CHAPTER 3

Settling the Northern Colonies, 1619–1700

# Focus Questions

. What religious turmoil in the Old World resulted in the little colony of Plymouth in the New World?

. Why was the initial and subsequent colonization of the Massachusetts Bay Colony more successful than Plymouth?

. How did the colony of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colony contribute to the origins of American independence and government? What were the contributions to American independence and government from the New England Confederation, the Dominion of New England, and the Glorious Revolution?

. What role did religious intolerance play in the founding of New England colonies other than Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay and in the founding of some middle colonies?

. Besides England, what other nations influenced the colonization of the Atlantic coast of North America?

. How did the colonization of Pennsylvania differ from the New England colonies and other middle colonies?

# Chapter Themes

**Theme:** Religious and political turmoil in England shaped settlement in New England and the middle colonies. Religious persecution in England pushed the Separatists into Plymouth and Quakers into Pennsylvania. England’s Glorious Revolution also prompted changes in the colonies.

**Theme:** The Protestant Reformation, in its English Calvinist (Reformed) version, provided the major impetus and leadership for the settlement of New England. The New England colonies developed a fairly homogeneous social order based on religion and semicommunal family and town settlements.

**Theme:** Principles of American government developed in New England with the beginnings of written constitutions (Mayflower Compact and Massachusetts’s royal charter) and with glimpses of self-rule seen in town hall meetings, the New England Confederation, and colonial opposition to the Dominion of New England.

**Theme:** The middle colonies of New Netherland (New York), Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware developed with far greater political, ethnic, religious, and social diversity, and they represented a more cosmopolitan middle ground between the tightly knit New England towns and the scattered, hierarchical plantation in the South.

chapter summary

The New England colonies were founded by English Puritans. While most Puritans sought to purify the Church of England from within, and not to break away from it, a small group of Separatists—the Pilgrims—founded the first small, pious Plymouth Colony in New England. More important was the larger group of nonseparating Puritans, led by John Winthrop, who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony as part of the Great English Migration of Puritans fleeing persecution in England in the 1630s.

A strong sense of common purpose among the first settlers shaped the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Because of the close alignment of religion and politics in the colony, those who challenged religious orthodoxy, among them Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, were considered guilty of sedition and driven out of Massachusetts. The banished Williams founded Rhode Island, by far the most religiously and politically tolerant of the colonies. Other New England settlements, all originating in Massachusetts Bay, were established in Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire. Although they shared a common way of life, the New England colonies developed with a substantial degree of independence.

The middle colonies took shape quite differently. New York, founded as New Netherland by the Dutch and later conquered by England, was economically and ethnically diverse, socially hierarchical, and politically quarrelsome. Pennsylvania, founded as a Quaker haven by William Penn, also attracted an economically ambitious and politically troublesome population of diverse ethnic groups.

With their economic variety, ethnic diversity, and political factionalism, the middle colonies were the most typically American of England’s thirteen Atlantic seaboard colonies.

# developing the chapter: suggested lecture or discussion topics

* Explain Puritanism in terms of the Puritan dilemma of trying to pursue high religious ideals, while somehow remaining practically effective and involved in the world. Emphasize how the Puritans believed that their “errand into the wilderness” in New England would enable them to build an idealistic “City upon a Hill” that would inspire a corrupt world.

REFERENCE: Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (1989).

* Examine the relationship between Puritan theology, the ideas of government its educated leaders promoted, and the religious beliefs and experience of the more ordinary settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Consider the ways in which Puritanism created both strong communal ideals, while almost guaranteeing tensions and conflicts at the boundaries of church and society.

REFERENCE: David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England* (1989).

* Explore the development of religious, political, and social freedom in New England and the middle colonies. Examine the role that the fight against religious intolerance in New England played in the developing ideas of American religious liberty and the particular role that dissenters, like Quakers and Baptists, played in that development in New England, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

REFERENCES: Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (1991).

* Consider the relations of the New England settlers and their Puritan leadership to the Indians. Examine how they adjusted, or failed to adjust, their understanding of covenant and the communal role of town government to those on the frontier of settlement. Analyze episodes like King Philip’s War and the Pequot War to discover what they revealed about the roles of insiders and outsiders in defining American identity and culture.

REFERENCE: Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origin of American Identity* (1998).

* Examine the origins of ethnic and social diversity in America by focusing on the early middle colonies, especially New York and Pennsylvania. Contrast the ethnic and religious diversity of those two colonies with the Anglo-Saxon, Puritan character of New England and relate this to the more turbulent politics of the middle colonies. Consider how the middle colonies’ ethnic variety laid the basis for later American immigration and ethnicity.

