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to follow the laws of their puritanical faith
- the Pilgrims forced everyone in the Plymouth Colony to follow the Separatists doctrine.

United Colonies of New England

At one point the English colonies loosely bound together as a body of government ideas despite their various differences of religious thought.

United Colonies of New England

- one of the preliminary governments of New England
- formed May 19, 1643 and lasted until 1684
- included the colonies of:

Massachusetts

Plymouth

Connecticut

New Haven

As an united force these English colonies envisioned themselves opposed to the outside “heathen” influences such as Native Americans; the Dutch, in what is now New York; and the French Jesuits, in what is now Canadian territory.

United Colonies of New England

English Colonies Excluded:

- The Virginia colony Jamestown was not included because it was created as a commercial venture and was invested through another British-based company.
- The Rhode Island colony was excluded because of their liberal leanings and sympathy to the Native Americans.

Roger Williams

Roger Williams, an independent preacher, founded the colony Rhode Island.

- Williams fled religious persecution from the Massachusetts Bay Colony
- he established with his fellow settlers on a liberty of conscience
- Providence Plantation's name is based on the idea that agriculture was to be the basis of its economy
- the colony was very progressive for its time, passing laws:
 - abolishing witchcraft trials
 - imprisonment for debt
 - abolishment of most capital punishment sentences
 - abolished slavery of both blacks and whites on March 18, 1652
- Most religious groups were welcomed, with only restrictions on some forms of the Catholic faith.

Roger Williams

Some of his many radical ideas:

- asserted that the Colony magistrate should *not* punish any sort of breach of the Ten Commandments, such as idolatry, Sabbath-breaking, false worship, and blasphemy; the civil authority should not be the same as the ecclesiastical authority; Church and state should be separate units
- every individual should be free to follow his own convictions in religious matters
- people should have freedom of opinion on religious matters—and be able to discuss it for intellectual and meditative purposes.

Conflicts Between Colonies

- Even with the United Colonies of New England government policy in place these groups often were in border skirmishes with each other and with Native Americans.
- Bloodshed common in territory disputes between the colonies and outside “heathens.”