

Chapter III

Pilgrims and Puritans and the Myth of the Promised Land

1. WHY THE PILGRIMS AND THE PURITANS?

[The Puritans] conceived of the American paradise as the fulfilment of scripture prophecy.

SACVAN BERCOVITCH, *THE PURITAN ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN SELF*

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the exodus is one of America's central themes.

WERNER SOLLORS, *BEYOND ETHNICITY*

We got one last chance to make it real
To trade in these wings on some wheels
Climb in back, heaven's waiting down on the tracks
Oh come take my hand
We're riding out tonight to case the Promised Land.
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, "THUNDER ROAD"

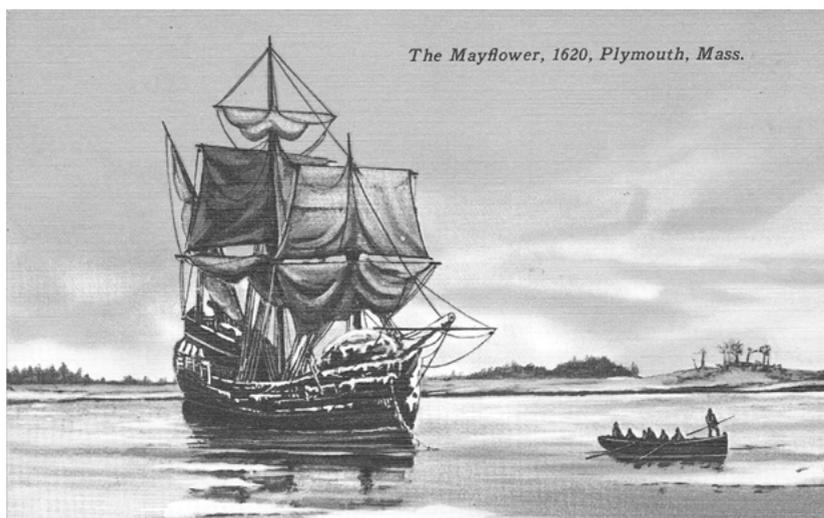
The Pilgrims and Puritans who settled in New England in the first half of the 17th century, arriving only a little later in America than the settlers of Jamestown, Virginia, are the protagonists of a foundational myth which has survived across the centuries as a story of American beginnings characterized by religiosity, idealism, sacrifice, and a utopian vision based on theology. Many scholars have considered the New England Pilgrims and Puritans as the 'first Americans' in the spirit of what would later develop into the full-fledged notion of American exceptionalism. Often, they have been contrasted favorably to the settlers in Virginia, who were seen as "adventurers" supposedly interested in material gain only (cf. Breen, *Puritans*), whereas the Pilgrims and Puritans, it was claimed, came for spiritual reasons and considered themselves religious refugees (cf.

ibid.; Tocqueville, *Democracy* Vol. 1 31-32). These religious dissenters from England thus were often cast as morally superior to the men of the Virginia Company in early Americanist scholarship, and the ‘cradle of American civilization’ has often been located in their early New England settlements. The moral righteousness of the Pilgrims and Puritans, however, is a matter of contention. Often, they have been unfavorably and stereotypically represented as overtly pious, stoic, narrow-minded, intolerant, and even fanatic. While they claimed for themselves the right to dissent from the orthodoxies of the Church of England, they in turn, it is argued, denied those who did not conform to their own doctrines the same right of religious freedom. And while the narrative of origins told about Virginia cast Pocahontas, a Native woman, in the title role, “the Massachusetts myth centered on a patriarchal hierarchy, even though women composed a relatively large percentage of the Plymouth population” (Uhry Abrams, *Pilgrims* xv).

Who were the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony? They were two groups of English religious dissenters, influenced by the Reformation, in particular Calvinism, who turned away not only from the Catholic but also from the Anglican Church and sought to establish a new ‘Holy Commonwealth’ in North America. They considered America their Promised Land, thus taking biblical scripture as prophecy and anticipating its fulfillment in their own lived reality in North America. In history and scholarship, the terms ‘Pilgrims’ and ‘Puritans’ are sometimes used synonymously, and this conflation indicates that the two groups had many things in common. For reasons of historical accuracy, however, we should be precise about the terminology: The Pilgrims were religious separatists who reached America in 1620 on board of the *Mayflower* with William Bradford (1590-1657); when sailing for the ‘new world,’ they had been granted land and support by the Virginia Company, yet, landing further north on the coastline, they ‘missed’ Virginia – perhaps purposefully so – and founded Plymouth, as legend has it, at the site of a rock. Within a few years, the colony had 2,500 inhabitants and maintained quite a rigorous community life. The Puritans – originally having been a derogatory term, they did not refer to themselves as such – arrived in 1630 on board of the *Arbella* and several other ships under the guidance of John Winthrop (1588-1649) after they had been granted the right to settle a new colony by Charles I, and founded the city of Boston, which for a long time remained the center of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Pilgrims and the Puritans thus originally formed distinct communities, but interacted with each other (as well as with the Native population). The so-called Great Migration (1630-40) brought many newcomers from

England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which soon outnumbered Bradford's Plymouth Colony by far. By 1640, there were about 10,000 settlers. Three generations later, in 1691, English colonial politics eventually merged the two colonies into the so-called Province of Massachusetts Bay. Up until then, the inhabitants of both colonies had made formative experiences which have left, as many scholars argue, "a permanent mark upon American history" (Hall, "Introduction" 1); these marks are most evident in the national mythological repertoire of the US.

Illustration 1: The Landing of the Mayflower (Historical Postcard)



Smith's Inc., *The Mayflower, 1620, Plymouth, Mass.* (1929).

In what follows, I will reconstruct the genesis of a myth of American origins in which the Pilgrims and Puritans and the notion of America as a biblical Promised Land have been closely connected. The scriptural story of the Hebrews' escape from slavery in Egypt and their journey to a new land promised to them by God is one of the most powerful narratives of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This religious narrative was turned into a cultural myth by reconfiguring the ingredients of the biblical story – human suffering under slavery, God's sympathy for the oppressed, divine providence, a sacred journey to a Promised Land, and claims of God-given entitlement – into a potent narrative of American beginnings (cf. Mazur and McCarthy, *God* 25-6), which constitutes a core foundational myth of the United States. In order to establish a chronology of this process, I will first turn to the early history of the Plymouth and Massachusetts

Bay Colonies and to the narratives of beginnings shaped by the 17th-century post-Reformation discourse of Puritanism. To understand this discourse and its development in the years from 1620 (the landing of the *Mayflower*) and 1630 (the landing of the *Arbella*) to 1691 (the end of much of the colonies' autonomy from the British Crown), we need to take into account that America had been imagined in Europe as a utopia since the Renaissance and thus seemed an obvious place to envision and found a utopian new society at the beginning of the 17th century. Second, I will turn to the foundational period of the United States and inquire about the role of the utopian legacy of the Puritans and the Pilgrims in this context. Third, I will trace how after American independence the history of the Pilgrims and the Puritans became a foundational story that was transformed from a regional narrative of New England into a national myth, and a crucial one at that. Fourth, I will trace the myth through the 19th and 20th centuries and look at revisionist as well as affirmative references and representations. While the myth was championed against alternatives from the South, the West, and from across the Atlantic and, in the context of the American Civil War, was quite successful in overcoming other competing narratives of national genesis, the topos of the Promised Land at the same time was used as a form of cultural critique with the aim of empowering groups who had found hell rather than their Promised Land in the United States. First and foremost among those groups were African American slaves, in whose religious culture it loomed large because of its emancipatory thrust. And whereas the modernists in the early decades of the 20th century were largely critical of the Puritan legacy, the myth of the Promised Land was concurrently claimed by immigrant and ethnic writers in a religious or semi-religious fashion.

In the field of American studies, the myth was established by scholars in the formative phase of the discipline in the 1930s as the dominant genealogical narrative and can be described as the 'myth that made American studies' but has been challenged thoroughly (and lastingly) in the writings of the New Americanists since the 1980s. The latter were influenced by the social protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which contested the white male bias and exceptionalist teleological impetus of this foundational narrative. Tracing the American myth of the Promised Land through the centuries, we can easily see that it has been one of the most prevalent of America's national mythical narratives. Whether its claim that the settlements of the Pilgrims and Puritans contained the seeds of American democracy is tenable still is a matter of debate. Yet, articulations of this myth have not only contributed to idealized accounts of American history, but have also, as we will see, employed the trope of the Promised Land as a vehicle for radical cultural dissent.

2. AMERICA AS UTOPIA: A PREFACE

Remarkably soon after its discovery, in fact, America became the locus for a variety of imaginary [...] utopian constructions.

JACK P. GREENE, *THE INTELLECTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICA*

Amerika, Du hast es besser
als unser Kontinent, der alte.

JOHANN WOLFGANG V. GOETHE, *XENIEN*

In the so-called age of discovery and exploration, Europeans often imagined the Americas as a site of utopian communities by coupling the “emerging expectations about America” with “the subsequent development of the utopian tradition;” this is paradigmatically done in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), in which the author “located Utopia in the Atlantic and used the experienced traveler just returned from a voyage with Vespucci from the ‘unknown peoples and lands’ of the New World” as his central literary device (Greene, *Intellectual Construction* 26). In the early 16th century, a number of other writers also located their visions of utopian societies in America or its vicinity: Tommaso Campanella in *City of the Sun* (1602), Johann Valentin Andreae in *Christianopolis* (1619), and Francis Bacon in *New Atlantis* (1624). Most of them have a strong religious dimension: Campanella envisions, for instance, a theocracy, Andreae a Protestant (Lutheran) utopia; Bacon’s is the only one among the canonical utopian texts of that time which gives priority to science over religion.

Those geographies of the imagination however were not empirically corroborated; European explorers and travelers did not come across any marvelous utopias in the Americas. The indigenous communities they actually encountered in their eyes did not constitute extraordinary alternative ways of life worthy of emulation; constructed by their Eurocentric gaze as radical alterity rather than viable alternatives, the indigenous cultures of North America seemed worthless and inferior in comparison to those of Europe. Native Americans were considered to be barely human – as ‘heathens’ not readily open to Christianization, they could be forcefully removed in order to make room for the newcomers. Europeans thus increasingly replaced their hopes of discovering a utopia in the Americas with reflections on how to build one there themselves: Even before the Pilgrims and Puritans settled in the ‘new world,’ prospective English settlers no longer “thought in terms of *finding* an existing utopia but of *founding* one in the relatively ‘empty’ and inviting spaces of North America” (Greene, *Intellectual Construction* 51).

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries many religious separatist groups existed in England and in Europe as a whole, many of which migrated to the Americas. As Mark Holloway points out, “[s]eventeenth-century Europe was full of [...] sects. Persecution, however severe, did nothing to diminish their fervor. And when America had been colonised, vast numbers of them emigrated in search of religious liberty” (*Heavens* 18). The Pilgrims and the Puritans thus were the earliest and certainly the most prominent of these groups yet by no means the only ones. Other religious groups which aspired to create their own “heavens on earth” (cf. *ibid.*) in North America were e.g. William Penn (1644-1718) and the Quakers, Johannes Kelpius’ (1673-1708) Society of Woman in the Wilderness, and Johann Conrad Beissel’s (1691-1768) “Dunkers,” who all settled in Pennsylvania; Mother Ann Lee (1736-1784) and the Shakers, who settled in upstate New York; and the Moravians, who came to North America in 1735 as pietistic and reformist missionaries and founded Winston-Salem in North Carolina. None of these groups – many of which still are part of the rich array of denominations in the United States today – ever came close to being as symbolically powerful as the Pilgrims and the Puritans, who are the only religious groups to form the cornerstone of a foundational narrative of the ‘new world.’ None of the great many utopian communities, whose number reached its historical climax in the 1840s and ‘50s and dwindled toward the end of the 19th century, ever elicited the same fascination as did the early settlers of New England. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the notion of America as utopia has remained highly attractive for a variety of groups and newcomers, and has been modified and appropriated according to their respective agendas; these more recent visions of America as the Promised Land are still shaped and propelled by the religious rhetoric of the Pilgrims and the Puritans.

