Pilgrims and Puritans
Importance of the Puritans

To know the making of the “American mind,” understanding the Puritans is important. They influence:

• Americans’ view of religion and its role in society
• Americans’ view of morality
• Americans’ view of the role of government in society
• Americans’ view of the mixture of all of the above.
Puritanism in England

• Church of England breaks w/ Roman Church in 1530s. Begins a series of reforms.

• Puritans thought these reforms did not go far enough and more were required.
  – Seek ‘purity’ or original church
    • Abolish many ceremonies and holidays (Christmas, for example)
    • Reduce reliance on liturgy and a ‘prayer book.’
    • More authority to local churches, and less to ‘ecclesiastical government’ (bishops, etc.)
    • Greater emphasis on the Bible in worship

But... Puritans disagreed among themselves on the degree and extent of these reforms.
Origins of Puritanism

Key issue of the 17th C.- proper way for a Christian to gain access to will of God.

– Catholics and Conservative Protestants—traditions of Church and Bible. Because of fallen condition of man, individuals could not determine God’s will- so had to rely on (do not question) the Church. Church was the path to salvation.

– Puritans disagree with this perspective.
Calvinism

Calvin had a major influence on Puritan religious view. Major components of Calvinism.

- No event occurred apart from the direction of God.
- Predestination
  - God’s elect/select.
    - The Logic: salvation only a special infusion of God’s grace » God gives this grace to some and not others out of His own sovereign pleasure (evidenced here on earth with some in higher and some in lower stations in life) » God know all even before it happens » certain souls are predestined for salvation.
    - Ultimately the logic is that God so ordained it.
- Crippling effects of original sin
- Power of God’s grace could transform sinners
- Saving truth through scripture alone.
Calvinism

Key Understanding:

- In America theology was seen as practical- a discipline of godliness. Not an academic exercise.
  - Biblical theology the goal- go beyond mere reason. Bible provide precepts and precedents (through examples of Bible characters) for action.
Puritan beliefs...

1. Puritans saw Anglican Church as too like Roman (vestments, ornamentation, corruption).
2. Authority should be at the congregational level, not Episcopal.
   a) Church created not by legislation from above, but by agreement from below.
3. Puritans rejected notion that church was the path. God only grants salvation - Grace.

4. Anglican church took anyone who walked in. Puritans believed that ‘visible’ church should look like the ‘invisible church’ (heaven) - only be God’s chosen people (emotional conversion experience often taken as the key). Predestination.
Puritan beliefs...

5. People not truly engaged w/ God- simply going through the motions w/ prayer book and rituals. Church corrupted by laxity and abuse. Only the Bible provides reliable account of Christ.
   a) Book of common prayer w/o value- tampered w/ original meaning of the Bible.
   b) Hymns corruption of God’s word (so they sang Psalms directly from the Bible).

6. Follow only biblical precedent.
   a) They believed Bible indicated predestination.
   b) A powerful push to action. If saved, would lead a godly life. Led to a compulsive drive. Constantly comparing themselves to others
Puritan beliefs...

6. **Original sin**: Since “The Fall”, history proved and daily events showed that men were not naturally reasonable, good, honest, etc. Needed a strong religious community to compel adherence to religious values.

7. **Beauty is Order** for Puritans. They cultivated a studied simplicity.

“It was Order that gave Beauty to this goodly fabrick of the world... [f]or Order is as the soul of the Universe, the life and health of things natural, and the beauty and strength of things Artificial....” (William Hubbard, 1621-1704)

9. **Learning is key**- must be able to read one’s Bible.
Puritans and the Bible

Puritans differed from Church of England especially on the primacy of the Bible.

- Bible was the ‘revealed word of God.’
- Bible contained a ‘complete body of laws, an absolute code in everything it touched upon.’
- Church of England saw Bible as revealing only broad principles.
Pilgrims? vs. Puritans?
Separatists/Pilgrims v. Puritans

Often in historical texts a distinction is made between “Separatists/Pilgrims” and “Puritans.”

- Separatists/Pilgrims- need to leave the Church of England because it is not Christ’s Church.
- Puritans- try to purify the church but not necessarily leave it.
- May be a distinction w/o a difference in the case of America. All Puritans who came to America separated.
The Mayflower
Image: *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*, Robert W. Weir, U. S. Capitol Building, 1837
The Mayflower Compact
November 11, 1620
Of Plymouth Plantation

The Pilgrim’s Original Settlement
Puritan Homes
Plymouth Meeting House/Church/Fort
View of Plymouth from Meeting House/Fort
Plymouth Today: Leyden Street - the oldest in America
William Bradford

Governor and Historian of Plymouth
Governor Bradford’s Grave Stone

Under this stone rest the ashes of WILLM BRADFORD a zealous puritan & sincere christian Gov of Ply. Col. from April 1621 to 1657, (the year he died aged 69) except 5 yrs. which he declined.

Ω uæ patres difficillime adepti sunt nolite turpiter relinquere.

Note: Not original- original marker was made of wood. This stone replaced that marker when the original had disintegrated.
Concept of Covenant

- Covenant between God and the community.
- A contract w/ God: God promises redemption for his chosen, people promise a faithful life.

Community life key to Puritans and the Covenant

- A community of ‘saints’ pledged to mutual love.
- Personal salvation linked to community life. Success or punishment would come down on all, so all must live faithfully.
- Quest for individual perfection (due to effort to show that the individual is ‘chosen’) turns outward and becomes political- pursuit of perfect community.
Concept of Covenant

• Fires, droughts, insect infestations, crop failures, cold/heat, diseases—all at times explained as punishment for community failures.
  – Baptists, Quakers, Catholics, witches, Indians also all blamed at times. “Barbarous Heathens”

• This creates among the Puritans a sense that members of the community must be compelled to behave within community guidelines. (More on this later.)
Concept of Covenant

As Puritan towns rose, each wrote a covenant (see p. 40 of Hellfire Nation).

