



Puritan Settlement in New England

In A Nutshell

It was a dramatic historical moment. A community of devoutly religious Christians traveled across the ocean to a relatively unknown land, radically different from the society they left behind. For these travelers, who called themselves Pilgrims, the journey took on spiritual as well as physical significance. When they arrived on the new continent, it was not simply the vast forests or lack of densely populated areas and developed commercial markets that made it a land of opportunity and rebirth. The New World represented a fresh slate, an ocean away from the sins and corruption of the Old World and a chance to start anew, to build a society from the ground up on firmly pious principles.

Native Americans' contact with these newcomers was a startling encounter across a vast cultural and spiritual divide. Not only did European settlement encroach upon their lands, but it brought devastating plagues of diseases never before encountered on the North American continent, which soon decimated Indian populations.

Both the English and the Indians survived the setbacks and the ravages of disease and death; different members of both groups approached one another with a range of reactions, from trust and generosity to hostility and suspicion. In their first half century on the new continent, the English settlers learned from, interacted with, and battled against the Indian nations of New England. They also developed the institutions for which they would be forever remembered: the town meeting, the Congregational church, the hard-scrabble farming life of New

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Englishers, and the Protestant work ethic, which influenced the character and composition of subsequent American societies.

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Brain Snacks - Trivia

Half a million people emigrated from England in the century after 1607, but most went to Ireland or the West Indies, not to North America. Some of the early New England towns restricted access to land ownership for newcomers, thinking that they could maintain an ideal social and economic order by keeping large tracts in the possession of the founding families and their descendants. Watertown, the first inland settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, averaged up to 200 acres per male household (among its older families) in 1647. Only 6% of that land was actually under cultivation; the families were granted more acreage than they could actually cultivate.

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