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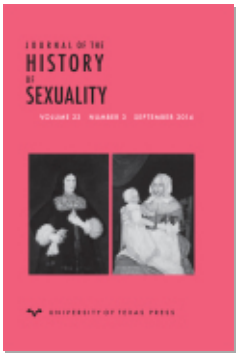

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Generations and Regeneration: "Sexceptionalism" and Group Identity among Puritans in Colonial New England

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As Puritan colonists ventured to North America, they experienced a set of obligations deeply connected to their identity as English subjects. To the Crown they pledged the settlement of a new continent that would further promote the monarchy's growing empire. To God they vowed to be models of "Christian charitie" as they cared for each other in a harsh new environment.[1] And for their own fulfillment they promised commitment to pure Christianity, extending the dissent that had led them to pursue distance from England as well as its church.[2] While colonial New

Thanks to my colleagues David Valone, Daviel Kevles, Richard Godbeer, Susan Crane, Nita Prasad, Karin Matchett, Jill Fehleison, and Joseph Conforti and to researchers Mark Firmani, Nicholas Federn, Erin Baier, Daniel Osborn, Kelly Doyle, Linda Hawkes, Emily Ampel, and Zachary Blanchard. I am grateful for funding from the National Science Foundation, the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University, and Quinnipiac University.

[1] They acted as a "city upon a hill" to illustrate God's approval of their mission. John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1996), 10. Since Perry Miller's *Errand in the Wilderness* (New York: Harper, 1956), Winthrop's words often have been seen as a symbol of the Puritan desire to represent God's work to the world. Recently, however, historians have revised that interpretation substantially. See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 81–82, 91; Sacvan Bercovitch, "Puritan Origins Revisited: The 'City upon a Hill' as a Model of Tradition and Innovation," in *Early America Re-explored: New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture*, ed. Klaus A. Schmidt and Fritz Fleischmann (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 31–48. Joseph A. Conforti explains that the use of Winthrop is "customary but often limited," since he was addressing critics in England (*Saints and Strangers: New England in British North America* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006], 3, 40).

[2] Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 136, 144–45. While my focus is on the Calvinist views of Puritan settlers in general, it is important to note that Winthrop is associated with the larger settlement of Massachusetts Bay and the Puritans who anticipated successful reform of the Church of England—smaller congregations that would influence the larger church. By contrast,

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Englanders denigrated the world they had left—they believed England's corruption would be punished by God—they experienced an internal struggle with regard to the authority of the Crown and their status as English subjects. The trinity of obligation, combined with their ambivalence regarding England and their experience of a hostile and foreign environment, created for the Puritans a powerful and at times contradictory collection of expectations regarding population growth, identity, and reproduction—each related directly to sexuality.

These New English settlers used notions of "generation" and "regeneration" to create a surprising, multifaceted discourse about sexuality that ultimately created a revised sense of group identity and continuity.[3] Unpacking this trope, overlooked in the extraordinarily rich literature on colonial sexuality, reveals a prenational tribe that developed identity across generations partially, but significantly, through sexual expectations and behavior.[4] In essence, from the first to the second and third generations they redefined their reproductive and sexual imperative. To use Benedict Anderson's terms for nationalism, the Puritans show the "transforming of fatality into continuity" and "links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of regeneration"—but with religion intact and infused with sexuality. More precisely, Puritan continuity was expressed substantially in religious terms, and these terms were intimately bound up with sex and generation.[5]

Recent historical scholarship has uncovered fascinating details about sex in colonial America while also suggesting new analytical approaches and subject matter. This body of work explores attitudes toward marital and heterosexual sex, as well as less common practices of homosexuality, bestiality, and sexual violence, and it has distinguished everyday sexual lives and

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William Bradford and the Pilgrims found the Church of England too corrupt for redemption. Known as "separatists," these settlers had no intention of returning. Despite this tradition, Bradford wrote that these "loyall subjects" sailed "for the glorie of god, and advancement of ye Christian faith, and honour of our king & country" in *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1901), 110.

[3] The word "generation" denoted the increase of population; "reproduction" was not used in this sense until the late eighteenth century. See Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth Century Britons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20–22. The mixed identity felt by many settlers is captured in "Agreement among the Settlers," Exeter, New Hampshire, 1639, reprinted in John Demos, *Remarkable Providences: Readings on Early American History*, rev. ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 230. Virginia Anderson analyzes early generations in a different sense in *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[4] Although we know them as Puritans, ironically it was contemporary critics who provided this label. See Conforti, *Saints*, 34. Recent scholarship is divided on the question of the roots of American national culture in Puritan New England. See, for example, Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975).

[5] Benedict Anderson also argues that "the nation steps in as religion declines," in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 11.

beliefs from those of the Calvinist leaders. Recent investigations also cover Foucauldian struggles, socially constructed visions, and power dynamics in the regulation of sex, as well as crucial essentialist themes.[6] Procreation is especially central to existing analysis of the Puritans, but despite the long-dominant paradigm of the "reproductive matrix," there were additional cultural uses of sex.[7] For instance, Puritans believed that the reproduction of saints would further God's plan by increasing the population of English participants in the regeneration of the world. Within this framework, however, Puritans developed nonreproductive meanings around sex, sensuality, purity, and taboos that provided useful ways of interpreting themselves and their environment. Sexual expression—especially when closely watched by the members of the Puritan community—could be used to gauge moral quality that could help identify saints and further the kingdoms of God, old England, and New England.[8] Closer attention to sex and sexual behavior reveals a fairly utilitarian mechanism in Puritan efforts not only to bring about God's plan for his people but also to develop individual agency in group identity, salvation, and improvement. Sexuality and religious conviction combined at "the crossroads of discourse and lived-experience" and created yet another intersection, that of "lived religion" and "lived sexuality."[9]

The Calvinist New English sought regeneration, which was the process by which the group and the individual established a proper relationship with God. Understanding this (re)generative nature of the colonists helps to recover a more complex understanding of sex and its utility for group identity and continuity among New England Puritans—and what one might playfully call "sexceptionalism"—in America. It is not, however, that these colonists were exceptional sexually but instead that sex—as a tool for reproduction, population growth, and moral judgment—contributed to the group identity of a people that considered themselves "exceptional."[10]

[6] See, for example, Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Thomas A. Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon, 2006); Richard Archer, *Fissures in the Rock: New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2001); and Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Foster argues against the earlier historical focus on the "reproductive imperative" in "Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1999): 723–44.

[7] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[8] Colin Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 7.

[9] Caroline Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 108. She is discussing early Christianity, but the methods equally apply to colonial America. See also Lawrence Buell, "Religion on the American Mind," *American Literary History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 32–55.

[10] Although they did not use the term "exceptional," these Puritans clearly saw themselves uniquely positioned, geographically in "the wilds," and cosmically as divine agents in

The New English, in part through sexuality, engaged in a cosmological shift—rather than limiting themselves to passive roles in God's plan, colonists increasingly actively worked to improve the group and individuals. Sexual activity and reproduction were crucial tools that allowed Puritan settlers to chisel a rough outline of individualism into seventeenth-century colonial culture. This approach builds upon the reproductive matrix but supplements it with an examination of insecurity about identity as well as questions about the quality of the group that created worries, regulation, remonstration, and sexual behavior that played into a developing sense of identity and its related moral and ethical obligations.[11] Sexuality emerges as a generative and regenerative force that was by turns erotic, unruly, reproductive, religious, illicit, ecstatic, transgressive, individual, and public and that played a substantial role in the development of a tribal sense of self.