- A modern term for covenant would be a ‘contract.’
- Once a covenant is drawn—even a King can be charged with violating it.
- Covenants are in many ways forerunners of constitutions in America.
Puritans’ MISSION

Help save the world (some millennialism) here.

- Set an example for the world. City on a Hill.  (see p. 35 Hellfire Nation)

- To stay on path for the mission, conflict w/in the community must be avoided (suppressed). “We must knit together in this work...”
  - To make this happen, everyone must play their divinely appointed roles. Stay w/in rank in society. Defer to leaders.

- Must make the community function in a godly fashion. Their contribution to the world would be what they made of themselves. If they got it right, others would want to copy them.
  - Don’t compel outsiders, but model for them.

- Yet, must get Puritan citizens to behave so would be the model.
Puritans’ MISSION

- Laws are to be drawn up for the community under Biblical guidelines.
  - Men are to submit to these laws drawn from God’s commandments.
- Laws NOT drawn primarily from human reason/goodness.
  - History proves human reason/goodness fails regularly.
- The Bible provides the premises of reason from which laws should be drawn.
We shall be as a city set upon a hill...
... for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty vpon a Hill, the eies of all people are vppon vs; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee haue vundertaken and so cause him to withdrawe his present help from vs, wee shall be made a story and a byword through the world, we shall open the mouthes of enemies to speak euill of the wayes of god and all profeessours for Gods sake...
Tensions in Puritan Community

Existed despite effort to avoid conflict (perhaps because of this).

- Puritan Economics-
  - God created a hierarchy. Each person given a rank. People are to remember their rank and respect higher rank- not aspire to it. No idea of equality in a Puritan community.

- Problem: ‘saints’ expect to work hard (God called people to occupations) and worldly success was considered a ‘sign’ of God’s favor.
  - Hard work leads to social mobility- and lack of hard work can cause one to fall. What was to be fixed became unfixed. Caused tension.
Tensions in Puritan Community

Puritan salvation-
- Who is saved, who is chosen, and how do we know? How does one demonstrate that one should be considered a ‘saint’ and thus a church member?
  - Psychological difficulties arose due to doubt.
- Tension between individualism and communitarianism in regards to salvation. Each had to “face his maker” alone, and yet all had to be marshalled into a united community that demonstrated what a saved community should look like.
Tensions in Puritan Community

Politics

- Puritan view of government polar opposite to later Jeffersonian view that “that government which governs best governs least.” Community has to be bonded together by inviolable ties.
- Government was an active instrument of leadership, discipline, and, if necessary, coercion.
- Leaders to adhere to God’s wishes, not the wishes of the community.
- How balance autonomy w/ central power; elite authority w/ popular participation.
  - Congregations did not answer to a higher authority, so how to prevent diversity?
  - Who defines heresy?
Puritan paradoxes

• Puritan freedom: not freedom to do what you want, but freedom from sin. Don’t be a slave to sins.
  – Sought freedom to practice, but denied it (from a modern perspective) w/in their domain.
  – No conception of a separation of church and state as might be thought of in modern America.
    • This view was consistent w/ the rest of the western world, where it was not believed that a pluralistic religious society could survive. One church state was the rule- so must not judge Puritans too harshly for their “intolerance” in the context of the times.

• Organized a society of faith, but said church efforts couldn’t lead to salvation. Only God’s grace.

• Puritans were assured that they knew the truth, it was in the Bible, and that they were establishing this truth in their governments in America.
  – Rests on the assumption that the Bible is clear and explicit. But... why did the Puritans have disagreements if this is so?

• Often pointed out that ironically it was England that forced religious toleration on America- compelled Puritans to stop hanging Quakers and witches and shutting the churches of Anglicans.
Puritan "Rebels"

Roger Williams

Anne Hutchinson
Witch Trials
Arrest Warrant for Proctor and Cloyce
...she did most grievously torment and afflict me... she would strike me down or all most choke me to death... the apparition of Susannah Martin has most grievously afflicted me by biting, pinching, and almost choking me to death, threatening to kill me if I would not writ[e] in his book...

Accusation affidavit (by Mary Wolcott against Susannah Martin)
Examination of a 'witch'
Hanging of Bridget Bishop
Persons Executed

† Bridget Bishop
† Rev. George Burroughs
† Martha Carrier
† Martha Cory
† Mary Easty
† Sarah Good
† Elizabeth How
† George Jacobs Sr.
† Susannah Martin
† Rebecca Nurse
† Alice Parker
† Mary Parker
† John Proctor, Sr.
† Ann Pudeator
† Wilmot Redd
† Margaret Scott
† Samuel Wardwell
† Sarah Wilds
† John Willard
Died in Prison
† Lydia Dastin
† Ann Foster
† Infant Girl (daughter of Sarah Good)
† Sarah Osborne
† Roger Toothaker

Died of Torture
† Giles Cory
Predestination in the Bible

Some Biblical verses often used as sources for Christian beliefs in predestination:

- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, [...]" (Eph. 1:3-5, NASB)

- "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." (Rom. 8:28-30, NASB)

- "[...] but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; [...]" (1Cr. 2:7, NASB)
Predestination in the Bible

• "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." (Act. 4:27-28, NASB)

• "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:4-9, NASB, emphasis added)
Predestination in the Bible

• "[...] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, [...]" (2Ti. 1:9, NASB)

• Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them. (Psa. 139:16, NASB)

• "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. [verse 17 omitted] So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." (Rom. 9:16-18, NASB)