3. THE PILGRIMS IN AMERICA: WILLIAM BRADFORD'S *OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION*

[N]ot having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

PAUL THE APOSTLE, "EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS"

Ideal communities have always been formed by minority movements.

MARK HOLLOWAY, *HEAVENS ON EARTH*

Jay Parini selected William Bradford's chronicle *Of Plymouth Plantation* as one of the "thirteen books that changed America" (cf. his book of the same [sub-] title). Bradford in his book indeed did a lot to 'create' America as the Promised Land of the Pilgrims and by doing so dramatically changed the America he had found. *Of Plymouth Plantation* is a key text of 'new world' beginnings, a self-representation of the Pilgrim experience, a crucial historical source, and a prominent foundational text of the United States. Its author was the single most important individual in the Pilgrim settlement of Plymouth: Bradford was the governor of the Plymouth Colony from 1620 almost continuously until his death in 1657 and wrote the history of the colony, seeking "through his history, to preserve both the record and the fact of Plymouth's separate identity" (Delbanco and Heimert, "William Bradford" 51). *Of Plymouth Plantation* covers the period from 1606 to 1646 and encompasses two volumes: Book One describes the history of the Pilgrims until their landing in the 'new world' (1606-1620), Book Two recounts the early years of the Pilgrims at Plymouth (1620-1646). Bradford's work has survived as a major document about 17th-century North America. Of course, we do not know and are not able to reconstruct to what extent Bradford's account is trustworthy; still, for our purposes it is crucial to examine how he described and framed the Pilgrim enterprise as an Exodus from England to the Promised Land, and thereby established a powerful foil for the interpretation of early European settlement in North America.

Yet, whereas John Smith's self-confident narrative about his experiences and observations in Virginia and his narrative of the founding of Jamestown were immediately available to his contemporaries in print, William Bradford's historiography, written between 1620 and 1647, was printed only in 1856. It was an immediate literary sensation – not least because of Bradford's appended passenger list, which finally enabled Americans to trace their ancestry literally back to the *Mayflower*, an endeavor which previously had been based mostly on

speculation. Prior to the publication of Bradford's text, only a few clergymen and scholars had access to the manuscript – not least because it went missing in the Revolutionary War and only resurfaced in a London library in the 1850s – and yet it “was from these deliberately selective and didactic interpretations that the Pilgrim myth evolved” (Uhry Abrams, *Pilgrims* 23). Overall, the early clerical historians viewed the Pilgrims' voyage from Europe to America as a “religious hegira” (ibid. 24), and “for two centuries, this reading of colonial history predominated and contributed greatly to the myth that the first settlers of Massachusetts were pious Puritans who immigrated to obtain religious freedom,” even though this “is not exactly the way Bradford wrote it” (ibid.). In fact, when we examine Bradford's text, we will frequently find ambiguity, doubt, skepticism, and disappointment concerning the progress of the Pilgrims in realizing their Promised Land in North America. Yet, throughout his memoirs, the key text for a study of Pilgrim mythmaking, Bradford keeps referring to the biblical tale of the Promised Land, thereby consistently contrasting present oppression and misgivings with the promise of future freedom and salvation.

In the first part, Bradford's narrative recounts the trials of the Pilgrims moving first from England to the Netherlands to escape persecution, and then back to England to prepare for their journey across the Atlantic. The narrative thus begins with the suffering of the Pilgrims in an environment hostile to their religious beliefs. According to Bradford, it is with God's help that the group then manages to escape its plight and to preserve its faith and community. During their journey to North America, God's special providence is revealed to the Pilgrims in many ways, e.g. by being delivered from the danger and terror of a heavy storm. They are also shown the consequences of blasphemy and ungodly behavior, e.g. in the somewhat drastic and highly illustrative episode about a young sailor onboard the ship who frequently mocked the Pilgrims during their journey:

There was an insolent and very profane young man, – one of the sailors, which made him the more overbearing, – who was always harassing the poor people in their sickness, and cursing them daily with grievous execrations, and did not hesitate to tell them that he hoped to help throw half of them overboard before they came to their journey's end. If he were gently reproved by anyone, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God, before they came half seas over, to smite the young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first to be thrown overboard. Thus his curses fell upon his own head, which astonished all his mates for they saw it was the just hand of God upon him. (Bradford, *Of Plymouth* 41)

Bradford uses this episode to (somewhat smugly) illustrate God's providence in guiding the Pilgrims on their sacred journey to the Promised Land and letting those perish who want to harm their progress. The spirit of companionship in God culminates in the so-called Mayflower Compact that was drawn up and signed by 41 men on board the *Mayflower*, who in so doing wrote into being a new "civil body politic:"

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britaine, Franc, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc., having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honour of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and the furtherance of the ends aforesaid and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general use of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. (Bradford, *Of Plymouth* 49)

The Mayflower Compact is a collective speech act of a white, male elite and a pragmatic attempt to define those Pilgrims who are striving for their Promised Land in North America as a social entity unto themselves. Many accounts have idealized and mythologized this contract as the beginning of American democracy, or even as the first American constitution (among them George Bancroft's 19th-century *History of the United States*); yet, in fact, it intended to achieve the exact opposite: namely to keep power and authority in the hands of the elite, to exclude other settlers and the Natives from it, and to exert control over how the ideal society was to look like. It was both a self-empowering declaration of loyalty as well as of autonomy by the separatists.

In *Of Plymouth Plantation*, William Bradford describes the arrival in the Promised Land upon which, he writes, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries of it, again to set their feet upon the firm and stable earth, their proper element (cf. 42-3). The settlement site is named Plymouth, after their place of departure in England. Yet, this site at first does not look like a Promised Land at all. Bradford, in fact, compares himself standing on the dunes of Cape Cod to Moses standing on Mount Pisgah, yet under different and more difficult circumstances, as the Pilgrims could not go

up to the top of Pisgah, to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the Heavens!) they could gain little solace from any outward objects. Summer being done, all things turned upon them a weather-beaten face; and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, presented a wild and savage view. (ibid. 43)

Thus, it is still a big leap from the “savage wilderness” to God’s “heavenly kingdom” (ibid.), and it is this ambiguity – the radical discrepancy between dogma and experience, between ideological construction and empirical reality – that continues to preoccupy Bradford even as the vision of America as the Promised Land for the Pilgrims propels his narrative. This kind of interpretation of God’s will and intentionality is characteristic of both Pilgrim and Puritan diction; the world and every detail in it become intelligible only as signs of God’s divine plan. Bradford in this way also justifies the Pilgrims’ sense of entitlement toward the ‘new world,’ which is “fruitful and fit for habitation, though devoid of all civilized inhabitants and given over to savages, who range up and down, differing little from the wild beasts themselves” (ibid. 13). Whereas Bradford recognizes the Natives at least nominally and acknowledges their presence even when denigrating their way of life as “brutish,” another text from the first half of the 17th century claims more drastically that the extinction of the indigenous population was God’s work, who by “sweeping away great multitudes of the natives by the smallpox a little before we went thither [...] [made] room for us there;” to the anonymous author, this revealed how “the good hand of God favoured our beginnings” (*New England’s First Fruits* 65). It becomes apparent in these sources that the Pilgrims’ notions of the Promised Land and of God’s divine scheme served to justify and legitimate the displacement and destruction of other peoples.

Yet, apart from his condescending attitude toward the indigenous population and despite descriptions of early English-Native conflicts and skirmishes, Bradford overall portrays the interaction with the Natives as relatively peaceful, which is mainly due to two Native figures: Squanto and Massasoit. Squanto is introduced as a Native American who upon their arrival “came boldly among them, and spoke to them in broken English, which they could well understand, but were astonished at it” (Bradford, *Of Plymouth* 51). Squanto, the only survivor of the Patuxet tribe, spoke English because of his previous captivity on board an English ship and a seafaring life that had brought him several times across the Atlantic, to the Mediterranean Sea, all the way up to Newfoundland, and eventually back to New England – just in time to greet the Pilgrims. His (mostly

involuntary) geographic movements were quite exceptional at that time, and the Pilgrims therefore marveled at an English-speaking Native. Squanto appears as an “eccentric native,” as a “disconcertingly hybrid ‘native’ met at the ends of the earth – strangely familiar, and different precisely in that unprocessed familiarity” (Clifford, “Travelling” 19). He carved out a space for himself as the mediator between the culture of the newcomers and that of the Natives and was extremely helpful to the Pilgrims in showing them many things they did not know, because despite their claim to be culturally, religiously, and morally superior to the indigenous population, they were in fact utterly helpless and disoriented. From Squanto they learned how to survive that first long winter – after all, they had arrived at Cape Cod in November. Not surprisingly perhaps, the Pilgrims took Squanto’s presence not as an effect of the globalizing force and violence of colonialism of which they themselves were a part, but primarily as another token of God’s providence, which never ceased to amaze them:

[...] Squanto stayed with them, and was their interpreter, and became a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation. He showed them how to plant their corn, where to take fish and other commodities, and guided them to unknown places, and never left them till he died. (Bradford, *Of Plymouth 52*)

Whereas Squanto was a native informant, Massasoit was the chief of the Wampanoags, who lived in the area where the Pilgrims settled. Massasoit from the beginning met regularly with the Pilgrims and initiated and negotiated a peace treaty in 1621, the first of its kind. Little did he know that those newcomers felt they were entitled to his people’s land on the basis of their interpretation of a story in a text collection compiled thousands of years before their arrival in America. Yet, the pilgrims managed to live peacefully with the Wampanoags for the first 50 years, while the nearby Puritans and the Virginians to the south were already fighting the local indigenous peoples over land and resources. The peace agreement between the Wampanoags and the Pilgrims lasted until 1675, when an armed conflict often referred to as King Philip’s War broke out. But, to return to Bradford’s account of English-Native relations: as already mentioned he describes them mostly positively, yet at the same time he and his fellow Pilgrims are extremely condescending toward the Natives. For all the good intentions to give a balanced, even sympathetic portrayal of the indigenous population, Bradford repeatedly echoes Columbus’s representation of the American natives in his first letter from the ‘new world;’ a milder and more strongly religiously invested but not altogether different colonial hermeneutics emanates from Bradford’s text. The religious discourse of the Pilgrims is permeated by cultural assump-

tions of their own (i.e., white) superiority; as we can see here, religion does not transcend (English) culture – rather, it is part of it. This is also evident in the writings of other Pilgrims; Edward Winslow for instance writes in a letter on December 11, 1621:

We have found the Indians very faithful in their covenant of peace with us, very loving and ready to pleasure us. We often go to them, and they come to us. [...] Yea, it hath pleased God so to possess the Indians with a fear of us, and love unto us, that not only the greatest king amongst them, called Massasoit, but also all the princes and peoples round about us, have either made suit unto us or been glad of any occasion to make peace with us [...]. We entertain them familiarly in our houses, and they as friendly bestowing their venison on us. They are people without any religion or knowledge of any God, yet very trusty, quick of apprehension, ripe-witted, just. The men and women go naked, only a skin about their middles. (qtd. in Young, *Chronicles* 51)

Due to the lore that has developed around the experience of the Pilgrims' first winter in North America as well as due to the absence of major hostilities in the early decades of the Plymouth Colony, the Pilgrims' settlement is often connected to notions of Native hospitality and peaceful intercultural relations – notions which inspired then-President of the United States Abraham Lincoln to make Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863 in order to commemorate that very first 'Thanksgiving' which took place in Plymouth in 1621. However, Bradford himself does not dwell on this event in his text, which has only been fleshed out and embellished by subsequent writers. Lincoln in his efforts to promote an ideology of peace and domestic harmony at a time when the 'United' States were at war with each other (cf. Seelye, *Memory's Nation* 17) chose Thanksgiving as a day of commemoration, yet the ambiguity of Thanksgiving in the ideology of the Pilgrims is apparent: they gave thanks to God for their survival but hardly to their Native fellow men and women, who, they believed, acted not of their own accord but merely as instruments of God's will. In Bradford's text, the world is interpreted according to typological doctrine and biblical literalism in an often futile attempt to brush aside or smooth over ambiguity and uncertainty.

