New England

For centuries it has been argued that the motivations that brought the English Puritans to North America were primarily religious. More recently, however, social historians have speculated that the rise of Puritanism in England might have been a consequence of distinct social changes taking place there. Between 1530 and 1680, the population in England doubled; people were living longer; babies were surviving into (at least) young adulthood; childbearing less frequently resulted in the death of the mother. The dramatic demographic shift created tension in an already troubled economy: fewer consumable goods were available for more people, which brought a rise in prices, made worse as the number of workers increased and real wages dropped. Social tensions added to the problem: the well-to-do, alarmed at the rising population of the lower classes, feared what might be the disappearance of their traditional ways of life. The English Reformation was only part of the picture, albeit an important one.

The mid-sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century was a turbulent period of religious controversy, persecution, and civil war that climaxed in the regicide of King Charles I in 1649, the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell (leader of the Puritan parliamentary forces), and finally the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. When Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church for refusing to grant him a divorce, he established the Church of England, or Anglican Church, in 1534. For the most part, this church differed little from the Catholic Church, except that the English monarch, not the pope, was its head. Some reformers thought that Henry and his short-lived successor, Edward VI, did not go far enough. European reformers like Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German monk whose criticism of the Catholic Church in 1517 is said to have begun the Reformation, and John Calvin (1509–1564), a French cleric and lawyer who settled in Geneva and was very influential among English Protestants, argued for less ritual and fewer mediating structures like priests and Latin masses. Luther called for a "priesthood of all believers," and Calvin emphasized the total depravity of humanity and double predestination (to salvation and damnation). English Protestants, many of whom studied with Calvin in Geneva, sought greater change in the Anglican Church.

But when Mary Tudor, Henry VIII's eldest daughter, came to the throne, she returned the Church of England to papal control, and she persecuted dissenters, many of whom fled to the European continent. In 1558, her half-sister Elizabeth succeeded her and firmly re-established the Protestant church. Relative peace reigned for the rest of the century, but political and theological divisions developed when Elizabeth's successor, James I (also James VI of Scotland), the first Stuart king, and his son Charles I, came to the throne. Both kings—but especially Charles, who married the Catholic daughter of the king of Spain—were suspected of sympathizing with Catholics and of turning back the Reformation.

The Church of England was headed by the monarch and a ruling episcopacy similar in organization to the Catholic Church hierarchy. "Independents," however, rejected this top-down structure. These Protestants fell into two main groups:

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ans, still believed in a national church but
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tional church governance in favor of small
groups of worshipers who came together
in self-governing congregations, overseen
by ministers, elders, and deacons selected
by the community. These "Independent"
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Charles's adviser William Laud, arch-
bishop of Canterbury, advocated more
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ters to sign the Thirty-nine Articles of the
Church of England, which included an ac-
knowledgment of the divine right of the
national church. Some English Protes-
tants, like the "separatists" who fled first to
Holland and then to Plymouth (William
Bradford dubbed them "Pilgrims"), con-
sidered the Church of England so corrupt
that it was not salvageable. Others, like the
Congregationalists who later founded and
settled Massachusetts Bay, believed that
the Church of England could be purified
from within. But because they would not
"conform" to Laud's High-Church doc-
trine, the "Puritans" were silenced, removed
from their churches, prevented from other
employment, and imprisoned. Many immi-
grated to Massachusetts Bay Colony in the
decades following its founding in 1630,
and they attempted to establish a Puritan
commonwealth there as a model and bea-
con for Old England, which was rife with
economic problems and religious and civil
unrest.

Religion was a daily presence in the
lives of the Puritans who came to the New
World. Followers of Calvin, they believed
that God had predestined their souls for
heaven or for hell and that even devout be-
lievers in Christ could do nothing to alter
their predetermined fate. Because mere
belief did not assure salvation, constant
vigilance and self-examination, on the in-
dividual and communal levels, formed a
necessary part of the Puritans' primary du-
ties as Christians. With heaven the destina-
tion for only a few—the "elect," the
"saints," or (following Old Testament ter-
minology) the "chosen ones"—they be-
lieved that only those who could give a
convincing narrative of their conversion
and spiritual life should enter into church
membership. For a time, civic privileges,
like the franchise, were only open to male
church members. The interior examination
of one's soul thus influenced the external
arena of social action. Self-questioning was,
to some extent, a kind of pre-condition to
social place. But even the most pious con-
tinually doubted their place with God, and
many, like John Winthrop and Samuel Sew-
all, kept diaries in which they carefully
detailed and examined everyday occur-
rences for signs of God's hand in their en-
deavors.

