
UNIT 1 THE PURITAN CONTEXT

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: The pre-history of the Puritan presence in New England
- 1.2 Who were the New England Puritans?
- 1.3 The New England Puritans as they saw themselves and their mission in America.
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- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Questions
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

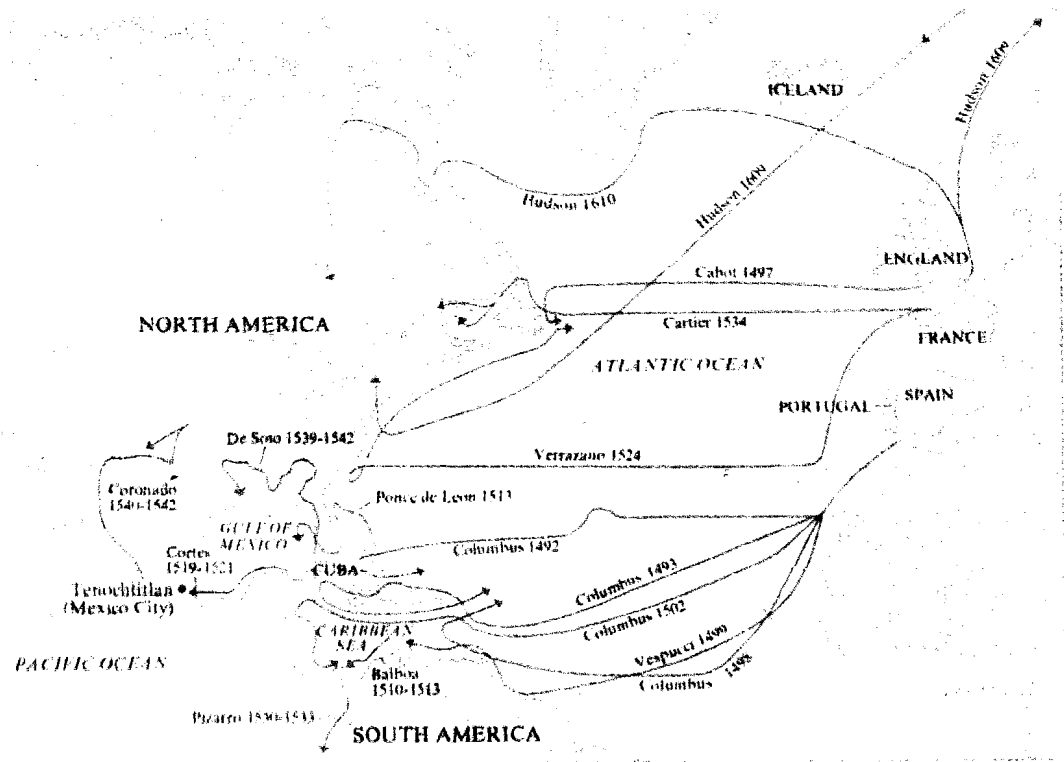
In this Unit I shall throw light upon the context of the Puritan migration from the Old World to the New World and the emergence of a "new" American culture and literature. Along with information about the New England Puritans, I shall also present a range of extracts from the writings of these Puritans about themselves and their mission in America. You will see from these writings, which are self-justificatory in tone, that the Puritans thought that they and they alone were the founders of American civilization, and not the inhabitants of the territory before or after. Gradually, over the centuries, people accepted the Puritan view as the dominant view of American history.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE PURITAN PRESENCE IN NEW ENGLAND

The Puritans were certainly not the first inhabitants, not even the first settlers from Europe in the American continent. As you are aware, many a voyage of exploration and discovery starting with that of the Italian sailor Cristoforo Colombo (better known as Christopher Columbus) in 1491 found its way, by accident or intention, to the shores of what was later to be called America. These voyages extended for over a century, but till the 1580s none of them, or so records suggest, were manned by Englishmen. Englishmen were resolutely engrossed in their internecine conflicts through these decades, and it was as late as 1584 that Sir Walter Raleigh despatched an English ship to investigate if it was possible to colonise other lands. Another attempt took off in 1606, and in this instance the energetic intruders decided to establish a settlement in Jamestown, Virginia, named after their Virgin Queen. The settlement however, suffered from many disasters.

Homesickness, epidemics, deaths--the list of troubles encountered by the earliest English settlers in America were many. The Chesapeake, the "Red Indians" of the region, instigated by their illustrious leader, Powhatan, resented the coming of the outsiders. They thought that the English, in not organising any agricultural activities on English lands, needlessly exploited their resources and exertions. Skirmishes ensued soon. The English were especially savage in their assaults, especially because they were extremely dependent upon these people whom they despised and therefore

determined to demonstrate an absolute superiority over them. In order to punish a haughty tribe, the English would resort to mass massacre of its members. Some



European explorations in America

Englishmen had a tendency to wander off to stay with the relatively affluent Indians, with their organised and abundant food supplies, or to trade with them. The Jamestown authorities burned, flayed and killed their own people. Meanwhile, thousands of settlers died from starvation and illnesses.

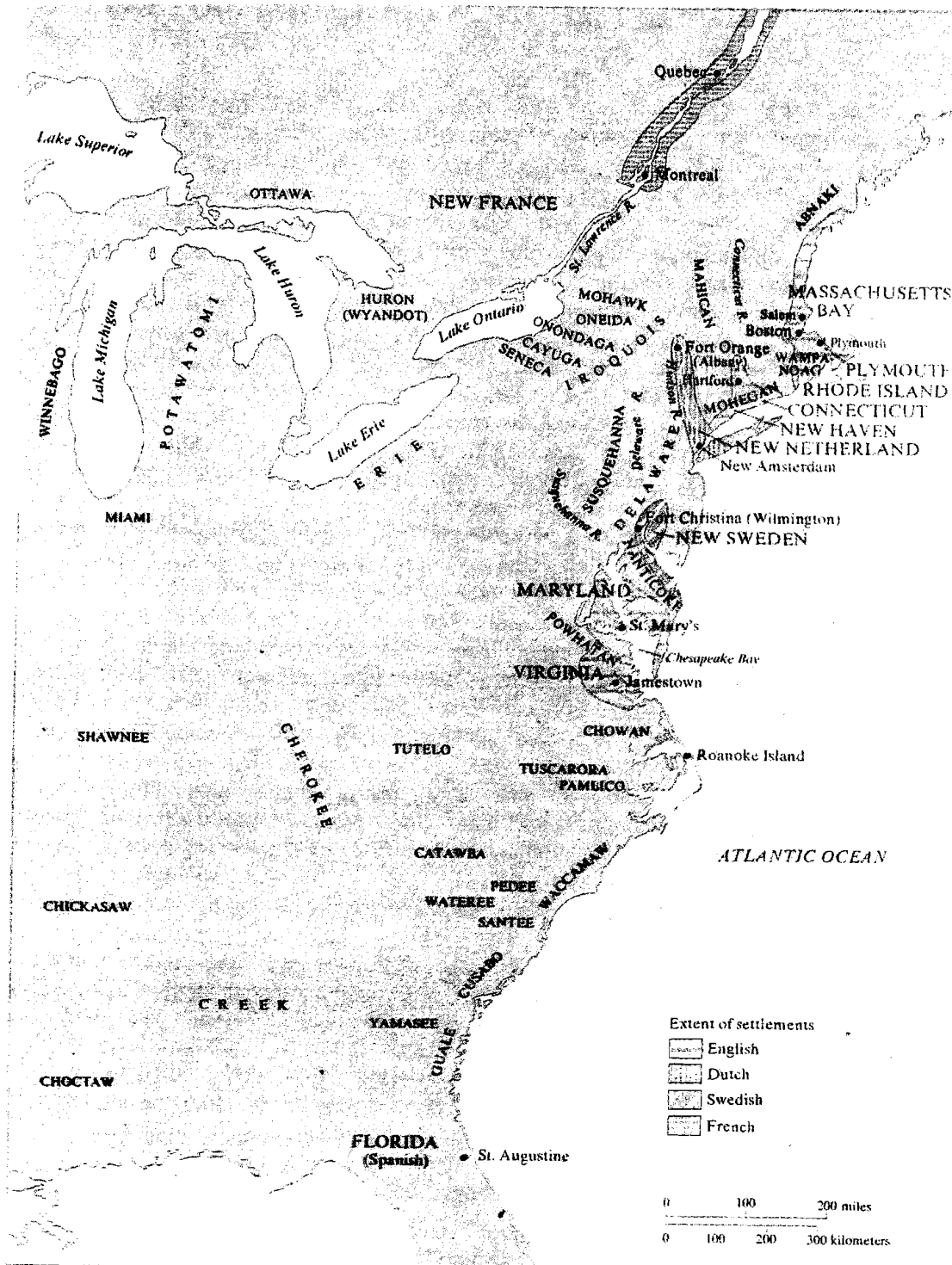
To save the declining Virginia settlement, the Virginia Company, which had sponsored the settlement in the first place, soon realised that the colonists had to be given a personal interest in what they were doing. They would not work hard to raise food for the company itself; the power of individual enterprise had to be put to work. In return for a small annual quit rent, settlers were allowed to take up sizeable tracts of land to farm for themselves. The time of hardships was soon at an end. Then, in 1619 a legislative body allowed the Virginia settlers, to own and cultivate the land which transformed them from unimportant employees of an old company to significant citizens of a new country. The tobacco crop planted experimentally in 1612 yielded such high profits from London that by 1620 an amazing "gold rush" was under way for tobacco land. At last, Virginia appeared to be evolving into a prosperous settlement.

Up north, towards the eastern edge of the American continent in the meanwhile, the first Puritan fleet, transporting its four hundred devout souls, sailed around the tip of Cape Cod and stationed itself finally at the Plymouth harbour off Massachusetts Bay. The first settlers who came to Massachusetts thus in 1620 to found a dedicated community were the Pilgrims. Fleeing from the hardened depravities of the Old World to the New World, they established their homesteads in an obscure stretch close to Plymouth. Ten years later came the Great Puritan Migration from England, followed by an astonishingly numerous rabble bringing thousands of settlers, the largest single expedition of English people in the seventeenth century. Puritan settlements sprang up at Dorchester, Boston, Watertown, Roxbury, Mystic and Lynn. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was now fully launched.

By 1640, religious sectarianism surfaced, forcing renegades or rebels to abandon Massachusetts to develop Rhode Island, which was chartered in 1644. Others,

enticed by fantasies of fabled affluence left for richer haunts southward to the west of the Connecticut River. In 1639 certain towns had already adopted the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut as the colony's constitution. By 1662 a royal charter had been issued that authenticated Connecticut's independent status. The earliest settlements emerged in New Hampshire in 1623. After endless debate between ambitious English agents and Massachusetts authorities, it became (by 1680) an autonomous territory of the Crown. The status of Maine, which had been settled in the 1630s, was troubled likewise until 1691, when it was made part of Massachusetts.

At the end of the century, New England, as the entire region was named, was a flourishing new enclave within the English empire.



European settlements and Indian tribes in America 1650

The New England way of life was sharply polarised against the way of life of the Virginians as well as similar materialistically inspired immigrants. Virginians aspired to ownership of property, either as tobacco farm or as cotton plantation, and needed to employ indentured servants and chattel slaves, to acquire the trappings of aristocracy. New Englanders, on the contrary, aimed at the actualisation of an ideal. For them, there had been no option but to flee their Old England which was being taken over by Satan. They considered themselves to be God's special emissaries on a "mission into the wilderness" seeking to establish "a Jerusalem renewed." This, in essence, was the Puritan project in America.

1.2 WHO WERE THE NEW ENGLAND PURITANS?

I am sure you know from your study of Indian history that many sects like Buddhism and Jainism sprang up as a protest against the abuses of Brahminical rituals and ceremonies which they found were devoid of true spiritual change. Similarly Puritanism, as Perry Miller has remarked in his classic study on the subject, began as an agitation within the Church of England in the latter half of the sixteenth century. It was a movement for reform of that institution, and as such hardly an alternative denomination to Anglicanism, which was the dominant theology. In the 1530's the Church of England had broken with the Roman Catholic Church. By the inception of Elizabeth I's reign in 1558, it had proceeded a certain distance in this revolt, had become Protestant, had disestablished the monasteries and rectified many Papist abuses. Puritanism was the belief that the reform should be continued, that more abuses remained to be corrected, that practices still survived from the days of Papacy which should be renounced, that the Church of England should be restored to the "purity" of the first-century Church as established by Christ Himself. In the 1560s, when the advocates of purification first acquired the name of Puritans, no one, not even the most radical, knew exactly how far the process was to go or just what the ultimate goal would be. Down to the days of the so-called Puritan Revolution there was never any agreement on this point, and in the end this failure of unanimity proved to be the undoing of English Puritanism. Many Puritans desired that only certain ceremonies be abolished or changed. Others wanted ministers to preach more sermons, make up their own prayers on the inspiration of the moment rather than read set forms out of a book. Others went further and proposed a revision of the whole form of ecclesiastical government. But whatever the shade or complexion of their Puritanism, Puritans were those who wanted to continue a movement which was already underway. Their opponents, the Anglicans, were those who felt that with the enthronement of Elizabeth I and with the "Elizabethan Compromise" within the Church, things had gone far enough. The Elizabethan Compromise, according to the Anglicans, had adequately eliminated the excesses of Roman Catholicism. They wanted to call a halt, just where they were, and stabilize at that point.

Thus the issue between the two views, though large enough, still involved only a limited number of questions. On every thing except matters upon which the Puritans wanted further reform, there was essential agreement. The Puritans who opted to go to New England were among the more extreme--though by no means the most extreme that the movement produced. Even before their departure in 1620 they had gone to the lengths of formulating a concrete platform of church organisation which they wished to see instituted in England in lieu of the episcopal system.

By the 1620, the Puritans had moved the Church of England a long way toward their way of thinking, but then a startling reversal occurred. The new king, Charles I, working with those who disagreed with the Puritans, initiated a determined counter-offensive. First, the Anglicans, supported by the monarch, managed to maintain the episcopal system. Second, they sustained the existing infrastructure for devotional services--elegant attire for the priest, glorious objects of gold and coloured glass in use during worship, the altar itself treated as a site of almost miraculous significance.

Third, the prayers of the Prayer Book, and the sacraments, were venerated by the Anglicans as the centre of all worship--especially communion, for it represented the Body of Christ.

The Puritans were shocked to witness these, what they thought to be, retrogressive tendencies within the church, and even more appalled when hundreds of priests who resisted them were dismissed from their pulpits. Like everyone else, Puritans believed that the Church of England was the driving force, the very centre of national life. If it were corrupted, chaos itself would descend upon the country. England, the Puritans asserted, was in an anarchic condition. There was disorder and discord all over: gambling, whoring, thievery, rape and murder were routine occurrences. Excessive self-indulgence and self-gratification seemed to have become the norms of social conduct. The Puritans articulated the emergent bourgeois ethos which celebrated temperance, caution, thrift and hard work. They held that God the Father, who must punish even as he protects, would surely not tolerate the sins of his children and would chastise them by sending down plagues and other disasters. Only when England possessed a fully purified church, the Puritans said, would God cease punishing the English for their sins.

The Anglicans pointed out that by law the king and his officers of the Church of England were entitled to take all decisions in religious matters and insisted that everyone's duty was to obey them, not to grumble and grimace. All agitation ought to halt. The Puritans, tenacious and stubborn, refused to oblige. To listen to humans masquerading as God's ministers would be tantamount to bringing back to the Church of England that "vast suffocating fog" of Papist superstition and irrationality that the Protestant Reformation was supposed to have swept away. Across the English Channel on the European continent this was the period when the powerful armies of Roman Catholic monarchs were sweeping from victory to victory as the Counter-Reformation against Protestantism launched by the Roman Catholic Church mounted in enthusiasm. Suspicious Puritans then alleged that what the Anglicans were doing was part of a covert Roman Catholic conspiracy, working through the king and his followers, to destroy Protestantism in England.