The second volume of Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which accounts for the settlement's development in the early decades of its existence, is imbued with a rhetoric of damnation as well as reward; it is permeated by a sense of sinfulness and reveals that the colony was embroiled in tremendous generational conflict. It is here that Bradford's writings show a deep ambivalence about the analogy of the Promised Land. He increasingly realizes a "failure of Plymouth to fulfill its original purpose as a selfless community," and also makes note of "the

concurrent completion of the Reformation through Cromwell's victories in Old England" (Delbanco and Heimert, "William Bradford" 51). Bradford implies a causal connection – that "Plymouth's congregational polity informed Massachusetts Bay and that the example of the larger colony in turn inspired the ecclesiastical revolution in England" (ibid.) – yet he also thinks that the colony is in decline because of its consolidation with the Puritan community, and nostalgically reminisces about the early 'golden days' of Plymouth, and even about the Dutch exile in Leyden. In revisiting the early days of the colony, Bradford not only chronicles history but also reminds his brethren of their vision and the strength of their faith, which he seeks to re-invigorate by calling to mind the divine signs which assured the Pilgrims of God's providence. Bradford "seems intent on showing what might have been if a deeper devotion of all to all had prevailed," and he is anxious that a great "change" will come over the colony, which he finds now devoid of "its former glory" (Rosenmeier, "With My" 100). Late in his life, William Bradford taught himself Hebrew to be able to read "that most ancient language and holy tongue, in which the Law and Oracles of God were writ" (qtd. in ibid.). About his Hebrew studies, he writes that "I am refreshed to have seen some glimpse hereof; (as Moyses saw the land of Canan a farr off)" (qtd. in ibid.). The Promised Land of William Bradford in the 1650s is no longer America but the Hebrew Scriptures, one might conclude. (Re)turning to the holy text more than thirty years after his arrival in North America, Bradford prepares for his own "resurrect[ion] to new and literal life" (ibid. 106) in a Promised Land not of this world: he dies in 1657. His history of the Pilgrims today appears to be much more complicated and ambivalent than has often been acknowledged, and moreover has in fact been straightened out and idealized by generations of religious scholars and historians, and by Americans who have celebrated Plymouth Rock – the site where the Pilgrims supposedly first set foot on American soil – as a symbol of 'new world' beginnings. Bradford sailed to the 'new world' in order to find/found a Promised Land, yet the high expectations in this self-proclaimed 'exceptional' community remained unfulfilled. As much as Bradford insisted that God had "preserved their spirits" through "crosses, troubles, fears, wants, and sorrowes" in the establishment of the colony (*Of Plymouth* 381), the whole enterprise ultimately seemed somehow incomplete, and dubious in its consequences for all parties involved – it was as if the Pilgrims had never really left the biblical wilderness and were perpetually stuck in a painful moment of delay in which the Promised Land was beckoning in the distance but could still somehow never be reached.

4. THE PURITANS AND THEIR PROMISED LAND

We shall be as a city upon a hill.

JOHN WINTHROP

Hayle holy-land wherin our holy lord
Hath planted his most true and holy word
Hayle happye people who have dispossesst
ourselves of friend, an meanes, to find some rest
For your poore wearied soules, opprest of late
For Jesus-sake, with Envye, spight, and hate
To yow that blessed promise truly's given
Of sure reward, which you'l receve in heaven.
THOMAS TILLAM, "UPON THE FIRST SIGHT"

What went you out to the wilderness to find?

SAMUEL DANFORTH, "A BRIEF RECOGNITION"

Whereas the history of the Pilgrims was primarily represented by William Bradford, there were many chroniclers, orators, and commentators among the Puritans. In fact, the New England Puritans "were highly self-conscious about their achievements and began interpreting themselves for posterity as soon as they arrived in the New World" (Morgan, *Founding* 3). In promotional tracts, sermons, histories, and autobiographical conversion narratives, the Puritans fashioned themselves as the founders of a model colony that realized God's will. Whereas the Pilgrims had arrived in North America ten years earlier than the Puritans, "with the formation of the Massachusetts Bay Company and with the arrival on the scene of Governor John Winthrop in 1630, Massachusetts became the spearhead of Puritan emigration to the New World" (ibid. vii) – although not all of the Massachusetts settlers were Puritans in the strict sense of the term, and by far not all of them were members of the rather exclusive Puritan congregation. Aside from the aforementioned John Winthrop, John Cotton, Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, Samuel Danforth, Increase Mather, and Cotton Mather would also become influential Puritan theologians. New England Puritanism was not homogeneous though and cannot be interpreted monolithically; in fact, the experience of 'America' crucially transformed the Puritan religious dogma and increasingly led to conflicts among the Puritans about what their Promised Land should look like.

Illustration 2: Portrait of John Winthrop

Unknown Artist, *John Winthrop* (ca. 1800).

Though they were less radical dissenters than the Pilgrims, the Puritans too accepted neither the Pope nor the English King as religious authorities beside or above the Scriptures. Like the Pilgrims, the Puritans were strongly influenced by Calvinism's doctrine of predestination, which contends that salvation can occur only through the grace of God and that the individual is responsible to God only. As a powerful reformist grassroots movement, Puritanism had been forced underground by the end of the 16th century, as it was considered an affront to England's clergy and king; King James I (after whom Jamestown, Virginia, and the English translation of the Bible commonly referred to as the King James Bible have been named) supposedly threatened: "I will harry them out of the land" (qtd. in Schmidt, *William Bradford* 12), and his successor Charles I (crowned in 1625) was even less tolerant toward the Puritans. Unlike the Pilgrims, however, the Puritans did not consider themselves separatists but reformists; they believed that their New Jerusalem in North America was going to set an example that would be emulated on the other side of the Atlantic, allowing them eventually to return to a fundamentally changed and reformed England. Yet, even if the Puritans may have considered their sojourn in North America to be only temporary (as has been argued most famously by Perry Miller), ultimate-

ly only 10 percent of the first settlers of the Great Migration ever went back to England.

John Winthrop, who led the first group of Puritans to North America in 1630 (700 passengers on 11 ships), was a key figure in the founding of Massachusetts with a pronounced sense of self-importance, of which he has left ample evidence himself: “From the time he set foot on the *Arbella* until his death in 1649, he kept a journal, the historical purpose of which is suggested by the fact that after the first few days he refrained from using the first person singular and wrote of himself as ‘the governor’” (Morgan, *Founding* 174). Most famously, John Winthrop declared that the Puritans in the ‘new world’ would be “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630). His famous lay sermon (Winthrop was never ordained officially as a minister) laid out the terms of religious and social coexistence in the colony, a blueprint for the founding of a new community:

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God’s sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us. (216)

Winthrop’s use of the biblical topos of the heavenly city evokes the exceptionality of the Puritans as a model for others, if not mankind. He references Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus tells his followers “you are the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth.” Whereas Bradford likened himself to Moses leading his people out of bondage to the Promised Land, Winthrop refers to both Jesus and Moses in the closing passage of his sermon. While exhorting the Puritans with words from the Sermon on the Mount, he admonishes them with references to Moses’s farewell to the people of Israel “to love the Lord our God and love one another” (*Winthrop Papers* 295), so

that the Lord our God may blesse us in the land whether wee goe to possesse it: But if our heartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship other Gods [...] we shall surely perishe out of the good Land whether wee passe over this vast Sea to possesse it. (ibid.)

Included in Winthrop’s vision of the holy community is also a kind of social contract. He likens the Puritans’ future civil society to an organism by describing it as “knit together in this worke as one man,” and states that its aim is to “par-

take of each other's strength and infirmity, joy and sorrow, weal and woe." "The care of the public," Winthrop preached, "must oversway all private respects" (ibid.). Winthrop's vision of communal life in the Promised Land of North America is characterized by hope, harmony, and religious freedom as well as by discipline and social control. Similar to Bradford's text, Winthrop's sermon was published rather late:

For two centuries, the sermon circulated in various manuscript versions; upon its first publication, by the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1848, it became known as the classic statement of the Puritans' understanding of their place in history, their mission, and their ideals. (Delbanco, "John Winthrop" 3)

The Exodus and Promised Land rhetoric runs through much of Puritan writing as a kind of "Colonial Puritan hermeneutics" (Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins* 186) throughout the 17th century and well into the 18th century, from Winthrop's sermon to the rather unorthodox and somewhat ironic "New England Canaan" by Thomas Morton of Merrimount. However, on closer inspection, we can detect shifts in the authors' attitude toward the realization of the Promised Land in the colony. At first, many texts equate the Promised Land with America, i.e. New England. John Winthrop initially describes his new home with the following words: "here is sweet air, fair rivers, and plenty of springs, and the water better than in England" (*History* 375). As Puritan scholar Alan Heimert has noted: "America was to be 'the good Land,' [...] a veritable Canaan. The Atlantic, if not the Red, was their 'vast Sea,' and the successful conclusion of their voyage, the end of their tribulations, their emergence from the 'wilderness'" ("Puritanism" 361-62).

This initially positive impression also resonates in Thomas Tillam's eulogy on New England titled "Upon the First Sight," which in the beginning connects the Scriptures to the experiences of the Puritans in New England but soon gives way to less enthusiastic sentiments and at times very different observations. Immediately after their arrival in North America, the Puritans began to experience difficulties which played themselves out internally in communal strife and externally in conflicts with the indigenous population. In fact, "the first decades of settlement were characterised by an ongoing dialogue over the shape that the colony's institutions should take" (Bremer, *Puritan Experiment* 128). As early as the 1630s, theological disputes about the exercise of power over the members of the congregation as well as heavy skirmishes with the Native tribes ensued. Only six years after their arrival in Massachusetts, those conflicts come to a head. In 1636, Thomas Hooker leaves the colony and founds Hartford (in today's

Connecticut); he is followed by Roger Williams, a dissident banned from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for suggesting a more liberal handling of church membership and for approaching the indigenous population with curiosity rather than disdain. Williams authors the first dictionary of Native languages (titled *A Key to the Languages of America*; cf. *Complete Writings*) and founds Providence, Rhode Island, in 1636, where he is joined by Anne Hutchinson, an antinomian who rejected all political and theological authorities in favor of her own version of ‘true’ Puritanism, which is condemned as heresy by Winthrop, who suppresses Hutchinson and her followers “because she set her private revelation above the public errand” (Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins* 174). In 1638, John Davenport settles the colony of New Haven (later to become part of Connecticut), further diversifying the socio-religious scene of New England.

John Winthrop, who plays a crucial role in policing the Puritans and comes down hard on what he perceives as unauthorized dissent, is commemorated by Puritan historian William Hubbard with the words that he was “a worthy gentleman, who had done good in Israel” (qtd. in Morgan, *Founding* 134). Trying to ban ‘difference’ outside and inside the community, Winthrop sought to preserve the ‘Holy Commonwealth’ that had come at such a high cost. As Stephen Foster suggests, the New England clergy were “required to reconcile their movement’s conflicting demands” (*Long Argument* 152) at a time when “boatload after boatload brought ashore the refugees” from England’s Church, and that they managed to do so is considered by Foster to have been a “masterpiece of ecclesiastical statesmanship” (ibid. 151). As we take a closer look at the early history of the colony, it becomes more and more apparent that the rhetoric of the Promised Land and divine providence on the one hand aims to uphold an ideological construction of the ‘new world’ which quite obviously was at odds with the actual experiences of the “saints” (as the Puritans called each other), and on the other serves as a legitimization of colonial rule, an instrument of control, and a means to homogenize the colony by defining norms of conduct and marginalizing or excluding those who do not adhere to those norms.

As the population of the colony grew rapidly with the Great Migration, the local tribes, among them the Pequots, fought against the increasing incursions the English settlers made into their land. The Pequot War culminated in the Mystic Massacre in 1637, in which hundreds of women and children were killed. Ultimately the entire tribe was exterminated; survivors were dispersed or sold into slavery. Although victorious, the Puritans themselves experienced this conflict as a major crisis that threatened the existence and future of the colony. The Pequot War shows that the interaction of the Puritans with the indigenous population was far less peaceful than that of the Pilgrims in the first decades, and

the ruthlessness with which it was fought reveals the brutality of English colonialism even (or especially) when it is cloaked as religious destiny, as in the case of the Puritans' quest for the Promised Land. Although the war could well have been taken as an indication of God's anger, the victory of the English over the Pequots was readily interpreted as a merciful act of God instead, yet again demonstrating the arbitrariness of ideology.

