

Those Amazing Pilgrims

In honor of Thanksgiving, let's set the Pilgrim record straight. The Pilgrims were English Christians who objected to many of the mandatory practices of the Church of England. They embarked on a long, perilous journey of danger and hardship to seek freedom in America. In September of 1620 the Mayflower left port with 102 passengers, plus supplies. The conditions were incredibly crowded and miserable. The weather was brutal and treacherous, so brutal that one of the storms cracked a main beam. The Pilgrims and sailors improvised, using the Pilgrims own primitive house construction jack to support, then lift and repair the beam, survive the storm and arrive in America. Before landing and despite the sickness, grueling hardship and danger, they had the presence of mind to create the Mayflower Compact, an astonishing document setting forth how the colony would be governed. It was the world's first written constitution and required that decisions and leaders be voted upon by the colonists.

Once they landed at Plymouth Rock, the Pilgrims allied with the Wampanoag Indians. The Wampanoags, decimated by the plaque and endless Indian raids, relied upon the Pilgrim's firearms for protection from their stronger, hostile neighbors. The Pilgrims learned efficient Indian techniques for farming, fishing and forestry and thus invited the Indians to Thanksgiving. In fact, Indians served on juries, the Pilgrims were prohibited from purchasing certain key tracks of Indian land by law and the Indians could sue Pilgrims for mistreatment. Punishment was the same for English and Indian.

No land was stolen - it was bought with money or manufactured goods. As Governor Josiah Winslow pointed out, every piece of land was purchased from the Indians with the exception of their first settlement because no one lived there. Those Indians were killed in plagues and Indian wars. Critics of the purchase price fail to consider the Indian population in North America at the time - responsible estimates range from 2.1 to 7 million. The 48 contiguous United States consists of 3,119,884.69 square miles. If we use the 7 million estimate, each Indian had almost ½ million square miles of land to himself. The Indians were savages, meaning primitive, and had not invented the wheel or a written language and used stone tools. A metal knife, a warm jacket or a firearm was well worth a few hundred acres to an Indian. If you're lost in the desert with a pocket full of diamonds, no doubt you'd trade one for a few gallons of water. Same with the Indians.

The Indians lost their land because they broke their treaty with the Pilgrims and launched a brutal sneak attack in King Philips War. In World War II we lost about 1% of our male population, in the civil war 4.5% (600,000 dead), but in King Philip's War the Indians killed 8% of English males. The Pilgrims were not kind after winning. We recommend you compare Nathaniel Hilbrick's anti-Pilgrim polemic, "Mayflower" with "Flames over New England," by Ogla Hall-Quest, a Columbia grad who did her graduate work at NYU and who presents a balanced picture of what occurred.

Our opinion is Hall-Quest's work, which was intended by Dutton as a supplemental history text, towers above Hilbrick's Mayflower in prose and objectivity. Indeed, we think most critics of the Pilgrims embarrass themselves. Robert Tracy McKenzie of Wheaton College claims the Mayflower Compact is over-rated because it acknowledges the Pilgrims are loyal

subjects of the King. Were they really supposed to openly rebel against England? Hilbrick claims the Indians construction of a secret fort stockpiled with food, ammunition and gun powder was a peaceful act, that Mary Rowlandson's forced labor after enslavement and sale by the Indians (they murdered her child first) was justified, and somehow blames the Pilgrims for the ancient Indian custom of torturing each other for fun.

Don't believe us, Hall-Quest or Hilbrick - read both and decide for yourself.

This is a column of opinion and satire. The author knows of no undisclosed facts. Contact Lewis, the author of The Diaries of Pontius Pilate, at www.josephmaxlewis.com and click on Rimersburg Rules. © Joseph M. Lewis