

Influence of john winthrop's puritan dilemma



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In the *Puritan Dilemma* auto biography of John Winthrop and the leadership he committed over the Massachusetts colony for the Puritans. Throughout history and today we see problems and conflicts between demands of authority and individual freedom, the Puritans brought these ideas here. The author Edmund Morgan sought to tell everyone of the hardships and overall triumphs of the Puritan movement through telling the story of the most influential member of the Puritans at this time, John Winthrop. The *Puritan Dilemma* goes into depth about John Winthrop and the Massachusetts colony he governs on a daily basis, most of his troubles conspire either with England or the Indians over land. However, he does encounter the "first winter" that will wipe out over half the new settlers due to food storage, weather conditions, lack of supplies. Throughout Winthrop's life he sought to help the Puritans through any conflicts or problems that would arise with the new world, he also sought to expand the Puritan religion (Puritanism) to the Indians and to new settlers.

Throughout the book we learn of problems and conflicts that affected the Puritans and John Winthrop, the first conflict that arose was the Puritan fever. When the Puritans first set foot in the first colony ever the Massachusetts Bay colony they faced many new problems and conditions that they're body need to adapt to. As John Winthrop said in the *Puritan Dilemma* In the first months and throughout winter smallpox had taken over the colony as well as other diseases such as respiratory complaints. John Winthrop said, "For the natives, they are near all dead of the smallpox, so the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess." (Morgan, 56) These new diseases came from English fishermen and the fur from new introduced animals as John Winthrop

Explained could have been a lead factor. However, the Puritan fever is more of a metaphor for Puritanism drying people out due to the intensive lifestyle you had to devote. Meaning, that Puritanism seemed good but if closely observed it was destroying people. Many people thought as Puritanism strict due to the rules and worshiping ways they saw. However just like today people only see one side of things and those are the extremists that Puritans don't even believe in themselves. Puritanism sees religion as not needed to be strict nor should it be relaxed however you should have an equal balance among the two. This is why they sought after a new world due to the church of England pushing away Puritans and trying to religiously prosecute them.

John Winthrop and the rest of the colonies in America were all facing different challenges that seemed to always be an uphill battle with no end in sight. The problems kept arising making the colony suffer even more. When the Puritans came over on the royal charter (the one John Winthrop had invested in) they claimed "the colony would not be a mere commercial enterprise, nor would it be simply a hiding place from the wrath of God. It would be instead a citadel of God's chosen people, a spearhead of world Protestantism." (Morgan, 42). This would soon cause Winthrop and the Massachusetts colony a huge problem later on not realizing that there needs to be separation between church and state because Puritans did not indeed believe that but society cannot function properly as we know today. Even at first, they though thought that Puritanism should be part of everything. When Winthrop and the people first landed in the New World in Salem Winthrop first really realized how bad the living conditions were, it was summer and the heat was more than anything they were used to in England.

The French and Spanish also had rival colonies that could attack them at any time (Morgan, 52). One thing was food and shelter the previous colonists in Salem copied the Indians building huts out of twigs and tree parts and building a fire in the middle of them with letting the smoke escape through a hole in the top. Winthrop immediately saw these people were barely surviving as they had no plan or were working to clear the forest out. Barely any of the forest was cleared to accompany new people. One of the last problems was food there was tons of corn and crops but it belonged to the Indians and there were no relationships with the Indians yet so no sort of trade had been established (Morgan, 52-53).

After the colony had formed in Boston fleeing sickness and disease, they built up Boston relatively fast due to them being more familiar with using the land and the natural resources it had to offer. Setting up the government was still in process with Winthrop at the helm. They set the church and were awaiting on more people to come. More and more people arrived on ships bringing cargo and other supplies as they welcomed all Puritans, separatists came as well to the New World "to be right while the rest of the world was wrong" (Morgan, 67).

Winthrop did encounter with some people imposing as Puritans when in reality they weren't. Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were two of these people that we learn about through Winthrop. When Winthrop met Williams for the first time he liked him and sort of respected him a way, but soon to come Winthrop would learn how Williams wasn't just a Separatist but an Extreme Separatist which the colony nor Winthrop liked nor fully understood. They both agreed on the fact that the Church of England was not good but he

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believed in separation of church and state heavily which the Puritans did not at all because religion should control how we act and what we do government wise. Williams' Opinions started to influence the other of the colony that conflicted with the processes of Puritanism. Of course, if people are questioning Puritanism they started to question Winthrop. To save himself and everything that has been worked on since the beginning Winthrop does what anyone would do banish him from the colony on tenses that simply couldn't be argued with. Surprisingly he convicted the colonist of how Williams didn't know what exactly he was talking about, but by banishing him from the colony everyone started to respect Winthrop in a way where they wouldn't question him nor the Colony of Massachusetts anymore, which in reality shouldn't have happened anyway after everything that Winthrop had done for the people.

Of course, this wasn't the end as Anne Hutchison soon had things to say and her teachings were not directly following Puritans and this made Winthrop not too ecstatic (Morgan, 128-130). Anne Hutchison was known to be an Antinomian but also just like Williams a Separatist which caused conflict. It wasn't that she was a separatist that caused conflict she was just an extreme separatist. By her directing her teachings in a negative way towards Puritanism really upset Winthrop and Winthrop had to act fast to make sure her teachings don't affect the colony anymore. They trailed her for this and Winthrop being the main reasoning however in court she admitted to everything calling herself the "define" which made everyone upset (Morgan 133). Hutchison also went on to say how God told her that if they do not let her free and to go at her own will then they shall all be punished for trailing

her. But this did not make anyone mad at all because she was very faithful, however, Winthrop and so did everyone else knew it wasn't for the right reasons. Winthrop went on to banish her and everything started to go well as Winthrop had successfully moved across the world leading the Puritans to a better life without the Church of England controlling everything they did. Winthrop showed the people he governed how it was their beliefs that got them to the New World and how being faithful is the most important thing, however don't overdo it meaning that don't take being faithful to a new level like Williams and Hutchinson. By banishing the extremist this didn't happen too much and banishment seemed to be the key answer to many of the interpersonal problems they faced.

Throughout present day we learn about people that had an influential start to this country and influential characters that helped shape America. We tend to hear names of great people that helped form this country but never the people that suffered and put everything they had into forming what we know today. *The Puritan Dilemma* was a book that allowed me to understand the man with the name of John Winthrop who especially put everyone before himself to make sure their colony would be successful. With the problems Winthrop faced in the very beginning in England with the Church of England not agreeing with Puritanism to dealing with "Puritan fever", or with dealing with the Indians many people would've just given up. Winthrop fulfilled peoples and was able to create a utopia but it took a lot of work and sacrifices to do so. A lesson that we all can take from John Winthrop besides religion wise is that to never give up or back down and fight for what you believe in. Winthrop governed one of the first successful colonies that were

able to withstand the harsh first couple of years and live off the land. The Puritans are what made the freedom we know in this country today by giving up everything they knew and had for the sacrifices of others, Puritans were the founding fathers of freedom and independence we embrace today.

Bibliography

- Morgan, Edmund Sears. *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop*. Third ed., Pearson Longman, 2007