In sum, the Puritan experience as American experience is characterized by a number of transitions that engendered some paradoxes. The first transition, of course, is their physical movement from England to North America, which entailed events that could not be integrated into the biblical script which they attempted to follow. These discrepancies were initially suppressed, of course, but surfaced time and again over the years. The second transition concerns the Puritans' transformation from an oppressed minority of non-conformist believers into an oppressive ruling elite; yet their efforts to uphold religious orthodoxy in the colony from the beginning were met with heavy resistance. Third and most importantly perhaps, even the firmest of believers became increasingly doubtful whether North America in fact was the Promised Land they had been looking for. How were they to interpret the obstacles and difficulties with which they had to wrestle daily? And why did this Promised Land look like a wilderness? The Puritans' anxieties grew in tandem with internal and external conflicts and led to increased pressure of the Puritan elite on any form of dissent; to them, the violence against the Native tribes seemed both necessary and providential, and thus fully legitimate. Yet, the "Puritan struggle of self-knowledge, relentless introspection, [and] tortured uncertainty" mirrored the tenuousness of their faith and time and again threw into doubt the endeavor of Puritanism, and "[t]he burden of such doubt has never quite lifted from what we once would have called the American soul" (Delbanco and Heimert, "Introduction" xv).

In many texts of the 1630s and 1640s, America figures as an ambiguous force to be reckoned with rather than as a safe haven: "They were [...] uncertain whether New England was to be their Israel or their Wilderness of Sinai – that is, a permanent dwelling place for the elect of God, or a temporary refuge in which their religious affections and institutions would be tried, purged, and perfected" (Slotkin, "Introduction" 11). Patricia Caldwell has identified this ambiguity in many of the early conversion narratives:

For most, it was an America neither of joyous fulfillment nor, on the other hand, of fearsome, howling hideousness, but a strange, foggy limbo of broken promises. [...] [T]he

America encountered by these yearning souls was no visible saint but an invisible, ever-receding, unloving god. (*Puritan Conversion Narrative* 134)

Caldwell's analysis of the ambiguities of North American Puritan conversion narratives evidences that the "specific shift to America," the "motion to New England," reverberates with emotional turmoil and trauma: "[T]he new world is not just a disappointment; it is a positive setback, and one from which many people scarcely recover" (*ibid.*). Alan Heimert has argued that the colonizing experience so crucially altered Puritan attitudes toward the meaning of their physical surroundings that it was imaginatively transformed from a Promised Land (back) into a wilderness (cf. "Puritanism" 361).

The experience of America shocked the Puritans out of their belief in the Promised Land, so to speak, and left them bewildered in the 'wilderness' of America: "The conditions of life in the colonies did not make for the sort of education that the Puritans had originally conceived. [...] American conditions posed threats to the Puritan system that they could not have anticipated" (Slotkin, "Introduction" 14). And it is from this discrepancy between doctrinaire belief on the one hand and the physical experience of North America on the other that a specifically *American* Puritan culture with its own particular conversion rituals, religious practices, and rhetoric developed, which put the sacred journey as well as the experience of America at the center of both their narrative of the past (genealogy) and their narrative of the future (mission).

After the hardships of the early years (1620-1640), the colony seemed no longer threatened by extinction after the mid-1650s; quite to the contrary: the "Puritan adult of 1670 emerge[d] to a condition of relative ease and prosperity" (*ibid.* 9). With this prosperity came a decline in church membership, as American-born Puritans no longer wanted to submit to the strict regime of congregational life, and focused more on worldly rather than on religious concerns. In order to keep church membership numbers up, the Puritan elite finally allowed for a half-way covenant (i.e., partial church membership with limited rights) by softening the original membership requirements. This liberalization was the subject of controversial discussions among the Puritan clergy and was also accompanied, once again, by conflicts with other groups living in and on the edges of the colony.

Having reviewed the initial enthusiasm and certainty of the first and second generation of Puritan settlers that was soon followed by anxiety, disappointment, and disorientation, we witness in the rhetoric of the Puritan clergy of the later decades of the 17th century repeated attempts to re-invigorate the early Puritan

faith and dogma against the backdrop of a changing American Puritan culture. In this light, we may read sermons such as Samuel Danforth's famous "Errand into the Wilderness," which later gave the title to two seminal works of Puritan scholarship (cf. Miller's book of the same title and Bercovitch, "Rhetoric"). Addressing the assembled delegates on the election day of the Massachusetts General Court, the sermon poses the question of Puritan uniqueness and exceptionality. Danforth quotes Jesus – "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" (Matthew 11:7) – in order to confront his congregation with the question of why they had come to America. Danforth criticizes those who have of late been more concerned with worldly rather than religious matters. As a direct consequence of the colonists' sins, Danforth identifies God's punitive measures against them. Yet, he also renews the "promise of divine Protection and Preservation," and offers his listeners the opportunity to "choose this for our Portion, To sit at Christ's feet and hear his word; and whosoever complain against us, the Lord Jesus will plead for us [...] and say. They have chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from them" ("Errand"). By quoting from the Bible, Danforth takes his audience back to their 'new world' beginning, and prophesies in the rhetorical mode of the American jeremiad that by turning away from materialism and worldly pleasures, the Puritans could still transform their environment into the Promised Land. He thus both consolidates and transforms the myth of the Promised Land: Whereas he displaces it into the future and admits that the colony so far has not become the Promised Land, he also affirms the possibility that it may still happen. What we witness in Danforth's text is the transfer of the Promised Land topos from space into time: if the colony falls short of being the realization of God's Promised Land now, it will have to strive harder to attain this status in the future. The discrepancy between what is and what should be propels Danforth's prophecy. Sacvan Bercovitch uses Danforth's sermon to demonstrate the specific structure and formula of the American jeremiad:

Danforth's strategy is characteristic of the American jeremiad throughout the seventeenth century: first, a precedent from Scripture that sets out the communal norms; then, a series of condemnations that detail the actual state of the community (at the same time insinuating the covenantal promises that ensure success); and finally, a prophetic vision that unveils the promises, and explains away the gap between fact and ideal. (*American Jeremiad* 16)

Closing the gap between the wilderness of North America and the Promised Land of the Chosen People, then, Danforth suggests, is the unfinished task of the Puritans that will be achieved in the future.

Whereas Danforth's theological discourse rekindles the idea of turning the American wilderness into God's Promised Land, the events in the colony provide a different kind of closure for the Puritan experiment. In the mid to late 1670s, King Philip's War raged in the American colonies and threatened the survival of the white settlements in an unprecedented manner. This violent confrontation between a coalition of Native tribes led by Metacomet (a.k.a. 'King Philip') and the English settlers spread over the entire territory of the early American frontier, and became one of the most devastating in American history:

For all their suffering, the English fared well compared to New England's Native American peoples. [...] One account estimated that three thousand Native Americans were killed in battle. In a total population of about twenty thousand, this number is staggering. (Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War* 15)

At that time, the English settlers face major problems not only in the confrontation with the indigenous population but also within the colony, and with colonial rule. Increasingly, the English monarchy tightened the reigns on the 'new world' dominion of the Pilgrims and the Puritans, paving the way for a final eruption of the inner contradictions and conflicts of interest which culminated in the Salem witch trials and the executions of 19 people in the course of a year. The witchcraft hysteria, which has elicited a whole range of interpretations from social and economic to feminist and psychoanalytic, marks another climax of the inner turmoil of a colony placed under ever tighter control of the English Crown. Soon, the colony was forced to practice religious toleration. In 1692, self-governance was curtailed, and the colony had to accept a royal governor sent from England to North America, whereas before the Massachusetts Bay colonists had appointed this official from their own ranks. "By the end of the seventeenth century," as Ursula Brumm puts it succinctly, "the beginnings of the new world were already history" ("What Went" 1). Faith in the Promised Land was severely shaken, if not quite lost.

Yet, the Puritan elite were neither ready nor willing to concede the shortcomings of their project. In 1702, theologian Cotton Mather (son of Increase Mather, grandson of Richard Mather and John Cotton) published his magnum opus, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, in which he insisted on an affirmative perspective:

I write the Wonders of the Christian Religion, flying from the Depravations of Europe to the American Strand: And, assisted by the Holy Author of the Religion, I do with all the conscience of Truth, required therein by Him, who is the Truth itself, Report the Wonder-

ful Display of his Infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness and Faithfulness, wherewith his Divine Providence hath irradiated an Indian Wilderness. (*Day* 163)

By that time, the original charter of the colony had been revoked. “These changes meant the end of the society that Winthrop and Cotton had originally envisaged” (Hall, “Introduction” 5). Mather tries to defend the values of the colony’s founders against both royal rule and against widening the eligibility for church membership to include those who would not have been considered pious enough by the first and second generation Puritans. Yet, Mather’s own exuberant language, “its baroque style” (Brumm, “What Went” 1) and hyperbole reveal that he has come a long way from the sober, understated, and reflective writings of the early Puritans. Mather makes an almost desperate plea for the preservation of the ‘New England Way,’ reiterating once more the role of the colony in a global scheme of redemption and salvation. He is the first Puritan to call himself ‘American’ in writing – “I that am an American” – the term having been used until then exclusively to refer to the Native American population (cf. Herget, “Anders” 44). Even if the realization of the Promised Land remained doubtful, the making of Americans in the process of negotiating the terms of (co)existence in a heavenly utopia are explicated in Mather’s epic. And, as Alan Heimert has noted, the realization that the New England wilderness was not the Promised Land may have contributed to the continuation of a search in time *and* space: As Danforth’s exhortations admonished the Puritans to lead better lives, the “heaven on earth” that the Puritans were looking for could still be imagined by following generations further west in the less populated and ‘purer’ regions of North America (cf. “Puritanism” 375).

Even though the historical record of the Pilgrims and the Puritans unambiguously shows that the realization of a utopian community on American soil utterly failed, their rhetoric has survived their social experiments in remarkable ways. It is a rhetoric that thrives on the vision of a Promised Land in *this* world, not the next: The Promised Land could be realized – in the near future, and in America. It is this rhetoric of providence that turned those early settlers into forefathers of mythical proportions, even though subsequent conceptualizations of the Promised Land may have diverged greatly. As Christopher Bigsby so succinctly put it:

America has so successfully colonized the future that it has mastered the art of prospective nostalgia. Its natural tense is the future perfect. It looks forward to a time when something will have happened. It is a place, too, where fact and fiction, myth and reality dance a curious gavotte. It is a society born out of its own imaginings. (“Introduction” 1)

The Puritan myth of the Promised Land both generates and displays this dynamism.

5. THE PILGRIMS AND THE PURITANS IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA AND THE 19TH CENTURY

The *Mayflower* cult, the Pilgrim legend, was built up in New England at the end of the eighteenth century and developed in the first half of the nineteenth. It was spreading west into the prairies by the mid-century. [...] The ideas of New England were carried across the continent.

CRISPIN GILL, *MAYFLOWER REMEMBERED*

Thomas Jefferson, co-author of the Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States of America, early on realized the usefulness of the Exodus narrative for American nation-building. He wanted to place the inscription “the Children of Israel in the Wilderness, led by a Cloud by day, and a Pillar of Fire by night” on the Great Seal of the United States, as John Adams, then delegate to the Second Continental Congress and later second President of the United States, wrote to his wife in 1776 (qtd. in Buckley, “Thomas Jefferson” 46). Time and again, Jefferson returned to the myth of the Promised Land to describe the special relationship of Americans with God. In his second inaugural address, Jefferson refers to “that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land; and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life” (qtd. in *ibid.*). In Jefferson’s political rhetoric, “the Exodus event in and through which God had formed his chosen people prefigured the formation of the American nation” (*ibid.*). In the ways that the rhetoric of the Promised Land became partially secularized for the purpose of nation-building, we can observe how the memory of the Pilgrims and Puritans was preserved and adapted into a specific US-American civil religion (to be discussed in detail in the following chapter).

Illustration 3: Plymouth Rock

Photograph by James Freeman and Cindy Freeman (2006).

