**Reasons for Puritan Migration**  
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**Annotation:**

No group has played a more pivotal role in shaping American values than the New England Puritans. The seventeenth-century Puritans contributed to our country's sense of mission, its work ethic, and its moral sensibility. Today, eight million Americans can trace their ancestry to the fifteen to twenty thousand Puritans who migrated to New England between 1629 and 1640.

Few people, however, have been as frequently subjected to caricature and ridicule. The journalist H.L. Mencken defined Puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, might be happy." And particularly during the 1920s, the Puritans came to symbolize every cultural characteristic that "modern" Americans despised. The Puritans were often dismissed as drably-clothed religious zealots who were hostile to the arts and were eager to impose their rigid "Puritanical" morality on the world around them.

This stereotypical view is almost wholly incorrect. Contrary to much popular thinking, the Puritans were not sexual prudes. Although they strongly condemned sexual relations outside of marriage--levying fines or even whipping those who fornicated, committed adultery or sodomy, or bore children outside of wedlock--they attached a high value to the marital tie. Nor did Puritans abstain from alcohol; even though they objected to drunkenness, they did not believe alcohol as sinful in itself. They were not opposed to artistic beauty; although they were suspicious of the theater and the visual arts, the Puritans valued poetry. Indeed, John Milton (1603-1674), one of England's greatest poets, was a Puritan. Even the association of the Puritans with drab colors is wrong. They especially liked the colors red and blue.

Although the Puritans wanted to reform the world to conform to God's law, they did not set up a church-run state. Even though they believed that the primary purpose of government was to punish breaches of God's laws, few people were as committed as the Puritans to the separation of church and state. Not only did they reject the idea of establishing a system of church courts, they also forbade ministers from holding public office.

Perhaps most strikingly, the Puritans in Massachusetts held annual elections and extended the right to vote and hold office to all "freemen." Although this term was originally restricted to church members, it meant that a much larger proportion of the adult male population could vote in Massachusetts than in England itself (roughly 55 percent, compared to about 33 percent in England).

John Winthrop (1606-1676) was a well-off landowner who served as governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for much of its early history. Unlike the Pilgrims, Winthrop and the other Puritans who traveled to Massachusetts were not separatists. Rather than trying to flee the corruptions of a wicked world, they hoped to establish in New England a pure church that would offer a model for the churches in England. In this selection, Winthrop offers religious and economic arguments in support of moving to New England.

**Document:**

Reasons for Puritan migration

1. It will be a service to the Church of great consequence to carry the Gospel into those parts of the world...& to raise a Bulwark against the kingdom of AnteChrist w[hi]ch the Jesuits labour to reare up in those parts.

2. All other churches of Europe are brought to desolation, & o[u]r sins, for w[hi]ch the Lord begins already to frown upon us & to cut us short, do threaten evil times to be coming upon us, & who knows, but that God hath provided this place to be a refuge for many whom he means to save out of the general calamity, & seeing the Church hath no place left to fly into but the wilderness, what better work can there be, then to go & provide tabernacles & food for her against she comes thither:

3. This Land grows weary of her Inhabitants, so as man, who is the most precious of all creatures, is here more vile & base then the earth we tread upon, & of less price among us then an horse or a sheep: masters are forced by authority to entertain servants, parents to maintain there own children, all towns complain of the burthen of their poore, though we have taken up many unnecessary yea unlawful trades to maintain them, & we use the authority of the Law to hinder the increase of o[u]r people....

4. The whole earth is the Lords garden & he hath given it to the Sons of men w[i]th a gen[era]l Commission: Gen: 1:28: increase & multiply, & replenish the earth & subdue it,...why then should we stand striving here for places of habitation...& in the meane time suffer a whole Continent as fruitful & convenient for the use of man to lie waste w[i]thout any improvement?

5...all arts & Trades are carried in that deceitful & unrighteous course, as it is almost impossible for a good & upright man to maintain his charge & live comfortably in any of them.

6. The fountaine of Learning & Religion are so corrupted as...most children (even the best wittes & of fairest hopes) are perverted, corrupted, & utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples....

R.C. Winthrop, Life and Letters of John Winthrop (Boston, 1864), I, 309-311

Source: R.C. Winthrop, Life and Letters of John Winthrop (Boston: Ticknor and Fick's, 1864), Vol. 1, pp. 309-311.

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