But still more fundamental to their differences was the Anglican and the Puritan argument over the nature of mankind. To the Puritans, human beings in their "natural" condition are totally depraved, their reason effectively impaired by their passion. If any are "saved"--forgiven their sins and going to heaven--it is entirely because God has willed it so, not because of anything that individual persons may have done on their own.

The Anglicans recoiled from all this. They believed, of course, that human beings are all sinners, but also that God has made them discriminating creatures. Ethical choice, they said, is "the candle of the Lord." Thus, to some degree we have a free will; that is, we do have a role in deciding our personal destinies. The Anglicans believed that if we choose to live in God's way, take the sacraments regularly, and accept the salvation that a benign God has offered to all, we are saved.

The important thing was not so much what faith we had, but how we treated each other. Certainly we must love God, as the First Table of the Ten Commandments decreed, but equally important were some other questions. Are we loving to each other? Obedient and dutiful to appropriate worldly authority? And mindful of good works? These were what the last six of the Ten Commandments--the Second Table--called for, and it was here that Anglicans laid their stress.

The Puritans emphasised upon the first four of the Ten Commandments--the First Table--which ordered humanity to revere God and to glorify Him and to have no other thing or person in their lives before Him. The dilemma was that human beings were so naturally rotten, their passion so predominant upon their reason, that every instinct and inclination turned them away from God. They chose evil knowingly.

Do we all, then, go to hell? No. The Puritans believed that God, for reasons known only to Him, had decided to save some of humanity from that everlasting torture. He had sent Jesus Christ to save these persons, who are the elect from all eternity. In the course of their lives after painstaking, prayerful and prolonged inner studies, they suddenly learn that they are indeed saved. In that overwhelming moment the old, sinful person within, i.e. Adam, dies, and a new, sinless person, i.e. Christ is born. Thereafter, the persons so saved will by divine grace live virtuous and inviolate lives, clearly designed to bear witness to the grandeur of God.

Their re-defined enterprise is to do God's work on earth, unceasingly, in remaking and reviving this world. They must erect a rejuvenated Jerusalem and not be deterred by existing tarnished edicts and customs. They had a covenant with God in which salvation has been granted to them without riders but with a clear obligation to live thereafter a principled and committed life.

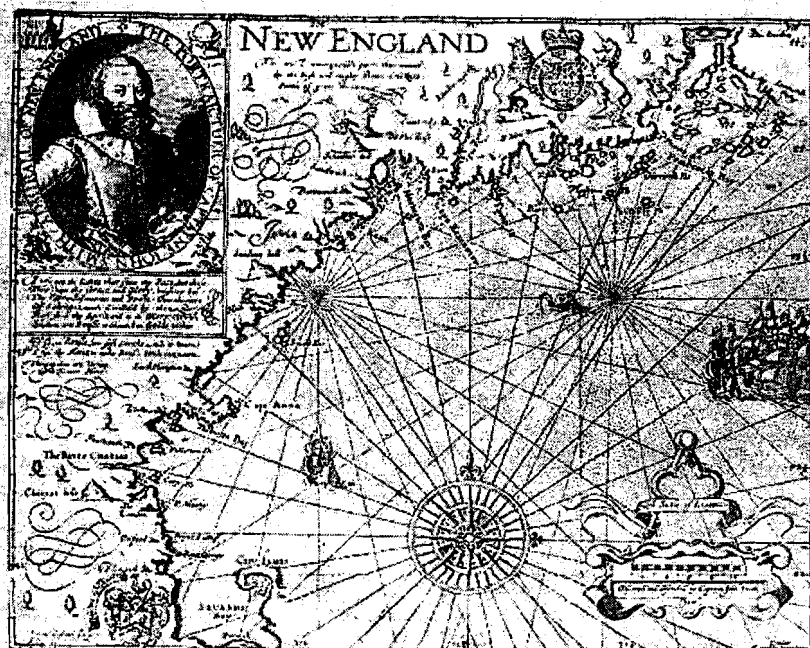
1.3 THE NEW ENGLAND PURITANS AS THEY SAW THEMSELVES AND THEIR MISSION IN AMERICA

When Puritan John Winthrop's fleet led the Great Puritan Migration from England to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, it was in pursuit of a utopian goal: to found in the New World a utopia that would serve as an example to the Old World. They were not escaping from England, they were on an "errand into the wilderness." "For wee must Consider," said Winthrop, who would later become the Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, "that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us."

For wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are uppon Us, soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken, and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. . . .

*Therefore lett us choose life,
that wee and our seede
may live by obeyeing his
voyce and cleavelng to him,
for hee is our life and
our prosperity.*

—John Winthrop
A Modell of Christian Charity
1630



Winthrop's utopian goal, of course, was supremely unconcerned with those who already lived in America. North America was a vast continent occupied for many, many thousands of years by (according to recent estimates) perhaps ten to twelve million native Americans north of Rio Grande. How could the Puritans make a lasting bridgehead among so numerous a people? Already, in 1616, English fishermen visiting New England had brought the European disease bacilli which, assuming epidemic proportions, had annihilated probably half of the Indians of New England, who had numbered 25,000. "Their bones and skulls," an Englishman wrote, "made such a spectacle . . . it seemed to me a new found Golgotha."

Rather than regard this event as a tragic human disaster, the English in general looked upon it as a proof of God's wishes: that the land be made empty for them. And then came a second devastation, smallpox, shortly after the Puritans' arrival, which in the early 1630s killed thousands of more Indians. What had happened over the past century in Mexico, where a population of perhaps twenty-five million had shrunk to less than one-twelfth that number, was occurring around the Puritans as well.

The weakened local Indians therefore made room for the Puritans with not much resistance, and the Puritans in turn stated that since the land was not "occupied" or "claimed," it could be rightfully taken. Besides, the English said, they were a "civilized" people and the Indians "inclose no land, neither have any settled habitation, nor any tame Cattle to improve the Land by . . ." So the Puritans simply moved in and established their settlements. Later they made purchases of great tracts from the Indians, but only to establish a "legal" title to the land so that the Dutch of New Amsterdam (later New York City) could not.

There was much talk among the Puritans that they should Christianise the Indian, and small groups of "praying Indians" were eventually formed into villages nearby. But unlike the Spanish who came before them, the Puritans did not bring with them great armies of missionaries to spread out among the Indians, but only enough ministers to meet the Puritans' own needs. The authorities of Massachusetts Bay Colony declared that the Indians in their region were subject to the laws of the colony and tried to control their moral behaviour. This, however, quickly brought them into conflict with the Pequots, a strong and sturdy Indian tribe, and led them to the Pequot War of 1637, during which the tribe was almost obliterated. After that, for nearly forty years, there was peace. As earlier in Virginia, so now in New England, Indians and Puritans remained biologically separate, and more or less in their own separate enclaves.

1.4 THE EMERGENCE OF PURITANISM AS THE HEGEMONIC AMERICAN IDEOLOGY

The historian Francis Jennings has rightly written about the Puritan migration into America that the "so-called settlement of America was a resettlement, a reoccupation of a land made waste by the diseases and demoralisation introduced by the newcomers." The obliteration of the Old cultures of the New World by the new entrants from the Old World only partially explains however the emergence of Puritanism as the hegemonic American ideology.

The Puritans were extremely self-conscious emigres who made a fetish of recording their experiences in the New World even as they were undergoing the experiences. John Winthrop was certainly not the only Puritan to write a journal noting in detail the day-to-day episodes of his adventures on alien shores. The ability to write, indeed, was supposed to be the mark of the civilisation of the European traveller. Correspondingly, (from the European point of view) the unlettered aboriginals, the Indians, and slaves, the Africans brought in as chattel labour a little later, were either written down in or written out of the Puritan narratives.

Consider, for instance, the following account of a Puritan raid on a Pequot village, extracted from William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* (written 1630-46; published, 1857):

Those that scaped the fire were slaine with the sword; some hewed to peeces, others rane throu' with their rapiers, so as they were quickly dispatchte, and very few escaped. It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fyer, and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stincke and sente thereof, but the victory seemed a sweete sacrifice, and they gave the prayers thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them, thus to inclose their enemise in their hands, and give them so speedy a victory over so proud and insulting an enemy.

It is clear that Bradford applauds the slaying of the Indians despite his protestations about the sordidness of the event. The Puritan theologian Cotton Mather is much more candid than Governor Bradford in his approval of the genocide. "It was supposed that no less than 600 Pequot souls were brought down to hell that day."

Bradford's narrative is no ordinary piece of writing. Meant to be a memoir of his own American odyssey, this tract by the most illustrious of administrators of the colony of Plymouth transforms itself soon into cultural propaganda from contemporary New England.

Two motifs flow with each other through the text. The first motif is that America was utterly savage, in the state the Puritans encountered it. It was virtually uninhabitable and by extension uninhabited. The second is that whatever it was and whatever it was to become, America had nothing to do with Europe. America, in other words, was to become what the Puritans wished it to become.

Before the Puritans, writes Bradford, lay a wild landscape such as no civilized people had ever encountered, and "if they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they passed and [which] was now a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world." Not even the ship lying at anchor qualifies this absolute separation, for the captain daily threatens to leave. "May not and ought not the children of these fathers," Bradford instructs his first readers, who are just these children, rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen, which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity." The Puritans are certainly in need of the Lord's support as their plight is worse than that of "the Apostle and his shipwrecked company" to whom "the barbarians showed . . . no small kindness in refreshing them." The savages the Puritans met "were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise." Bradford's chronicle distinguishes itself from other early American texts by featuring natives who are ferociously against the whites.

Of Plymouth Plantation, as Bradford's call to the children of the fathers makes explicit, consciously invents a historical tradition. To quote Myra Jehlen, "It proposes some fundamental terms for organising the experience of colonisation." The most important of these terms are re-definitions of wilderness and civilization and the opposition between them. On the one hand, the wilderness is without trace of any cultivation. On the other hand, precisely in its untouched character, it is the site of a potentially exceptional construction. Simultaneously, civilization, in Bradford's account, acquires a strange ambiguity. The civilization left forever by the Puritans is suggestive of great accomplishments no doubt. But it is also an abode of destructive viciousness.

The final impression that Bradford's book leaves on the reader about the apparent polarities of civilization and wilderness is not one of contrast; the situations curiously resemble one another. They are like mirror images rather than like antithetical

emblems. When the Puritans step on to the New World to face its searing inhospitality, they leave behind not an antithetical good but another kind of evil; and the complaint that there were no towns, inns, or houses in the New World measures their problem without advancing a solution. The solution is still to be engendered, and the rest of the book describes each undertaking, whether the building of accommodation or the enactment of laws, as from scratch.

All in all, the Puritan elite repeatedly asserted that their endeavour in founding America, inscribed in their numerous chronicles (such as Bradford's), coupled with the lack of any similarly scripted and detailed claims from other groups who inhabited America already during or before the Puritan arrival, made Puritanism emerge as the hegemonic American ideology.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I have tried to explain the circumstances under which the Puritans migrated from Europe to America and how, in the process, they created the context for the emergence of a "new" American culture and literature. Extracts from the writings of some eminent early Puritan migrants to the New World from the Old World, which are included in the Unit, indicate that the Puritans thought that they and they alone were the founders of American civilization notwithstanding the inhabitants of the territory before or after. Over the centuries, the Puritan view came to be accepted as the dominant view of American history.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. Who were the first settlers from Europe in the American continent? What were their motives for trying to settle in America?
2. How were the Puritans different from the first European settlers in America? What were their reasons for emigration?
3. Why did Puritanism emerge as the hegemonic American ideology in the course of less than a century?

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Robert, Kelley. *The Shaping of the American Past*, 1975.

Howard, Zinn. *A People's History of the United States*, 1980.

Milton, R. Stern & Seymour L. Gross, Ed. *American Literature Survey: Colonial and Federal*. To 1800, 1962.

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Sacvan Bercovitch. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, 1975.

UNIT 2 THE CONSOLIDATION AND DISPERSAL OF THE PURITAN UTOPIA

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction: The Puritan town as a projected communal utopia.
- 2.2 Unanimity as the motif for an integrated community.
- 2.3 The emergence of trading interests as a factor undermining the unity within the Puritan settlements.
- 2.4 Puritans against themselves: the beginnings of dissent within the fold of Puritanism.
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Readings.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to represent the structure of the Puritan town in New England as that of a projected communal utopia. The focus of study will be the Puritan elite's efforts to highlight the spirit of unanimity within the community in order to obscure the frictions and fractions that frequently threatened to disrupt its unity. Various factors contributed towards the dissolution of the collective identity which the Puritans sought so assiduously to cultivate. Not the least of the factors was the emergence of trading interests which involved attempts to link the economy of the Puritan town with that of the world beyond. Gradually, new and manifold forces of dissent started to operate from the margins against a mainstream notion of Puritanism. The Unit will indicate the complex modes through which some of these forces succeeded eventually in diluting, if not destroying altogether, the utopian aspirations of the new England Puritans.

2.1 THE PURITAN TOWN AS A PROJECTED COMMUNAL UTOPIA

The historian Robert Kelley has astutely stated,

Virginians settled as individuals upon the land they received from the Crown. New Englanders settled as communities upon land granted to each village by the General Court (the legislature) of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

In New England, individuals got land only from the village, and then only if they were members of that community. That is, they would be looked over first by members of the village leadership to see if they were godly, if they were true Puritans. Then they would sign the covenant (common agreement) which the founders of the village had drawn up together at its founding. This covenant bound all people living in the town to "fear and reverence . . . Almighty God" and "p[ro]fess and practice one truth . . . the foundation whereof is everlasting love."

Each town (the term refers to a large piece of territory, not just to the village at its core) might be hundreds of thousands of acres in extent. The founding villages, however, turned their backs on that vast wilderness and formed compact village communities devoted to producing the perfect Christian life. All townspeople accepted the community's moral authority and discipline. According to the number of persons in each household, their social standing, and the "usefulness in either Church or Commonwealth" of their patriarch--Puritan life was profoundly rooted in male dominance. As echoed in the Old Testament--the town would grant so much pasture lands in the "commons," so many strips of arable farming land, and so much woodland. Everything was done communally. Just as each person's moral life was properly under the general observation of the overseeing group, so the cattle were grazed under the supervision of a common herdsman and what was planted in the fields was decided upon in common and ploughed and harvested in the same way.

New England towns were almost entirely self-governing. And no one in them had to pay quit-rents to any overlord for their lands (in contrast to the colonies in the south, where annual quit-rents had to be paid to the proprietors or to the Crown). Land, once granted to the individual farmers by the town, was theirs in fee simple: they owned it absolutely. The Puritans were determined never to reproduce in their part of America the ancient curse of tenant farming, which existed as the general rule in England--that is, the rule of manor lords who could raise rents and evict tenants at will. Just as Puritans wanted no bishops over their churches and their religious lives, they wanted no lords over their properties and their secular lives.

Several days a week the townspeople would gather in the meeting house to hear sermons from their minister. Each congregation was an independent community; there was no hierarchy that bound them together with other congregations. The basis of admission to any congregational community would be the ability of an individual to publicly, and in detail, describe the agony and the ecstasy of having gone through a salvation experience. Congregationalism, in short, was a "church of saints" built around a vision of Christian perfection. Visible faith and a visibly faithful way of living: these, it was said, were clearly the marks of God's grace in the saved person. Then, after grave inquiry, the "selectmen" who would govern the town were elected from the community. It was assumed that henceforth these individuals ultimately answered only to God.