The memorial culture surrounding the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans has both a regional as well as a national tradition. At the site of the founding of Plymouth, a veritable cult of the Pilgrim Fathers started to develop in the second half of the 18th century that continued well into the 19th century. One element of the Pilgrims' story which cannot be found in the 17th-century sources and which is difficult (if not impossible) to authenticate is Plymouth Rock, which became the focus of a narrative of mythical proportions. The rock supposedly marked the spot where the Pilgrims first set foot on American soil and was turned into a fetish of New England beginnings, even though Bradford does not mention it anywhere in his text. It is only in the revolutionary era that promotion of the Rock as "a political icon" sets in (Seelye, *Memory's Nation* 1). By focusing on the physical contact between the feet of the Pilgrim Fathers and a rock at the coastline, this mythology distracts attention away from and displaces the more difficult issue of cultural contact between the indigenous peoples and the Pilgrims – a rock does not speak or fight back, after all. The rock is mentioned for the first time in 1741 and in the following decades is cherished, fenced in, and protected against the weather – especially after 1774. In the 1830s, the famous French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by the cult around Plymouth Rock, which then was in full swing:

This rock has become an object of veneration in the United States. I have seen bits of it carefully preserved in several towns of the Union. Does not this sufficiently show how all human power and greatness are entirely in the soul? Here is a stone which the feet of a few poor fugitives pressed for an instant, and this stone becomes famous; it is treasured by a great nation, a fragment is prized as a relic. (*Democracy* Vol. 1 34)

The term ‘relic,’ of course, already connotes the sacral and holy that turns a worldly thing (here a rock) into an object of worship. This symbolic surplus constitutes the mythic quality of lifeless matter in the foundational framework of a nation. Udo Hebel has in great detail chronicled the rise and demise of Plymouth Rock’s role in the New England imaginary and in that of the nation. He has pointed out that the “history of the commemoration of the arrival of the Mayflower in Plymouth harbour as Forefather’s Day dates back to 1769” (“Rise” 142), even as Plymouth Rock’s symbolic power diminishes with the rise of Thanksgiving as the more prominent national holiday. To be chosen to compose and to deliver the annual Forefather’s Day oratory next to the rock was one of the greatest honors that could be bestowed upon a member of the community. Among the more famous speakers chosen for that occasion was the lawyer, politician, and orator Daniel Webster, who gave an address called “First Settlement of New England” at the bicentenary celebration of the Pilgrims’ landing at Plymouth in 1820; the bicentenary was organized by the newly founded Pilgrim Society, which not only took good care of the rock but by 1824 had turned Plymouth into a popular tourist attraction (cf. Uhry Abrams, *Pilgrims* 45). Webster’s speech shows how the effort of commemoration is inextricably intertwined with mythmaking, and contains all the elements characteristic of the Pilgrim’s myth of origin in New England. First, he delineates the ‘new world’ as a safe haven for the religious refugees from England, calling New England “the place of our father’s refuge” (“First Settlement” 26). Second, he strongly idealizes the Pilgrim Fathers and their “voluntary exile,” states that they sought “a higher degree of religious freedom” and “a purer form of religious worship” (ibid. 29), and turns them into victims and quasi-martyrs: theirs “was a humble and peaceable religion, flying from causeless oppression” (ibid. 31). Third, Webster mythologizes the landing and fetishizes the rock by invoking its *spiritus loci*, which “inspires and awes us” at this “memorable spot [...], this Rock [...] on which New England received the feet of the Pilgrims” (ibid. 27). Fourth, Webster emphasizes the distinctness of the Plymouth Colony from all other colonial projects past and present. He even casts the Pilgrims’ arrival at the shore as a radical and singular form of a new beginning built upon religious prophecy that made them feel and act ‘at home’ in the ‘new world’ immediately (cf. ibid. 36) –

thanks to the Mayflower Compact. Their settlement was not a colonial outpost or a mere extension of the motherland, but marked a radical new beginning “with the very first foundations laid under the divine light of the Christian religion” (ibid. 36) that led to progress and democracy built on “morality and religious sentiment” (ibid. 49). Briefly chastising the slave trade and the institution of slavery, Webster concludes, “let us not forget the religious character of our origin” (ibid. 51). His speech explicitly declares the Pilgrims to be the true founders of the United States of America by inextricably linking the US of 1820 to the New England beginnings of 1620 and assigns this colony an exceptional status. The Pilgrims’ endeavor thus figures as an exceptional venture, and the moment of landing is described as a singular temporal constellation, or *kairos*. While Webster explicitly refers to the Pilgrims, the Puritans are also championed in his skilful oratory.

Forefather’s Day annually commemorated the landing of the Pilgrims in North America and gave ample opportunity for public addresses to affirm the Pilgrims’ importance for the American republic. Among the orators were poet William Cullen Bryant (who could trace both of his parents back to the *Mayflower*), lawyer and politician Rufus Choate, Samuel Davies Baldwin (who gave a speech titled “Armageddon: Or, the Overthrow of Romanism and Monarchy; the Existence of the United States Foretold in the Bible”), as well as Massachusetts politician John Gorham Palfrey, author of a compendious pro-Puritan history of New England (cf. *History*). All in all, these commemorative speech acts were important cultural practices and political rituals that further bolstered the myth of the Pilgrims and the Puritans in the Promised Land.

Other facets of 19th-century American memorial culture reveal the foundational quality attributed to the Pilgrims and the Puritans as mythical figures of the American past. In the same way that the (competing) origin myth of Virginia became part of the national mythical repertoire, the myth of the Pilgrims and Puritans quickly achieved a national dimension. In the United States Capitol, there are three images of Pilgrims and Puritans in and around the rotunda, and additional images of individuals can be found in the Statuary Hall (a statue of Roger Williams) and in the Hall of Columns (a statue of John Winthrop). All of these images attest to the centrality of the Pilgrims and the Puritans for the foundational narratives of the nation and frame them in terms of their religiosity as well as of God’s providence. Contrary to the figure of Pocahontas discussed previously, they reference the European, i.e. the English origin of the United States of America.

Illustration 4: The Pilgrims Prepare for the 'New World'

Robert W. Weir, *Embarkation of the Pilgrims* (1843).

Enrico Causici's 1825 relief *Landing of the Pilgrims, 1620* in the Capitol depicts a family in a boat welcomed by a Native offering an ear of corn; the fresco *Landing of Pilgrims at Plymouth, Mass., 1620*, which is part of the Frieze of American History, is a similarly sedate rendering of the landing. The painting *The Embarkation of the Pilgrims at Delft Haven, Holland, July 22nd, 1620* (1843) by Robert W. Weir however is placed even more prominently inside the rotunda of the US Capitol. Weir's painting, like Chapman's Pocahontas painting, highlights the theme of salvation: whereas "Pocahontas saved Virginia for the Anglican Church, the faith of the Pilgrims saved the United States from paganism" (Uhry Abrams, *Pilgrims* 39). The painting suggests that "God willed the transportation of Protestantism to America" (ibid.). Weir focuses on the departure from the 'old world,' not on the arrival in the 'new.' His painting mythologizes the moment of departure and celebrates the trust in God's providence. Geographically, it identifies the founding of Plymouth Colony as an English/European project, by which we can discern a fundamental difference in perspective between the myth of Pocahontas and the myth of the Pilgrims and the Puritans that would continue to fuel controversial discussions.

All of the visual representations of the Pilgrims and Puritans at the meeting place of the national legislature are highly affirmative and work as foundational representations. They are in accordance with contemporaneous historiographies

of the United States, most prominently again those by New England historians such as George Bancroft, author of the well-known *History of the United States*:

The pilgrims were Englishmen, Protestants, exiles for conscience, men disciplined by misfortune, cultivated by opportunities of extensive observation, equal in rank as in rights, and bound by no code but that of religion or the public will. (*History* 23)

As a historian of the romantic school, Bancroft sees liberty and God's providence as the defining moments in American history, and thus also accords the Pilgrims a central role.

Yet, the mythologization of the Pilgrims and the Puritans in the 19th century did not only affirm a regional identity and extrapolate from it a national imaginary, but also pursued three major strategic goals in relation to what New Englanders perceived as rival influences coming from three different directions. First, the New England Way is pitted against the genealogy of the South and its foundational mythology. In his oratory, Daniel Webster takes an abolitionist stance and openly opposes the South's system of slavery – an opposition he would later compromise in the so-called Webster-Hayne debate. Within the United States, the North and the South became increasingly polarized. It was in the midst of the sectional conflict that Thanksgiving was pronounced a national holiday in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln in an act that seemed to proclaim the dominance of the North over the South. Thus here it is against the South's political and cultural aspirations that the myth of the Pilgrims and the Puritans as a foundational American myth is implicitly directed.

Second, the West was perceived by the Protestant elite of New England as a major arena in the cultural battle over dominance with the South and as a fruitful field for missionary activities. Renowned clergyman (and father of Harriet Beecher Stowe) Lyman Beecher for example argues in *Plea for the West* for what Ray Allen Billington refers to as “the Protestant Crusade” (cf. his book of the same title): to spread Puritanism and Protestantism in the West and to contain slavery in the South – an agenda that was shared by many of his contemporaries. In this logic, the West was to become part of the Promised Land of white American Protestants descended from Puritan stock.

Third, we need to consider the narrative that insists on casting the Pilgrims and Puritans as the founders of New England and of the nation as a reaction to the contemporaneous non-English Catholic (and Jewish) immigration from Europe. Mythologizing the Protestant rebels helped to establish a hierarchical contrast to the Catholic newcomers: The “Catholic system is adverse to liberty, and the clergy to a great extent are dependent on foreigners opposed to the prin-

ciples of our government, for patronage and support,” Beecher somewhat self-righteously contends (*Plea* 61). In opposition to other ethnic and religious groups living in and coming to the USA during the second half of the 19th century, the “Plymouth settlers [were cast] as a master race” (Uhry Abrams, *Pilgrims* 145-46).

Throughout the 19th century, the laudatory commemorations of the Pilgrims and Puritans in public and political discourse continued, and “by the end of the century the Puritans were generally regarded as the founders of American democracy” (Hall, “Introduction” 1). This hegemonic discourse is obviously exclusionary – for one thing, because it is profoundly racialized.

6. WHERE IS THE PROMISED LAND? THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

When Israel was in Egyptland
Let my People go
Oppressed so hard they could not stand
Let my People go
Go Down, Moses, Way down in Egyptland
Tell old Pharaoh let my people go.
SLAVE SPIRITUAL (JUBILEE SINGERS, 1872)

We didn't land on Plymouth Rock, brothers and sisters, Plymouth Rock landed on us.
MALCOLM X

The fundamental theme of New World African modernity is neither integration nor separation but rather migration and emigration.
CORNEL WEST, *KEEPING FAITH*

From the perspective of Africans who were brought to North America and forced to work on the cotton fields and in the plantation households, America is obviously not the Land of Freedom but figures as the site of cruel enslavement and bondage, forced labor, cultural destruction, and death. The Middle Passage – the leg of the transatlantic triangle which brought Africans from the coast of West Africa to the Americas – was not a ‘sacred journey’ but rather a trip to hell, a journey through the underbelly of Western modernity. America was built, at least to a considerable degree, “on the backs of blacks” (cf. Morrison’s essay of

the same title). The first ship with Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619, and thus earlier than the Puritans; in fact, slavery was a crucial part of early colonial history. After almost two hundred years of trading and owning slaves, all northern colonies and states abolished slavery between 1777 and 1804 in the wake, it is often suggested, of the American Revolutionary War. Slavery in the southern states continued and intensified until the American Civil War. But before we turn to African American responses to the myth of the Promised Land, we should remind ourselves of racial discourses in the historical context.

Puritan congregations were exclusionary entities that for the most part barred servants and women from membership – not to mention the indigenous population and Africans/African Americans. Slavery in America presented a fact that was camouflaged by an ideologically fraught racial discourse that portrayed America as a land of freedom and deliverance. From the beginning, religious groups such as the Quakers, intellectuals, and politicians wrestled with this conundrum and sought ways to solve this dilemma, but slavery continued to be an integral part of American society well beyond independence; it was sanctioned by the Constitution, and was abolished only after the American Civil War (1861-65). The post-abolition period was characterized by continued and in some ways even worse oppression of African Americans and by the most extreme excesses of racist violence, such as lynching. In the context of his first presidential campaign, Barack Obama even referred to slavery and racism against African Americans as “America’s original sin” (qtd. in Leeman, *Teleological Discourse* 55-56).