The common purpose of the New Eng-
land Puritans surely contributed to their
survival. Their later prosperity—although
they considered it a sign of God's hand
working favorably among them—brought
about their dispersal. The community re-
lied upon the necessary interdependence
of its individuals, with the Old Testament
model of the patriarch (in New England,
the governor) at the head of the state and
the church. Modeling their society upon the
one they had left, the Puritans established
a patriarchal community: just as God the
father directed the endeavors of the elect
church, so did the husband and father di-
rect the activities of the family, which in-
cluded not just his wife and children but
his servants and slaves as well.

This patriarchal hierarchical structure
in church and family, a structure founded
on "Christian Charity" (the model of love
that John Winthrop spoke of on board the
Arbella), was modified by their conception
of mutual consent. The covenantal nature
of their faith—the belief that God had

made an agreement with them by choosing them; of all other people, to come to America and they had a responsibility to uphold their end of the contract—coalesced with the covenantal relationships they established on the familial and church level. The Mayflower Compact (1620), like the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639), established social systems that reflected their beliefs in covenanted communities based upon the mutual consent of those so governed. The Puritans signaled their religious and governmental goals by establishing compact towns with churches and common grounds at their centers. Their communal endeavor, their attempt to establish a "city upon a hill," required a uniformity that brought them through the most difficult times of the earliest settlement but also quashed dissent.

Not surprisingly, trouble emerged from the start. Encroachments upon the Connecticut River Valley brought a war with the Pequots, who were native to the area, in 1637. Roger Williams had warned in 1635 that England had no right to be giving away charters to lands held by Native Americans and that the Puritans had no right to impose themselves and their faith on all people. His advocacy of toleration threatened disunity, and he was banished from Massachusetts. He founded the town of Providence, known for its tolerance of all faiths, on Narragansett Bay.

Another dissenter, Anne Marbury Hutchinson, brought even greater challenge to Massachusetts Bay authorities. Arguing that the elect could communicate with God directly and get assurance of salvation, Hutchinson threatened the structure of the institutional church, because her religious assumptions denied the necessity for a minister's mediating efforts. As a midwife, she first gained many followers among the women in Massachusetts Bay. When the husbands of her women followers started to join them for Bible study in Hutchinson's home instead of in church, authorities grew uneasy. Hutchinson was brought before the General Court of Massachusetts in 1637, ostensibly because she threatened religious orthodoxy. But she threatened the patriarchal hierarchy as well. Puritans believed that all people were equal before God but that women were inferior to men because they were tainted by Eve's guilt. The magistrates who tried Anne Hutchinson commented upon her "masculine" behavior as much as they commented upon her religious beliefs. John Winthrop accused her of setting wife against husband. Another judge was more indignant: "You have stept out of your place," he adjudged, continuing, "you have rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject." Anne Hutchinson was expelled from Massachusetts Bay in 1637.

When it was clear that the Massachusetts Bay settlers were surviving the ordeal of colonization, greater numbers of settlers came over in what historians have called the "Great Migration" (1629–40). Some of the new colonists were Puritans; others were merchants and artisans simply bent upon making their way in the English colonies. The numbers of people emigrating combined with the increasing population (children born in New England survived in greater proportions than their counterparts in England in the seventeenth century) to require larger Puritan landholdings and a dispersal of the once centralized population. There were societal changes for Puritan and non-Puritan alike.

A key change was that fewer and fewer people wished to attend to the rigor of Puritan church discipline. By 1662, the New England clergy had established the Half-Way Covenant, which offered admission to one of two church sacraments (baptism but not the taking of the Lord's Supper) to the children of baptized church members. The Half-Way Covenant enabled those who were *born of members* who had expressed a visible sainthood—but who had not themselves experienced God's grace—to attend church sacraments. The relaxation of church rigor, it was beli might encourage more people to atte the state of their souls—and to a church. For traditionalists, the intro tion of the Half-Way Covenant was a ful sign that God's chosen people failing.

