

# Review of mckenna, puritan origins of american patriotism



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The pages of human history, daubed in bloodshed on account of religious wars, race and color prejudices, economic aggrandizements, conflicts for territorial gains, ask the crying question. How to make this Planet Earth heaven-like? The answer is simple and direct Eyes full of understanding, hearts full of love and the life that refuses conflicts—enough, these alone are enough! What is the use of reading many religious texts, listening to many sermons, if one doesn't make efforts to experience divinity within?

What is the significance of cross on the neck, if Christ in the heart doesn't exist? Somebody should have briefed him on the above lines, when John Winthrop, in the year 1630, was about disembark from Arbella off Southampton, set on the journey to the New World. He proclaimed to his fellow passengers that “ we shall be as a city upon a hill. ” The New England we are talking about is the subsequent USA. He spoke and inspired his followers like a militant, though he had a kind heart. But it belonged to a particular type kindness-the rigid kindness.

He believed that his views and understanding about Christ were correct leaving no scope for others to argue. He viewed with suspicion, those who met his every argument with a counter argument. He was a scholar, but all scholars do not grasp the true meaning spirituality. The practice and experience of real spirituality means to transcend the borders of reason and enter the heaven of freedom and bliss. This is the zone of supreme silence and divinity. The mindset of Winthrop and the like is important to understand the puritan origins of American Patriotism, through an inquisition scene.

George McKenna records, “ Most historians have concluded that by sheer nerve, brains, and conviction Mistress Anne Hutchinson was for a time was <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-mckenna-puritan-origins-of-american-patriotism/>

beating her inquisitors in argument, or at least frustrating their efforts to trip her up. "(McKenna, 2007, p, 16) She subsequently fumbled in her answers, trapped in her own replies and was banished from the Church. With no support forthcoming, in that helpless situation, she and her family members were killed by the original inhabitants of the place, the Indians.

Notwithstanding the advancement in human thinking, change in the social environments, even after the lapse of two centuries, the original American Puritanism remained the same, with minor adjustments here and there. The dreams of an independent Puritan Commonwealth did come to an end. But the spirit of New England prevailed and expanded. It engulfed New York State, Upper Midwest, Iowa and a part of Missouri and then it moved to Oregon and Northwest. In the East, the Puritans had the definite plans of spreading their ideology on God.

They worked like an Emperor who cultivates greed to conquer more and more territories. Shiploads of books written by Puritans and published in Boston reached important cities and townships. Preachers and missionaries from New England swarmed like locusts on the fresh green crops. They established seminaries which later turned to great universities. Puritanism was taught to the children in the schools. According to them God demanded man's best efforts and it is not possible for the man to comprehend the ways of God-- What he does and how he functions!

Such Puritans cleared the path for God, with spades and hammer strokes of reason of their style and they trampled down and destroyed everything that obstructed His march! George's book reads like the war book, the booming of the guns much less, but not totally absent, going by the contents and <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-mckenna-puritan-origins-of-american-patriotism/>

titles of the chapters, like Revolutionary Puritanism, Romantic Puritanism, The Holy War, Puritans in the Gilded Age, Puritanism Debunked and Revised, American Blessed and Judged; The Fifties & Sixties, Intermezzo and America after 9/11. Is it the God's curse for America, American people and the people of the countries attacked by America?

They are ever engaged in wars--wars on religious issues, wars on race issues, wars about security and securing world peace as per their own perspective! As for the advancement of Puritanism in USA, the Southern did not take kindly to its encroachment on their territories. They saw Puritanism as a threat to their own peculiar institution. They cursed the Puritans for disturbing the peace of the world. (Even now, America is accused of disturbing the peace in the world). They began to build levees and dikes to keep Puritans at bay, from their region.

