

Puritan Influence in Colonial America

Puritan ideas and values greatly influenced the political, social, and economic development of the New England Colonies in many ways between 1630 and the 1660s. Puritans came to the Americas, like many other people, in order to create a "perfect and ideal christian society". This mind set became the building blocks for the colonies. It became so rooted into the foundation of New England, it affected the colonies economically, socially, and politically.

John Higgins stated that "this is a plantation of religion, not a plantation of trade." This statement shows that, in the puritan's eyes, it was frowned upon to care more about the economic prosperity of the colony than the word of God and worship of him. Higgins also stated that worldly gain was not the design of the people of New England, but religion was. These two statements greatly show the fact that Puritans relied on their faithfulness to God to prosper as a community. Puritans focused primarily on acquiring their very basic needs for living, and even then, gave whatever extra they had to the less fortunate puritans of their colony. Along with affecting colonies economically, the puritans very much also affected their social norms due to their mind set.

Puritans were very strong believers that the Man was the head of the house, while the wife was to always acknowledge all power and authority toward their husbands. They also believed that the children were to obey the parents, no questions asked. Schools were built solely for the reason that they were always "dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches", as stated in A statement about education in New England 1643. Puritans believed that the Bible was the true law of God, and that it gave guidelines stating how one should live. If one was caught not attending church, they were taken to trial and almost guaranteed to be found guilty. This could be shown in the trial of the Bay Colony Vs. Goold, Osburne, and George in 1666. The fact that a religious problem was taken to trial shows just how deeply religion was rooted into politics as well as the social and economic aspect of the puritan lifestyle.

Puritans believed in giving man limited power. To ensure this, colonies held annual town meetings to settle legal disputes and decide on the next town leader. Town meetings consisted only of male participants twenty-one years or older who owned land. Although there were many restrictions, this was the first form of a democracy that was seen in the Americas.

The puritan lifestyle was very strict, and very much the same day in and day out. They were the foundation of America, and were even the foundation of two of the most prestigious universities in modern day America. Thanks to them, we had a foundation for one of the most important documents in US History, the United States Constitution, which explains our democracy.

Quakers in Colonial America

The Quaker religion, also called the Society of Friends, was started by George Fox. He thought that the only way to talk to God was through an inner spiritual faith. He believed that it was possible for everyone to talk directly with God. This belief challenged the authority of the Anglican Church. He started the Quaker religion to practice what he believed. Many people became Quakers and started to follow Fox. Most Quakers thought fighting is wrong, and they thought that everyone was equal. Quakers would not take off their hats to other men. The English didn't like the Quakers and put many of them in jail. This is why the Quakers decided move to America.

When the Quakers moved to America, they still were not treated very nicely. They were still put in jail and were even hung. When William Penn came to settle in Pennsylvania, the Quakers were very happy because William Penn was a Quaker. They thought that this would be a new and happier life for them. The Quakers did prosper. They worked hard, and soon controlled most of Pennsylvania.

When the Revolutionary war broke out, the Quakers were beaten because they wouldn't take sides. They did help raise relief funds to help the wounded from the war.

One of the most important Quaker beliefs was that they were against slavery, and they would not have any slaves. By 1776, the National Quaker Organization banned slave-holding among themselves.

The Quakers may have been against fighting, but people fought against them. Through all the years of Quakerism in the Colonies, Quakers were beaten and whipped for practicing what they believed.

George Fox was born in 1624 and died in 1691. The persecution of Fox and his many thousands of followers eventually led to increased religious freedom in Britain.

Deism Influence in Colonial America

During the Age of Enlightenment, changes occurred in nearly every system in Europe, including politics and theology. After the Protestant Reformation, Christianity experienced a period of upheaval. As religious wars spread into several countries, people began to turn to other systems that could provide a healthy alternative to orthodox Christianity. Deism, a philosophy which had existed since ancient times, endorsed a reason based system that looked to the natural world for answers about God, life, and death. Rejecting Christianity and other organized theologies, deism appealed to individuals seeking a philosophy that promoted Enlightenment principles such as rationality, tolerance, and freedom. Initially enjoying success in Europe, deism eventually appeared in America during the eighteenth century before disappearing entirely in the following century. Since then, British and French deism has been readily covered by historians for its impact on European theology and philosophy. But widely ignored is American deism; a topic that has either been dismissed altogether or only briefly mentioned when exploring the Enlightenment period.

A main reason for this oversight is that American deism had to function within the confines of a period that was largely dominated by orthodox Christianity. Because deism was associated with atheism, an often punishable offense, the movement remained largely underground until the mid-eighteenth century. When deism did finally appear in the public arena around 1750, it suffered from disorganization. Also, its followers came from a variety of different backgrounds. While some were well educated, others were barely literate. As many deists worked in trade occupations, some were influential political and theological leaders. Therefore, deism's main tenets were interpreted in a multitude of ways. There were deists who were liberal and then there were deists who considered themselves Christians. This confusion over doctrine contributed to many of its followers never officially declaring themselves deists. And then, as the century closed, deism suffered from the appearance of new theological and philosophical systems that were appealing to a new generation of Americans. By 1810, deism had nearly disappeared. Left behind was a body of work that had already become irrelevant in a new century. All of these issues have generally led historians to doubt deism's overall impact on American life in the eighteenth century.

Religion's Impact in Eighteenth-Century America

Against a prevailing view that eighteenth-century Americans had not perpetuated the first settlers' passionate commitment to their faith, scholars now identify a high level of religious energy in colonies after 1700. According to one expert, religion was in the "ascension rather than the declension"; another sees a "rising vitality in religious life" from 1700 onward; a third finds religion in many parts of the colonies in a state of "feverish growth." Figures on church attendance and church formation support these opinions. Between 1700 and 1740, an estimated 75 to 80 percent of the population attended churches, which were being built at a headlong pace.

Toward mid-century the country experienced its first major religious revival. The Great Awakening swept the English-speaking world, as religious energy vibrated between England, Wales, Scotland and the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. In America, the Awakening signaled the advent of an encompassing evangelicalism--the belief that the essence of religious experience was the "new birth," inspired by the preaching of the Word. It invigorated even as it divided churches. The supporters of the Awakening and its evangelical thrust--Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists--became the largest American Protestant denominations by the first decades of the nineteenth century. Opponents of the Awakening or those split by it--Anglicans, Quakers, and Congregationalists--were left behind.

Another religious movement that was the antithesis of evangelicalism made its appearance in the eighteenth century. Deism, which emphasized morality and rejected the orthodox Christian view of the divinity of Christ, found advocates among upper-class Americans. Conspicuous among them were Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Deists, never more than "a minority within a minority," were submerged by evangelicalism in the nineteenth century.