2.2 UNANIMITY AS THE MOTIF FOR AN INTEGRATED COMMUNITY

The Puritan village, wherever located, was defined by an enthusiasm for unity, order and peace. New England was not founded, as is a popular misconception, as a democracy in the modern sense. People were supposed to talk together and argue things out in the town meeting house, but when decisions were made, all were to "assent unanimously." In practice, Puritans accepted that certain individuals were more substantial and authoritative than others, and the board of selectmen elected from this elite was generally presumed to exercise a divine magistracy that should be obeyed dutifully. Indeed, Puritans generally disliked what we would call democracy, which implies free and open criticism of leaders and the organisation of opposition to depose them. This was seen as running against the oneness desired by God, and being disruptive of harmony. The idea of dissension, of a kind of "party politics" within the village community, was beyond grasping, or accepting, as right. Were they not people of one God? Was there not one truth in all things? Unanimity - this was what New Englanders aimed for and prized. Anarchy and chaos were feared.

What did New Englanders think about the relationship between state and church? On the one hand they rejected the idea that church and state should be unified in the sense that they should be interwoven. Back home in Old England, the Church of

England shared in the making of laws (its bishops sat, and still sit, in the House of Lords), and it had a court system that could punish people by even incarceration for moral offences. The Puritans wanted none of this, and they gave their ministers no such function or powers. However, Puritans were not what were then termed "separatists"--radicals who demanded an absolute separation of state and church. Rather, they believed that in a given country there should be a single state church supported by public taxes to which all citizens of the country should belong. We must remember, once more, that the Puritans believed deeply in unanimity, in the whole community thinking and acting in unison in every respect.

2.3 THE EMERGENCE OF TRADING INTERESTS AS A FACTOR UNDERMINING THE UNITY WITHIN THE PURITAN SETTLEMENTS

The immediate task in New England was to find an economic basis for the new community. The money that emigrating Puritans brought with them sustained Massachusetts through its early years. Meanwhile, a frantic search for furs was under way. By 1640 this search had pushed settlements out to Connecticut, south along Long Island, and north to the Merrimac River. However, the supply of furs in New England was limited. By 1660 the trade had dropped off steeply; by 1675 it was virtually extinct. Worse yet, the outbreak of civil war in England in 1642 reduced immigration to a trickle, and with it the flow of money from England. Thereafter, Massachusetts entered extremely difficult times.

A lasting source of income was found in the rich fishing waters that lay off the coasts of northern New England and Newfoundland. Steeped in minerals and nutrients, the mix of cold Arctic waters and the Gulf Stream in this region generated a huge fish population and therefore fertile fisheries. These waters had provided fish to French and Portuguese traders for generations, but after 1640 New Englanders moved in so vigorously that within twenty years they dominated the trade. The codfish became the Massachusetts symbol, for it provided the basis for a healthy New England economy.

The consequence was the emergence of an extensive and elaborate trading system in the Atlantic. Based upon fish, lumber products, rum, wine, tobacco, English manufactured goods, and eventually slaves, it touched England, West Africa, the Caribbean Islands, the Southern colonies in America and New England. Through this trade, New England became closely embroiled in the slave traffic. In 1643 the first New England vessel carried a cargo of black slaves to the plantations.

As this intricate new trading network emerged, an ascendant class, the merchants arose in Massachusetts. The Puritan authorities were not traders, but were usually drawn from the lesser rural gentry in England. They were firmly moored to the traditional medieval conception that business activities should be engineered so as to benefit the general community and not just particular individuals.

Controversy soon broke out in Massachusetts over whether merchants could raise the price of goods when the demands of the market allowed them to do so. The medieval injunction, issued at a time of stable prices, was that every article has a "just" tag. Higher rates were nothing but exploitation of the buyer. Robert Keayne, a Boston merchant, who insisted on selling imported goods at higher prices than those decreed by the General Court, was tried and fined for his offence. As trade enlarged, these early troubles evolved into a continuing internecine conflict between the Puritan authorities, backed by the rural villagers all over Massachusetts, and the increasingly assertive and aggressive merchants of Boston. The merchants had emigrated directly from the crowded business districts of London. They knew each other intimately,

The Consolidation and Dispersal of the Puritan Utopia



Simultaneously, New England merchants began trooping to Whitehall, headquarters of government in London, to complain of the harsh restrictions imposed on them by the Puritan authorities in New England. They pointed to laws against the residence of "strangers" and the requirement of a salvation experience as the basis for admission to the community. Few merchants were "saved." Many, indeed, had converted to Anglicanism, especially since Anglicans were back in power in England.

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From then on, the governor of Massachusetts was not elected locally from the Puritan gentry, but almost invariably chosen in London from among English politicians. The governor administered the colony in company with the powerful upper house of the legislature, the Council, which was composed of the various officials of the Massachusetts government, themselves appointed by the governor. They were often chosen from the merchant class, now completely victorious over the Puritans. At the same period, an Anglican church was opened in Boston and all discrimination against Anglicans were removed. The Bible Commonwealth had finally been undermined.

2.4 THE PURITANS AGAINST THEMSELVES: THE BEGINNINGS OF DISSENT WITHIN THE FOLD OF PURITANISM

Dissensions within the Puritan fold were in part responsible for hastening the end of the projected Puritan utopia in New England.

In 1631, Roger Williams had arrived in Boston to be a minister. He was soon preaching that no church (not even New England's Congregational Church) should be supported by general taxation, nor should everyone be required to attend it. Inevitably, he had to leave, and in 1636 he founded his own colony, Rhode Island. Here he created a unique community in which there was complete freedom of conscience and genuine democracy of institutions. Williams believed that only people's actions, and not their thoughts, should be supervised by government, and then only if they led to the harm of others. If they wished to gather together and form churches, these should be totally self-supporting and not connected to the state. That is, the gathered worshippers should be "Baptist"--and Baptist Protestantism in America has its origins in Roger William's Rhode Island. Gradually, Rhode Island attracted discontented religious individualists from all over New England. Puritans regarded it with distaste, for Rhode Island seemed to emblemise a licentiousness and a lasciviousness that they found hard to accept.

The secular heterodoxy represented by Anne Hutchinson, however, was even more startling. Born in 1591, Anne immigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1634, when she and her husband joined the Puritan minister John Colton and his followers in the fledgling colony. In New England, the outspoken Anne, who had been deeply influenced by her father, a preacher imprisoned several times for his opposition to the Established Church, quickly ran afoul of the colony's basic distrust of women. When she realised that women were to be excluded from colonial affairs, she began holding meetings for women to discuss both religious and secular matters. Her strongly expressed belief in the individual soon attracted the merchants of the colony, who also chafed under the authoritarianism of the Puritan regime, clerical as much as lay. Anne and her acolytes consistently came into confrontation with the authorities--opposing wars with the Indians, fighting against the concept of Eve-induced Original Sin, upholding the separation between church and state. By 1637, Anne had a larger appeal than Governor John Winthrop. Brought to trial for her dissenting views, she found a forum to address the entire colony, England--and posterity. During the trial she was labelled a witch, a Jezebel, and compared to "the lustful Eve." Convicted, she was banished from the colony and finally--ironically--murdered in exile by Indians..

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I have tried to highlight the structure of the Puritan town in New England as that of a projected communal utopia. This utopian projection is seen as an attempt

on the part of the Puritan elite to gloss over differences and dissensions that existed within their community. A major factor of disruption of the integrity of the Puritan community stemmed out of the community's opening up to trading interests and thereby inevitably to the world outside itself. Slowly but steadily, this induced divisive elements to assert themselves against a hegemonic interpretation of Puritanism. An account of these elements which ultimately dispersed the Puritan consolidation is also provided in this Unit.

**The Consolidation and
Dispersal of the Puritan
Utopia**

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Describe the structure of the Puritan town in New England as that of a projected communal utopia.
2. How did the emergence of trading interests undermine the unity within the Puritan settlements.
3. Discuss the cases of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson as types of dissent emerging against the hegemonic interpretation of Puritanism in New England.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Same as for Unit 1.

UNIT 3 THE PURITANS AS LITERARY ARTISTS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction: Puritan theory of literature
- 3.2 The literary style of the Puritans
- 3.3 The literary genres of the Puritans
- 3.4 Puritan literature versus Puritan ideology, or how Puritan ideology is sometimes subverted by Puritan literature
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions
- 3.7 Suggested Readings.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit I shall describe the Puritan theory of literature insofar as such a theory exists and is to be extrapolated out of the literary practices of the Puritans. In the analysis of the literary practices of the Puritans, you must pay special attention to the choice of literary style and literary genres. An attempt will be made to demonstrate how the literature of the Puritans, some of it at least, effectively distances itself from, if not actually destabilises, Puritan ideology.

3.1 INTRODUCTION: PURITAN THEORY OF LITERATURE

The tenets of Puritan faith hindered any clear formulation of general literary theory. Therefore the Puritans rarely expressed themselves cohesively and coherently as a group in their appreciation of literature. Nevertheless, they have individually left on record a substantial number of short comments on the art of writing as well as a few long essays.

In each instance the comments are somehow concerned with the question: How can prose or verse be made serviceable to the preacher, historian or pedagogue? Usually the answers are related to the fulfillment of some far-reaching end. The motive behind Puritan authorship was inevitably utilitarian: the writer might chronicle the story of his age, narrate the lives of famous personages, arraign unwelcome schools of thought, discourse upon human duties or compose hymn praises to God, but the end he intended was never merely an enjoyment of belles-letters or of literature for its own sake.

This is not to say that the writer was always devoid of literary sensibility. Puritans saw expressions of divine imagination in the world around them, and drew analogies between the beautiful objects and the perfect archetype which they conceived as existing in the mind of God. Beauty was supposedly the order and harmony which God established, and literature useful only insofar as the perusal of it might shape human spirit to a better understanding of the divine metaphysic. Literature, thus, did not deserve more than incidental attention in the Puritan arrangement of things.

The literature of the Puritans was meant not to be self-foregrounding or self-glorificatory. Even before New England was founded, the Puritans had advocated a literary style that was simple, lucid and controlled, fit to satisfy the intellect, not excite the passions, to instruct not to titillate. "Painful" Perkins, fellow of Christ College, Cambridge, was a Puritan whose evangelical fervour made him one of the most influential leaders, of New England thoughts. He had written, in a manual on sermonising that was the recognised authority in New England, that "the Minister may, and yea must, privately use at his libertie the arts, philosophy, and variety of reading, whilst he is in framing the sermon: but he ought in publike to conceal all these from the people . . ." Thomas Hooker warned of such readers as might find the manner of his discourse "too Logical, or Scholasticall, in regard of the terms" he used

That plainesse and perspicuity, both for matter and manner of expression, are the things that I have conscientiously indeavoured in the whole debate: for I have ever thought writings that come abroad, they are not to dazle, but direct the apprehension of the meanest, and I have accounted it the chiefest part of Judicious learning, to make a hard point easy and familiar in explication.

Although Puritans aspired towards a deliberate spartanness of style, it would be a mistake to think that this style was necessarily insipid and placid. The audience aided the minister to maintain an interesting style, for the Puritan laity esteemed that preaching creditable whereby the clergyman engaged their enthusiasm without resorting to ornate and elaborated diction. The ministers too were wise enough to realise that arid and dull sermons would not hold the respect of an educated flock, nor did they want that the uneducated among their people should be allowed to respect a slipshod oration. One of the greatest preachers in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Richard Sibbes, whose works were widely read in New England, enunciated one part of the Puritan theory of style in writing the preface for a fellow Puritan's book:

. . . But because the way to come to the heart is often to pass through the fancy, therefore this godly man studied by lively representations to help men's faith by the fancy. It was our Saviour Christ's manner of teaching to express heavenly things in an earthly manner; and it was the study of the wise man, Solomon, becoming a preacher, to find out pleasant words, or words of delight.

Sibbes here reveals that the source for much that is inspirational in Puritan writing was the Bible--the model which justified an indulgence in figures of speech even though plainness and perspicuity were being elevated at the expense of flourish and finish.

However, had the Puritan style derived exclusively from Biblical models, it would have lacked the analytical expositions and the articulate explanations which happen to be its hallmarks. William Ames's textbook of theology was the standard work used at Harvard and Yale down to the middle of the eighteenth century. Ames defended the non-ostentatious style of the Puritan preachers, and his example influenced almost every sermon delivered in New England:

The drinesse of the style, and harshnesse of some words will be much blamed by the same persons [as those who object to the cause-and-effect framework]. But I doe prefer to exercise myself in that heresie, that when it is my purpose to Teache, I thinke I should not say that in two words which may be said in one, and that that key is to be chosen which doth open best, although it be of wood, if there be not a golden key of the same efficacy.

But economy of words was not to imply insufficient communication; the spartan style was not proposed to become a boring style. As Ames instructed his students on another page:

... the Word of the Lord is a two-edged sword, that pierceeth into the inward thoughts and affections, and goeth through unto the joyning together of the bones and marrow. Preaching therefore ought not to be dead, but lively and effectually, so that an unbeliever coming into the Congregation of the faithful he ought to be affected, and as it were digged through with the very hearing of the Word, that he may give glory to God.

3.3 THE LITERARY GENRES OF THE PURITANS

The non-ostentatious style of the Puritans was not confined to their pulpit discourses or devotional paeans alone. Historians from William Bradford (first generation Puritan immigrant) to Cotton Mather (third generation Puritan immigrant) brought out narratives about their lives and times with the express purpose of reaching out to every ready reader.

Chronicles, intertwining the individual and the collective experiences of the Puritans in New England were written by the dozen through the seventeenth century. The Puritans did not distinguish between the public and the private domains of experience. For them, the church represented the body of Christ, with each member such an integral part that if one person were in distress the entire body writhed. Conversely, if the spiritual community was troubled, each person was afflicted. The single subject's striving towards salvation became an objective community mission, serving as an indication of the condition of the congregation just as the condition of the congregation was reflected in each member. With the extensive interdependence of personal and community history, stable times ensured not only personal assurance but also community assertion against traitors and aliens. But unstable times engendered community as well as personal self-castigation; in days of darkness the flock would delve into the depths of their souls to understand the source of God's anger and explain their plight through harsh scrutinies of each other's spiritual lapses. Once even a single sinner entered the holy order, the order remained in danger of disintegration. The community must stand together to defeat the threat, as in the instances of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams or at Salem in 1692.

A remarkable account of the encounter with evil is in *The Diary of the eminent minister Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)*. Born in Yorkshire, England, in 1631, Wigglesworth moved with his parents to New England in 1638 and settled in New Haven. A brilliant student, he studied with the famous schoolmaster Ezekiel Cheever and was writing tracts in Latin by the age of nine. After an interruption in his education consequent upon his father's five-year illness, he went to Harvard, where he studied theology as well as physiology, finished first in his class, obtained an A.B. and an A.M., and remained as a tutor until 1654. In 1655 he married his cousin Mary Reyner, and in 1656 he was ordained as the minister of the church at Malden. Then he entered an excruciating period of painful illness that so weakened him that he could not perform his clerical chores. In 1659, when Mary died, Wigglesworth's debilitation deepened. He declined the presidency of Harvard because he did not think his "bodily health and strength competent to undertake . . . such a weighty work."

In 1686, however, Wigglesworth experienced a remarkable rejuvenation. he resumed his duties in Malden, but shocked the community by marrying his housekeeper, Martha Mudge, who was twenty-five years younger than he and not a member of his church. But, as the marriage endured and reared six children, Wigglesworth ultimately regained the respect of his congregation and of the greater Puritan

association. Wigglesworth was married a third time, following Martha's death, to Sybil Avery in 1691, when he was sixty.