From the beginning, Protestant evangelical groups argued for the abolition of slavery, and Protestantism is an important factor in the history of abolitionism in the United States; often it is used to distinguish New England (where slavery was abolished in all states by 1804) from Virginia in particular, and the South in general. Many critics contrasted the economic system of the North with the South’s exploitation of slave labor, for example Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of the New York Central Park, who contended that Virginians had “never done a real day’s work in their lives before they left England” and again refused to do so after the first shipload of Africans had arrived on their shores (qtd. in Uhry Abrams, *Pilgrims* 167).

How can we relate the existence of slavery to the myth of the Promised Land? What position did the religious tradition that had formulated this horizon of expectation take on slavery, and what impact did it have on slavery and the slaves themselves? In order to tackle these questions, we will briefly turn to the antebellum South. Historians of 19th-century American history have for a long

time debated the complicated role of the Protestant religion in African American slave culture. Some scholars have claimed that religious indoctrination and conversion were used as an effective instrument of social control. The Christian religion, it is argued, taught the slaves submissiveness, docility, and a negative self-concept based on claims of their unworthiness in the eyes of God; slaveholders frequently drew on the Bible (mostly the Old Testament, and especially the Curse of Ham narrative) to justify slavery to the slaves and to white abolitionists (cf. Jordan, *White* 17-20). For many critics, Harriet Beecher Stowe's fictional Uncle Tom – an extremely pious character who does not even try to escape from slavery because of his faith – exemplifies the harmful effects of religious 'education:' even when he is brutalized and finally killed by his master, he suffers without resistance and forgives his tormentor (cf. Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*).

On the other hand, scholars have insisted that Christianity offered African American slaves access to symbolic resources which they could use for their own purposes and that the relative freedom in which they could gather to practice their faith allowed them to secretly engage in other social, cultural, and political practices. Most importantly, however, the biblical story of the Exodus and the Promised Land – which explicitly addresses the unjust and unjustifiable evil of slavery – provided them with a (religious) narrative model of emancipation, escape, and freedom. This story was as attractive to the African American slaves as it had been to the English Puritans. Stripped of its ideological investment, the story of the Promised Land can be seen (from a structuralist point of view) as a blueprint for collective empowerment, which can thus be appropriated for the purpose of cultural and political critique.

Although the 17th-century Puritan construction of the 'new world' as Promised Land excluded Africans and African Americans, the latter would try to partake in this promise through an appropriation and ideological reconfiguration of the myth. Popular African American spirituals used biblical themes and stories from the Exodus narrative to envision freedom, and turned Moses into an African American hero. To give just one example: Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., the black theologian who came to fame during Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, wrote his MA thesis on the "Treatment of Biblical Passages in Negro Spirituals" (1969) and discusses biblical narratives (such as the Exodus) as strategies of empowerment for black slaves.

African American intellectual and former slave Frederick Douglass in the 19th century described religious practices already as what later theorists would call 'signifyin' practices' (cf. Smitherman, *Talkin*, and Gates, *Signifying Monkey*) used as a kind of code by the black slaves:

A keen observer might have detected in our singing of
 O Canaan, sweet Canaan,
 I am bound for the land of Canaan,
 Something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the *North*, and
 the North was our Canaan.
 “I thought I heard them say,
 There were lions in the way;
 I don’t expect to stay
 Much longer here.
 Run to Jesus – shun the danger.
 I don’t expect to stay
 Much longer here.”

Was a favourite air, and had a double meaning. On the lips of some it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to a world of spirits, but on the lips of our company it simply meant a speedy pilgrimage toward a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery. (*Life* 109)

The “double meaning” that Douglass refers to is apparent in many spirituals, whose lyrics frequently focus on deliverance, salvation, and the topic of mobility. “The escape motif appears in hundreds of songs: the slaves are always sailing, walking, riding, rowing, climbing, and crossing over into Canaan” (Blassingame, *Slave Community* 142). Most evident was the subversive effect of religion on a slave in the singular incident that took place in Southampton, Virginia in 1831 and is often referred to as Nat Turner’s Rebellion, in which Turner and a group of fellow slaves killed most whites they encountered until the insurrection was squashed. In *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, written down by Thomas R. Gray before Turner’s execution and later used by William Styron in his 1967 novel of the same title, Turner claims that God appeared to him in a vision and told him to deliver his people from enslavement and to punish the whites:

[W]hite spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened – the thunder rolled in the heavens, and blood flowed in streams – and I heard a voice saying, “Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bear it.” (qtd. in Blassingame, *Slave Community* 219)

Turner, feeling that his actions were in accord with the will of God, set out to kill whites and to free slaves, deeds for which he was later executed.

The subversive use of the Exodus narrative is not restricted to male fugitives and abolitionists. Most notably, female African American abolitionist activist Harriet Tubman (1820-1913) is referred to as “the Moses of her people” in a book by Sarah H. Bradford (cf. *Harriet*) published under the auspices of Susan B. Anthony. Tubman is compared to Moses because she repeatedly went back to the South after her own escape and led more than 70 slaves to escape to the North. These rescue missions became even more difficult after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which required the North to cooperate with and assist in the attempts of the South to recapture fugitive slaves. Canada, which no longer had institutionalized slavery in the mid-19th century, then became the ‘New Canaan’ in place of the North of the United States. The similar spelling of Canada and Canaan further reinforced the notion that the Promised Land for African Americans and fugitive slaves lay beyond the national border. Kathryn Smardz-Frost’s *I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (2007) picks up this notion in recounting the complicated and paradigmatic escape of Lucy and Thornton Blackwell. Other scholars also affirm the vision of Canada as the Promised Land for African Americans (cf. Winks, *Blacks*). Approximately 60,000 blacks fled to Canada before the outbreak of the Civil War, half of whom supposedly went back after the war was over, the other half staying mostly in small towns in lower Ontario and in Toronto.

The Promised Land topos may thus be seen as a floating signifier that was used by African Americans to refer to various regions or territories. While the foundational national narrative focuses on the arrival of the Pilgrims and Puritans in the Promised Land and thus locates freedom from oppression *in* America, African American appropriations of the biblical story locate freedom from oppression in a Promised Land that is always elsewhere, so to speak, and often outside of the US.

The Great Migration of African Americans to the northern cities at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century is often represented as a ‘second exodus,’ which is evidenced by such titles as Milton C. Sernett’s *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (1997), and Nicholas Lemann’s *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991). In African American literature addressing the experience of migration, however, there is often an ambivalent evaluation of the Promised Land rhetoric and the expectations with which black characters move from the South to the urban centers of the North. James Baldwin’s first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1952) for example expounds the redemptive quality of migrating from the South to the North, but at the same time addresses the sense of loss, confusion, and displacement of the first generation of African Americans

raised in the urban North. African American writing has thus not only promoted but also deconstructed white American versions of the myth of the Promised Land. Along the same lines, Toni Morrison's historical migration novel *Jazz* (1992) "is a portrait of a people in the midst of self-creation, a document of what they created and what they lost along the way" (Griffin, *Who* 197).

A third variation of the African American Exodus narrative reroutes the journey to Africa and can be seen as the most radical and consequential inversion of the Puritan myth of the Promised Land in America. Edwin S. Redkey's *Black Exodus* (1969) discusses Black Nationalism and Back-to-Africa movements since 1890. Many African American intellectuals, among them most prominently Marcus Garvey, proposed in the 1920s a re-migration across the Atlantic; Garveyism became a forceful movement that rested on a radical critique of American society and racist US national discourse. Africa as a place of belonging, as an 'imaginary homeland' and as a site of liberation and cultural and political autonomy has always figured prominently in African American culture. Thus, Black Nationalist discourse is explicitly counter-hegemonic as well as anti-foundational in its repudiation of narratives that idealize the US as the Promised Land.

In the second half of the 20th century, the myth of the Promised Land found resonance in the American civil rights movement and in the rhetoric of emancipation used by religious leaders in anti-racist activism. In April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. in his very last speech before his assassination encourages his audience to persevere in the face of often violent resistance to the movement's goals, and emphasizes the worldly and the spiritual dimension connected in the image of a better world:

But it doesn't matter with me now because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain, and I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not go there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. ("I've Been")

In a rhetorical move very similar to that of William Bradford more than 300 years earlier King uses the Exodus narrative to draw a parallel between himself and Moses being led by God to the Promised Land. Only in King's sermon it is

the African Americans who are cast as Pilgrims hoping for salvation from racism and oppression – it is they who are God’s chosen people.

African American rewritings of the Promised Land narrative adapted and appropriated the biblical story in various ways and for different ideological and counter-hegemonic purposes. At times it may be difficult to ascertain whether these adaptations rest on the Bible directly or rather rewrite the Puritan narrative – or even the semi-secular national narrative into which it evolved. The wide spectrum of interpretations and re-interpretations of the Promised Land myth in any case suggest, first, that it powerfully addresses the human longing for freedom in general, and second, that it lends itself readily to a variety of contradictory evaluations of the project that is America from national, subnational, and transnational perspectives.

7. IMMIGRANT VISIONS: INHERITING THE PROMISED LAND?

The myth of the promised land is a tale told by strangers. It is the mythology of a people adrift, of a population without location, the rootless and the restless, the displaced, the exiled.

DAVID F. NOBLE, *BEYOND THE PROMISED LAND*

The invention of Plymouth (and especially Plymouth Rock) as an exclusivist ethnic symbol replaced earlier ideological readings in revolutionary, religious and abolitionist contexts at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

WERNER SOLLORS, “AMERICANS ALL”

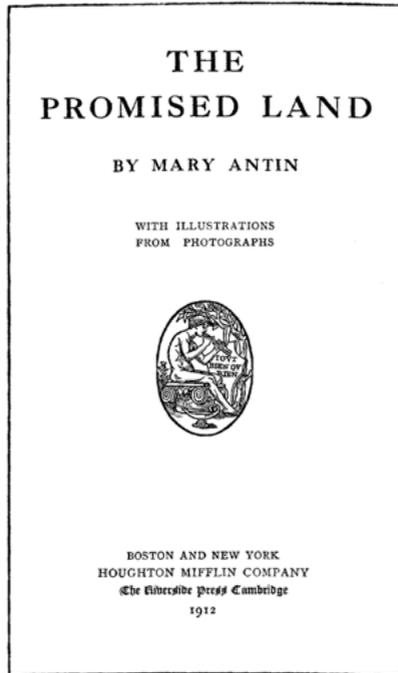
Every ship that brings your people from Russia and other countries where they are ill-treated is a *Mayflower*.

MARY ANTIN, “THE LIE”

Despite the fact that the Pilgrim and Puritan myth of origins in the mid-19th century was used by nativists to stoke anti-immigrant sentiment in the face of increased Catholic and other ‘foreign’ immigration from Europe, many of these immigrants cherished their own version of America as the Promised Land. The Jewish immigrants, for example, clearly recognized in the narrative of the Promised Land their own story of repression, bondage, release, and salvation. The comparison between the Puritans and the Jewish immigrants has often been drawn with regard to typological interpretation, i.e. the collapsing of Holy Scrip-

ture and worldly experience. After all, was not William Bradford one of the first immigrants from Europe and his work, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, America's first immigrant narrative?

*Illustration 5: Jewish Immigrants
as the 'New Pilgrims'*



1912 title page of *The Promised Land* by M. Antin.

