**Dr Belmerabet Fatiha**

**First Year ASCC Lecture on American First Settlements**

**PART TWO**

**The first puritans and the Pilgrim Fathers who came to America**

**Introduction**

Before the Pilgrims and Puritans Came to America, colonists came to America for many reasons. They came to explore, to make money, to expand the British territories and settled their own business, following the policy of expansion and colonization set by the British monarchs. However, the Pilgrim Fathers and Puritans came to America to practice religious freedom.

**William Bradford and Pilgrim Fathers**

In the 1500s England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and created a new church called the Church of England. Everyone in England had to belong to the church. There was a group of people called Separatists that wanted to separate from the Church of England. The Separatists, under the leadership of William Bradford, decided to leave England and start a settlement of their own so that they could practice their religion freely. Bradford went to the Virginia Company and asked them for permission to establish a new colony in Virginia. The Virginia Company agreed, so the Pilgrims set sail on the Mayflower (the name of the ship) in September 1620 towards Virginia. The Pilgrims had a long and difficult journey across the Atlantic Ocean. A storm blew them off course so instead of landing in Virginia, they landed further north in Cape Cod, an area that John Smith had mapped and called New England. The Pilgrims decided to settle in this area and called it Plymouth.

**The Mayflower Compact**

The pilgrims faced a problem of governing their people because; there was no form of government to follow. Though, The Virginia Company gave the Pilgrims a charter to settle in Virginia. The charter was not valid for Plymouth. The men aboard the Mayflower decided that they would write a plan of government for their own colony. The plan of government became known as the Mayflower Compact. The men agreed to consult each other about the laws for the colony, and they promised to work together to make the colony succeed. All the men signed the document. Women were not allowed to participate.

**Pilgrim Settlement in Plymouth in November 1620**

The Pilgrims finally landed in November of 1620. This was not the best time to establish a colony. It was very difficult for the Pilgrims to find food and shelter in the middle of winter. By the time spring arrived, half of the colonists had died. When spring arrived the Pilgrims set out to plant crops and build their colony. They Pilgrims were told how to plant corn and other crops and how to trap animals for food and clothing by two Native American Indians called Samoset and Squanto. By fall the colony was saved and to celebrate their success they celebrated the first **Thanksgiving** which became an annual religious feast**.**

**John Winthrop and the Puritans in America**

By the late 1620s, England was troubled by religious and political conflict. Many groups of dissenters were speaking out against the king and the Church of England. The Puritans were one such group. Unlike the Separatists, who wanted to break away from the English church, the Puritans wanted to reform, or “purify” its practices. The Puritans faced increasing persecution in England. Many decided to leave and set up a Puritan society in America

In 1630, a group left England in search of religious freedom. This group was called the Puritans. The Puritans wanted to leave the Church of England to become pure by getting rid of Catholic practices. The Puritans received a charter from the Massachusetts Bay Company to settle land in New England. John Winthrop led approximately 1,000 Puritans to America and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The colonists wanted to base the colony on the laws of God. They believed that God would protect them if they obeyed his laws.

Winthrop wanted to make this colony a model for all other colonies to follow. Like the other colonies, the Massachusetts Bay Colony established a government. All men who were church members were able to vote for governor and for representatives to the General Court. The General Court would then make laws for the good of the colony. Roanoke Island, Jamestown, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay Colony were the earliest of the English settlements.

**The New England Way of government**

The Puritans set up their ideal society that is a religious “commonwealth” of tightly-knit communities. Instead of a church governed by bishops and king, they created self-governing congregations. A congregation is a group of people who belong to the same church. Because Puritan congregations were self-governing, their churches came to be called “Congregationalist.” This Congregationalist way of organizing churches became known as “**the New England Way**.” Each congregation chose its minister and set up its own town. The town’s most important building was the meetinghouse, where religious services were held. Everyone had to attend these services. The meetinghouse was also used for town meetings, a form of self-government. Puritan values helped the colonists to organize their society and overcome the hardships of colonial life.

Puritan colonists set their own laws to govern their colony. Among the most important law are:

• Hard work as a way of honoring God. The Puritan work ethic contributed to the colony’s rapid growth and success.

• Education. Because the Puritans wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible, laws required that all children learn to read.

• Representative government. Puritans brought their traditions of town meetings and local self-government with them to America.

Democratic rights were quickly expanded. The colony’s charter allowed only “freemen” or investors to vote. But when the colonists arrived in America, Winthrop, the colony’s first governor, changed the definition of “freeman” to mean any male church member. Although this covered only a limited number of people and excluding women, it was a major step in expanding voting rights.