Wigglesworth's Diary for the years 1653 and 1657 documents his youthful fears of damnation brought on by nocturnal emissions, sexual desire, and masturbation, and his guilt feelings over his anger toward his father, especially about his inability to feel sorrow over his father's death. Wigglesworth's Diary is filled with the kind of statements that have given the Puritans a reputation for obsessive gloom.

"Innumerable evils compass me about, and prevail against me, wherefore I am afraid and ashamed and unable to see God still loving me with an everlasting love. I find so much of my spirit to go out unto the creative, unto mirth, that there is little savour of God left in my soul." His accounts of his interactions with his students suggests that "mirth" was probably fairly rare in Wigglesworth's life. "I set myself this day to wrestle with the Lord for myself and then for my pupils . . . but still I see the Lord shutting out my prayers . . . for he whom in special I prayed for, I heard in the evening with ill company playing musick, though I had solemnly warned him but yesterday of letting his spirit go after pleasures." The lamentations of Puritan diaries sometimes appear forced and formulaic, but the specificity of Wigglesworth's sorrowing to quote Emory Elliot, "gives convincing evidence of mental anguish."

The *Autobiography of Increase Mather* is more objective than the Wigglesworth Diary, but it too makes clear that even those who had the strongest reasons to expect sanctification experienced periodic incertitude throughout life. Often called the "foremost American Puritan," Increase was the son of the first-generation minister Richard Mather. He graduated from Harvard in 1656, completed a master's degree at Trinity College, Dublin, married the daughter of John Cotton, and was pastor of Old North Church, Boston, for almost sixty years. A prolific author, he published over a hundred works, including histories, sermons, tracts, treatises and a biography of his father. The most eminent minister in New England from about 1670 to the early 1700s, Mather socialised with the highest government officials and the wealthiest merchants. From 1685 to 1701, he served as president of Harvard, which he served through severe legal and financial crises. In 1688, he was chosen for a mission to England to entreat James II to restore the charter, and when William and Mary became the new sovereigns in 1689, Mather negotiated a new charter with them. Although he probably obtained as much for Massachusetts as was possible in that context, some criticized him for yielding too much and for using his political position to help his friends, especially his nominee for governor, Sir William Phelps. After Phelps's mediocre administration, Mather became embroiled in nasty political battles and suffered a decline of influence until his death in 1723.

Over the course of his life, Mather kept a diary, but in 1685 he decided to compose a formal autobiography from his many diary volumes. Writing for his children with no intention of publishing, he declared his purpose was to show them how his faith had been sustained through trials and tribulations. One of the most interesting features of this work is the way in which the idea of God's covenant with an individual developed, at least in Mather's mind, to a two-sided agreement in which God had certain obligations. At a low point in his youth, when he was awaiting both his temporal calling to his ministry and his eternal calling to grace, he wrote that "the Lord broke in upon my conscience with very terrible convictions and awakenings . . . I was in the extremity of anguish and horror in my soul." Unable to bear the torture, Mather actually dared to threaten God "that if He should not answer me graciously, others after my decease, that should see the papers which I had written, which I kept as remembrances of my talking before God would be discouraged."

Dilemmas, such as are expressed peripherally in the histories of Mather and Wigglesworth, are central to the poetry of the Puritans. The term "Puritan poetry" itself is somewhat of an oxymoron. In England, during the sixteenth century, Puritan radicals had warned that the senses were unreliable, that appeals to the imagination were dangerous, and that the use of imagistic, figurative, or symbolic language

bordered upon idolatry. Reasoning that God had inscribed all the truth that humanity needed in the scriptures, they held that plain and direct discussion of His word was the only truly legitimate and temperate mode of verbal expression. The Catholics' and the Anglicans' use of graven images, emphasis on pulpit paeans, appeals to congregations through music, and ornate vestments were further proof to the Puritans that artistry invited idolatry. The Puritans' iconoclastic destruction of religious statuary during the Civil War, their closing of the theatres, the plainness of their churches, and their official statements condemning ornate dress and speech strongly support a view that "Puritan poetry" was all but impossible.

Yet, from the 1940s through the 1960s, scholars continued to discover and exhibit innumerable Puritan poems, many of which contain provocatively striking decorative language and allusions not only to the Bible but also to classical models such as Ovid, Cicero, Virgil, Horace and Livy. Numerous poems also contain intertextual references to the work of contemporary poets, among them Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Herbert, Vaughan and Quarles. Such evidence of an apparent gap between Puritan theory and Puritan practice in the realm of poetry continues to appear.

EMINENT PURITANS



Cotton Mather

Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.



Judge Samuel Sewall (left) helped to burn witches, made public repentance, and wrote a chatty diary.

Photo by George M. Cushing, Jr., Courtesy, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.



John Winthrop, first governor under the Charter.



Rev. Richard Mather
Wood engraving by John Foster.



William Pynchon
Courtesy, Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.

It is important to remember that the Puritans who emigrated to New England had been, after all, heirs to a rich literary tradition, and many must have cherished the beauty of the language and the literature in spite of religious scruples. Eventually the ministers expanded their doctrines or discovered various intricacies in them that allowed an increase in the quantity and quality of artistic creations. By 1650, a major shift had become evident authorising writers to use sensual imagery more freely and even to strive consciously for stylization. A notable sign of this change was the revised translation of The Bay Psalm Book undertaken in 1651 by President Henry Dunster of Harvard and Richard Lyon, who said they had "a special eye" for "the sweetness of the verse." Cotton Mather later said of this edition that "it was thought that a little more of Art was to be employed upon the verses."

The movement toward verbal artistry received its strongest official endorsement from the eminent English Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-91) in his highly popular *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (1650). A military chaplain in the Puritan Army during the Civil War and a respected antipapist, Baxter could be trusted to deal safely with such sensitive issues such as the use of the senses, imagination and imagery in the poetic processes. Intended primarily as a handbook for tracking the stages of the saint's spiritual journey, Baxter's work also had important implications for legitimising literary invention because he endorsed appeals to the imagination. Baxter argued that God gave humanity a plastic language in order to enhance people's abilities to perceive his truths. Highlighting the many uses of images in the Bible, he proposed that "these with most other descriptions of our Glory are expressed as if it were the very flesh and sense, which though they were all improper and figurative, yet doubtless if such expressions had not been best, and to us necessary, the Holy Ghost would not have so frequently used them." Therefore, enjoins Baxter, people are obliged to use this God-given system and to take delight in the world of objects, which is itself an image, a text of God's instruction.

The other developing component of Puritan thought that served to certify a Puritan poetics was the more liberal employment of biblical typology. The routine clerical explications of the Old Testament types in the New Testament antitypes had established a mode of symbolic expression. In the early decades of the settlements, some clergy warned against the extension of this hermeneutic method, but, gradually the creative impulses of the Puritan ministers and other writers and the inviting vision of New England as New Jerusalem led to a most liberal use of typology. Opening the system towards more elaborate constructs engaging biblical types as well as historical events, moral formulations, and even the characters of well-known individuals. Present-day re-appraisals of Puritan poetry have served to reconfigure conceptions of Puritan poetics. With a new awareness that it was very possible for a Puritan poet to

strive intentionally for artfulness, readers have been less inclined to dismiss newly discovered productions and more open to recognising aesthetic achievement.

If Puritan poetry projected the dilemmas of individual Puritans in the process of adhering to their faith, this crisis of faith was addressed in a different way by the Puritan ministers in the sermons that they delivered to the collective group or the flock. Now known as the Puritan jeremiads, these sermons selected their texts from Jeremiah and Isaiah, and reinscribed a rhetorical formula that included recalling the courage and piety of the founders, lamenting recent and current ills, and crying out for a return to the original commitment and conviction. In current scholarship, the term "jeremiad" has expanded to include not only sermons but also other texts that rehearse the familiar tropes of the formula such as letters; covenant renewals, as well as confessions.

The specific circumstance in which the jeremiad emerged as a literary genre was a series of traumas that afflicted the Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1660 and 1690. These included impersonal disasters such as fires, floods, droughts, earthquakes, and the appearance of comets and human mishaps such as renewed fighting with the Indians, growing materialism, increasing occurrences of dissent from within the ranks and a general decline of the religious spirit.

Whether an actual decline of religious zeal among the Puritans in these decades did happen remains one of the most debated issues in Puritan scholarship. Church membership records suggest that the decline in membership may have been a myth born of the jeremiad ritual and the compulsion to place blame for what seemed otherwise to be inexplicable calamities. Yet a shared perception of moral deterioration accrued social and political force and inspired many of the colony's most interesting literary texts, and indeed, the trope of decline became central to later Puritan expressions.

Overall, the jeremiads had a complicated, seemingly contradictory, communal function. On the one hand, they were designed to awaken a lethargic people. On the other hand, in their repetitive and ritualistic nature, they functioned as a form of reassurance, reinscribing proof that the Puritans were still a united denomination who ruled New England in covenant with God and under his sometimes chastising and yet ultimately protective hand. The tension between these competing, yet finally reconciled, purposes gives the jeremiads their literary richness.

The most striking instance of this genre is Samuel Danforth's (1626-1674) *A Brief Record of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*, which was preached in 1670 and published the following year. Born in Framlingham, Suffolk, England, Danforth had lost his mother when he was three and came with his father to New England in 1634, when he was eight. He graduated from Harvard in 1643 and accepted a post as minister in Roxbury in 1650, where he served with John Eliot, whose missionary work among the Indians left Danforth to perform the major responsibilities of the parish. In 1651, Danforth married Mary Wilson of Boston, and they had twelve children, several of whom died young.

Although he took his text for his famous jeremiad from Mathew 11:7-9 and not Jeremiah or Isaiah, Danforth announced in his preface that his theme was the "loss of first love . . . being a radical disease too tremendously growing upon us," and he declared the "observation of that declension [was] justly calling for so meet an antidote." From a literary perspective, Danforth's project is particularly notable for its imaginative evocation of wilderness imagery and its incorporation, in the final pages, of a dramatic dialogue between Danforth and a community of fearful listeners. The text thus can be read as resonant with Christ's ironic dialogue with followers of John the Baptist upon John's return from the desert where he began his ministry. The Doctrine that Danforth draws from the text forms a typological connection between John and the Puritan founders: both are such as have sometimes left their pleasant

cities and habitations to enjoy the pure worship of God in a wilderness. Like those who followed John and eventually lost interest in his preaching, some Puritans "are apt in time to abate and cool in their affection." At which point, "the Lord calls upon them seriously and thoroughly to examine themselves, which it was that drew them into the wilderness."

The 1670s through the 1680s witnessed preachers using election days, fast days, funerals, executions, and any special events to perform the jeremiad ritual, and more often than not the emergent generation was the target. Increase Mather proved masterful in his exploitation of the genre, and with four such sermons each, he and his son Cotton preached more election sermons than any other ministers. In addition to his classic *Day of Trouble is Near* (1674), Increase's jeremiads included: *A Renewal of Covenant the Great Duty Incumbent on Decaying and Distressed Churches* (1677), *Pray for the Rising Generation* (1678), and *A Call from Heaven to the Present and Succeeding Generations* (1679). A few other titles of famous jeremiads convey a sense of the consistency of theme: William Adam's *The Necessity of Pouring Out of the Spirit from on High Upon a Sinning Apostatising People* (1679), Samuel Hooker's *Righteousness Regained From Heaven* (1677), Urian Oake's *New England Pleaded With* (1673), Thomas Sheppard Jr's *Eye-Salve, or a Watch-Word . . . To Take Heed of Apostasy* (1673), Jonathan Mitchell's *Nehemiah on the Wall in Troubled Times* (1671), and Thomas Walley's *Balm in Gilead to Heal Zion's Wounds* (1669).

Whether the clergy continued to preach jeremiads after the 1680s is not certain, but certain it is that fewer such sermons were printed in the eighteenth century. The sermons that were published were on the whole more encouraging and cheerful, less engrossed by the fall of moral standards and thus not quite quintessentially Puritan.

3.4 PURITANS LITERATURE VERSUS PURITAN IDEOLOGY, OR HOW PURITAN IDEOLOGY IS SOMETIMES SUBVERTED BY PURITAN LITERATURE

Curiously, the quintessentially Puritan author of the seventeenth century too had sometimes scripted texts that militated against the ideology of the Puritans. Two instances of such subversive authorship ought to suffice to prove this point. Anne Bradstreet, born in Northampton, England, was the daughter of Thomas Dudley, steward of the learned Puritan, the Earl of Lincoln. Brought up in aristocratic surroundings, she was given an education unusual for women at the period and enjoyed the resources of the Earl of Lincoln's magnificent library at Sempringham Castle. When she was sixteen, she married Simon Bradstreet, a graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, steward of the Countess of Warwick and, in a small way, protegee of Thomas Dudley. When she was eighteen, Anne, Simon and her parents sailed with John Winthrop aboard the *Arabella* for Massachusetts Bay, where both her husband and her father later became governors. An exemplary wife, house-keeper and mother of eight children, she was nevertheless a precursor of the "emancipated woman" of modern days because she could not fully reconcile herself to a life completely limited by children, kitchen and church. Apparently every minute she could do so she devoted to writing verses, letters, and diary notes. In these she not only showed her strength of character and her passionate love for her husband and children, but also her learning and her uneasiness about being unable to submit as constantly and dutifully as a good Puritan matron should to a total acceptance of the orthodox beliefs of her sect.

Her first book was taken in manuscript to London by John Woodbridge, a relative. In 1650 it was published in England under a title not of Mrs. Bradstreet's choosing: *The*

Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America. Or, several Poems, compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning, Full of Delight . . . By a Gentlewoman in those Parts. The poems were attempts to versify not only her moral and religious sentiments but also contemporary scientific ideas, and they reflected the psychology, physiology, physics, natural sciences, and "correspondences" of the Renaissance. Published as "Quaternions," the poems included the "The Four Elements," "The Four Ages of Man," "The Four Humours in Man's Constitution," "The Four Seasons of the Year" and "The Four Monarchies." As intellectual exercises, they speak of the influence of Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, Plutarch, Usher, Francis Quarles' *Emblems*, the Bible, and most particularly the Sylvester translation of *La Sermaine* by Guillaume due Bartas.

Comparatively little is known about the early years of Edward Taylor, America's greatest colonial poet. He was born in Leicestershire, England, either in Coventry or Sketchley, probably in 1645, and probably to a dissenting family. In any case, British universities were not hospitable to young Puritans during the persecutions of the 1660s; furthermore the loyalty oaths in favour of the monarchy required after the Restoration were repugnant to a man of Taylor's persuasions. Thus armed with letters of introduction to the influential Increase Mather, second generation New England minister, and the moneyed John Hull, Taylor arrived in Boston, in July 1668, a refugee in search of formal education. Subsequently he went to Harvard, where he earned distinctions and became a close friend of Samuel Sewall. He was graduated in 1671 and accepted a call to the ministry at Westfield, Massachusetts. There he spent the remaining fifty-eight years of his life as a physician and a passionate, engaging and brilliant pastor. He was married twice, had thirteen children, was honoured with a Master's degree by Harvard in 1720. This is about all that is known about the private life of Edward Taylor.