The most prominent and programmatic author in the field of Jewish immigrant writing is Mary Antin (1881-1949), who immigrated to the United States with her mother and her sisters in 1894 to join her father, who had three years earlier fled the Czarist pogroms. Her autobiographical narrative *The Promised Land* (1912) relates the Puritan topos of the Promised Land to her own exodus from an Eastern European *shtetl* to Boston and New York. In that text she affirms the willingness of immigrants in general and of herself in particular to assimilate into American society, thereby countering nativist claims that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were unwilling or unable to integrate. Repeatedly, Antin refers to the Pilgrim Fathers as “our forefathers” (cf. also *They Who Knock*), thereby claiming a common ancestry of American-born and immigrant

citizens. Chapter headings like “The Tree of Knowledge,” “The Exodus,” “Manna,” or “The Burning Bush” evidence that Antin’s (spiritual) autobiography strongly references the Old Testament (including the Exodus narrative). *The Promised Land* has become canonical in American studies not only for its topicality but also, as Werner Sollors reminds us, for its subtle aesthetics and versatility: “Antin continued the portraiture of America as a new Canaan from an immigrant’s point of view, while leaving no doubt that the metaphor of the promised land was especially suited to Jewish immigrants” (*Beyond Ethnicity* 45). In what was criticized as a “cult of gratitude” (cf. Tumin’s article of the same title) “characterized by excessive assimilation and submissiveness,” she “claimed the American egalitarian promise defiantly by equating [herself] with George Washington” (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 45) – and with the Pilgrim Fathers, one might add; the immigrant girl symbolically adopted American foundational figures as her forefathers.

Antin’s autobiographical text resonates in the writings of other Jewish American authors, for example in Anzia Yeziarska’s short story “America and I,” which (also) features a female Jewish immigrant protagonist-narrator: “I began to read the American history. I found from the first pages that America started with a band of Courageous Pilgrims. They had left their native country as I had left mine. They had crossed an unknown ocean and landed in an unknown country, as I” (20). This analogy is then used by the narrator for personal empowerment as an immigrant struggling for inclusion: “I saw that it was the glory of America that it was not yet finished. And I, the last comer, had her share to give, small or great, to the making of America, like those Pilgrims who came in the *Mayflower*” (33).

Yeziarska, like Antin, rhetorically authorizes her protagonist by establishing a connection between 20th-century Jewish immigrants and the 17th-century Pilgrims. Many authors beside and after Antin and Yeziarska have worked with the myth of the Promised Land to make sense of their American experience, as Werner Sollors’ enumeration of titles by ethnic and immigrant writers proves:

Lewis E. MacBrayne, “The Promised Land” (1902); Sidney Nyburg, *The Chosen People* (1917); W. Forest Cozart, *The Chosen People* (1924); Rudolph Fisher, “The Promised Land” (1927); Martin Wendell Odland, *The New Canaan* (1933); Margaret Marchand, *Pilgrims on the Earth* (1940); Stoyan Christowe, *My American Pilgrimage* (1947); Robert Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land* (1957); Mario Puzo, *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1965); and Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965). (*Beyond Ethnicity* 46)

Since Sollors's 1986 study, many more titles have appeared, of which I will briefly discuss two contemporary examples in order to demonstrate new and at times ironic turns in the appropriation of the myth. In *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), Gish Jen takes up Antin's reconfiguration of the myth by portraying a Chinese immigrant family, the Changs, who in the fictional New York neighborhood of Scarshill – which is strongly suggestive of Scarsdale, the New York suburb in which Antin had lived at the beginning of the century – are considered the “New Jews” (3). The Changs' new family home is anything but new, as Mona, the Chinese American immigrant protagonist-narrator, quips: “Their house is still of the upstanding-citizen type. *Remember the Mayflower!* It seems to whisper” (ibid. 4). Mona's life is decisively shaped by the old Jewish American community her family has moved into, whose members have come a long way from their turn-of-the century ancestors described in Mary Antin's text. As a high school student, Mona has “been to so many bar and bas mitzvahs, she can almost say herself whether the kid chants like an angel or like a train conductor. At Seder, Mona knows to forget the bricks, get a good pile of that mortar. Also she knows what is schmaltz” (ibid. 6). Early on, Mona wishes to become a Jew, and indeed converts to Judaism. To her bewildered and somewhat alarmed parents, Mona explains: “Jewish is American [...]. American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick Jewish” (ibid. 49). She studies the Torah with Rabbi Horowitz, who “assigns so many books that Mona feels like she started on a mud bath, only to end up on a mud swim” (ibid. 35). At the end of the novel, however, the Rabbi also ‘converts’ and marries a non-Jewish woman (cf. ibid. 267). Overall, the novel deftly mocks the Puritan tradition of conversion and offers an ironic, postmodern take on the myth of the Promised Land and the theme of assimilation, which it adjusts to the *zeitgeist* of multiculturalism and to theories of cultural performativity.

Even more recently, the Jordanian American writer Laila Halaby puns on the myth of the Promised Land in her novel *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), in which she chronicles the decline of the marriage of Jassim and Salwa in Tucson, Arizona after the events that occurred in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. The title, which is suggestive of a fairy tale beginning, already indicates the sense of disillusionment and of things falling apart that pervades the narrative. Jassim kills a teenage boy in a car accident, and is targeted by the authorities for being an Arab American; Salwa has a miscarriage, and starts an affair with a colleague who turns out to be mentally disturbed and violent. Both Jassim and Salwa are exiles as much as they are immigrants. In this narrative of descent, the Promised Land is no more than a fairy tale – a mere fiction/fantasy. To conclude: immigrant writers have inverted, rejected, mocked,

re-arranged and expanded the myth of the Promised Land to fit their own collective experience, to contest dominant regimes of representation, and to call into question the founding myth in its singular historical meaning.

8. MODERNIST REVISIONS: BLAMING THE PURITANS

But Puritans, as they were called, if they were pure it was more since they had nothing in them of fulfilment than because of positive virtues. By their very emptiness they were the fiercest element in the battle to establish a European life on the New World.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, *IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN*

Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone somewhere may be happy.

H.L. MENCKEN

What did the Pilgrim Fathers come for, then, when they came so gruesomely over the black sea? [...] They came largely to get away – that most simple of motives. To get away. Away from what? In the long run, away from themselves.

D.H. LAWRENCE, *STUDIES IN CLASSIC AMERICAN LITERATURE*

After the Pilgrims and Puritans had been mostly celebrated as founding figures of New England since the late 18th century, had acquired mythic proportions during the revolutionary period, and had been idolized in 19th-century national discourse, they came under closer scrutiny in modernist texts. Of course, there had been quite a few critical voices earlier; during the so-called ‘American Renaissance’ (cf. F.O. Matthiessen’s 1941 book of the same title) of the 1850s – which actually was a ‘New England Renaissance,’ if anything – writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville among others were quite ambivalent about early Puritan history and mythmaking. Hawthorne most prominently scrutinizes the repressive forces of Puritan doctrine and dogma in his historical romance *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and in short stories such as “Young Goodman Brown” and “The Maypole of Merrimount.” His introduction of the Puritan crowd at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* is revealing:

A throng of bearded men, in sad-coloured garments and gray, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded, was assembled in front

of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this rule, it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house somewhere in the vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson's lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old churchyard of King's Chapel. Certain it is, that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. (45)

Hawthorne casts the new world utopia in a rather "gloomy" and "sad" light and throughout the text maintains an ambiguous stance toward Puritan rigor and American exceptionalism. His protagonist, Hester Prynne, is convicted of adultery and sentenced to wear a scarlet 'A' on her breast as a lasting reminder of her 'crime.' And yet, as Prynne gains the admiration of many community members for the dignity with which she bears her punishment (and also refuses to name her extramarital partner, a hypocritical Puritan clergyman), the narrator concedes that apparently "the scarlet letter had not done its office" (145; cf. Bercovitch, *Office*).

The reluctance of Hawthorne and other writers of the 'American Renaissance' to embrace the foundational myth of the Pilgrims and the Puritans anticipates the skepticism and disillusionment of modernist writers and critics, who thought that Puritanism wielded an immensely detrimental influence on American culture, literature, and intellectuality. From the moderns' point of view, America's early colonial history had been a Dark Age of fanatic religiosity from which Americans had recovered only gradually and to a limited extent, with Puritanism's moralistic and anti-intellectual tendencies continuing to affect American cultural life. With Freudianism en vogue, critics engaged in "blaming the Puritans for the repressive tendencies in American life" (Hall, "Introduction" 1). This "Anti-Puritanism" led some intellectuals to suggest that "the central theme of Massachusetts history was the gradual emancipation of society from the authority of the ministers" (ibid. 2), a sentiment that is shared by George Santayana (cf. *Genteel Tradition*), Waldo Frank (cf. *Our America*), James Truslow Adams (cf. *Epic; Founding*), and Vernon L. Parrington (cf. *Main Currents*). Much of American historiography in the 1920s – in stark contrast to the previous

predominance of positive if not idealizing portrayals – is markedly critical of the Pilgrims and Puritans, who it either viewed as religious fanatics or as a sanctimonious plutocracy that camouflaged its interest in maintaining power under a cloak of religiosity. Hence, the Massachusetts Bay Colony was not, as had previously often been suggested, the ‘cradle’ of American democracy; instead, Puritanism was criticized as inherently anti-democratic. James Truslow Adams quotes John Winthrop describing democracy as “the meanest and worst of all forms of government” (*Epic* 39) and stating that there “was no such government in Israel,” which for him meant that to have it in Massachusetts would be “a manifest breach of the 5th Commandment” (*Founding* 143). And G.P. Gooch pointedly quips that democracy may have been a child of the Reformation, yet not of the reformers (cf. *History* 8).

Illustration 6: Lillian Gish as Hester Prynne



The Scarlet Letter (dir. Victor Sjöström, 1926).

James Truslow Adams in his study *The Founding of New England* (1921) approaches the Puritans from yet another revisionist angle. He argues that economic, not religious motives were crucial for emigration to North America. He points out the exclusivist nature of Puritan congregations, which granted church membership to only one out of five men in Massachusetts and barred all others from becoming members. Adams (among others) suggests that people continued to emigrate to America regardless of this exclusionary practice because they simply did not care about religious practice and religious orthodoxy:

They came for the simple reason that they wanted to better their condition. [...] They wanted to own land; and it was this last motive, perhaps, which mainly had attracted those twelve thousand persons out of sixteen thousand who swelled the population of Massachusetts in 1640, but were not church members. (*Founding* 122)

More recently, Uhry Abrams confirms this assessment when she states that “there was far less religious or social conformity than the myths would have one believe” (*Pilgrims* 29).

In the field of literature, William Carlos Williams’s 1925 collection *In the American Grain* is a good example of the modernists’ tendency to criticize the Puritans and the New England Way as repressive. Intolerance, hypocrisy, and religion are “substitutions for life” for those who with “tight-locked hearts” (63) stressed “the spirit against the flesh” (66): “The jargon of God, which they used, was their dialect by which they kept themselves surrounded as with a palisade” (63). “They must have relied on vigorous hypocrisy to save them – which they did” (67). Williams comments on the Salem witch trials in the colony in 1692 to conclude his argument:

In fear and without guidance, really lost in the world, it is they alone who would later, at Salem, have strayed so far – morbidly seeking the flame, – that terrifying unknown image to which, like savages, they too offered sacrifices of human flesh. [...] And it is still today the Puritan who keeps his frightened grip upon the world lest it should prove him – empty. (67)

By likening Puritanism to barbarism (“like savages;” “sacrifices of human flesh”), Williams inverts the hierarchy between Puritans and Native Americans that was established in colonial discourse (civilization vs. savagery) and thus articulates the most radical critique of his time.

Modern writers and essayists thus lamented the harm that the Puritan narrative of origins had done to generations and generations of Americans. They reconfigured the Puritan master narrative of divine liberation and emancipation into one of purposeful oppression both on an individual as well as on a collective level. As a consequence, the Puritans were considered useless if not obnoxious ancestral figures for a modern, 20th-century America, which resulted in a call for disidentification and for the deconstruction of a national narrative obsessed with the Pilgrims and Puritans’ Promised Land and some rock on a beach. As early as 1918, Van Wyck Brooks’s essay “On Creating a Usable Past” argued for the creation of pasts *other than the Puritan* in the face of a pluralistic America – a

timely call that, however, would only be heeded seriously in the second half of the 20th century.

9. PURITAN ORIGIN VERSUS “MESSY BEGINNINGS” IN AMERICAN STUDIES

The place of the Pilgrim Fathers in American history can best be stated by a paradox. Of slight importance in their own time, they are of great and increasing significance in our time, through the influence of their story on American folklore and tradition. And the key to that story, the vital factor in this little group, is the faith in God that exalted them and their small enterprise to something of lasting value and enduring interest.

SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON

Having failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on the hill, they were left alone with America.

PERRY MILLER, *ERRAND INTO THE WILDERNESS*

During the emergence of American studies as a discipline in the 1930s and '40s, the story of the Pilgrims and the Puritans has often been studied as a foundational narrative of American beginnings in order to explain the cultural specificity of what would later develop into the United States of America. The formation of national identity and national cohesion has repeatedly been delineated as a continuous evolution from the Puritan errand to the 'new world' and from the first generation of English settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the present. Titles such as *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* by Sacvan Bercovitch indicate the degree to which the concepts of the Puritan errand and covenant with God served as models for accounting for later, specifically US-American, social, cultural and political developments and practices.

Not surprisingly, Harvard University – founded by the Puritans in 1636 as the first institution of higher education in North America – became the center of Puritan scholarship beginning with the long-since canonical work of Samuel Eliot Morison and Perry Miller, among others. It is a remarkable fact that the scholarly reappraisal of the Pilgrims and Puritans took off at the moment when American studies as a new academic discipline was launched in the 1930s. Both Perry Miller and Samuel Eliot Morison found the Puritans to be not dull conformists, but intellectuals who were 'exhilarated' by their faith. Miller's influential studies such as *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*

(1939), *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), and *Errand into the Wilderness* (1964) as well as Samuel Eliot Morison's seminal study *Builders of the Bay Colony* (1930) placed the Puritans at the center of a national foundational narrative, which thus also became foundational for American studies. Conservative Puritan scholar Samuel Eliot Morison argues that the Puritans believed what they preached and he sees it as Winthrop's intention "to inspire these new children of Israel with the belief that they were God's chosen people; destined, if they kept their covenant with him, to people and fructify this new Canaan in the western wilderness" (*Builders* 106). It should be noted that Native Americans, however, hardly figure in early Puritan scholarship, which thus contributed to no small degree to popular misconceptions about early North American history.

Sacvan Bercovitch argues in *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975) that "[t]he persistence of the myth is a testament to the visionary and symbolic power of the American Puritan imagination" (186) and that "the Puritan myth prepared for the re-vision of God's country from the 'New England of the type' into the United States of America" (136).

That the (re-)discovery of the Puritans in American history and the establishment of American studies under the arch of American exceptionalism coincide is by no means accidental. Scholars of the so-called Myth and Symbol School turned to the Puritans and Pilgrims and the New England Way in order to identify culturally specific symbols and patterns to bolster the notion that the US was indeed exceptional (there is an astounding amount of Puritan scholarship in the establishment and consolidation of American studies as an academic discipline, of which for the purposes of this chapter I could reference only a fraction). The foundational paradigm of Puritanism embraces the assumption that the origins of American society are exclusively white and European, and credits white Anglo-Saxon Protestants with the formation of the US nation. Not all of the Myth and Symbol scholars shared the same affirmative interpretation of Puritan culture, but the majority placed the Puritan elite center stage and marginalized all other groups – Native Americans, Africans/African Americans, women, indentured servants, etc. – in their work on American beginnings. It is thus unsurprising that this body of work led subsequent generations of Americanists to criticize it for heralding and backing an exclusivist US-American ideology. Philip Fisher's analysis of the first generation of Puritan scholars in American studies points in that direction:

Beginning with the work of Perry Miller in the late thirties, the explanation of America as a long history of Puritan hope and decline resulted from the fact that academic intellec-

tuals, looking into the past to find not necessarily its chief actors but precisely those congenial figures whose analytic and critical stance most resembled their own, discovered in the Puritan writers what was for them the most intelligible feature of the past, the one mirror most filled with familiar features. They too were intellectuals engaged in holding up a mirror of admonition or exhortation to their society. In theocratic New England they found embodied the secret self-image of all intellectual cultures, a society in which the critics and intellectuals were not marginal, but actually in power. (“Introduction” x)

Fisher’s statement shows that scholarship is tied as much to the time in which it is practiced as it is about the time that it addresses; if scholars fail to reflect on their own positionality, the outcome of their work may be easily marked by – more or less subtle – ideologically motivated simplifications of their subject matter. Crispin Gill, for instance, sees in the study of Puritanism and, by implication, in the model of the Puritans an effective antidote to the protest movements of the 1960s in America:

In time, youth finds that its new discoveries, like sex, are not really original. There were Harvard students who, during the early days of the 1969 troubles on the campus, realized that there had been a rebellion in America before them. [...] [T]he men and women of the Mayflower have much to say to the young rebels of today. What is more, the Pilgrims were constructive rebels. They were not content with denouncing one form of society, they persevered until they had built another which did give life and reality to their ideals. (*Mayflower* 182)

In a somewhat similar vein, Andrew Delbanco describes the first generation Puritans as follows: “[T]he founders of New England were drop-outs – with all the indignation, idealism and wounded righteousness that the term implies” (“Introduction” xxii). Yet, whereas in 1970, Richard Reinitz could still write that “Puritanism was an English movement which became the single most influential factor in the shaping of American culture and society” (“Introduction” i), such aggrandizement was no longer acceptable in the 1980s and ‘90s. In 1984, Jan C. Dawson – following the earlier critique of the modernists and Van Wyck Brooks’s writings – declares America’s Puritan tradition “the unusable past” (cf. her book of the same title). Richard Slotkin, a representative of the Critical Myth and Symbol School, has pointed to the violence at the center of the Puritan experience in the ‘new world’ (cf. *Regeneration* 5). Other critics look for alternative ‘possible pasts,’ stressing the fact that the Puritans were not the only residents in North America at that time. Uhry Abrams sees the myth of the Pilgrims and the Puritans as a regional New England narrative that for a long

time has erroneously dominated discussions of American beginnings by ignoring for instance the Jamestown colony, which was founded more than a decade before Bradford landed in America and more than two decades before Winthrop's Puritans arrived there, after all (cf. *Pilgrims*); she thus holds that Puritanism as a paradigm in American studies scholarship not only presents a highly idealized version of American beginnings but also marginalizes other stories of American genesis. Whereas Uhry Abrams in her book of the same title rather schematically contrasts "the Pilgrims and Pocahontas," more recent work done on early American history adopts a postcolonial studies approach and operates with the concept of "messy beginnings" (cf. Schueller and Watts's essay collection of the same title) with a three-fold aim: first, to analyze the Puritan project beyond the rhetoric of the Promised Land as colonization, pure and simple – the Pilgrims and Puritans were part of a hierarchical settler colony and acted as colonizers upon the indigenous population; second, to draw attention to other groups in early American history and their versions of the national prehistory; third, to analyze the complicated ways in which these different groups interacted. Approaching early American history and specifically the settlements in New England from the perspective of postcolonial criticism, Schueller and Watts suggest that

the colonization of what became the United States and the formation of the nation involved a complex series of political negotiations, machinations, violent encounters, and legal maneuvers that attempted to define differences among various groups: the Puritan clergy, the emergent bourgeoisie, the white backwoodsmen, the mixed-bloods, American Indians, and African Americans. ("Introduction" 5)

Thus, the earlier scholarship of the Myth and Symbol School in its historical, cultural, and political context must from a postcolonial studies perspective inevitably come into view as part and parcel of the master narrative of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America.

10. CONCLUSION: BURYING THE ROCK OR PREPARING THE TURKEY?

The white people made us many promises, more than I can remember. But they never kept but one. They promised to take our land, and they took it.

RED CLOUD

Finding is the first act

The second, loss.

EMILY DICKINSON

Whereas the mythology of the Pilgrims and Puritans, the Promised Land, Plymouth Rock, and Thanksgiving still is firmly embedded in national narratives, iconography, and cultural practices, protest against this WASP version of American beginnings has not abated. Native American organizations have enacted a counter-cultural practice at Plymouth: Burying the rock. On Thanksgiving, November 23, 1995, Moonanum James (Wampanoag), leader of the United American Indians of New England, gathered over 300 Native people and supporters of all nationalities at Plymouth Rock, where “the protesters climbed across a fence to get to the rock and buried it covering it with sand and erecting an indigenous warrior flag on top of it” (“Native People”). This symbolic burial of Plymouth Rock, as the activists explain, “capped the 25th anniversary of the National Day of Mourning speak-out held here in Plymouth. The Day of Mourning is a protest against the U.S. celebration of the mythology of Thanksgiving, and against the racist ‘Pilgrim’s Progress Parade’” (ibid.). The parade referred to here reenacts Pilgrims walking to church, muskets and bibles in hand. Moonanum James comments that “[t]hey want to act as though we sat down and ate turkey and lived happily ever after. That is simply not true – and we keep coming back year after year in order to give answer to their lies” (qtd. in ibid.). And in regard to the Mayflower Compact, he states:

There was no room in that Compact for women, lesbians and gay men, and the poor, let alone for Native people or our sisters and brothers of African descent. We call on all oppressed people to unite and join the fight against the racist and murderous ruling class, and not glorify the Mayflower Compact but to condemn it and the system it created. (qtd. in ibid.)

Illustration 7: 'Illegal Pilgrims'



Yaakov Kirschen, *The First Thanksgiving* (2006).

Political protest not only counters sanitized versions of American history in which the Pilgrims and Puritans are painted as victims of an oppressive society rather than as genocidal colonizers, but also other commemorative rituals that are part of the national fantasy of the Puritans which arguably function to suppress the more gruesome aspects of their story. Many aspects of Thanksgiving, “America’s most loved holiday” (Dennis, *Red* 81), are by and large later fabrications: The turkey, for one thing, was certainly not part of the Thanksgiving celebration in 1621. Archaeologist James Deetz, who worked at the site of the first settlement of the Pilgrims, points to a long-standing misconception:

We finally found some turkey bone after ten years of digging. The circumstantial evidence is that it wouldn’t be likely [that the Pilgrims ate turkey]. Turkeys are very hard to kill and the matchlocks of the period weren’t very good for hunting. (qtd. in Dennis, *Red* 100-101)

Dennis elaborates how the American turkey industry has fabricated the traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner in the latter decades of the 19th century (cf. *ibid.*). The Thanksgiving turkey turns out to be a fiction – and a market-driven capitalist fiction at that.

And yet, religio-political devotion to the idea that the USA is a (or the) Promised Land and the fantasy of Puritan national origins are still somewhat hegemonic. Many comparisons have been drawn between the Protestant legacy of the Pilgrims and the Puritans and contemporary Evangelicals in the United States, as both groups adhere to Biblical literalism, strive for a theocratic society, and do not allow for a functional differentiation of the social world: in their view, religious doctrine underlies *all* aspects of public and private life. And religious fundamentalism and evangelicalism cannot be neglected as a political force. But even more structural reverberations of Puritan thought can be found in contemporary politics: Kevin R. den Dulk discusses what he refers to as “Evangelical Internationalists” (cf. his article of the same title), and Jeremy Mayer has pointed out the ideological proximity between US-American evangelicals and conservative religio-political groups in Israel, who share, and bond over, an exceptionalist and Promised Land rhetoric: chosen people both (cf. “Christian Fundamentalists”). We may consider this a transnational dimension of the Promised Land myth.

11. STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Relate the Promised Land myth to the biblical Exodus narrative. What kind of correspondences did the Pilgrims and Puritans construct?
2. Discuss William Bradford and John Winthrop as religious leaders in the context of Promised Land mythmaking.
3. Compare the myth of the Promised Land to the myth that has been constructed around Jamestown and Pocahontas. Can you establish similarities and differences between them?
4. Discuss the presence/absence of Native Americans with regard to the myth of the Promised Land.
5. In what way did African Americans appropriate the Promised Land myth? Give examples from the text and from other sources.
6. Discuss Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957) as a modern pilgrimage. How does the text make use of the myth of the Promised Land? And how is the myth connected to the genre of the road-narrative/movie in more general terms?
7. Discuss the role of Thanksgiving in the American calendar as a cultural practice of commemoration and the role of Plymouth Rock as a tourist destination.
8. Analyze how selected texts of American popular culture (e.g. lyrics of pop songs such as those mentioned in the text) use the Promised Land rhetoric.
9. Explain the phrase 'messy beginnings.' What kind of vision of early American history does it entail?
10. What are (or could be) the transnational implications of the Promised Land myth?

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