

# Early Colonial Ideology - part 1

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# Time Line overview

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- 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 / 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
- 1633/4 • John Cotton sails to New World
  - Anne Hutchinson sails to New World
- 1635 • Roger Williams flees Salem

# *Time Line overview*

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- 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.

# *The Puritan Mind-Set*

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**For a majority of the Puritans—all words were a necessity, even sensuous words, despite their limitations.**

Unlike the Native 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 salvation — because all words 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*

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## **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*

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The marked distinction between Anglicans in England and the Puritans who chose to colonize the 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*

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## **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

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- 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*

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- Ironically, in England they were actually more tolerant of other denominations of faith.
- Within the Separatists/Puritan communities, performances of plays, gambling, and dancing the may-pole were banned.
- Some music was permitted outside of church, but not dancing.
- Self examination is important. Conscious prayer and meditation on self control keeps the individual on track.
  - > This will be of importance as self-expression develops in the colonies; this mind-set will affect future themes and approaches to writing
  - > An acknowledgement of God's will and determinations must be addressed and applied to the self

# *Clash of Cultures*

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- 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 (74-75).

Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Touchstone, 2007. Print.

# Clash of Cultures

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- 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, to Nathaniel Rich, dated 22 May 1634, he states: “For the natives, they are near all dead of the smallpox, so the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess” (*The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*).<sup>1</sup>
- He further commented later the same year within his journals: “God hath consumed the Natives with a great Plauge in those parts, soe as there be few Inhabitants left” (312)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gilderlehrman.org>

<sup>2</sup> Winthrop, John. *Life and Letters of John Winthrop*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864. Print.

# Clash of Cultures

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- 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 in his records of the same year:

for it pleased God to visit these Indians with such a great sickness and such a mortality that of a thousand above nine hundred and a half of them died, and many of them did rot above ground for want of burial [...]

This spring, also, those Indians that lived about their trading house there fell sick of the smallpox, and died most miserably, for a sorer disease cannot befall them. (*Norton Anthology of American Literature* 131)