PURITAN AND ENGLISH IDENTITY IN NEW ENGLAND

There was a tremendous amount at stake for the Puritans of New England—successful settlement and service to God required family and church and good government, all of which depended on men and women of good Christian character, whom they called "saints." An ungodly nation—or family or church—would experience divine displeasure and punishment. Yet Puritan theology made the status of godly nation or individual hard to discern. Each person was subject to original sin and total depravity, so that even the youngest infant or the best-behaved adult was first and foremost a sinner. Nonetheless, God had chosen his people at the beginning of time—or "predestined the elect"—who would receive salvation as God's gift. A proper life, as well as a clear-cut conversion experience, could demonstrate God's favor, but it could not earn it—this was a key sticking point in Puritan theology. One could neither choose to be saved, nor could one be sure if one had been saved. Accordingly, each individual Puritan often lived a life of extreme insecurity with regard to his or her status with God and his or her prospects for the afterlife. As a group, however, Puritans believed that God in general had promised them special favor and that life conduct did provide a reasonable guideline for earthly judgment. As these Calvinist settlers ran their communities and churches, therefore, they did their best to purify churches by admitting as members only those who appeared to be "visible saints."[12] The community observed each other closely to ensure behavior

God's plan for human "regeneration." The broader literature on American exceptionalism itself is vast. See, for example, Gordon Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York: Penguin, 2011); David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

[11] D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters.*

[12] Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather, 1639–1723* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 5–6, 15. See also Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963).

that would please God and punished or removed those who did not comply with group expectations. While on earth, the elect experienced their lives as an extended process of regeneration in which they moved closer and closer to knowing God and to reclaiming God's image in their own being.[13]

These principles of election and regeneration had a tremendous impact on the Puritans' efforts to define themselves. The individual could be elect and regenerate, but so could the group. Regeneration of the larger population occurred through natural increase, which resulted in more saints. Each new generation of Christians could increase its godliness and instigate the transformation—or regeneration—of the world.[14] In the Calvinist tradition, Swiss Reformer Huldreich Zwingli emphasized the "elect race," as well as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people . . . which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God." He also called them a "*holy race* . . . a *people* sought and obtained by the blood of Christ." This link was especially connected with the covenant with Abraham—"therefore we are they who formerly Abraham and his like were"—a hook also frequently used by the Puritan ministry.[15] Puritan leaders emphasized the obligation to care for the regeneration of those within one's larger group. Much of this was related to the "covenant" with Abraham, which included all of his descendants.[16] In particular, the theology emphasized the "seed" and lines of descent—as the Puritans commonly said, "God casts the line of election in the loins of godly parents."[17] While continuity would occur mainly by "naturall generation," it also allowed for salvation from outside of physiological connection—"not onely that many Nations should spring from his loyns by naturall generation, but that the Nations of the world (though not springing from him by naturall meanes,) should be counted to him as his children, and that he should be called their Father."[18]

[13] While the New England Puritans emphasized a lifelong process of regeneration, other groups sometimes linked regeneration more precisely to conversion.

[14] John Cotton explained that a man, as a human being, should not be "without a woman, without a Wife, without a Meet Help. . . . It is not good that the man should be alone in this respect; which is to be understood again of the species (of mankind)" (*A Meet Help: or, a wedding sermon preached at New-Castle in New-England, June 19th 1694 at the marriage of Mr. John Clark and Mrs. Elizabeth Woodbridge* [Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1699], A2, 11).

[15] Huldreich Zwingli, "Refutation of the Tricks of the Baptists," in *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli (1482–1531): The Reformer of German Switzerland*, ed. and trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1901), 233; emphasis in the original. See also Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (1944; New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 8, who also quotes Zwingli.

[16] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 7, 135, 180. Thomas Hooker, *The Saints Dignitie and Dutie together with the Danger of Ignorance and Hardnesse. Delivered in severall sermons, etc.* ([Boston]: G.D. for Francis Eglesfield, 1651), 147.

[17] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 182.

[18] According to Peter Bulkeley, writing in 1651, "there is a double seed of his mentioned in Scripture; First, a carnall naturall seed, according to the flesh, proceeding from him by naturall generation, but still remaining in unbeliefe. . . . [S]econdly, there is a spiritual seed, that walke in the faith and steps of the faith and obedience of Abraham" (*Gospel Covenant*

In the first generation of American Puritans, that is, before about 1660, church elders questioned candidates for church membership about a complex of evidence that could demonstrate a pure life, specifically, their daily conduct, devotional practices, conversion experiences, and understanding of doctrine. The system showed strain quite quickly, though, as some of the first and many of the second generation failed to meet the criteria and had less concern for the social and political ties provided by the church. The Half Way Covenant of 1662 allowed baptism, and therefore partial church membership, to the children of the first group of settlers, who themselves had been baptized but did not have the conversion experience that was expected to ensue. Technically, their children, the third generation, would not have been eligible for baptism. While controversial (many churches resisted the Half Way Covenant), this accommodation to generational shifts nonetheless located salvation more firmly in lines of descent that connected families. Members of the third generation still were admonished to follow through and respect their special place in God's plan so that the group could fulfill its obligation to God and avoid his displeasure.[19] The second and third generations of Puritan settlers were therefore marked with an additional level of insecurity but also with more agency—a dash of individualism—in the formation of their identity. At the same time, it seemed that ministers were "encouraging their congregations to hope that grace was hereditary." In turn, "physical procreation and spiritual fecundity became closely related in Puritan minds" so that the "salvation of the individual soul as well as of the Puritan community on earth was now perceived in terms of the reproductive imperative intrinsic to the tribal ethos."[20]

Many Puritans compared leaving England to leaving Sodom, escaping its tainted sexual morality and its polluted theology. They also believed that they could further their pure community and theology—efforts that would also clarify their own efforts to define themselves and help them please God—if they were geographically removed from the corruptions of England.[21] Each individual needed to behave well and conform to the social order not only to provide evidence of his or her own salvation but

Or the Covenant of Grace Opened [1651; Whitefish, NY: Kessinger, 2003], 38–39). See also Michael Warner, "New English Sodom," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 330–58, at 350. Here and elsewhere I have preserved the original spelling and capitalization of Puritan writings.

[19] Conforti, *Saints*.

[20] Some historians have made these links with family and heredity. See, for example, Richard Godbeer, "Love Raptures: Marital, Romantic, and Erotic Images of Jesus Christ in Puritan New England, 1670–1730," *New England Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1995): 355–84, at 366. Morgan suggests that in later generations the "church was thus turned into an exclusive society for the saints and their children. Instead of an agency for bringing Christ to fallen man it became the means of perpetuating the gospel among a hereditary religious aristocracy" (*The Puritan Family*, 174).

[21] Warner, "New English Sodom," 330–58.

also to protect the group and its experiment.[22] The relationship to England therefore was very complex, and so was the Puritan identity as English. In seventeenth-century England, many Christians expected the arrival of the millennium at any time, and most believed that the English had a key role in the world's transformation.[23] For English Protestants more generally, England was a chosen nation that was furthering its purpose through the settling of the Americas. Christians, in this context, had a special obligation to ensure that all of the world's peoples had heard about God's plan for salvation. The discovery of the new world had revealed a new population that required proselytizing. That new world was also a site to display God's power—the "city upon a hill."[24] Boston-born Cotton Mather, like so many of his Puritan colleagues, saw God's hand in the founding of "the spot of earth" meant specially for fulfilling his plan.[25] While these Christians believed they had to spread the word, they also did not expect to convert—salvation was for God's chosen people, but the world as a whole, according to the theology of the day, did not have to believe, they simply had to be exposed to divine intentions. Thus, seventeenth-century evangelical efforts generally emphasized revealing God's plan to the world so that the millennium could come. Bound up with this hope, for the Puritans, was the need to separate from "sinful" and "doomed England."[26] The nature of English identity was fraught when divine expectations were worked into the picture, and it made sense, even if only just under the surface, to reconsider one's Englishness, especially when colonizing a new continent. Given the Puritan belief that true, human-induced conversion was impossible, it would seem that generation—as the growth of the Christian population—was the only way to spread the Gospel far and wide so that all would hear. This was the means to the millennium and to the regeneration of the earth.

