



The Mayflower, 1620

The scene below is aboard the Speedwell (July 22, 1620), the sister ship of the Mayflower. Notice the darkened Old World (Holland, right) and the rainbow of hope in the New World (left). Also note that the focal point is the opened Bible. Other details include the families present, the leaders (Brewster with Bible, Carver with head down, Pastor Robinson with eyes up, and Captain Standish with armor), the giant screw (center) which saved the Mayflower, and the words “God With Us” on the sail (left).

The Ideals of *America* Were First *Embodied* in the *Pilgrims*

Why are the Pilgrims so important to American history? What role did they play in our wonderful heritage? Why was a painting of them (below) included in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol? The answer to these questions can be summarized in two ideas. First, the Pilgrims were “the bridge” between the Old World and the New; and, second, the Pilgrims first embodied the ideals of Americanism.

Of course, every detail of the Pilgrim story is noteworthy and inspiring, but the best way to understand their purpose is to consider them from a providential view. God, in 1500, was able to see the past, present, and future. He saw what the people of Europe were like – spiritually asleep under the shadow of Roman

Catholicism, civilly enslaved by the arbitrary rule of selfish, tyrannical kings, and largely illiterate and ignorant. Then, He looked ahead, perhaps to 1800, at what the people of America would be like – spiritually and religiously free because of their Protestant faith in Christ, lovers of liberty, civilly self-governed, as well as literate and educated.

In order to transition from the dark days of the Old World to the hope and happiness of the New, the Lord would need to affect major changes in Europe, preserve a place in North America, and, then, call out a people prepared to bridge the gap. These people would embody the best of what the Old World had to offer and carry it to the shores of America.



Painting by Robert Weir, 1843
Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol

Americanism First Embodied in the *Pilgrims*

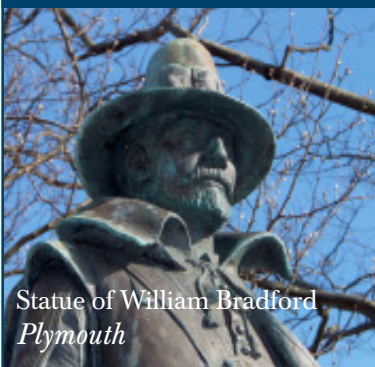
Before Leaving England

“This proposition [to go to America] being made public, it raised many variable opinions and caused many fears and doubts among them. It was answered that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted that the dangers were great, but not desperate, the difficulties were many, but not invincible. Though there were many of them likely, by providential care and the use of good means they might in great measure be prevented, and all of them, through the help of God and by fortitude and patience, might be borne or overcome.”

After Reaching America

“What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: “Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity. Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good, and His mercies endure forever.”

Governor William Bradford



Statue of William Bradford
Plymouth



Signing of the Compact
Aboard the Mayflower, 1620

1 John Goodwin, *The Pilgrim Republic*
2,4 Peter Marshall, *The Light & the Glory*
3 *Pilgrim Letter to the Virginia Company*

This vital role was assigned to the Pilgrims in 1620. The Protestant Reformation was well underway, and the English were no longer under the shadow of the Catholic Church. As a result of having access to the Bible (Calvin’s *Geneva Bible*), the Pilgrims were educated in biblical principles. They desired to worship freely, according to their conscience, and with the rise of persecution, God removed them from under the oppressive rule of an unjust king and relocated them to a place where they could plant a colony. The Pilgrim story is incredible. To think that the seeds of our great nation lay in the hull of the tiny Mayflower, ready to be planted in the fertile New England soil.

All that is great about America was first embodied in those Pilgrims. They were Protestant Christians; a free nation could not be established by an enslaved religion. They possessed a biblical worldview, holding high God’s Word as the measure of all things. They championed religious liberty, a freedom that Americans still hold dear. They demonstrated impeccable character, enduring extremely difficult circumstances and answering them with admirable courage and faith. They governed themselves, devising their own laws and electing their own leaders. They encouraged personal responsibility, hard work, and enjoying the fruit of one’s labor.

Finally, the Pilgrims were a people of peace, befriending and working alongside neighboring Indian tribes.

Virginia was in a dying state, but it seemed to revive and flourish from the example of New England.¹ The Pilgrims endured everything cheerfully. They never complained about their conditions, and they thanked God for the merest blessings.² However, the people of Plymouth were locked in a life-or-death struggle with Satan himself; for this was the first time that the light of Christ had landed in force on his continent, and if he did not throw them back into the sea, there would soon be reinforcements.

Nonetheless, they said themselves, “We believe and trust that the Lord is with us, and that He will bless our endeavors. It is not with us as it is with other men, whom small things can discourage or small discontentments cause to wish themselves home again.”³ The more that adversity mounted against them, the harder they prayed; and, in contrast to the settlers at Jamestown, as their ranks thinned, they drew closer together and trusted God all the more.⁴ It is this example that paved the way for the United States, to the greatest degree of prosperity and liberty man has ever known. Long live our Pilgrim heritage in the hearts and minds of every American!