As far as his public life is concerned, of course, there is the remarkable manuscript book of poetry he produced. Although it is a mistake to think that the ecstasy expressed in his poems was not representative of Puritan piety, Taylor's occasional certitude of bliss and emphasis on joy came close to the heresies of Antinomianism, Pelagianism and "enthusiasm." Much later, his grandson, President Ezra Stiles of Yale, presented the manuscripts to the Yale library in 1783. In 1937, Thomas H. Johnson announced the discovery of this hitherto obscure exemplar of colonial literature in an article published in the *New England Quarterly*. In 1939 Johnson published selections from the manuscripts in the form of a compilation. The basic groupings of the manuscript book are "God's Determinations," which in highly unorthodox fashion celebrates the primacy of divine mercy rather than justice for man caught in the continuing war between Christ and Satan; "Five Poems;" and "Sacramental Meditations," which expresses a fervent yearning for an expectation of ecstasy in acceptance by Christ.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I have tried to outline the Puritan theory of literature insofar as such a theory exists and is to be extrapolated out of the literary practices of the Puritans. Special attention has been accorded to the Puritans' selection of literary styles and literary genres. Instances of how the 'literary' often militates against the 'ideological' in the realm of Puritan writing receives special concentration in this Unit.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Outline some of the outstanding tenets of the literary theory of the Puritans.

2. Comment on how the Puritans' selection of literary styles and literary genres abides by the tenets of their literary theory.
3. Give instances of how Puritan literature might militate against Puritan ideology.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Same as for Unit 1, and

Marcus Cunliffe. Ed. *American Literature to 1900 (The Penguin History of Literature)*, 1973.

Sacvan Bercovitch. Ed. *The Cambridge History of American Literature Volume One, 1590-1820*, 1994.

A.N. Kaul, *The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 1963.

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Sacvan Bercovitch, Ed. *Typology and Early American Literature*, 1972.

UNIT 4 SOME "OTHER" CONTEXTS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction: The Quaker context, or the context absorbed.
- 4.2 The Indian context, or the context eliminated.
- 4.3 The Black context, or the context invisibilised.
- 4.4 The Poor White context, or the context overshadowed
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Readings.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In my Introduction to this Block I had asserted that I would use the Block to enlarge upon some contexts of American literature "other" than the Puritan context which has, till recently, received inordinate attention from American Studies scholars as being the only context for the American cultural enterprise including the production of its literary texts. The other contexts thus suppressed included the Quaker context, the Indian context, the Black context and the Poor White context, all of which indispensably went into the making of the Puritan self.

4.1 INTRODUCTION: THE QUAKER CONTEXT, OR THE CONTEXT ABSORBED

By the turbulent 1680s, in the aftermath of the republican experiment and before the Glorious Revolution, England and its empire were in the throes of numerous controversies over constitutional liberties and autocratic power. Against this backdrop arose a sect of Christians, inspired by a man named George Fox, who had turned away from every established church, Catholic, Anglican and Puritan in search of the true road to God. These were the Quakers.

The Quakers believed that divine guidance was not to be found in any outward church, or even in the Bible (though the latter was of course central to all faith). It was to be found in the voice of conscience, which is God's voice. Neither rituals nor clergy were needed. Even taking the sacraments in church was unnecessary. One's whole life was instead to be a continuing baptism, in the sense of resisting sensual evils, and a continuing communion, in the sense of a union with Christ.

The purpose of a religious gathering, what the Quakers called a meeting, was to commune jointly, in silence, with the indwelling spirit. If a member felt called upon to rise and speak, he was to do so freely and without concern for his lack of clerical training. The Quakers were distrustful of learning, for they felt it led to the sin of pride in self. True preaching came not from a learned and arrogant ministry, they believed, but from within the body of the meeting in the persons of "god-called" ministers.

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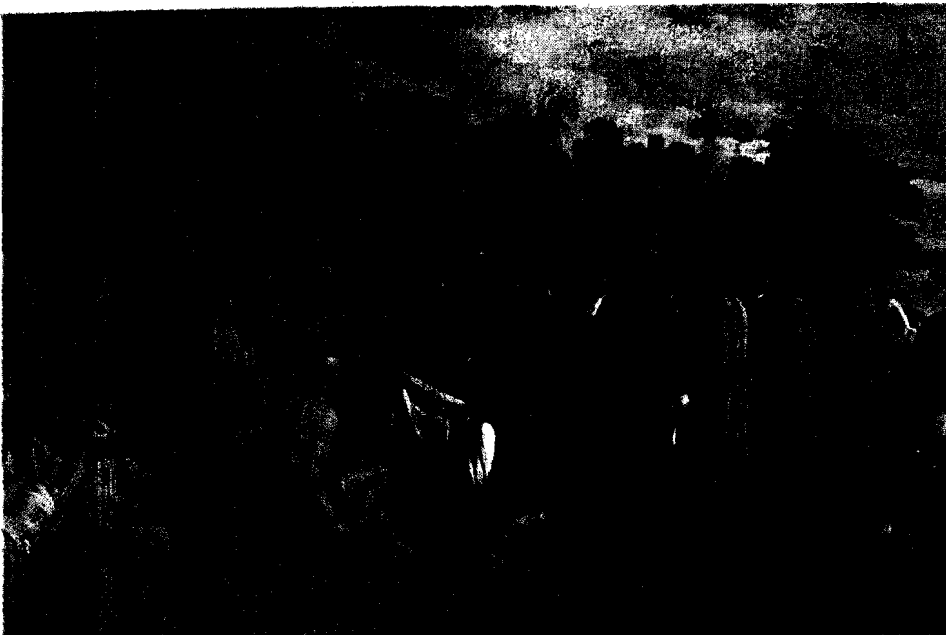
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The Quakers insisted upon living inviolate and orderly lives of thrift and frugality. Every person should have a "calling," a committed engagement to work in this world. Even in jail, the Quakers busily set about working at crafts and skills. These habits helped to make them well-to-do merchants, leading to the wry jest that they were people with one foot in the meeting house and the other in the counting house.

But though the Quakers had a lot in common with the Puritans, the two sects held theological opinions opposed to one another. The Puritans were horrified by the Quakers belief in the perfectability of all human beings. If there is evil in the world, declared the Quakers, it lies in external institutions of hierarchy, power and violence, not inside the human heart. Where Puritans thought of God as supreme authority, and in his image built strong institutions of government, in which the magistrate was central, the Quakers regarded God as absolute love, and in his image built a civil society without supervisory or superintending structures.

Thus, the Quakers sought to apply the Sermon on the Mount in the most literal sense, creating a world of equality and fraternity here and now. They aided the poor and the destitute, and were the first to condemn slavery. They believed in complete equality between men and women--women had leading roles as charismatic leaders in the Quaker movement--as well as between everyone in society. They would not refer to anyone as "Mister" (which originally meant "master"), called the King "Charles" instead of "King Charles," and always used the familiar forms "thee" and "thou" instead of the more formal "you" in interpersonal conversation. Since "hat honour" was insisted upon in seventeenth century European life (inferiors always took off their head covering in the presence of superiors), Quakers wore theirs even in the king's presence.

The Quakers grew in numbers, reaching perhaps 60,000 by the 1680s, but this was in the face of sheer repression. It was common for a Quaker congregation to be fined thousands of pounds for not attending Anglican services, for Quakers by the thousands to be imprisoned or to have their livelihood denied them for not taking oaths. What they wanted, therefore, was to find a place of refuge abroad, some place in the king's empire where they might live in peace--and, they hoped, attract converts by the virtue and purity of their lives and religion. For years this searching went on, into the islands of the Caribbean and on the North American mainland.



William Penn sealing the 1683 treaty under which Indians and settlers prospered in peace and mutual respect

In 1674 a group of Quakers, including the gifted William Penn, joined to buy the western half of New Jersey as their place of settlement. As an oppressed minority

they were acutely conscious of the need for guaranteed fundamental rights, and the constitution that William Penn wrote for West New Jersey--the Concessions and Agreement--was strikingly liberal. It established an annually elected assembly that was fully independent of the executive. Settlers were guaranteed full due process in court (confrontation of accusers, the right to cross-examination, and the admission of evidence), and trial by jury. There was to be neither life imprisonment nor capital punishment, both novel provisions centuries ahead of their age. Everyone in West Jersey was also guaranteed complete religious freedom, for there would be no established state church. Liberal land provisions were offered to attract settlers, and within a few years hundreds of settlers, mainly Quakers had arrived. (All of New Jersey became a royal colony in 1702, the two halves being merged under a unified government that was provided by New York Colony until 1738.)

A far grander "holy experiment" was set in motion in 1681. King Charles II had owed a large debt to William Penn's dead father, and to repay it he granted to William Penn--a close friend of the Duke of York--a huge proprietary colony (that is, Penn personally owned the land, and had absolute powers of government), Pennsylvania, including what is now Delaware, which had already been settled by Swedes and Dutch. Now, half a century after John Winthrop had taken his company of Puritan settlers to New England to begin their attempt at building a utopian Christian society, Penn and the Quakers set out on a similar adventure.

Pennsylvania was outstandingly prosperous from the beginning. Its rich farmlands attracted a constant stream of settlers, who produced a bountiful supply of food to be sold abroad. Philadelphia was quickly settled by experienced merchants from London and from towns elsewhere in the colonies. By the mid-eighteenth century they had made Philadelphia the third commercial city in the British Empire, after London and Bristol.

Through personal religious ties, Quaker merchants had contacts all over the North Atlantic commercial world, from Germany to the Caribbean. It was not uncommon for an intermarried network of merchants to connect Madeira, London, Barbados, Newport, and New York, and then work together in assisting one another. In London itself there was a vigorous community of Quaker merchants who aided their counterparts in Philadelphia. In the same letters they sent, along with denominational news, reports on crops, prices and finances also.

Pennsylvania's wealthy men soon invested in western lands, reselling at higher prices to incoming farmers. Many of them sought land for the same reason that the aristocracy did in England did--to provide social eminence as well as income. Quaker merchants also were not long in starting to build iron foundries. Because of this, Pennsylvania has been uniquely identified with the metals trade since the colonial days. Based upon this and other enterprises, an aristocracy grew up in Pennsylvania comparable to that of the planters in the Chesapeake and Carolina colonies, the patroons in the Hudson valley and the merchant princes of Boston.

However, though they were so like the Puritans in their ways of living (if not in their religious beliefs), in one great particular they differed--they could abide dissent. Indeed, allowing people to dissent, and to believe in and practice their own different faiths in their own diverse ways, was the bedrock of the Quakers' social policy. In turn, this principle would create so great a babble of creeds and sects in their colony of Pennsylvania that their own distinctive identity would be lost.

4.2 THE INDIAN CONTEXT, OR THE CONTEXT ELIMINATED

If the Quakers lost their identity due to their own catholicity, the Indians of New England did not have much of a choice but to do so. (You will remember that

'Indians' refers to the original inhabitants of America before the arrival of the English, and not to people of India)

By the 1670s the Indians of New England were desperate. Ever since the brief Pequot War of 1637, they had kept their heads low, traded a dwindling supply of furs for guns and alcohol and gems, and watched their cultures, their identity, and their territories declining. Meanwhile, the wealthy and healthy Puritans were growing rapidly in numbers, from 25,000 in 1650 to 50,000 in 1675. Several thousand "praying Indians" tried to emulate white ways, but a rising generation of proud younger Indians looked upon them with contempt and burned for revenge against the humiliations their people were suffering.

Metacom, the leader of the Wampanoags (the New Englanders called him King Phillip), had for years brooded over his tribe's fate. In 1671 he had been forced to accept a treaty of absolute submission to white authority in all land sales. Soon thereafter, there began gathering around him a movement of resistance to the whites. The moment of crisis was approaching: either the whites were going to be expelled and the Indians could recapture their pride and dignity with their erstwhile lands, or utter defeat would have to be accepted.

When in spring 1675 a praying Indian revealed the Wampanoag's plans, he was put to death. Consequently, three Indians accused of the crime were hung under New England's laws, following a white man's trial. Now a guerilla campaign began against isolated New England villages and settlements. Militia troops were raised to retaliate; the alarm went out through all New England and through the summer of that year an elusive Metacom, joined by other tribes, engaged in battle after battle. In time the whole New England frontier was in flames. The fighting continued for months, on into the winter and then to the spring of 1676. By that time, New England settlers were streaming back to towns nearer the coast and the upper Connecticut valley was ravaged. Towns less than twenty miles from Boston were under attack.



Plymouth, 1621. Indians join colonists in three days of thanks for best harvest.

The demands of life in the New World left little time for festivity, but artists of the early years, and many since, have created a history of impressions—moments of light-heartedness, drudgery, and decision for the young country.

But the conflict had become one of simple endurance, and the Indians were running out of food and fire power. Fleeing westward they ran into the barrier of the Iroquois, their traditional enemies. Turning back to their ancestral lands, they again came under attack. In the summer of 1676 surrenders began; leaders were executed, or sold into slavery in the West Indies. In August 1676 Metacom was slain.

The first of the great Indian wars was over, but it had been a shocking holocaust, easily among the most savage and costly of all such conflicts in American history.

The Five Tribes of the Iroquois were different from the other Indians whom the colonists encountered. Occupying the Mohawk Valley in New York, their powerful confederacy with its 10,000 people terrified all other interior tribes. They undertook widely-ranging campaigns over vast distances, sending other Indians fleeing in terror before them and redistributing the whole interior pattern of tribal residence.

Curiously enough, when not at war they were extremely mellow and urbane. The Iroquois based life within their confederacy on arrangements for individual freedom and government by consent of the governed that contrasted sharply with the situation in most European countries. Their principal chiefs were known as "powerful reasoners," wise and formidable men who relied on a clear and distinct set of ideas for guidance. Moved by some inexplicable genius, they had been able to construct an enlightened and enduring confederacy in the midst of an Indian world characterised by dissipation and disintegration. Common concerns of the confederated tribes were settled through representative interactive councils and not by the use of force.

The prime mover of this inspiring confederation was an extraordinary individual named Hiawatha. Inspired by another extraordinary individual named Deganawidah who had a transcendent vision of universal human bonding, Hiawatha attempted to unify the then endemically conflicting Iroquois tribes by moving back and forth from tribe to tribe, trying to teach them to live peacefully with the rest of the tribes.

The government of the Iroquois confederacy was fashioned thereafter under the guidance of Deganawidah and Hiawatha. A completely civil confederacy, it did not allow warriors to be representatives to the federal councils, for they might tend to take warlike stands. Each tribe had a given number of representatives, who could be removed for wrong-doing by their own tribes. The "capital" of the Iroquois League moved about; it was located near the present town of Cazenovia, New York (south of Syracuse), when white men came into contact with the confederacy.

In their relationship with white men, the Iroquois tried to play off the "inimical" French against the "friendly" British. In order to cement their friendship with the British, the Iroquois became the middlemen in the fur trade, delivering to Albany what would otherwise have gone to Montreal. Thus they ruled virtually uncontested over an empire of thousands of square miles, from the Atlantic to Lake Superior, from Canada to the Tennessee River.

Yet it was their alliance with the British that proved to be their undoing, implicating them in the British defeat in the American War of Independence. Thus ended a unique empire devoted to humanitarian ideals of liberty and fraternity, conceived and executed by an Indian people prior to the arrival of the whites--and surviving even today in the traditions of the Iroquois who still live in the Mohawk Valley.

4.3 THE BLACK CONTEXT, OR THE CONTEXT INVISIBILISED

Even as the Indians were encountering the onslaught of white power, material as well as cultural, the whites were engaged in importing yet another ethnic group into America with the express purpose of exploiting them to erect their own structures of state and civil society.

The African slave trade first began in the 1500s, bringing workers to the Spanish empire and to the large Portuguese possession, Brazil. Indeed Africans have always made up a larger proportion of the Brazilian population than they ever have that of North America. It was common in large parts of the country for slaves to outnumber whites three to one. Indeed it could be stated without hyperbole that the influence of Africa upon Brazil was second only to that of Portugal.