The act of generation, as the Puritans charmingly referred to intercourse, resulted in population growth, and forms of sexual expression more generally indicated the moral quality of an individual. These informal data points made sex a means not just to replicate but also to evaluate and improve (not

[22] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 10.

[23] See Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1994).

[24] John Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), esp. 184–218.

[25] Cotton Mather wrote that "this at last is the spot of *earth*, which the God of heaven spied out for the seat of such *evangelical*, and *ecclesiastical*, and very remarkable transactions, as require to be made an history," in *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England*, 7 vols. (1702; Hartford: Silus Andrus, 1853), 1:45. John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

[26] In "the Protestant apocalyptic tradition in which England conceived itself as God's elect nation, . . . the colonization of America . . . constituted a singular revelatory event in the unfolding history of salvation, drawing now to its eschatological moment" (Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 118).

only to generate but also to regenerate) individuals so that the group would em-body, and "em-spirit," the proper character for the "chosen" group. These Calvinist settlers also experienced a chain of moral contradictions more directly related to sexual expression. First, God commanded his subjects to have intercourse so that they would "be fruitful and multiply." But, second, their theology asserted that intercourse was sinful. Paradoxically, third, sexual expression also could provide a remedy to sin, or regeneration.[27] This ironic and ongoing negotiation of generation and regeneration saturated the Puritan discourse with regard to sexual expression and the sense of identity among the New English. Examining the process by which Puritan leaders navigated this complex terrain and mapped it for the more general population adds dimension along with depth to our understanding of ideas about Puritanism specifically and also to the dissonance inherent in group identity more generally. Ultimately, it appears that the first generation of settlers trusted their status as "elect," as God's chosen people, and experienced generation as the means to build the kingdom of God. The second generation used sexual discourse as well, but their process was more founded in "regeneration." The first generation birthed its elect, while the second used sexual and erotic metaphors to recruit a new "select"—these unique Puritans in this way became "sexceptional."

BIRTHING THE ELECT

Puritan sexuality was extraordinarily complex—in some ways surprisingly liberal and in others expectedly restrictive. Alongside a belief in the importance of female orgasm in conception, for instance, was a general fear of women's sexuality. Masturbation, of course, was widely viewed as particularly sinful. And pleasure in intercourse was considered a real human good, but only in the context of marriage.[28] The institution of marriage itself was essential for many reasons, not the least of which was that without marriage and its legitimate realm for procreation "the world would cease." First-generation colonist and Boston minister John Cotton was not so much alarmed by potential apocalypse as he was by how the dying out of the human race would foil God's plan: without marriage "we cannot easily see, how the

[27] Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 56, discusses these paradoxes in greater detail.

[28] Puritan ideas about sexuality once were dismissed as extraordinarily prudish, an approach epitomized by H. L. Mencken and his often quoted crack that Puritans universally harbored the "haunting, haunting fear that somewhere, someone may be happy" (H. L. Mencken, quoted in Randall Stewart, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958], 4). A shift to more positive attention began with Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritans and Sex," *New England Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1942); and Morgan, *The Puritan Family*. See also Roland Mushat Frye, "The Teachings of Classical Puritanism on Conjugal Love," *Studies in the Renaissance* 2 (1955): 148–59; Kathleen Verduin, "'Our Cursed Natures': Sexuality and the Puritan Conscience," *New England Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1983): 220–37.

great things that God hath yet to do on the Stage of the World, would be accomplished."[29] Even with regard to the duty to reproduce, therefore, Puritan theology was complicated; marriage legitimized procreation only in part because it fulfilled God's immediate command to be "fruitful and multiply." Equally important, it seems, was the way that reproduction moved along God's longer-term plan for regeneration. According to Cotton, marriage and generation—and therefore sex—were necessary to ready God's people for their place in his kingdom.

At first glance the parameters about sex seem clear enough: reproduction was essential to the settlers and to their trinity of obligation in the process of settlement. As they aimed to meet the demands of the mother country, colonists needed to settle and claim territory, and breeding efficiently increased the population so that it could expand. It was not entirely clear, however, if settlers should devote themselves to England or if they should split further from the mother country so they could cultivate the growth of God's kingdom. In this liminal space, the settlers had to begin to wonder, could they, and should they, remain English?[30] Still, John Cotton echoed a common theme when he argued that those who shun the "Nuptial Bed"—bachelors—or give "themselves up to a Contemplative life"—celibate Catholic clergymen—were "not instrumental of giving life to others." These nonreproductive individuals were "unworthy to Live themselves" because they did "nothing honestly towards the worlds continuance, increasing God's Subjects or the Kings"; reproduction was necessary to satisfy the mother country and God.[31] To set up their "city upon a hill" Puritans needed government, and Puritan government depended upon family—developed through procreation and other social relationships—as its model so that it could "bear witness to those truths concerning [God's] visible Kingdome."[32] Furthermore, at least by later claims, the Puritans had come to the new world because they wanted to be sure their pure religion continued in future generations, in particular their own offspring.[33]

[29] Cotton, *A Meet Help*, A2.

[30] See Conforti, *Saints*, 3; and Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 8–9, 12.

[31] Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 16–17. On the condemnation of celibacy, see William Haller and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1942): 235–72.

[32] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 3, quoting James Allen, *New-England's Choicest Blessing* (Boston: John Foster, 1679), 11. For Puritan leaders the family was "the very First Society . . . produced among the Children of Men" and thus was the essential foundation for the larger model New Englanders hoped to provide to the world. Cotton Mather, *Family Religion Urged* (London: Benj. Harris, 1709), 1, quoted in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 133. For more on the Puritan connection between family and government, see John Demos, *The Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (1970; New York: Oxford, 1990); and Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

[33] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 168.

Regeneration, in God's plan, required generation. As he addressed younger Puritans in the second half of the seventeenth century, Boston pastor and Harvard College head Samuel Willard explained that "the main errand which brought your Fathers into this Wilderness, was not only that they might themselves enjoy, but that they might settle for their Children, and leave them in full possession of the free, pure, and uncorrupted libertyes of the Covenant of Grace."[34] The substantial English advice literature for women on how to select men likely to produce children spoke to the importance of sex as reproduction and governance more generally in the 1600s.[35]

The role of women illustrated much of what was important in generation and the place it had in God's plan.[36] Cotton preached that woman "answers natural, economical, and Theological ends." As for the "natural ends" in God's plan, Cotton somewhat understatedly argued that she "is helpful in the propagating of mankind," or, as he quoted from the book of Ruth, "she helps build up the House," presumably of God and of Puritanism.[37] Clearly, women gained much of their significance in early modern English society thanks to their reproductive functions: according to Willard, "no other could have answered all the Ends of Human Society."[38] Among Puritan leaders this broad claim even included woman's purpose in the negative aspects of God's plan because, somewhat perversely, it also was she who "drew man into Sin, that seduced him," thus creating the need for and setting in motion God's drama of the Fall and ensuing regeneration of sinful mankind. Woman could use sex as a remedy to sin, and thus as a means to regeneration in daily life, because she could be a "helper of [man's] Infirmity," providing "a remedy of unlawful Love" by helping man "to avoid Fornication."[39] This obligation was mutual; since Puritans believed that women were as sexual as men but less able to control themselves, men had perhaps an even stronger duty to perform sexually so that women could avoid "the devils snares" of adultery and fornication. Sexual satisfaction, or "holy delights," might also deter other inappropriate behavior, so that marriage and even intercourse

[34] Samuel Willard, *Covenant-Keeping the Way to Blessedness* (Boston: James Glen, 1682), 117, quoted in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 168. Morgan also quotes Increase Mather, *A Call from Heaven* (Boston: Richard Pierce, 1685), 42, and John Wilson, *A Seasonable Watchword* (Cambridge, MA: S. Green, 1677), 8.