REFERENCE: Michael Zuckerman, ed., *Friends and Neighbors: Group Life in America’s First Plural Society* (1982).

# for further interest: additional class topics

* Focus on the Thanksgiving image of the Pilgrims and Puritans and compare it with the historical reality. Consider the enduring influence of the Puritans on America and the American self-image. (See boxed quote by William Bradford on page 44.)
* Focus on Anne Hutchinson as a complex instance of religious, political, and perhaps gender-based dissent. Consider to what extent the hostility to her religious opinions might have been strengthened because she was a woman challenging the male religious and political establishment.
* Compare the colonizing effort of the Dutch in New Netherland with that of their English neighbors. Note particularly how Peter Stuyvesant’s absolutist religious and political controls differed from the much looser quality of English colonialism.
* Consider William Penn and the Quakers as a case study in religious influence on colonial origins, and compare the Quakers with the New England Puritans. Examine the influence on Pennsylvania of particular Quaker beliefs—such as each individual’s “inner light,” social equality, and nonviolence—as well as how circumstances altered the implementation of such beliefs.

# character sketches

## John Winthrop (1588–1649)

John Winthrop was the leader of the great Puritan migration to Massachusetts Bay in 1630 and the dominant influence in the early colony. His personality and political policies reflected the complex nature of New England Puritanism: intense, high-minded, sober, driven, intellectual, intolerant.

A very well-off country gentleman and attorney, Winthrop began to experience career difficulties in England because of his strong Puritan leanings. He grew deeply pessimistic about the future, especially after the dismissal of Parliament in 1629, and joined as one of the twelve influential Puritans who organized the migration to the New World.

Winthrop was elected governor before sailing on the *Arbella* (1630) and reelected nearly every year until his death. Pious, humorless, and extremely stern toward dissenters, he skillfully managed the colony’s affairs, successfully negotiating with Puritans and others in England—while putting Massachusetts Bay on a sound economic and political footing.

**Quote:** “The Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us as his own people and will command a blessing upon us all in our ways.… And he shall make us a praise and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations: the Lord make it like that of New England. For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill; the eyes of all people are upon us.” (Sermon aboard the *Arbella*, 1630)

REFERENCE: Lee Schweninger, *John Winthrop* (1990).

## Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643)

Anne Hutchinson was the strong-minded religious dissenter whose challenge to Massachusetts Bay authorities from 1636 to 1638 shook the infant colony to its foundation and led to her banishment.

The second of thirteen children of a Puritan minister, from whom she received a strong education in theology and Scripture, she married William Hutchinson, a well-to-do merchant, and bore fourteen children between 1613 and 1636, of whom eleven survived infancy.

Hutchinson’s twice-weekly meetings in her home to discuss sermons and Scripture won her an enthusiastic following throughout Massachusetts Bay, and for a time, it appeared that she and her clerical allies might take over the colony. But her enemies gained control of the General Court in 1637, and she was excommunicated from the church and banished from the colony, despite her clever defense. First, she went to Rhode Island, but after her husband died in 1642, she moved with her children to Pelham, New Netherland (now in the Bronx), where she and all but one of her children were killed by Indians in 1643.

**Quote:**

Court: “See how your argument stands. Priscilla, with her husband, took Apollo home to instruct him privately. Therefore Mistress Hutchinson, without her husband, may teach sixty or eighty.”

Hutchinson: “I call them not, but if they come to me, I may instruct them.”

Court: “Yet you show us not a rule.”

Hutchinson: “I have given you two places of Scripture.”

Court: “But neither of them will suit your practice.”

Hutchinson: “Must I show you my name written therein?”

(Excerpt from Hutchinson’s trial, 1637)

REFERENCE: Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (1987).

## William Penn (1644–1718)

Although this English Quaker, who founded Pennsylvania, engaged in frequent quarrels with the colony’s settlers, his basic policies of liberality, tolerance, and free immigration had a lasting effect on Pennsylvania and eventually on other American colonies, as well.

In his youth, Penn developed nonconformist religious leanings that angered his father, the great Admiral Sir William Penn, and eventually landed the younger Penn in the Tower of London. Reconciled to his father on Sir William’s deathbed, he obtained the charter for Pennsylvania because of debts owed to his father by King Charles II.

Although Pennsylvania was a great economic success, Penn benefited little from it. His friendship with King James II caused him to lose political influence after the Glorious Revolution and his dissolute son wasted much of his fortune, so that he ended up in debtor’s prison.