The necessity of the Half-Way enant, the growth of dissenting opi the increasingly debilitating Indian and the widespread secularizatio contributed to an era of self-doubt f Puritan patriarchy. Although it was p the functioning of the Puritan faith th dividuals continually concern them with their soul's state, individual doubt transformed into a kind of co nal self-doubt. Some thought the dev arisen in the unwary New England munity. Some saw it as the chastisem a vengeful Lord ready at any mom strike at the failing community of These various social and religious culminated in the Salem witch trials 1690s.

Some historians argue that this upheaval resulted from the growin sions in a land-hungry community w overabundance of unmarried w Others argue that the trials repres communal Puritan doubt turned int mutilation. By the end of the de twenty-seven people were convict witchcraft, fifty more had "confe and one hundred others were impri and awaiting trial. Twenty people d accused witches. An additional two dred had been accused but never w trial. Public embarrassment, doub collective sorrow brought a speedy this communal trauma, which signifi weakened the hold of traditional tanism in New England. By the turn century, a more progressive theolog taking hold in New England, and t gion had transformed from a stru colony to a populous, powerful pro

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The necessity of the Half-Way Covenant, the growth of dissenting opinions, the increasingly debilitating Indian wars, and the widespread secularization—all contributed to an era of self-doubt for the Puritan patriarchy. Although it was part of the functioning of the Puritan faith that individuals continually concern themselves with their soul's state, individual self-doubt transformed into a kind of communal self-doubt. Some thought the devil had arisen in the unwary New England community. Some saw it as the chastisement of a vengeful Lord ready at any moment to strike at the failing community of saints. These various social and religious crises culminated in the Salem witch trials of the 1690s.

Some historians argue that this social upheaval resulted from the growing tensions in a land-hungry community with an overabundance of unmarried women. Others argue that the trials represented communal Puritan doubt turned into self-mutilation. By the end of the debacle, twenty-seven people were convicted of witchcraft, fifty more had "confessed," and one hundred others were imprisoned and awaiting trial. Twenty people died as accused witches. An additional two hundred had been accused but never went to trial. Public embarrassment, doubt, and collective sorrow brought a speedy end to this communal trauma, which significantly weakened the hold of traditional Puritanism in New England. By the turn of the century, a more progressive theology was taking hold in New England, and the region had transformed from a struggling colony to a populous, powerful province.

Although other narratives, like Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* and various letters by Roger Williams, give accounts of the settlement of New England quite unflattering to the Puritans, the Puritan version dominated, as did Puritan discourse. Based upon the relative "plainness" of the Geneva Bible, which Puritans preferred to the more lyrical Anglican King James version, this discourse depended upon the themes and figures of the Old and New Testament. Thus, like the Israelites of old, Bradford's pilgrims searching for their holy city were engaged in an epic battle not just for their own survival but for the hereafter. Winthrop's band of Congregationalists, as Winthrop exhorted them on board the flagship *Arbella* during the initial crossing, "must be knit together in this work as one man," so that they could "find that the God of Israel is among us," making them "a praise and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations: the lord make it like that of New England."

The Puritans implemented their social and religious ideology by linking it closely to literacy and the acculturation of children, servants, slaves, and, later, Indians. Protestant theology made individuals responsible for their own spiritual progress, which depended, in some measure, upon reading the word of God. Michael Wigglesworth's bestselling epic poem, *The Day of Doom* (1662), was so popular because it offered a veritable catechism of Puritan belief in easily memorizable verses. *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640) and *The New England Primer* (earliest extant copy from 1683), both of which used the same sing-song ballad measure as Wigglesworth's poem, also promoted acculturation into Puritan values through the acquisition of literacy. A good illustration of this is the very first rhyme a child encountered in the *Primer*'s famous illustrated alphabet for the letter A: "In Adam's Fall, / We Sinned all." The message could not be clearer.