[35] See Foster, "Deficient Husbands," 56; Merril D. Smith, *Sex and Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[36] See Porterfield, *Female Piety*.

[37] Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 21, quoting Ruth 4:11. See also Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1998), 157. Some Puritan thought also advocated positive sexuality in marriage as important to "increasing the world with a legitimate brood." See Daniel Doriani, "The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53, no. 1 (1991): 132.

[38] Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity: Consonant to the Doctrine of the Church of England* (Boston: B. Green and S. Kneeland, 1726), 125. See also Karlsen, *The Devil*, 167; Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 21.

[39] Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 22.

itself were not strictly about procreation.[40] Cotton concluded his marriage sermon with the admonition that "the woman be what she was made for, a meet help, not an unmeet hindrance," seemingly interjecting some play in language, if not in the bedroom.[41]

The usefulness and value of generation included further irony. Sin itself was inherited. Indeed, original sin was passed along through the act of intercourse itself, and thus, ironically, the emphasis on reproduction highlighted a theological complexity, since by fulfilling procreative obligations Puritans found themselves perpetuating the sinful state of human beings.[42] The polluted state, the status of "weapon of unrighteousness," was at times ascribed specifically to the penis, usually called the "member" or "yard," and the semen itself marked the offspring with sin.[43] Reformed statements of faith followed the progression outlined in the sixteenth-century Belgic Confession, which defined original sin as complete corruption of human nature, which begins in utero.[44] This theological principle that original sin was hereditary and passed along through sexual intercourse came to North America with the New English settlers, including leading Puritan ministers such as Cotton, Willard, and Mather. In particular, they believed that the "act of generation was tainted . . . by its association with the curse placed on Adam and Eve; this contaminated intercourse itself and the children that resulted from it."[45] Anne Bradstreet wrote in her poem "Childhood": "Stained from birth with Adams sinfull fact, / Thence I began to sin as soon as act."[46] Willard seemed to suggest that Jesus Christ's sinless state was the result of his birth from a virgin, and Mather's "Milk for Babes" prompted his flock to assess its sinful state according to Adam's actions with the words "my first Father . . . sinned, & I in him" and "I was conceived in sin & . . . born in iniquity" because "Adams sin imputed to me . . . and

[40] Foster, "Deficient Husbands," 742. See also Doriani, "The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," 125–43, on 130.

[41] Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 24. Cotton also may have reflected some of his own struggles with women. See Amanda Porterfield, "Women's Attraction to Puritanism," *Church History* 60, no. 2 (1991): 196–209, at 200; see also more generally Porterfield, *Female Piety*; and Ann Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A Study of Rhetoric, Prejudice, and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 27–32.

[42] Peter Gardella explores these connections between inherited sin, sex, and Christianity in *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[43] Godbeer, "Love Raptures," 380–81.

[44] The Belgic Confession (article 15) describes original sin as "a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind" (quoted in Shirley C. Guthrie, ed., *Christian Doctrine* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 222).

[45] Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 61. See also Karlsen, *The Devil*, 167.

[46] Anne Bradstreet, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 151.

a corrupt nature dwelling in me."[47] Later Massachusetts and Connecticut luminaries from Jonathan Edwards to Timothy Dwight agreed.[48] Sex was thus instrumental not only in reproduction and procreation but also in the process of perpetuating human sinfulness. The result was paradox and conundrum: sex was required, sex should be pleasurable, and yet sex, at least here on earth, passed sin on to the next generation. In the context of England's imperial ambitions, as well as the desire to satisfy God through families, government, and settlement, reproduction proved even more essential, intensifying the pressure implicit in God's mandate to reproduce.

MODES OF DEGENERATION AND REGENERATION

Generation facilitated individual and group regeneration. Yet Puritans also faced an ongoing struggle to resist degeneration. Two threats, as they experienced them, were the existing population of indigenous peoples and the new environment, including the contours of the land and its harsh weather. Facing these novelties solidified the sense of group cohesion that the settlers had established through the contrasts between their theology and that of the Church of England, but it also made sexual behavior, especially transgressive behavior, more highly charged.[49] Thomas Morton, a settler in Plymouth colony in the 1620s and 1630s, illustrated for Puritans the dangers of engaging the wilderness and the indigenous peoples too directly.[50] Morton was rebellious, having, for instance, seized control of a plantation when threatened with the prospect of being forced to move to Virginia. He called the plantation Merry Mount—itself a profane allusion to "Merry Old England"—and genuinely made merry with the Natives,

[47] Karlsen, *The Devil*, 167, makes this claim about Willard. Cotton Mather, *The man of God furnished—Milk for babes . . . shorten'd and suited, for the lowest capacities—An abridgment of the renowned Assemblies Catechism—Proposals, to parents of the sort, relating to the education of children* (Boston: B. Green, 1708), 20–21. See also Barrett Wendell, *Cotton Mather, the Puritan Priest* (New York: Don Mead, 1891), 6.

[48] Leonard Woods, *Theology of the Puritans* (Boston: Woodbridge Moore, 1851), 31; Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 14.

[49] See Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 26–27. According to Richard Godbeer, "sexual mores took on additional significance," so that "imposing moral order was rendered both more urgent and more farfetched" in a place that "seemed to encourage debased, even barbaric, tendencies." There was fear—"the grim prospect of cultural degeneration"—which "was compounded in the eyes of many contemporaries by the presence of apparently savage Indians and Africans, who threatened to contaminate the colonists and further compromise their civility" (*Sexual Revolution*, 19).

[50] Michael Zuckerman, "Pilgrims in the Wilderness: Community, Modernity, and the Maypole at Merry Mount," *New England Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1977): 255–77. This theme continued into later Puritan thought, and Cotton Mather wrote: "That many sorts of Inferior Creatures, when Transplanted from *Europe* into *America*, do Degenerate by the Transplantation" (*Things for a distress'd people to think upon* [Boston: B. Green and J. Allon, 1696]).

male and female. His activities drew the attention of Puritan authorities, due perhaps to the fears, especially pronounced in this first generation of settlers, of nature and wild peoples. Always alert to the possibility of sinking into barbarism and losing God's favor, as well as endangering English identity, Puritan leaders also were driven by the specter of miscegenation that accompanied what they saw as Morton's "sensual excess." His sexual behavior was not only a threat but also an indication that he was not morally suitable for the kingdom. Morton's dalliances raised an alarm about sexual activities that, according to Puritan thought, tended "to the destruction of the race of mankind," in particular, "the going after strange flesh, or other flesh than God alloweth."[51] Obviously neither godly nor pure, Morton threatened the Puritan principles of order that were especially essential to counterbalance the tempting liberty of the wilds of New England. Morton was arrested repeatedly and eventually died in jail.[52] In addition to illustrating efforts to regulate sex, Morton's case shows a violation of group expectations about purity in behavior as well as in generation—the possibility of fathering children with outsiders.