Penn was considered handsome, courtly, and well read—a remarkable combination of religious visionary, charming courtier, and practical statesman. In the words of a contemporary: “a man of great abilities, of an excellent disposition, quick of thought and ready of utterance, full of true discipleship, even Love, without dissimulation.”

**Quote:** “I am sorry at heart for your animosities. For the love of God, me, and the poor country, be not so governmentish, so noisy, and so open in your dissatisfactions.” (Letter to settlers, 1701)

REFERENCE: Richard and Mary Dunn, eds., *The World of William Penn* (1986).

# questions for class discussion

. Did the Puritans really come to America seeking religious freedom? How did they reconcile their own religious dissent from the Church of England with their persecution of dissenters like Hutchinson and Williams? Does their outlook make them hypocrites?

. How were government and religion—or church and state—related in New England and the middle colonies? How does the colonial view of these matters compare with more recent understandings?

. Was an American Revolution, separating the colonies from England, inevitable after the Glorious Revolution had encouraged colonists to end the Dominion of New England, England’s serious attempt at enforcing royal authority? Did England’s “salutary neglect” contribute to future problems in its empire? How might have England been able to successfully enforce its rule on the colonies without causing rebellion?

. Dutch colonization efforts in New Amsterdam most closely resembled English colonization efforts in which region: New England, the middle colonies, or the southern colonies? The Dutch had a powerful presence in the East Indies, so why were the Dutch less successful in the West Indies and North America? What is the lasting influence of the Dutch in English North America?

. How does the founding of the New England colonies compare with the origin of the middle colonies? In what ways were New England and the middle colonies each like the South, and in what ways were they different?

. In what ways were the middle colonies more open and diverse than New England? In what ways were they less democratic?

. How did different events in England affect the New England and middle colonies in the New World? Which was the most affected and least affected by events in the Old World: New England, middle colonies, or southern colonies?

. What were the push and pull factors for immigrants coming to each region of English colonies (New England, the middle colonies, and the southern colonies)?

9. How does the “Franklin chest” reflect both economic prosperity in the middle colonies as well as the complex history of religious persecution in the Old World and the New World?

# Contending Voices: John Winthrop VS. Anne Hutchinson

## Question for Class Discussion

1. Contrast Winthrop’s accusation with Hutchinson’s response. (See section “Character Sketches” above for more information on Hutchinson’s response to her accusers. See questions listed in the above section “For Further Interest: Additional Class Topics” as well as in the above section “Questions for Class Discussion” for more on how Hutchinson’s dissent can be used to explore the issues of dissent and intolerance in Puritan New England.)

# vARYING VIEWPOINTS

# Expanding the View

* Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Founding of American Civilization* (1938).

A view of America as the product of European culture:

“The most stupendous phenomenon of all history is the transit of European civilization to the two American continents. For four and a half centuries Europeans have been crossing the Atlantic to establish in a new world their blood, languages, religions, literatures, art, customs. This movement, involving many nations and millions of men and women, has been termed the expansion of a new Europe in America. The Indian civilizations have been overwhelmed or subordinated, and in their place have arisen great nations speaking English, Spanish, Portuguese, or French, whose peoples profess the Christian religion, are partly or entirely European in blood, accept Shakespeare or Cervantes or Molière or even Tolstoy as their own. … Historians have been too prone to neglect the factor of inheritance in interpreting the United States, especially the multiple inheritance which makes it the child, not of England, but of Europe.”

* Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The People of Early America* (1974).

A view of America as the product of the meeting of Indian, European, and African cultures:

“The pathways of power did not strictly dictate the history of cultural interchange—a point that is obscured if we mistakenly assume that under conditions of oppression and exploitation, acculturation occurs in only one direction. The cultures of Africans and Indians—their agricultural techniques, modes of behavior, styles of speech, dress, food preference, music, dance, and other aspects of existence—became commingled with European culture.… A New World it is…for those who became its peoples remade it, and in the process they remade themselves, whether red, white, or black.”

# Questions for Class Discussion

. Does J.H. Elliott’s work about the New World represent more of a Eurocentric discovery and conquest history or more of a contact and adaptation history? How does Elliott contrast Spanish colonization with English colonization? What were the long-term consequences of those differences according to Elliott?

. How does Wertenbaker represent the older and now generally unaccepted view that American society is essentially an extension of European civilization?

. How does Nash combine recognition of European exploitation with a belief that allthe peoples of America created a genuinely new culture?

. How is our view of subsequent American history altered if one adopts the diversity rather than the Europeanist perspective?