They called Puritans barbaric and cursed for having taken over so much of the North. The chivalrous Southerners revered their traditions deeply and their manners were civilized. " Over seventy years ago, Perry Miller began the work that would in time make him America's foremost scholar of Puritanism by writing a book entitled orthodoxy in Massachusetts. "(Mckenna, 2007, p, 20). This describes history and development of Puritanism that would enthrall a lay-reader. Why Puritanism appealed to those who happened to interact with the Preachers in the initial stages?

The philosophical concepts are lucidly explained and when you listen to such utterances through a honey-tongued missionary, you are inclined to believe that it is the truth. By the time one realizes their actual game-plan, sometimes it is too late! George writes about one such concept, the <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-mckenna-puritan-origins-of-american-patriotism/>

covenant. “ In ordinary usage, the covenant implies some element of conditionality: If you do this, I will do that. God has freely decided to make himself party to such a covenant, saying, in effect, if you believe in me, I will forgive your sins.

In Miller’s telling phrase, God has voluntarily “ chained” himself, and become “ a God who can be counted upon, a God who can be lived with. ” Miller’s analysis, so far as it goes, remains one of the most lucid explanations of Puritan covenant theology. ”(McKenna, 2007, p, 21) The final words of Adolph Hitler before he committed suicide were, “ Brutal force has not won anything durable. ”—Over the centuries, the rigid Puritans began to feel a sense of uneasiness about their rigidity. The tyranny of some of their stories began to pierce their hearts.

The renaissance and awakening that followed the post-Civil War era set their minds thinking and put them on the path of review. The opposition came from their young Protestant Preachers, who believed in dynamism without destruction. Can God be that heartless? The Preachers, who came from the German universities, were miles ahead as for their thinking level. The message was modernized, not the total revamp, but with authentic amendments. The original Puritans, however, remained the original Puritans! They will give up at one end and pick up some other thread.

The patriotic core remained intact, and the Americans believed, and even today that belief remains intact, that they have a special role to play in saving the world from the forces which they consider inimical! The forms changed, but the essentials of the Puritan faith remains intact! The outer coverings are new, but the inner content is almost the same! George  
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McKenna is the professor emeritus, City College of the City University of New York. He taught American government and American political thought for forty years and therefore he is eminently suited to write on the subject of Puritan origins of American patriotism.

This Puritanism is tempered with Reformation Protestantism. Puritans believe that the arrival of the early missionaries is in tune with a providential “errand” This errand evolved as one of the biggest ‘march’ of the history of mankind as it evolved for over 300 years and irrevocably influenced American political and social culture. Its impact was both positive and negative. The sapling of this activist theology has grown into a gigantic tree and has withstood many a storms to survive with its strong presence. The patriotism that is reflected in the social dispositions of America has roots in the incidents of the seventeenth century.

America is a peculiar Nation. It is inhabited by people from diverse backgrounds and from many countries. But this patriotism has the darker sides as well. The prejudice against the South in the nineteenth century, its anti-Catholicism etc! But strangely, history takes strange twists and turns. Today the staunch believers in Puritan narratives are the former “Outsides”—Catholics and Southerners. George braces through the American Puritan history and concludes with an insightful observations on the role of Puritan theology in the post 9/11 era.

Conclusion: The advent of materialistic philosophy, industrial and internet revolutions, World Wars I & II, and the subsequent Cold War (fight against the communism) changed the American political and social set-up completely. The Southerners and the Catholics joined the mainstream of the <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-mckenna-puritan-origins-of-american-patriotism/>

Nation that is America. They exhibited their great sense of patriotism during World War II. The war against Communism was the real test for each and every American and they played their role well in exhibiting a high sense of patriotism.

Freedom and democracy, which are the offshoots of patriotism, became the watchwords. But, if Winthrop was to resurrect from the grave and taken on a tour, he wouldn't believe that it is the America of his dream in the 1630s. It is a well written and absorbing book by George McKenna. The contents are well-researched, and give the complete picture of America from the 1630s. The ardent Puritan of the day will also not be displeased by George's narrations and observations and will approve of the reforms that have shaped the original Puritanism.