Further confounding Puritan identity as elect and regenerate was the unpredictability of sexuality, gender, and reproduction. For instance, according to early modern European thought also commonplace in the American settlements, gender was neither fixed nor binary. Genitalia were seen mostly as inverted forms between men and women, and, in line with the Galenic theory of four humors in the body, women in particular were subject to shifts in the balance of humors that could lead to complete change in sex.[53] Reproduction also lacked a sense of continuity founded in the physical body. Instead, physical, spiritual, and mental traits might be inherited thanks to the influence of life experience and state of mind and heart at the time of conception; bad conditions, including immorality and impure thoughts and behavior, led to bad results. Thomas Weld, first minister in Roxbury, Massachusetts, connected personality and spiritual status with reproduction when he wrote in the 1630s that outspoken and "obnoxious" church member Mary Dyer "had vented mishapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters"—and in this case the monster to which she gave birth, according to contemporary observer

[51] Richard Godbeer, "'The Cry of Sodom': Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (1995): 268, quoting *New-Haven's Settling in New-England. And Some Laws for Government* (London, 1656), 19. See also Robert F. Oaks, "'Things Fearful to Name': Sodomy and Buggery in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 2 (1978): 268–81.

[52] Morton represented the "most haunting anxieties, that immersion in the wilderness and association with the Indian would weaken the discipline they maintained so tenuously over their own impulses" (Michael Zuckerman, *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], 264–65).

[53] Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 3–4.

John Josselyn, "*was (it should seem) without a head, but having horns like a Beast, and ears, scales on a rough skin like a fish called a* Thornback, *legs and claws like a* Hawke, *and in other respects as a Woman-child*."[54] Puritans back in the mother country, including Robert Bolton, Samuel Hieron, Robert Cleaver, and William Whately, emphasized potential problems with children conceived in immorality—for instance, under the influence of too much passion, or "boiling lust," or during menstruation. Possible results included "miscarriages, barrenness, [or] bad children," or, as part of "the just judgment of God," resulting children might be "monsters or fools, or . . . most wicked, graceless and profane persons." In the case of conception during menstruation, Whately alleged that resulting offspring "must needs inherit numerous diseases."[55] Bestiality also, presumably, could be identified through offspring. For instance, Thomas Hogg and George Spencer were accused of intercourse with a sow thanks to the appearance of a piglet that shared traits, such as a deformed eye in the case of Spencer, with the men in question. The courts were more lenient with Hogg than with Spencer, who was convicted and executed for buggery.[56]

These monstrosities, abrupt gender switches, and human-animal crosses seemed to confirm a world where sudden degeneration was possible and various boundaries between animal and human could be crossed altogether too easily. No small matter among English settlers, these "catastrophic occurrences" instead "were evidences of God's displeasure" in a fairly dire situation in which only God's support would lead to economic, spiritual, and imperial success.[57] Together these fears that physical and character traits easily could be lost contributed to a larger sense of insecurity. However, these beliefs also allowed for some measure of self-determination—individuals could behave well, avoid negative consequences, and perhaps maintain the quality of the group as well as its identity. In addition, results of immorality would show themselves and allow for action that could promote security in the group.[58] Restraining individual variations in sexual expression was, then, very useful

[54] The Weld quotation comes from the preface to John Winthrop, *Short Story*, in *The Antinomian Controversy: A Documentary History*, ed. David D. Hall (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 214; John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England, Made during the Years 1638, 1663* ([Boston]: W. Veazie, 1865), 23; emphasis in the original. See also Lyle Koehler, "The Case of the American Jezebels: Anne Hutchinson and Female Agitation during the Years of Antinomian Turmoil, 1636–1640," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1974): 55–78.

[55] Doriani, "The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," 136, 141. In *Birthing the Nation*, Cody discusses similar views in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.

[56] Oaks, "'Things Fearful to Name,'" 276; Verduin, "'Our Cursed Natures,'" 227; Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 127.

[57] Koehler, "The Case of the American Jezebels," 73.

[58] See Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1996), 18–20; Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 11–14; and Calloway, *New Worlds*, 3–6.

indeed: it could at the very least prevent bad or questionable offspring, maintain group purity, and keep the relationship with God in good order.

Group sensibility also emphasized the power of ancestry and generations, and here the paradox of generation appears in another form. According to the Massachusetts poet and minister Edward Taylor, the prospective elect shared "all one father" in addition to being "all children of one mother Jerusalem that is above." Taylor claimed "all one nature, the New Man" for the "one family, the household of God" that was "walking in the same path [and] making to the same mark."[59] Generation presumably reproduced the elect and so was the means to continuity and group identity, as well as regeneration. Still, a theological mystery remained: given the unrevealed nature of God's plan and the belief that God did not disclose who among the faithful were elect, how could regeneration be attained across generations of Christians? The Calvinist doctrines of total depravity and predestination together formed a sort of theory of heredity, the determination of who would be saved and who would not. However, the traits "saved" and "damned" were hidden from the human eye. Individuals were powerless in the face of God's secret plan, without an obvious means—short of another virgin birth—to be sure that they were increasing the rolls of the elect.

While sex was godly, and sinful, and liable to lead to degeneration, Puritan discourse on sex also, ironically, allowed for more proactive furthering of regeneration by way of an elevated realm of sexual expression through spiritual connections. That is, Puritans frequently envisioned the relationship between Christ and his people as conjugal unions that included orgasmic ecstasy and conception, with marriage and sex envisioned as means to regeneration. Cotton, for instance, compared worship to the marriage bed, a place where "Christ embraceth the souls of his people, and casteth into their hearts the immortal seed of his word, and Spirit," with the result that "the Church conceiveth and bring forth fruits to Christ."[60] Comfort for the faithful and the ensuing offspring fit neatly into the larger Puritan

[59] Edward Taylor, "Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper," in *The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor*, ed. Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, 3 vols. (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 1:51. Godbeer emphasizes Taylor's vision in *Sexual Revolution*, 76. This theme also highlights the claims about being a New Jerusalem and the new Israel so prominent in Puritan ideology.

[60] John Cotton, *Christ the Fountaine of Life* (Boston: R. Ibbitson, 1651), 36–37; see also Cotton, *A Brief Exposition with Practical Observations Upon the Whole Book of Canticles* (London, 1655); Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 61, 164; Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 78; and Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 116. Thomas Foxcroft also used charged language: "the saints shall be impregnated" and would be "ripe to the harvest of glory" (*A Funeral Sermon Occasion'd by Several Mournful Deaths: And Preach'd on the Decease of Mr. John Coney, Late of Boston, Goldsmith, who Died August 20, 1722, in the 67th Year of His Age* [Boston: B. Green, 1772], 18, 27, 48). See also Margaret W. Masson, "The Typology of the Female as a Model for the Regenerate: Puritan Preaching, 1690–1730," *Signs* 2, no. 2 (1976): 311.

worldview of sex. Furthermore, ministers asked the faithful to elevate their thinking and love—"lay out the choicest of our Affections wholly"—to God, inevitably invoking the metaphor of spousal, and often conjugal, love.[61] Since there was no taint of Adam in this vision, these sermons manufactured a purer realm for sexual activity and even the avoidance of original or inherited sin. [62] They certainly created a useful way of seeing God's mysterious plan, since regenerated Christians could envision a path to ecstasy in the next world. Furthermore, with Christ sexuality could be embraced without reservation.[63] Mather insisted that each saint "resign thy Body unto Him" and "desire that all the Faculties of my Soul may be filled with thee, and used for thee."[64] Christians could look forward to the afterlife for the experience of these marriages but also could seek imperfect earthly echoes of this future in a variety of ways, including through marital relations that might inspire, through present activity, desire for heavenly marriage.[65] Other options included meditation, reading, and devotional activities. The sensory elements of reading—holding a book, moving one's eyes along a page, perhaps moving the tongue and teeth to articulate Scripture —and the deeply inward-focused contemplation of a future in heaven could facilitate "the experience of longing after Christ" and "sensitivity to feelings of anguish, ecstasy, and deep longing."[66] Cotton aimed to "find

[61] Thomas Hooker, *A Comment upon Christ's Last Prayer in the Seventeenth of John* (Boston: Peter Cole, 1656), 178–79. See also Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 166; and Godbeer, "Love Raptures," 355–84.

