

A STORM OF WITCHCRAFT (extract)

The founders of Massachusetts were part of what some have called the "Puritan diaspora," a substantial migration out of England between 1620 and 1640 of Puritans who fled the growing oppression of King James I and his successor, Charles I, and what they saw as the corruption of the Church of England. In his famous sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," Governor John Winthrop had proclaimed "*that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.*" Massachusetts would be a shining example of what the world **should** and **could** be, once everyone had adopted the Puritan faith. The new colony was to be a place where the Puritans could worship in peace and build their "Bible commonwealth." Winthrop noted that the people of Massachusetts Bay had entered into a covenant with God. In return for this special relationship, the Puritans would make extraordinary efforts to demonstrate their religious zeal and purity. (...)

The Puritan movement began in England in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Its adherents believed that the creation of the Church of England (or Anglican Church) by Henry VIII had not been a strong enough reform of Catholic corruption. Indeed, they viewed the Anglican Church as far too close to the Catholicism it had supposedly replaced. The church was still tainted and full of excess. Inspired by Continental reformers such as John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli, these "puritans"—a pejorative term used by their detractors—desired a return to what they conceived to be the simplicity and piety of the church at the time of Christ and his apostles. Unfortunately, there was far from universal agreement on what constituted that original austerity, so rather than sharing a unified faith, English Puritans had a range of views on the church and its

problems. Some, such as the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony, were separatists. They believed the church was so corrupt that they had to break with it completely and start again. The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay did not share the extreme view of the separatists. Rather, they believed that the church could be saved—but the best way to do so was to leave England and her corrupting influences and reform the church in America.

While not all Puritans would have agreed on the specific reforms for the church, all would have agreed on some points. First and foremost, Puritans were Calvinists, believing that because of the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, all people were born as sinners into a life of total depravity. Only God, with his awesome and unlimited power, could determine who was going to go to heaven. He made this decision even before a person's birth, predestining that individual for heaven or hell. While Catholics believed in the importance of performing good deeds and leading a moral life in achieving salvation, Calvinists thought that nothing one did in this life could change God's decision. The only thing people could hope for was that God would reveal himself in some way to them, to let them know they were among the "saints"—those predestined to go to heaven. Puritans also believed in the importance of reading the Bible for oneself and living one's life according to the example it provided. So strong was this belief in reading that by the eighteenth century, New England had one of the highest literacy rates in the history of the Western world—higher than it is today.

«A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience» | **Book by Emerson W. Baker.**