When the English founded their North American colonies in the 1600s, people of African descent appeared within them almost as soon as the whites. In a famous event in 1619, the first group of black slaves (possibly indentured servants) disembarked at Virginia. During the 1630s, the first colonial laws were enacted formally establishing the institution of slavery.

The Virginians of 1619 were in dire straits. Among them were the survivors from the winter of 1609-1610, the "starving time," when, crazed for want of food, they roamed the woods for nuts and berries and dug up graves to eat the corpses of those unfortunate fellow-colonists who died in batches till, all in all, they were reduced to sixty in number.

The Virginians needed labour, to grow corn for subsistence and to grow tobacco for marketing. They had just figured out how to grow tobacco, and in 1617 they sent off the first cargo to England earning a decent profit.

They could not force the Indians to work for them. They were outnumbered, and while, with superior firearms, they could massacre Indians they could not capture them and keep them enslaved; the Indians were rough and tough, and at home in these woods as the transplanted Englishmen were not.

White servants had not yet been brought over in sufficient quantity. Besides, they did not come out of slavery, and did not have to do more than contract their labour for a few years to get their passage and a start in the land they had arrived at. Such labourers were kept at their work by making settlement difficult so they could not live as independent farmers, or their terms of service were extended (which was often done, by various devices), or were kept poor. This produced a permanently turbulent, potentially explosive lower class.

The alternative was the use of black slaves. To their credit, the Virginians actually did not create the institution of slavery. Black slaves were commonly available as a regular item of trade. Using slaves, then, meant simply keeping them in the condition once purchased, and dispensing with the use of those troublesome white servants.

Naturally the English colonists started taking a major role in stimulating the enormous movement of people from Africa to America. Perhaps more people made this crossing, in fact, than from Europe. A conservative estimate is that during the whole course of the slave trade, perhaps 15 million Africans were delivered alive from one end of the America to the other. The number who perished either in Africa during long slave journeys or on the infamous slave ships might approach that figure. Starvation and sicknesses in the slaveships' stinking holds took a frightful toll. The Africans also fought back against their captivity, whenever and wherever they could, in bloody battles with their captors. On other occasions, captives simply flung themselves en masse into the sea to drown, turning in the water to shout derisively before disappearing from sight.

Colonists intentionally imported male as well as female slaves, so that the slaves had children, whom the owners got free of charge. Between 1700 and 1750 Virginia planters acquired about 45,000 slaves, but the black population actually increased during those years from perhaps 10,000 to 100,000. In such a situation, profits could be excellent, for a burgeoning labour supply meant burgeoning sales of tobacco.

Gradually slaves were employed in a diversity of jobs, as metal workers, miners, builders and the like. However, their primary utilisation continued to be in agriculture, on plantations where gang labour and disciplined group endeavour were practised.



Auction of Slaves

Charlestown, July 24th, 1769.

TO BE SOLD,

On THURSDAY the third Day
of AUGUST next,

A CARGO
OF
NINETY-FOUR
PRIME, HEALTHY

NEGROES,

CONSISTING OF
Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS,
Twenty-four WOMEN, and
Sixteen GIRLS.

JUST ARRIVED,
In the Brigantine DEMBIA, *Francis Bare*, Master, from SIERRA-
LEON, by
DAVID & JOHN DEAS.

Slave traders announced their sales in newspaper advertisements and broadsides like this one, from South Carolina. Note the imbalanced sex ratio among the slaves in the cargo. American Antiquarian Society.

Slavery came to Virginia in a big way when planters stopped buying the contracts of white servants. By the end of 1600s possibly half of the Virginia labour force consisted of slaves and the balance swung swiftly in that direction thereafter. The inflow of white indentured servants from England into Virginia dwindled away, which meant that the later inflow of white freed men into Virginia life also subsided. Now the threat of an angry labouring class of truculent white men was somewhat mitigated. Labour became more or less attached to skin colour. All white men increasingly had something to share, whether rich or poor: their status as free whites above enslaved blacks. This made for a powerful bond between white people.

No less than the Europeans, the black slaves brought from Africa varied widely in skin colour, appearance, stature and culture. They came from ancient societies with highly developed states, some of them so powerful that, except for tiny trading posts here and there, Europeans made no attempt to conquer the vast interior of Africa for Africans did not leave their cultural heritage behind when they were forced into slavery. This unique painting, done in 1775 or after, shows slaves passing their few hours of leisure on a Sunday or holiday with a dance. Several identifiably African elements appear in the picture. The drum and banjo-like instrument are both of African origin, as are the scarves and cane used in the tribal dance. The blue-and-white bandannas worn by two of the women are similar to Yoruba cloth (from West Africa). Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, Virginia.



hundreds of years after the slave trade began. Slave seekers, traded with the Africans, arriving off the coastline and sending in boats; they themselves did not trek into the interior and capture slaves.

In the great African principalities, as in contemporary late medieval Europe, slavery was widespread. In Europe and Africa it was simply an extreme form of servanthip applied to captured men and women from outside the nation or faith. Christians in Europe had given up enslaving other Christians, but infidels did not fall within the ambit of humane consideration. The slave in Africa, however, was treated more like a human being, who could marry, keep his family together, and progress out of slavery. Only in America, and particularly in the English colonies, did the idea evolve of the slave as a sub-human kind of chattel, to be bought and sold like a piece of real estate.

In their homelands, the Africans had developed a culture that was not only rich, but also intricate. The village unit (in which most Africans lived) had its skilled labour class, which was frequently divided into guilds of potters, weavers, wood-carvers and metal-workers. Agriculture was a highly organised communal undertaking since the land belonged to the entire village. In the interior regions, the African economy was largely pastoral, centring on the raising of goats, sheep and cattle. Great aggregations of interrelated people constituted kinship networks presided over by a patriarch. This person, in consultation with elders, served as judge, administrator, treasurer and diplomat.

African society was embedded in a rich cultural life in which sophisticated sculpturing in bronze, wood and ivory played an important part in religious observance. Complex musical compositions, involving instruments such as the violin, guitar, flute, zither, harp, and xylophone, enlivened every aspect of life. Dancing likewise was intimately intertwined with daily life. African literature, like the literature of the Indians of America, was basically oral, and like Indian-American literature, was rich in scientific information, history and poetic nuances.

For a while, the slave was thought of as an indentured servant, similar in status to but different from an English person labouring in the fields under contract. Certainly there appeared to have been free blacks in Virginia and Maryland not long after the use of slaves began. This was because English law in the seventeenth century did not recognise slavery, and there was a considerable period during which the legal status of slaves in the mainland colonies was in question.

The uncertainty regarding the black person's position as a slave however had been settled long before 1700. Enslaved men and women were clearly owned for life as were their children. They were not yet fully depressed into the legal condition of a mere piece of property with no democratic or personal rights, but that status was not far away. Eventually, American slavery became one of the most absolute forms of enslavement known to history. Chattel slavery, where marriages were not recognised in law, where slaves had virtually no authority other than their master, existed only in the English-speaking colonies. (In India, too, as you know, the custom of 'bonded labour' for life existed under the 'zamindars' or land-lords.)

Certain revolutionary alterations in the English economy over the seventeenth century had allowed for the release of the entrepreneur from any government controls and consequently granted owners of property, whether in the form of land, or goods, or chattel slaves, the liberty to handle their property entirely as they desired. That this vastly energised the English economy is without question, but the "progress" was questionable when looked at through the lens of social and moral values.

The planters of Virginia and of the other southern colonies of North America inherited this economic system. They were free to treat their chattel absolutely

according to their whims and fancies. The state and the several churches were impotent in the matter of regulating the management of slaves by their masters because financially they were wholly dependent upon their white patrons. Therefore, the "peculiar institution" of slavery in the English colonies thrived very much under laissez faire conditions.

4.4 THE POOR WHITE CONTEXT, OR THE CONTEXT OVERSHADOWED

The use of blacks as slaves, in some measure, spared whites from coming to terms with the class schisms within their own society. But the schisms were by no means eliminated altogether.

In 1676, seventy years after Virginia was founded, the colony faced a rebellion of white frontiersmen, supported by servants and slaves, a rebellion so intense that the governor had to flee the burning capital of Jamestown, and England decided to send a thousand soldiers across the Atlantic, hoping to restore order among the forty thousand colonists. This was Bacon's Rebellion.

Bacon's Rebellion began with conflict over how to deal with the Indians who, on the western frontier, constantly threatened those whites who had gone to settle there after having been denied lucrative land grants around Jamestown.

Violence had escalated on the frontier before the rebellion. Some Doeg Indians took a few hogs to redress a debt, and the whites, retrieving the hogs, murdered two Indians. The Doegs then took out a war party to kill a white herdsman, after which a white militia company killed twenty-four Indians. This led to a series of Indian raids with the Indians, outnumbered, turning to guerilla warfare. The government at Jamestown declared war on the Indians, but proposed to exempt those Indians who cooperated. This seemed to anger the frontierspeople, who wanted total war but also resented the high taxes assessed to pay for the war.

Times were hard in 1676. It was a dry summer, ruining the corn crop, which was needed for food and the tobacco crop, needed for foreign exchange. The great mass of people lived in severe economic straits. Governor Berkeley, in his seventies, tired of holding office, wrote wearily about his situation: "How miserable that man is that Governes a People where six parts of seaven at least are Poore Endebted Discontented and Armed."

His phrase "six parts of seaven" suggests the existence of an upper class not so poor. In fact, there was such a class already developed in Virginia. Nathaniel Bacon, the leader of Bacon's Rebellion, himself came from this class, had a good bit of land, and was probably less enthused about redressing class grievances than about killing Indians. But, as historian Howard Zinn has analysed, he became a symbol of class resentment against the Virginia establishment, making it through the mandate of an election to the legislative assembly of Virginia.

When Bacon insisted on organising armed detachments to fight the Indians, outside official control, Berkeley proclaimed him a rebel and had him captured, whereupon two thousand Virginians marched into Jamestown to support him. Berkeley let Bacon go, in return for an apology, but Bacon went off, gathered his militia, and began raiding the Indians.

Bacon died soon after of natural causes, and the rebellion fizzled out. A task-force of thousand soldiers sent from England managed to subdue the rebel garrisons, comprising freemen, servants and slaves, by a combination of guile and force. At the end of the operations, twenty-three rebel leaders were hanged.

It was a complex chain of oppression in Virginia. The Indians were plundered by white frontiersmen, who were pillaged by the Jamestown elite. And the whole colony was being exploited by England, which bought the colonists' tobacco at prices it dictated and made 100,000 pounds a year for the King.

For the masses of Virginia, however, the governor represented the most visible source of their exploitation, and as Richard Lee, a member of the Governor's Council, noted, their support of Bacon in his conflict with the governor was prompted by "hopes of levelling."

"Levelling" meant equalising the wealth. Levelling was to be behind countless actions of poor whites against the rich in all the English colonies, in the century and a half before the Revolution.

The people who joined Bacon's Rebellion were part of a large underclass of miserably poor whites who came to the North American colonies from European cities whose governments were anxious to be rid of them. In England, the development of commerce and capitalism in the 1500s and 1600s, the enclosing of land for the production of wool, filled the cities with vagrant poor, and from the reign of Elizabeth on, laws were passed to punish them, imprison them in workhouses, or exile them.

In the 1600s and 1700s, by forced exile, by lures, promises, force, and by their urgent need to escape the living conditions of the home country, poor people wanting to go to America became commodities of profit for merchants, ship captains and eventually their masters in America. Abbot Smith, in his study of indentured servitude, *Colonists in Bondage*, writes, "From the complex pattern of forces producing emigration to the American colonies stands out clearly as most powerful in causing the movement of servants. This was the pecuniary profit to be made by shipping them."

Indentured servants were bought and sold like slaves. Servants had few rights, could not marry without permission and could be separated from their families. Beatings and whippings of servants was common. Servant women were raped.

Finding their situation intolerable, and rebellion impractical in an increasingly organised society, servants reacted in individual ways. Sometimes they were just lazy and disobedient. Sometimes they hit out physically at their masters. Many sought to annul their bondage through escape. And a few went on strike.

But those poor whites in America who were not servants did not have an easy time either. It is quite clear that class lines hardened through the colonial period and the distinction between rich and poor became sharper. While the deprived majority scrounged around for a livelihood, the privileged minority within the nascent cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston monopolised the wealth and resources of an expanding economy.

Everywhere the poor were struggling to stay alive, simply to maintain themselves at a subsistence level of existence. All the cities built poorhouses in the 1730s, not just for old people, orphans, widows and crippled, but for new immigrants, war veterans and unemployed. In New York, at midcentury, the city alm house, built for one hundred homeless, was housing over four hundred. A Philadelphia citizen wrote in 1748: "It is remarkable what an increase of the number of Beggars there is about this town this winter." In 1757, Boston officials spoke of "a great Number of Poor . . . who can scarcely procure from day to day daily Bread for themselves and their families."

The colonies, it seems, were societies of contending classes--a fact obscured by the emphasis, in traditional histories, on the external struggle against England, the unity of colonists in the American Revolution. The country therefore was not "born free" but born native and alien, slave and free, servant and master, poor and rich. As a result, the political authorities were opposed "frequently, vociferously, and sometimes violently," according to sociologist Gary Nash. "Outbreaks of disorder punctuated the last quarter of the seventeenth century, toppling established governments in Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina."

With the existing problem of Indian hostility, and the increasing danger of slave revolts, the emerging problem of the disaffection among poor whites, servants as well as otherwise, troubled the colonial elite. As the colonies passed their hundredth year and went into the middle of the 1700s, as the gap between rich and poor widened, as violence and the threat of violence escalated, the problem of control became serious.

What if these different despised groups--the Indians, the slaves, the poor whites--should combine? Bacon's Rebellion was an especially fearsome event in the opinion of the rulers of Virginia because in it white servants and black slaves joined forces. The final surrender was by "four hundred English and Negroes in Armes" at one garrison, and three hundred "freeman and African and English bond-servants" in another garrison. The naval commander who subdued the four hundred wrote: "Most of them I persuaded to goe to their Homes, which accordingly they did, except about eighty Negros and twenty English which would not deliver their Armes."

A significant factor which came in the way of such subaltern unity on a wider scale was the development, by the end of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, of a white middle class, formed in the new cities, of independent farmers and moneyed tradespeople, who, given some rewards for making common cause with merchants and planters, would be a solid buffer against poor whites, slaves and Indians. These middle-class Americans might be invited to join a new elite by, on the one hand, being assured protection against competition from members of "other" races and, on the other hand, being seduced with aspirations of emulating the established rich.

The *Pennsylvania Journal* wrote in a typical piece in 1756: "The people of this province are generally of the middling sort, and at present pretty much upon a level. They are chiefly industrious farmers, artificers or men in trade; they enjoy and are fond of freedom, and the meanest among them thinks he has a right to civility from the greatest." Indeed, there was already a substantial middle-class fitting that description, not only in Pennsylvania but in most other states of America. But to call them "the people," as did the *Pennsylvania Journal*, was to omit the displaced Indians, the black slaves and the desperate poor whites.

The contexts of these ignored groups were hardly ever considered in dominant accounts of the American literature canon, although it was through the very process of their marginalisation that the canonical texts and context of American literature, as we have known them over decades, established themselves as such.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I have tried to account for some "other" contexts of American literature which the Puritan context, till recently taken as the only context of this literature, managed to sideline and even suppress. These include the Quaker context, the Indian context, the Black context and the Poor White context, all of which, in their very marginalisation, made possible the projection exclusively of the Puritan context of American literature.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. In what ways were the early Quakers in America similar to, yet different from, the early Puritans in America?
2. Give an account of how the first white settlers in America ensured that neither the culture of the Indians nor the culture of the Blacks would supersede, or even survive, their own?
3. How did the white elite in the English colonies of North America during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries prevent a united assault against themselves by the poor whites, the slaves and the Indians?