[62] Richard Godbeer writes: "The only union that was not tainted in any way was that between the regenerate soul and its savior. Christ was conceived 'immaterially' rather than through physical intercourse and so did not inherit original sin. Because he was 'born of the virgin,' he escaped 'vileness of that nature.' As Edward Taylor put it, Christ's 'love was ne'er adulterate, e're pure.' Sexual union was also pathetically inadequate when compared with Christ's embrace" ("Love Raptures," 370).

[63] Kathleen Verduin suggests that in these expressions is found "the arduous struggle against the passions that was at the core of the Puritan experience." When they argued for "union with God" they created a space for "the full surrender to desire that the Puritans' religion had denied," so that "human experience was no longer forbidden but permitted"—even "obliged not to resist" ("'Our Cursed Natures,'" 235).

[64] Cotton Mather, *A Glorious Espousal* (Boston: S. Kneeland, for B. Gray, and J. Edwards, 1719), 26. Mather further emphasized that the saint would find "Joy Unspeakable" and "Glory, from wondrous endless, inconceivable demonstrations of [Christ's] Love unto thee" (ibid., 19). See also Masson, "Typology of the Female," 304–15. According to Thomas Hooker, Christians could respond with abandon, justifying themselves with Christ's love: "He loves me, therefore let him do what he wil with me, take what he wil, Love wil supply al; give what he wil, Love is better than al" (*A Comment*, 176). Samuel Willard looked forward to the "intimacy that there is between the most loving Husband and the most beloved Wife, and transcendently greater" (*Compleat Body of Divinity*, 557). See also Verduin, "'Our Cursed Natures,'" 234–35; and Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts*, 105.

[65] Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 72–73.

[66] Belden C. Lane, "Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (2000): 372–402, at 381. See also Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668–1735," *Amer-*

Christ ravished with our love" and evoked the sensuality of food when he portrayed Christ, who "is pleased to feed us, to drop milke and honey into our soules." He also asked ministers "to preach sweet Doctrine as honey . . . to let thy Doctrine drop as honey, preach willingly, freely, sweetly, comfortably."[67] Virtuous women and men—reading and devotion were signs of especially powerful spirituality—therefore derived multiple benefits from their personal attention to God's word, in contrast to the mediated experience expected among other Christian sects.[68] Marital delights and redirected desire clearly were more than acceptable to many New English divines—they were useful to the cause of Christian devotion and to the growth of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Sex and desire increased the rolls of the elect; in heaven and on earth, these unions reproduced saints and built up God's kingdom.[69]

Among first-generation ministers, Cotton, though far from unique, was among the most prominent to emphasize sexual expression of Christian devotion, and he seemed especially oriented toward crafting understanding of the power of the relationship between Christian and Christ. Emphasis on these metaphors and descriptions seemed to increase as the seventeenth century progressed in conjunction with an important shift in the challenges facing second- and third-generation Puritan settlers. Leaders such as Mather and Willard also were inclined to emphasize the comfort, pleasure, and joy one could experience through one's Christianity and to use this erotic vision to appeal to potential converts.[70] Gentle and gratifying images would serve to bolster the community as it experienced the growing pains associated with "the spiritual malaise of the second generation" and those that followed. Accordingly, this positive emphasis on sexuality also seemed to be reflected in behavior as well as legal codes and enforcement. There also may have been a larger revolution in behavior through Puritan "members of the second generation who, as mature adults in the 1670s and 1680s, spearheaded a moral transformation that unleashed the wanton behavior

ican Quarterly 28, no. 1 (1976): 20–40; Belden C. Lane, "Jonathan Edwards on Beauty, Desire, and the Sensory World," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2004): 44–72.

[67] John Cotton, *A Practical Commentary or an Exposition with Observations, Reasons, and Uses Upon the First Epistle of John* (London: M.S. for Thomas Parkhurst, 1658), 128. Thomas Foxcroft, after his own meditations, reported "Delight and Extasy" and "vigorous and fervent . . . holy Longings after GOD" (quoted in Masson, "The Typology of the Female," 311; emphasis in the original).

[68] Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found," 20–40.

[69] See Robert V. Schnucker, "Elizabethan Birth Control and Puritan Attitudes," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (1975): 655–67.

[70] The emphasis on Christ as a dutiful and satisfying spouse seems to have waxed and waned. Belden Lane notes that "by the end of the seventeenth century, however, this emphasis on desire had begun to fade as a dominant theme in Puritan spirituality," which he attributes to "a failure of nerve on the part of subsequent Puritan writers. It was an unhappy loss, this pulling back from the passionate intensity of seventeenth-century piety" ("Two Schools," 401).

of the 1690s."[71] The threat of hell of course remained, and some—the "damned Sinners"—were "everlastingly Roaring & Howling under the Extremity of Infernal Plagues, and Torments." Others, however—the "glorified Saints in Heaven"—were "eternally Singing of Hallelujah's, Rejoycing & making Melody in the Presence of God and the Lamb, causing Heaven to ring, from one end to another with Acclamations of Joy." Rather than threatening congregants with expulsion from church membership or with hellfire and brimstone, Willard here emphasized the possibility of being a glorified Saint and enhanced the joy of song with the joy of sex; in heaven the faithful would experience with Christ the "reciprocal ardours of Affection." Climactically, these would "break over all Banks and Bounds, and we shall be entirely satisfied, both in Soul and in Body." The result also seemed postcoital—"then we shall come to our Rest."[72]

The sexual metaphors of abandoning oneself to God seemed to suggest active "selection" rather than passive "election"; through surrender one could convert new Christians, produce saints, and expand the group. In this context, Christ as lover was a powerful, if somewhat contradictory, metaphor that built on the notion of the second Adam. Sinless and virile, Christ was the sire of the regenerate, the source of the new Chosen. As Cotton Mather put it, "[God] has appointed his own incarnate Son to be a second Adam, the Redeemer and Head of Men, to recover the Rights and Interests of the human Nature, which were forfeited and lost by the first Adam's Apostacy." The first Adam was "made the Head of Mankind," since he had been "constituted by God at first to be both the natural and federal Head and Representative of all his Posterity" and the father "of a numerous Offspring, that should replenish the Earth, and branch out into all Nations of the Earth" so that "the Race of Men from Generation to Generation is continued on the Earth."[73] More clearly, Mather explained that "we all by Nature belong to the First Adam. We are Undone in and by him. We derive Sin, and so Death from him." Yet thanks to Christ, the elect formed "a select Part of Mankind," those who "belong to a Second Adam."[74] While the earthly act of generation promulgated the sinful state among all human beings, heavenly unions with the Second Adam were significant and powerful, providing, also thanks to Christ's purity, the means to regeneration for the elect, the individual and group improvement sought by the Puritans, essentially rectifying the damage passed down from the

[71] Conforti, *Saints*, 100–104; Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 74; and R. W. Roetger, "The Transformation of Sexual Morality in 'Puritan' New England: Evidence from New Haven Court Records," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 15, no. 3 (1984): 243–57.

[72] Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 558.

[73] Peter Clark, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Stated and Defended: In a Summer-Morning's Conversation, Between a Minister and a Neighbour* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1758), 7, 16.

