When is Thanksgiving? Colonizing America: Crash Course US History #2

Crash Course: U.S. History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=o69TvQqyGdg
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/o69TvQqyGdg

Hi I'm John Green, this is Crash Course US History and today we're going to tell the story of how a group of plucky English people struck a blow for religious freedom and founded the greatest, freest and fattest nation the world has ever seen. These Brits entered a barren land containing no people and quickly invented the automobile, baseball and Star Trek and we all lived happily ever after.

Mr. Green, Mr. Green, if it is really that simple, I am so getting an A in this class.

Oh, me from the past, you're just a delight.

[INTRO]

So most Americans grew up hearing that the United States was founded by pasty English people who came here to escape religious persecution, and that's true of the small proportion of people who settled in the Massachusetts Bay and created what we now know is New England. But these Pilgrims and Puritans, there's a difference, weren't the first people or even the first Europeans to come to the only part of the globe we didn't paint over.

In fact they weren't the first English people. The first English people came to Virginia. Off topic but how weird is it that the first permanent English colony in the Americas was named not for Queen Elizabeth's epicness but for her supposed chastity. Right, anyway, those first English settlers weren't looking for religious freedom, they wanted to get rich.

So the first successful English colony in America was founded in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. I say "successful" because there were two previous attempts to colonize the region. They were both epic failures. The more famous of which was the colony of Roanoke Island set up by Sir Walter Raleigh which is famous because all the colonists disappeared leaving only the word "Croatoan" on carved into a tree. [John shivers]

Jamestown was a project of the Virginia Company which existed to make money for its investors, something it never did. The hope was that they would find gold in the Chesapeake region like the Spanish had in South America, so there were a disproportionate number of goldsmiths and jewelers there to fancy up that gold which of course did not exist. Anyway, it turns out that jewelers dislike farming so much so that Captain John Smith who soon took over control of the island once said that they would rather starve than farm.

So in the first year, half of the colonists died. Four hundred replacements came, but, by 1610, after a gruesome winter called "The Starving Time", the number of colonists had dwindled to sixty-five. And eventually word got out that the new world's one-year survival rate was like twenty percent and it became harder to find new colonists. But 1618, a Virginia company hit upon a recruiting strategy called the headright system which offered fifty acres of land for each person that a settler paid to bring over, and this enabled the creation of a number of large estates which were mostly worked on and populated by indentured servants.

Indentured servants weren't quite slaves, but they were kind of temporary slaves, like they could be bought and sold and they had to do what their masters commanded. But after seven to ten years of that, if they weren't dead, they were paid their freedom dues which they hoped would allow them to buy farms of their own. Sometimes that worked out, but often either the money wasn't enough to buy a farm or else they were too dead to collect it. Even more ominously in 1619, just twelve years after the founding of Jamestown the first shipment of African slaves arrived in Virginia. So the colony probably would have continued to struggle along if they hadn't found something that people really loved: tobacco.

Tobacco had been grown in Mexico since at least 1000 BCE, but the Europeans had never seen it and it proved to be kind of a "thank you for the small pox; here's some lung cancer" gift from the natives. Interestingly King James hated smoking. He called it "a custom loathsome to the eye and hateful to the nose" but he loved him some tax revenue, and nothing sells like drugs.

By 1624 Virginia was producing more than 200,000 pounds of tobacco per year. By the 1680s, more than 30 million pounds per year. Tobacco was so profitable the colonists created huge plantations with very little in the way of towns or infrastructure to hold the social order together, a strategy that always works out brilliantly.

The industry also structured Virginian society. First off, most of the people who came in the 17th century, three-quarters of them, were servants. So Virginia became a microcosm of England: a small class of wealthy landowners sitting atop a mass of servants. That sounds kind of dirty but it was mostly just sad.

The society was also overwhelmingly male; because male servants were more useful in the tobacco fields, they were the greatest proportion of immigrants. In fact they outnumbered women five to one. The women who did come over were mostly indentured servants, and if they were to marry, which they often did because they were in great demand, they had to wait until their term of service was up. This meant delayed marriage which meant fewer children which further reduced the number of females.

Life was pretty tough for these women, but on the upside Virginia was kind of a swamp of pestilence, so their husbands often died, and this created a small class of widows or even unmarried women who, because of their special status, could make contracts and own property, so that was good, sort of.

Okay. So a quick word about Maryland. Maryland was the second Chesapeake Colony, founded in 1632, and by now there was no messing around with joint stock companies. Maryland was a proprietorship: a massive land grant to a single individual named Cecilius Calvert. Calvert wanted to turn Maryland into like a medieval feudal kingdom to benefit himself and his family, and he was no fan of the representational institutions that were developing in Virginia. Also Calvert was Catholic, and Catholics were welcome in Maryland which wasn't always the case elsewhere.

Speaking of which, let's talk about Massachusetts. So Jamestown might have been the first English colony, but Massachusetts Bay is probably better known. This is largely because the colonists who came there were so recognizable for their beliefs and also for their hats. That's right. I'm talking about the Pilgrims and the Puritans. And no, I will not be talking about Thanksgiving... is a lie. I can't help myself, but only to clear up the difference between Pilgrims and Puritans and also to talk about Squanto. God I love me some Squanto.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble.