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Same as for Unit 1, and

E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class, Authority and Leadership*, 1979.

Edwin B. Bronner, *William Penn's "Holy Experiment": The Founding of Pennsylvania 1681-1701*, 1962.

Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*, 1975.

Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America*, 1974.

Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 1975.

John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, 1979.

Carl Bridanbaugh, *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen 1590-1642*, 1968.

Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social History*, 1971.

UNIT 5 FROM THE COLONIAL TO THE FEDERAL: THE CONTEXTS OF THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction: The material basis of the American Enlightenment
- 5.2 The Enlightenment in America.
- 5.3 Slavery and the Enlightenment.
- 5.4 The American Woman of the Eighteenth Century
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to take stock of the contexts of American literature produced between the period of the early European colonial settlements in America and the formation of a federal association of these colonies in the wake of their struggle to achieve independence from the domination of the government in England. This period is often referred to as the period of the American Enlightenment, taking off from the Enlightenment in England in terms of its ideas and ideals. Some of these ideas and ideals, as well as their exponents are presented in the Unit. The Unit intends to offset the 'optimism' of the Enlightenment ideology in general by focussing upon certain 'darker' aspects of the Enlightenment period.

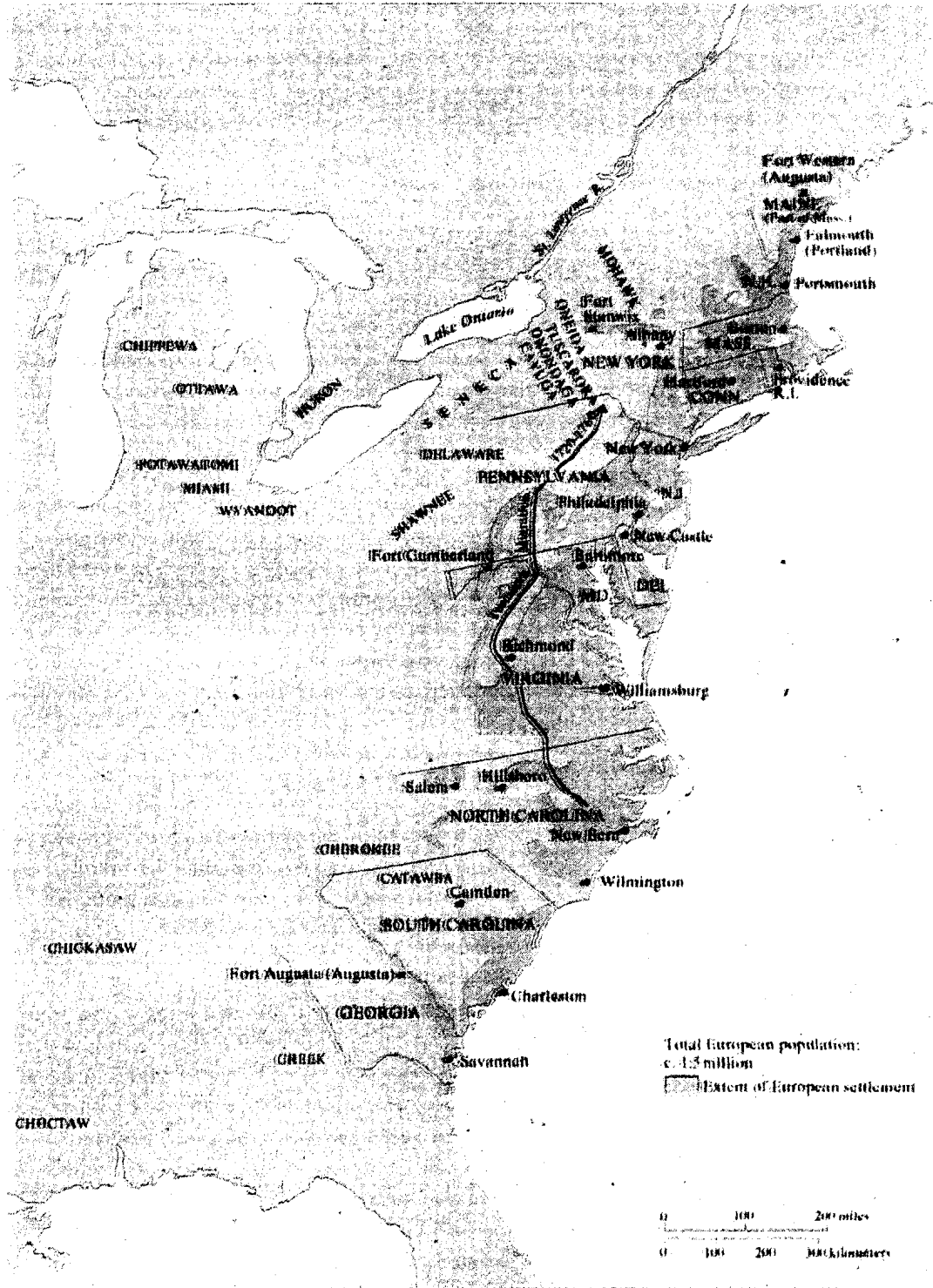
5.1 INTRODUCTION: THE MATERIAL BASIS OF THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

By the early 1700s two distinct economic worlds had taken shape in the colonies, generally north and south of Pennsylvania's southern border. One exported two crops, rice and tobacco, to Europe, and was in the process of constructing all its ways of living and thinking around a unique institution: chattel slavery. The other consisted overwhelmingly of, not the big planters such as those who owned the tobacco and rice plantations but, of small farmers free of feudal obligations to anyone superior to them. These two societies were unlike anything in the British Isles or in Europe as a whole.

The distinction between the southern and the northern colonies gradually began to be erased with the expansion of agricultural activities in the north to the extent that the colonies there started exporting their produce, contrary to their earlier practice, to the colonies in the south and beyond, to the West Indies. To facilitate this emerging commerce, by the 1720s a common paper currency was floated, bringing with it prospects of profit and riches. Soon, the placid colonies were living through a boom period.

At the hub of this boom was the new-look colonial city, no longer an extension of the countryside that it once used to be. Immigrants were beginning to pour in from

Germany and Ireland in the 1720s, and thousands of slaves were being purchased in the South. A high-rate of survival among American-born white children, who were reared in far healthier surroundings than children in Europe--eight live children in a family, as against four in Europe, was common--accelerated the rise of population, as did a relatively low death rate. In 1700 there had been approximately 250,000 people in the colonies. By 1775 there would be about 2,250,000 (and 5,300,000 by 1800) including people belonging to the indigenous tribes. A modern, multicultural America was in the making.



European settlements and Indian tribes, 1750

Transatlantic trade flourished, and settlement slowly but surely stretched beyond the limited coastal beachlands of the seventeenth century into the fertile back country, soon reaching the Appalachian Mountains and entering their long interior valleys.

5.2 THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN AMERICA

One of the many fascinating imports flowing into America from Europe after 1700 was a new way of thinking about God, nature, and humanity: the Enlightenment. Founded in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and especially in the work of towering English thinkers, like the physicist Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Enlightenment thought was consciously scientific, rational and this-worldly. As such, Enlightenment thinking became for a small minority of educated Americans a critique as well as a counter to classic, traditional Protestantism. Henceforth, these two ways of thinking would inter-mingle in the American mind, producing a curious and contradictory blend of theistic belief and sceptical humanism.

The New Learning arrived with a dramatic suddenness in 1714, when Yale received a gift of books on Newtonian physics and Lockean philosophy.



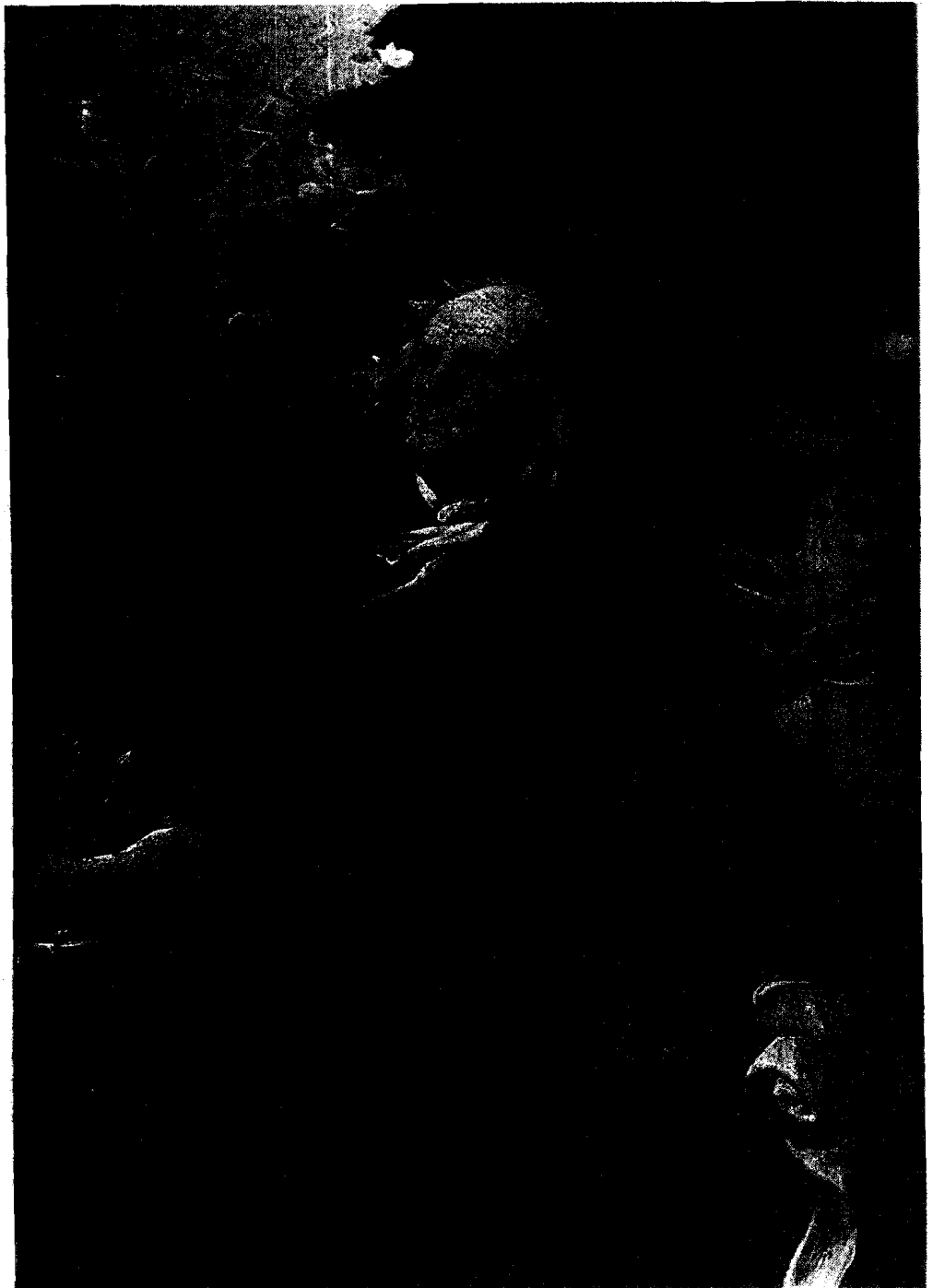
Harvard College (1726) founded by the Puritans

Newton simply wiped away the traditional view of the universe, brilliantly demonstrating how a few laws of physics could explain the motions of all heavenly bodies. The marvellous order and harmony, he believed, was the clearest possible demonstration of God's existence and authenticity, and of His real intentions for humans as well as natural life. Educated people who read Newton no longer saw the universe as controlled by an infinite number of spirits, each with its own planet, star, or comet to supervise. The sky seemed swept clean. All was geometry, calculation and predictability. The universe was not a space of mysteries and uncertainties. It was, above all, a reasonable universe.

John Locke applied this way of thinking so pervasively in political and social and human affairs that he became the preeminent philosophical influence in the eighteenth century thought, especially in America. He was fascinated by the power of reason, though he did not think it all-powerful. A moderate man in everything, he held that some things could never be explained by humanity's reasoning powers, that

there were limits to what we could know on our own. About God, for example, he said we could know little, other than that He is the author of the universe and a pervasive influence in human life. People therefore need the Bible, Locke said, for only in revelation from God could they learn essential truths about the divine that reason, unaided, could never reveal. However, he believed true Christianity consisted of only a few essentials, and therefore he not only urged, but exemplified, a wide toleration of all Protestant beliefs.

An archetypal product of the American Enlightenment was the figure of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). Franklin represented the essence of the Enlightenment--in his celebration of rationality, practical conduct and materialism. A self-made man and a man of science, Franklin characteristically expressed a preference for what his contemporaries called "natural religion" or deism. If natural laws govern everything, people such as Franklin asked, wasn't nature itself God's truest Bible? The



West's Benjamin Franklin experimenting with electricity has look of wizardry.

"reasonable" method in religion, therefore, according to them, called for a simple procedure: discover what things all people (that is, all "civilized" people) believe in, wherever they are. By this means, true religion could be found. This came down to a belief in a supreme deity, God; in a code of ethics divinely established, which tells us how to live; and a belief that there is an afterlife in which people will receive their rewards and punishments for their deeds in this world. Church, rituals and miracles were simply local superstitions and wholly unnecessary.

Some people were not ready to go so far. They believed that Christ, the ultimate miracle, was an expression, in some inexplicable way, of God's desires in this world. But they rejected the concept of the Trinity ("God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost") as not only mathematically paradoxical, but also contrary to natural law. Christ was a man, perhaps a divinely inspired one, but not God Himself. There was only one God, they said: thus, these people were called Unitarians. The Bible remained important to them as a book of divine teachings about how we should live with each other. Unitarians believed each person must rely upon his or her own reasoning powers, keeping in mind that there was little that could be certain in religious matters. They believed that the individual is fundamentally good, and that if all persons listened to the voice of conscience they would be listening to the voice of God. Unitarianism circulated as a kind of underground faith in England in the mid-eighteenth century, prominent among scientists and intellectuals. It came to America in the century's late years; most of America's Founding Fathers, including Franklin, would have called themselves Unitarians.

Another notable figure of the American Enlightenment was St. Jean de Crevecoeur (1735-1813). A friend of Benjamin Franklin and a truly Franklinian character, this French-born emigre used his classic *Letters From An American Farmer* (1782) to celebrate the "enlightened" practice of democracy in America. The Franklinian aspect of Crevecoeur's work is most readily apparent in the "American Farmer's" enthusiastic approbation of the values of individualism and industriousness which formed the basis of the existence of a freeholder such as himself.

It is the freeholder no doubt who is for Crevecoeur "the American, this new man" about whom he seeks information though his famous query "What then is the American . . .?" Indeed the first eight of Crevecoeur's twelve "letters" are devoted to answering this question. The American, Crevecoeur says, is a European or the descendant of an European "who, leaving behind all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds." In the "great American asylum" the poor immigrant is freed from the oppression of a feudal society, from the taxation of landlord, church and monarch, from involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury and useless labour." "Here religion demands but little of him; and little voluntary service to the minister and gratitude to God; can he refuse these?" Be he a trader, farmer, craftsman or common labourer, he will be rewarded amply for his labour, so that in time he will cast off his servile timidity and acquire the dignity and self-confidence of a true human being. No wonder Crevecoeur should exclaim: "We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world."