[74] Cotton Mather, *Ranatus: A Brief Essay on, a Soul Passing from Death to Life* (Boston: S. Gerrish, 1725), 6.

first Adam. And, as a sort of theological and spiritual bonus, communion with Christ also was infinitely more satisfying. The thinking clearly reflected identification as a distinct and chosen group, marked by the covenantal if not direct physiological descent from Abraham, and also may have influenced, even encouraged, the reliance on sexual imagery: "Just as future church members were to spring from the loins of godly parents, so believers envisaged regeneration as the fruit of sexual union with their savior."[75] While devotional unions with Christ may have been a metaphor, it was a metaphor that gave human form to the mysteries of regeneration. It also facilitated the generation—or production—of new saints.

Recruiting the Select

With this complex combination of positive and negative associations with sexuality, Puritans increasingly also pursued with greater clarity what they believed was the uniqueness of their own "tribe," particularly group consciousness implicitly related to generation and regeneration.[76] Increasingly, as the need to fill churches grew along with the challenges of making saints visible in the second and third generations, Puritans became less inclined to single out and remove prospective members from the church and instead seemed to emphasize the sense of being one big happy family of God's special favor on the children of saints. However, with their special exposure to God's grace and knowledge of God's word and plan, these offspring of the faithful were particularly fortunate—but also especially subject to God's punishment if they failed to follow God and his law. Massachusetts reverend Thomas Cobbet contrasted "degenerate Children" and "right-bred children of God," alluding to varieties of generation and the relevance of parental influence along with the enhanced expectations from the children of godly parents and the covenant they had with God. If they broke their agreement with God after the advantages given them, they would suffer more than others; this theme permeated the work of other spiritual leaders, including Increase Mather.[77] In many ways, the description was striking in its resemblance to the horrors that struck offspring conceived in lust or another unholy state: the children who strayed from God would lose his favor and the advantages that came with it. Instead, they would experience "contrary miseryes to those merceyes; that instead of peace there shall be wars, instead of plenty poverty, instead of health terrible sicknesses."[78]

[75] Godbeer, "Love Raptures," 366, 374.

[76] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 7–9.

[77] "God must needs be the more angry with you, because he hath shewed so much of your hearts, and of himself to you" (Thomas Cobbet, *A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse Touching the Honour Due from Children to Parents* [S.G. for John Rothwell, 1656], 193–94, and 200–201).

[78] According to Increase Mather, the "dreadful charge of Apostasy from God" would apply to "the Children of godly Parents" who "shall not walk worthy of god, but in the ways of Pride, Sensuality, Unrighteousness," and "shall be unholy and profane." Furthermore, these

Cotton Mather lamented the appearance of "the sins that made the *Old Land of Canaan, Vomit out her Inhabitants.*"[79]

The stakes of original settlement, and God's favor, seemed to increase rather than decrease as time went on. James Allen in 1679 worried his audience in Boston when he asked them to notice how commitment to God—and the blessings and happiness that came with this special relationship—had waned. He begged his constituents to stop the process, to keep God in the town by returning to the formerly faithful ways of New England.[80] Allen's plea may have in part reflected the decreasing status of Puritans in the mother country in the wake of the Restoration of the monarchy in the mid-seventeenth century, as well as their waning power in the colonies.[81] Still, the fear of losing special favor from God was significant, and the source could be as slight as the poisonous influence of one or two persons.

Given the impact that individuals could have on the group, Puritan leaders tolerated little if any sense of privacy. Watchfulness prevailed and created a sense of group continuity and responsibility.[82] Cobbet emphasized the impact with a list: "You become grossly unfaithful, yea, treacherous to your God, to your Ancestours, to your Parents, to posterity, to the whole church." Faithfulness, however, would maintain the church so that it would "receive his Truth, Worship and government . . . and faithfully and intirely to deliver the same to your posterity, and so to help propagate the same to such as come after you." This extended beyond reproduction of saints—for Cobbet the children of saints had been committed, even before their birth, to God. Straying was equivalent to adultery, even "spirituall whordome."[83] Minister William Stoughton looked to the next generation to save the people of New England and looked to families as the source: "The Books that shall be opened at the last day will contain . . . a Register of the Genealogies of New-Englands sons and daughters. How shall we many of us hold up our faces then, when they shall be a solemn rehearsal of our descent as well as of our degeneracies."[84]

With the focus on the internal group and the hopeful elect, Puritans

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"Apostates from God" would be "deprived of the great outward blessing and dignity which once he did enjoy" (*A Call from Heaven*, 42–45).

[79] Mather, *Things for a distress'd people to think upon*, 11–12.

[80] Allen wondered why "that gracious presence of God seems to be withdrawn from us that our Fathers enjoyed," and asked, "Where is that wonder-working Providence, whereby he did destroy the enemies of his people?" (*New-England's Choicest Blessing*, 13–14).

[81] Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 185; see also Anne G. Myles, "Restoration Declensions, Divine Consolations: The Work of John Foxe in 1664 Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2007): 35–68.

[82] According to Cotton Mather, "If the neighbor of an elected saint sins, then the saint sins also" (quoted in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution*, 104).

[83] This "whoredom," Cobbet preached, "is very heinous, in God's sight, and deeply provoking." Cobbet, *A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse*, 197, 199.

[84] William Stoughton, *New Englands True Interest Not to Lie* (Boston: S.G. and M.J., 1670), 33.

seemed increasingly to think of generation and regeneration differently: procreation was not the effective means to produce saints they originally believed it to be. Regeneration of what had once been "strangers" became a matter of continuing to facilitate God's mysterious plan and also of urging it along. The first generation focused on enforcing morality—on a scale as large as Thomas Morton and as small as regular church attendance. Subsequent generations, however, were bound somewhat more by the practical considerations that came with decreasing church membership thanks to inadequate experiences among prospective Christians. That is, the saints who were born in Christ were no longer so easily made visible, and the high reproductive rates in New England were not translating into the larger community, into the building of the house, anticipated in the early years of colonization.[85] Not surprisingly, therefore, over the second, third, and fourth generations New England culture and theology developed, in fits and starts, greater flexibility about church membership—for instance, by instituting the Half Way Covenant—and increasing evangelical efforts. Alongside it, interestingly, often came a relaxing of morality and related legislation.[86]

As Puritan theology came into contact with hard realities of generations raised without the theological and personal clarity provided by proximity to the Church of England and its apparent impurities, as well as the need to join forces against the American wilderness, it developed a more robust evangelical impulse. If group definition were not so insecure, Puritans may have been able to operate in line with the traditional vision of election. But the risks of degeneration were too great. To secure the "practical object" of regeneration, Puritans increasingly resorted to selection. According to a rigorous interpretation of Calvinist theology, human efforts to produce saints were doomed to fail—ministers could not "give the final ecstatic experience of grace without which true devotion proved impossible."[87] Human beings played some role in their own redemption, but it was complicated because the very "WILL to Repent and Believe is the GIFT of GOD."[88] For Puritans, inherited sin could not be altered through independent human activity and required "the Blood of the Redeemer." In the new environment, however, Puritan theology transformed from an emphasis on generation to regeneration but used sexual imagery and erotic sensibility normally associated with generation not only to enhance one's devotional relationship with God, and thus one's personal regeneration to achieve regeneration, but also to

[85] Early Puritans emphasized the eradication of sin by way of "a zealous enforcement of morality on others." More common in subsequent generations, however, was the belief that "the existence of the state depended upon the maintenance of a continuous supply of converts for the churches. If the supply failed, not only the church but the state, too, would collapse" (Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 6). Thomas Hooker advocated this view in particular in his *The Application of Redemption* (London, 1659), 684.

[86] Roetger, "The Transformation."

[87] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 185.

[88] Mather, *The man of God furnished*, 93–102; emphasis in the original.

entice others into the church with this sensual yet Christian material and thus increase saints overall. In this way, Puritans seemed, ever so slightly, to open the door to agency in an individual's own salvation—with significant implications for a developing sense of individualism.