These examples illustrate as well the dominant Puritan aesthetic, which regarded the arts as subservient to the great end of religious edification and stressed

content over form, order and logic over beauty and gracefulness. Distrustful of the senses and the imagination when not controlled and directed by the enlightened will, Puritan ministers like Cotton Mather cautioned their readers against the "intoxication of the Circean cup" of poetry and argued that the goal of rhetorical forms was to bring listeners or readers to a clearer understanding of divine law and so open their hearts to the saving effects of grace. The most effective "means" of grace was the voice of an inspired preacher; thus eloquence in public performance was a most valued accomplishment, especially in the form of the sermon, which Puritan ministers produced unstintingly. Sermons were also a vehicle for the airing of controversial issues, such as the sermons by Samuel Sewall and Cotton Mather on the keeping and religious education of slaves.

Music, except for religious hymns, was not encouraged, and stage plays were banned in New England until well into the eighteenth century. But everyone was reading and writing poetry, and distinctive poetic forms flourished in New England, such as the religious meditation, the acrostic and anagram, the elegy, the jeremiad. Anne Bradstreet's early poetry indicates her familiarity with Renaissance forms and literary models, as well as her sense of trespassing on male literary turf; her later poetry evolves a feminine and New World voice. Edward Taylor wrote in various forms—the meditation, the psalm paraphrase, the religious epic, the elegy—and adapted the metaphysical "wit" of English religious poets like George Herbert and John Donne to reflect a frontier landscape and a particularly Puritan aesthetic in which the very operations of language reveal the divine. His aesthetic dilemma as a Puritan poet—how can I, a fallen man, represent God's infinity—was finally inseparable from his spiritual pursuit of salvation.

The requirement for self-examination and the production of a conversion narrative for church membership attuned Puritans to their inner psychological states and encouraged the writing of journals, diaries, and especially spiritual autobiographies. By recording their experiences, Puritans could map their journeys toward salvation and read their lives and the world around them for "signs" of divine favor or disfavor. Thomas Shepard's brief autobiography provides remarkable insight into the lives of the early settlers, and Samuel Sewall's extensive journal depicts changes in New England over half a century. Winthrop's journal focuses on public events and is connected to another important prose genre of this period, history writing, exemplified by Bradford's account of Plymouth Plantation and Cotton Mather's sweeping history of New England.

Finally, the distinctly New World genre of the captivity narrative takes a particularly Puritan form in the examples by Mary Rowlandson and John Williams. Both a minister and a minister's wife fall victim to wars precipitated by European colonialism and are forced to experience life among peoples they were taught to abhor—Indians and French Catholics. Gender, race, and class are salient issues for both these writers, whose accounts struggle to square an ideologically rigid Puritan worldview with the often harsh realities of the New World.

Thomas Morton 1579?–

Little is known about Morton's e
except that he became a lawyer
"west countries" of England and
in 1621. In 1622 he first sailed to N
land and in 1626 established hi
head of a trading post at Passo
which he renamed "Ma-re Mount
Bradford spelled it, "Merry-mount"
he offended the neighboring S
Puritan settlement by erecting a
and cavorting with the Indians, t
according to Bradford, he sold g
was arrested by Miles Standish,
tary leader at Plymouth, and sent
England in 1628. He returned,
acquitted of the charges against
1629, but in 1630 his property
Mount was seized or burned by
authorities, and he was banished
land again. He then worked with
Puritan Anglican authorities in E
undermine the Massachusetts B
pany, but his effort did not succee
turned to New England in 1643,
prisoned for slander by the auth
Boston in the winter of 1644–1
died two years later in Maine (the
the Massachusetts colony), wher
finally settled. His only literary
New English Canaan (1637), be
for its satire of Puritans in gener
Separatists in particular.

Throughout *New English*
Thomas Morton more often resor
essays and loosely related anecdo
than to continuous historical
The lack of narrative continuity
tributed in large part to the gene
brid status of the text. Although
often referred to by critics as
tional tract, Morton's *New Engli*
also read at times like a natural
ethnography, and a political par
the first two sections of his three
Morton follows the format adh
many other writers of promotic