But, if in the projection of the perfection of American society in his first eight "letters," Crevecoeur echoes Franklin, in the last four "letters" he clearly signals the limits of the Franklinian discourse. It is in the ninth "letter" itself that we find Crevecoeur striking the first disturbed notes of a contrary and contradictory theme. The occasion is provided by his visit to Charleston and his witnessing of the "facts" of Negro slavery as it is practised in the South. The question that he now asks is not "What then is the American, this new man?" but "What then is man; this being who boasts so much of the excellence and dignity of his nature, among that variety of unscrutable mysteries, of unsolvable problems, with which he is surrounded?" The line of inquiry leads him on to other trajectories of investigation and observation.

What does the history of the earth show us "but crimes of the most heinous nature, committed from one end of the world to the other? We observe avarice, rapine, and murder, equally prevailing in all parts. The evil in human nature rivals the perversity of physical nature, which manifests itself arbitrarily in famine, diseases, elementary convulsions and dissensions, to such an extent that "one would almost believe the principles of action in man, considered as the first agent of this planet, to be poisoned in their most essential parts."

Crevecoeur's admission of the insufficiency of reason as a guide in human affairs represents another strain of Enlightenment thought, obverse of that articulated by Franklin. In Europe as well as in America many people, especially clergymen, reacted aggressively to the ideologies of rationality and materialism, and sought to re-establish the idea of a religion based on spirituality and emotionalism. "Natural religion" (such critics said) gave people the sin of pride. They exalted their worldly powers and forgot their human weaknesses. Full devotion to Christ must be expressed every hour of every day. Christ must fill and permeate one's being.

Preaching these ideas, John Wesley and George Whitefield, two Anglican priests, led a religious revival which swept England in the late 1730s. Enormous crowds in the fields listened enraptured. Storms of released feelings struck multitudes, as Whitefield, an especially dynamic preacher, warned of terrible sufferings that lay ahead for the unbelieving and held out salvation to all who truly believed in Christ.

There was great excitement when the famous Whitefield arrived in America in 1739. He was greeted by enormous crowds from one end of the colonies to the other. Everywhere he preached "vital religion" against "natural religion." So fantastic was the response that he was called the Wonder of the Age. Emulated by many American preachers, he thus helped to launch the revival frenzy that swept the colonial world in the years 1739 to 1744, the Great Awakening.

As the revival progressed, all colonials awaited New England's reaction, for that region had long been recognised as America's foremost "plantation of religion." It was the emergence of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1748) at Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1734 and 1735 that seemed to many to be the real beginning of the American revival. In New England, where there was much anxiety about rising affluence, individualism, and the breakup of old ways, the underlying tension exploded with especial violence. Enthusiasm achieved unmatched heights, reaching near delirium in its early stages.

Edwards utilized this enthusiasm and recast Calvinism to align with revivalism, thus becoming the most important Puritan theologian since John Calvin himself. The joy of the Great Awakening, he said, was good and proper. It was a delight that rushed in on people as their entire beings reacted to the love of God and to the beauties He had created in this world. But Edwards was a true Calvinist. God, in his mind, was still the blazing awesome, all-powerful, and wholly majestic Being who willed all things and was the centre of faith. Considering the perfection of God, Edwards said, people could see in contrast how prideful, lustful, and selfish they were in their self-centred, petty lives. Consider the universe that God had made, how harmonious and perfect it was; consider the beauties of the natural creation, of all that was of God. Astonished and overwhelmed by all this people would be drawn to God, as in nature all things were drawn by gravitation to a common centre.

Left to ourselves, he said, we are bound for hell. Such a fate was appropriate for creatures so corrupted and tarnished. This made God's salvation all the more ravishing to consider. Salvation, for Edwards, meant living not only a moral life, but also a life in which people worked for the regeneration of all society, in its institutions and arrangements as well as in its religion. Working across the boundaries of religious sects with others similarly regenerated in other churches, the new elect would transform the world. There had thus appeared once more, in the

5.3 SLAVERY AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

For all its celebration of reason, the American Enlightenment witnessed the large-scale expansion of the irrational institution of slavery. As the economy enlarged, Southern planters joined whites in the Caribbean Islands and Latin America in calling for more slaves from Africa. And by 1700 a new crop was making its appearance. About 1685 it had been discovered that the flat coastal lowlands of South Carolina were ideal for raising the ancient grain brought from the Orient to the Occident in the Middle Ages: rice. Slaves taken to the region around Charleston were put to work in large gangs on extensive rice plantations.

The harsh climate in the swamps and wetlands, and the regions endemic tropical diseases, brought horrifying death rates to the slave populations. However, high profits allowed the small white population to live in safety and luxury in Charleston, and, when the colony of Georgia was founded in 1732, in Savannah. Directing their plantations from a distance (i.e. they did not live in the presence of their slaves and come to know them as individual persons), they regarded the cost of replacing those who had died as simply an unavoidable cost of operation. The rice plantations sent eighteen million pounds of their crop to Europe in 1730; by 1770, exports had reached the huge total of 76 million pounds, and the price had even risen 10 per cent. Thus, black slaves, despite their high death rate, continued to be highly profitable. By 1750 they constituted 60 per cent of the Carolina population. In 1775, South Carolina alone held 100,000 slaves.

The other great region in the South lay around the Chesapeake Bay. Here the economy was built around the tobacco plant, which was raised most efficiently on small farms. Due to over-production, tobacco prices remained fairly low, keeping profits down. Thus, Virginia planters could not generally afford slave gangs. They tended, in fact, to buy more black women from Africa than did rice planters, in order to acquire cheaply, through later child bearing, the slaves it was hard for them to acquire directly. This in turn allowed for a healthier and more vigorous family life among Chesapeake Bay slaves, who in any event were freer of sickness because they did not work in disease-ridden swamps, and in large gangs, where contagious diseases spread rapidly. The Virginia slaves therefore flourished through natural increase in a fashion strikingly different from the situation further south, and especially from that in the cruel Caribbean island sugar plantations. There were over 170,000 slaves in Virginia in 1775, who amounted to almost half of the colony's population.

Desperate to increase their profits, slave owners extracted work from their slaves with utter ruthlessness. Idleness was not tolerated, indeed severely punished. Beatings became harsh and savage. Fugitive slaves could even be freely, legally killed for their crime. Also slave owners evolved an elaborate code of laws, practices and attitudes to rationalise their brutal treatment of the slaves, and make slavery appear right and proper and indeed a duty.

In the eighteenth century, of course, this was a situation not limited to the South. From Pennsylvania northward there were scattered concentrations of black slave populations, particularly in towns and cities. New York had the highest proportion, with perhaps 15 per cent of its population black; New Jersey and Pennsylvania contained 8 per cent; and in New England as a whole the figure was 3 per cent. In general, by the 1790s a higher proportion of the whole population was black than at any point ever again in American history: some 20 per cent.

With black people growing in numbers far more rapidly than whites, there was great fear of slave rebellions, which in fact began taking place, on a small scale, as early as 1663 in Virginia. This led to the creation of stringent, often savage, slave codes in all the colonies. These codes were built on two concepts: absolute authority of slave owners over slaves, and the belief that blacks were "of barbarous, wild, savage natures [and] wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices" that applied to whites. New York, with its many slaves, had a tough regimen of slave codes; in South Carolina, where by 1765 there were two blacks to every white person, regular slave patrols gave the countryside a military character.

Rivalling the spectre of slave revolt as a source of tension in the South was the obvious and widespread mingling of the races particularly where blacks were most numerous and under the strictest, most dehumanising controls. One of the great paradoxes in race relations is that the heaviest intermingling occurred precisely when black Americans were the least free, not after the ending of slavery. Nothing aroused such powerful anger in white men as the thought of black slaves forcing themselves on white women, a common and obsessive fear. Despite disapprovals and disallowances from London, southern states often used castration, sometimes in an astonishingly routine way, as a punishment or as "taming" tactic for black men. Few things so aided the rise of English contempt for Americans--indeed, northern contempt for southerners--as the manner in which slaves were treated from Chesapeake southward.

5.4 THE AMERICAN WOMAN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The irrationality of blatant race-oppression was matched by the irrationality of subtle gender-discrimination in eighteenth century America. The codes of gender discrimination, in fact, were inbuilt into the structure of the colonial American family. The form of family which the colonials brought with them from Britain was much like that familiar to modern Americans: nuclear family, in which husband and wife and their children formed a household. Land was generally granted to the head of the household--the father. As the generations passed and the original tight village communities of the early colonial phase broke apart, families tended to live in separate, isolated homesteads. By the 1750s, intermarriage between households in thousands of small towns and villages in the northern colonies had built a strong network of relationships which helped to make community life stronger than it had been. Nonetheless, nuclear families remained the basic social units in colonial life.

Within the family, the need to be almost entirely self-sufficient made for a close interdependence between husbands and wives. There was no question which of the two was legally and morally superior. Male supremacy was the rule (which is not the same as saying it was a law of nature). This was expressed most dramatically in the possession of land by men, not by women (unless they became widowed), since land was the economic basis of almost all life.

Women and men usually worked separately, the one in the house and the kitchen garden, the other in the fields and with the livestock, but the two activities flowed into a single economic unit. Broadly, men's work centred around farming while women's work centred around manufacturing. Women preserved the vegetables and salted the meats, brewed the beer and pressed the cider. In addition they wove cloth, made wool and sewed dresses. They also dipped candles, and cared for family health by preparing home remedies and soap. Preparing meals was but the last stage in the manufacturing process, and this was done in addition to the routine tasks of bearing and rearing children.

Nonetheless, wives were considered inferior to their husbands whom they were to obey--reverently. Colonials thought of the home as a "little commonwealth" in which man's authority provided government and administration, even if he were himself unruly. Everyone, in fact, was thought to occupy a certain position on the social hierarchy; all of life was thought to be arranged within the Great Chain of Being, and subjection to men was women's role.



On the other hand, Puritans and Quakers seemed determined to treat women as persons of substance and significance. Men were lectured endlessly not to be dictatorial, and women were instigated not to be dictated to. Colonial courts often moved in to protect women and children from brutal maltreatment of men. Marriage

was made a contract that could be broken, not a permanent, divine, state, as under Catholicism. And, of course, the woman's crucial role in the household, which had to be self-sufficient in a world where 90 per cent of the people lived on the farm, gave "Adam's Rib" a strong position. In addition, both Quaker and Puritan teachings made conjugal love--love between married people--a tender and lofty part of life. Couples were endlessly entreated to express their affection, to regard each other as one flesh and spirit, and thus to avoid the "civil war" that might tragically mar such little commonwealths. In short, there was a distinctly modern quality in colonial American marriage.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I have tried to describe the evolution of colonial America into a federal structure in the process of engaging with 'modern' economic and cultural influences. The period during which this transition occurred, anticipating America's emergence as a nation-state in its own right, is popularly referred to as the period of the American Enlightenment. This Unit focuses on some major Enlightenment personages as well as on their points of view. Simultaneously, an attempt is made to explore the 'other' side of Enlightenment euphoria--exploitation on the basis of race and gender in particular which made the 'progress' of the Enlightenment period possible.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Describe and discuss the material circumstances which made the American Enlightenment possible.
2. Sum up the major tenets of the American Enlightenment. Critically comment on the respective positions of Benjamin Franklin, St. Jean de Crevecoeur and Jonathan Edwards vis-a-vis these tenets.
3. Far from witnessing the withering away of racism and sexism, the American Enlightenment provided a fillip to these exploitative practices. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Same as Unit 1, and

Richard D. Brown, *Modernisation: The Transformation of American Life 1600-1865*, 1976.

Henry F. May. *The Enlightenment in America*, 1976.

Richard L. Bushman. *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765*, 1967.

Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*, 1979.

Winthrop, D. Jordon. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro 1550-1812*, 1969.

Mary, P. Ryan. *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 1975.

BLOCK CONCLUSION : THE MULTIPLE INTERSECTING CONTEXTS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Now that you have read the five Units that make up this Block on **Contexts of American Literature**, I hope you agree with me that an appreciation of the texts of American literature, including those of European-American or Puritan literature alone, necessitates an awareness of more contexts than merely the Puritan or the European-American context. Even the earliest white immigrants to America established themselves as American not in absolute terms but in relation, initially, to the Europeans from whom they had separated, and then, to the "other," ostensibly not-so-American, inhabitants of the continent, for example, the Indians who came before them and the blacks who were brought in after them. Thus the trope of Americanness became immediately, intricately interlinked with the politics of cultural exclusion and inclusion.

Inevitably, the canonisation of texts of American literature took place on the premise of this politics--so that the narratives, oral or written, of the slave populations or of the indigenous tribes of America remained bracketed out till recently from the category of American literature although they had much to express about the making of America. Talented authors from these "minority" cultural groups such as the Indian Chief Seathl and the black housemaid Phyllis Wheatley (both producing their works in the nineteenth century) became victims of this cultural erasure. Simultaneously, the works of white writers from Cotton Mather to Crèvecoeur, which would never have been authored had there been no "others" for them to reckon with in American society, received canonical acknowledgement. All this suggests the existence not only of multiple, but of multiple intersecting contexts which contributed to the production of the texts of American literature.

It is of course one of the greatest ironies of American cultural history that a monocultural construction was imposed upon it at that very junction, of the intersection between the 18th and the 19th centuries, when American society and culture was becoming, more than ever earlier, irreversibly pluralised.

GLOSSARY

Blacks	Descendants of African slaves in America
Hispanics	Spanish-speaking Americans of Latin American descent.
New Jerusalem	A title used by the earliest Puritan immigrants for the territories in North America freshly settled by them as an index of their aspirations to found a utopian society. Jerusalem was the holy city in Israel associated with the birth of Jesus Christ.
New England	A name given by the early English immigrants to the regions on the east coast in North America where they established their first settlements. These regions comprised the territories of modern-day New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and parts of New York State.
Red Indian	A term used to designate the aboriginal inhabitants of the American continent prior to and through the period of the European conquest of the Americas. They were so called because their European conquerers initially mistook them to be Indians of Asia and because they habitually painted their faces and skins with the most flamboyant colours.
Anglican	An adjective used to denote the Church of England and its concerns subsequent to its break with the Roman Catholic Church in the early part of the sixteenth century.
Ecclesiastical	pertaining to the Church and to church officers.
Episcopal	pertaining to bishops and their authority in the church.
Hegemonic	ideologically dominant.
Quit rent	rent paid towards occupation of land till actual price of the land is neutralised and the land may be claimed as a freehold.
Bible Commonwealth	a community established around the religious principles laid down in the Bible.
Secular heterodoxy	expression of dissent on other than-religious matters.
Incarceration	imprisonment
Eve-induced Original Sin	the traditional Christian notion of the Fall of Man as originating from temptation offered to Adam by Eve.
Adam's Rib	a metaphorical representation of woman, deriving from the biblical account of her origin from a rib of man

Patroon	a landowner with manorial privileges under the colonial governments in New England.
Covenant with God	Contract with God as, for instance, in the Old Testament between the Israelites and God
Antinomianism	a view, held for example by a sect in Germany in the sixteenth century, that Christians are relieved from the obligation of observing the moral law.
Pelagianism	a theory emanating from the monk Pelagius. (4 th -5 th century) denying the doctrine of Original Sin
Enlightenment	An intellectual/cultural movement in eighteenth century Europe/America emphasising reason and secular ideals rather than religious norms and faith.
Biblical typology	scheme of types, emblems and symbols used as representational aids in biblical narratives.
Hermeneutic method	method of deciphering/decoding used to explain scriptural texts.

NOTES