At first, ministers simply began to spread the word in new ways, and these evangelical efforts appeared in a variety of guises. Among the most striking were multiple conversion and execution narratives of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—stories of the transformation of criminal to saint in the weeks and months between being sentenced to death and reaching the gallows.[89] These second- and third-generation inspirational stories were clearly part of an effort to evangelize and increase the kingdom of God, perhaps even assisting God as he attended to the elect, and to increase the rolls of the church among those who were less zealous than their forebears.[90] Still, the result was clearly not inherited in any sense of lineage. Even though "Increase Mather was still mumbling his phrases about the loins of godly parents in 1721, it was long since clear, to anyone with eyes to see, that grace was not hereditary."[91] Later, Jonathan Edwards became one exemplar of attempts to convert the indigenous peoples, imbuing his message with his theological commitment to the universality of original sin, making sure that the Native audience understood that they needed God's grace and salvation. In this way, at least, national origins were irrelevant.[92] While his message to the indigenous was very different from what he preached to the English settler, that "loathsome insect over the fire," overall, Edwards clearly attempted to act as God's vehicle for regeneration of the indigenous Americans. Along with these changed approaches to evangelicalism, notions of the elect, and attachments to identifying visible saints, sexual imagery in Puritan sermons also began to vary.[93]

The dissonance between election and evangelism, like the dissonance among many elements of Puritan theology, seemed particularly striking. Yet, with all of this it is apparent that generation and regeneration were closely linked and that over time Puritans in New England were increasingly unable or unwilling to leave the entire task of creating or revealing saints

[89] See Daniel E. Williams, "'Behold a Tragic Scene Strangely Changed into a Theater of Mercy': The Structure and Significance of Criminal Conversion Narratives in Early New England," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (1986): 827–47; Jodi Schorb, "Uncleanliness Is Next to Godliness: Sexuality, Salvation, and the Early American Woman's Execution Narrative," in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex*, ed. Tracy Fessenden et al. (London: Routledge, 2001), 71–92.

[90] Williams, "'Behold a Tragic Scene,'" 827–47.

[91] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 185.

[92] Rachel Wheeler, "'Friends to Your Souls': Jonathan Edwards' Indian Pastorate and the Doctrine of Original Sin," *Church History* 72, no. 4 (2003): 758.

[93] For our purposes it is sufficient to note that "the Saints of the Great Awakening did not experience their God in the manner of the Saints of the seventeenth century" (Michael P. Winship, "Behold the Bridegroom Cometh! Marital Imagery in Massachusetts Preaching, 1630–1730," *Early American Literature* 27, no. 3 [1992]: 170–84).

to God. They aimed for some level of regeneration on earth and sought to convert both outside and inside the flock. The intellectual transformation from individual thinking to family hope is in part demonstrated through the Cotton-Mather line. First-generation minister John Cotton pointed to the scriptural mandate on marriage and how it aimed to guide men along the path to fulfilling God's plan: "It was Gods pleasure to make of one blood, all Nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth," and from this "one blood" God was effecting his "gathering a Church out of mankind."[94] Decades later, third-generation reverend—and grandson of John Cotton—Cotton Mather transformed the natural situation, ordained by God, into family responsibility. Speaking to the children of church members and presumed saints, Mather explained that "religion will thus, by your means, be Propagated unto the Next Generation," fulfilling and building on the "Eternal COVENANT of REDEMPTION wherein God the Father, has given His Chosen People unto our Lord-Redeemer." Thinking in narrow group terms, Mather emphasized that "it is with a Special Regard unto these that He has undertaken the Work of Redemption." Children continued to be admonished by Cobbet "to be a seed of the Church, to be as plants, to hold up Gods Orchards." The fate of the seed, however, revealed through genealogies—as emphasized by Stoughton—was cause for dismay when duty failed, for then there would be, in the reading of genealogy, "a solemn rehearsal of our descent as well as of our degeneracies."[95] These group considerations, juxtaposed not only with the "other" of the Church of England but also with the other of indigenous America, seemed to harden a sense of group identity that went beyond English and embraced a unique religious and national core.

Continuity, Generations, and Identity

The theological underpinnings of Calvinism should have left Puritans feeling essentially powerless with regard to individual improvement. Nonetheless, their worldview revolved around regeneration, and they utilized this constructive context to rethink generation, in essence experimenting around the edges of their theology until they found a soft spot in God's plan that might allow for the possibility of earthly involvement in individual and group salvation—channeling the will, independently repenting and believing, and even, as time went on, throwing off the shackles of original sin in favor of the idealism in republican thinking and, eventually, the Second Great Awakening. The lived experience of Puritan sexuality, theology, and identity carved one convenient channel for the development of an emphasis

[94] Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 12, quoting Acts 17.

[95] Mather, *The man of God furnished*, 20; emphasis in the original; Cobbet, *A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse*, 197; and Stoughton, *New Englands True Interest*, 33. Morgan quotes these ministers at length in *The Puritan Family*, 174–78.

on individualism and how generation and regeneration could create continuity and reproduce what some have called a persistent national character.

As the colony was transformed into a nation and its inhabitants gained a firmer sense of self, the sense of what it meant to reproduce character and the worries about failing became broader political and national sensibilities. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, expectations about purity and virtue increased even as freedom of expression, sexual and otherwise, increased. Waves of religious revivalism furthered the idea that each individual could save himself or herself. Nineteenth-century theories of evolution provided apparent measures of "civilization," purity, and human progress that reified thinking about what was best for human beings. By the early twentieth century in the United States and elsewhere, the scientific and social emphasis on quality, group identity, and scientific control contributed to the development of eugenic movements. In the Puritans' generation and regeneration, we see not only the usefulness of sex for group definition but also something very like heredity and environment, the twin pillars of any of the historical movements to reproduce or improve individual or group character.[96] Thinking specifically of American eugenics, the "city upon a hill" of the Puritan tribe came to represent a scientifically mediated imperative to improve the race according to the expectations of new American sexceptionalism.

In this way the early generations of Puritans in New England reveal theological, cultural, sexual, and environmental influences on thinking about human improvement from the earliest days of European colonization of the Americas and how crucially these elements of human experience contribute to feeling exceptional and attention to reproduction of the group. Understanding these deep seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historical, cultural, and intellectual roots of exceptional thinking and reproduction is essential to understanding later American history. The tribalism of the Puritans adds unexpected dimension and depth; while they certainly were guided by a great deal of hubris and absolutism, the Puritans also were surprisingly tolerant of dissonance—sex was good in some ways and bad in others, and the story often simply would not hold together. The paradoxes in their thinking and their practices demonstrate another way in which human experience, past and present, is broad and deep, allowing for a rainbow of experience in what is often seen as black and white. Delbanco reminded us in the late 1980s of the "persistent sense of renewal and risk that has attended the project of becoming American ever since" the Colonial era.[97]

[96] See William Max Nelson, "Making Men: Enlightenment Ideas of Racial Engineering," *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1364–94. Even some twenty-first-century American evangelicals have continued the religious elements of this trend by rooting sexual "evil" in individual human genes. See Amy DeRogatis, "'Born Again Is a Sexual Term': Demons, STDs, and God's Healing Sperm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (2009): 275–302.

[97] Delbanco, *Puritan Ordeal*, 1.

Perhaps we can take this a step further: renewal and risk attend the project of being human, and humanity is often expressed in one's group identity. The Puritans transformed their group sense of self in unexpected ways, demonstrating how change—and renewal and risk—while not always positive, can come about despite the most apparently rigid context.

About the Author

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