Most of the English men and women who settled in New England were uber-Protestant Puritans who believed the Protestant Church of England was still too Catholic-y with its kneeling and incense and extravagantly-hatted archbishops. The particular Puritans who, by the way did not call themselves that; other people did, who settled in new England were called Congregationalists because they thought congregations should determine leadership and worship structures, not bishops. The Pilgrims were even more extreme. They wanted to separate more or less completely from the Church of England. So first they fled to the Netherlands, but the Dutch

were apparently too corrupt for them, so they rounded up investors and financed a new colony in 1620.

They were supposed to land in Virginia, but in what perhaps should have been taken as an omen, they were blown wildly off course and ended up in what's now Massachusetts, founding a colony called Plymouth. While still on board their ship the Mayflower, forty-one of the 150 or so colonists wrote and signed an agreement called the Mayflower Compact in which they all bound themselves to follow "just and equal laws" that their chosen representatives would write-up.

Since this was the first written framework for government in the US, it's kind of a big deal. But anyway, the Pilgrims had the excellent fortune of landing in Massachusetts with six weeks before winter, and they have a good sense not to bring very much food with them or any farm animals. Half of them died before winter was out. The only reason they didn't all die was that local Indians led by Squanto gave them food and saved them.

A year later, grateful that they had survived mainly due to the help of an alliance with the local chief Massasoit, and because the Indians had taught them how to plant corn and where to catch fish, the Pilgrims held the big feast: the first Thanksgiving. Thanks Thought Bubble! And by the way, that feast was on the fourth Thursday in November, not mid-October as is celebrated in some of these green areas we call not America. Anyway Squanto was a pretty amazing character and not only because he helped save the Pilgrims.

He found that almost all of his tribe, the Patuxet had been wiped out by disease and eventually settled with the Pilgrims on the site of his former village and then died... of disease because it is always ruining everything. So the Pilgrims struggled on until 1691 when their colony was subsumed by the larger and much more successful Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Massachusetts Bay colony was chartered in 1629 by London merchants who, like the founders of the Virginia Company, hoped to make money. But unlike Virginia, the board of directors relocated from England to America which meant that in Massachusetts they had a greater degree of autonomy and self-government than they did in Virginia. Social unity was also much more important in Massachusetts than it was in Virginia. The Puritans' religious mission meant that the common good was, at least at first, put above the needs or the rights of the individual. Those different ideas in the North and South about the role of government would continue... until now.

Oh God. It's time for the mystery document?

The rules are simple. I read the mystery document which I have not seen before. If I get it right, then I do *not* get shocked with the shock pen, and if I get it wrong I do.

Alright.

"We must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities (su-per-fluities? I don't know), for the supply of others necessities, we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality, ... 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 a byword through the world."

Alright, first thing I noticed: the author of this document is a terrible speller or possibly wrote this before English was standardized. Also, a pretty religious individual and the community in question seems to embrace something near socialism: abridging the superfluous for others' necessities. Also it says that the community should be like a city upon a hill, like a model for everybody, and because of that metaphor, I know exactly where it comes from: the sermon A Model of Christian Charity by John Winthrop.

Yes! Yes! No punishment!

This is one of the most important sermons in American history. It shows us just how religious the Puritans were, but it also shows us that their religious mission wasn't really one of individualism but of collective effort. In other words, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one. But this city on a hill metaphor is the basis for one kind of American exceptionalism: the idea that we are so special and so godly that we will be a model to other nations, at least as long, according to Winthrop, as we act together. Lest you think Winthrop's words were forgotten, they did become the centerpiece of Ronald Reagan's 1989 farewell address.

Okay so New England towns were governed democratically, but that doesn't mean that the Puritans were big on equality or that everybody was able to participate in government because no. The only people who could vote or hold office were church members, and to be a full church member you had to be a "visible saint", so really, power stayed in the hands of the church elite.

The same went for equality. While it was better than in the Chesapeake Colonies or England, as equality went...eh, pretty unequal. As John Winthrop declared, "Some must be rich and some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection." Or as historian Eric Foner put it "Inequality was considered an expression of God's will and while some liberties applied to all inhabitants, there were separate lists of rights for freemen, women, children and servants."

There was also slavery in Massachusetts. The first slaves were recorded in the colony in 1640. However, Puritans really did foster equality in one sense. They wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible. In fact, parents could be punished by the town councils for not properly instructing their children in making them literate. But when Roger Williams called for citizens to be able to practice any religion they chose, he was banished from the colonies. So was Ann Hutchinson who argued the church membership should be based on inner grace and not on outward manifestations like church attendance.

Williams went on to found Rhode Island, so that worked out fine for him, but Hutchinson, who was doubly threatening to Massachusetts because she was a *woman* preaching unorthodox ideas, was too radical and was further banished to Westchester, New York where she and her family were killed by Indians. *Finally,* somebody who doesn't die of disease or starvation.

So Americans like to think of their country as being founded by pioneers of religious freedom who were seeking liberty from the oppressive English. We've already seen that's only partly true. For one thing, Puritan ideas of equality and representation weren't particularly equitable or representational. In truth, America was also founded by indigenous people and by Spanish settlers, and the earliest English colonies weren't about religion; they were about money. We'll see this tension between American mythology and American history again next week and also every week.

Thanks for watching; I'll see you next time. Crash Course is produced and directed by Stan Muller, our script supervisor is Meredith Danko, the associate producer is Danica Johnson, the show is written by my high school history teacher, Raoul Meyer and myself, and our graphics team is Thought Bubble. If you have questions about today's video or really about anything about

American history, ask them in comments; the entire Crash Course team and many history professionals are there to help you.

Thanks for watching Crash Course. Please make sure you are subscribed and, as we say in my home town, "Don't forget to be awesome."