

Recent Developments in the Historiography of Colonial New England

Jack P. Greene

Volume 17, numéro 2, spring 1988

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad17_2re01

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Greene, J. P. (1988). Recent Developments in the Historiography of Colonial New England. *Acadiensis*, 17(2), 143–177.

Review Essays/Notes critiques

Recent Developments in the Historiography of Colonial New England

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND, like that of colonial British America in general, has undergone a profound reorientation over the past two decades. The classic theme of the nature, implementation, and subsequent metamorphoses of puritanism in Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut has continued to receive major attention from historians. Indeed, no other subject in the vast and variegated history of colonial British America has yet attracted more scholarly attention. Increasingly, however, religious history has had to share the stage with social history. How this development has changed our conceptions of colonial New England is the subject of this paper. For convenience, the subject has been broken down into three rough periods, the first stretching from the founding to 1660, the second from 1660 to about 1720, and the third from 1720 to about 1770. To the rather considerable extent that Nova Scotia was a socio-economic and cultural extension of New England during the third quarter of the 18th century, this analysis may help to illuminate important aspects of the immediate background of its early development.

Much of the work done on the first generation of English settlement in New England before 1660 speaks most directly to the question of the typicality of the New England experience in the process of establishing English colonies in the America. Early American historians have widely, if usually only implicitly, assumed that the New England experience can serve as model for the English American colonial experience in this regard. But recent research on New England and other areas of settlement have revealed the inapplicability of this assumption. With regard to almost every area of life, the New England experience, at least insofar as it was manifest in the histories of the two major colonies of Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut, deviated sharply from that of every other region of English colonial settlement — in Ireland, in North America, and in the Atlantic and Caribbean island colonies.

Demographically, for instance, the experience of New England was quite peculiar. Although a few hundred people had migrated to Plymouth and other small coastal settlements in the 1620s, New England, in contrast to most other areas, was initially peopled largely by a short, sudden, and carefully organized burst of immigration. Between 20,000 and 25,000 Englishmen poured into the colony and adjacent areas in just twelve short years between 1630 and 1642. As many as 70 per cent of these immigrants, moreover, came not, as was the case elsewhere, as unmarried, young, and unfree servants but as members of established families, independent farmers and artisans with some accumulated

resources. Virtually from the beginning, therefore, the age structure and sex ratio in New England resembled those of established societies all over western Europe far more closely than was the case with any other new societies established by the English in America during the early modern era. Unlike the Chesapeake colonies which could never have sustained themselves without a constant flow of new arrivals from England, New England was the destination of relatively few new immigrants following the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642. Nor does it appear that immigration from England to New England ever again became substantial during the colonial period.¹

Nevertheless, New England population grew rapidly from the substantial base of initial immigrants. Largely free of serious epidemics, New England experienced much lower rates of mortality than either England or any of England's other colonies. Studies in the early 1970s by Philip Greven and Kenneth Lockridge suggested that infant mortality was low — of an average of 8.3 children born to a group of sample families in Andover, 7.2 survived to age 21 — and those who lived to 21 could anticipate long and healthy lives: 71.8 for men and 70.8 for women among the first generation of settlers, and 64.2 for men and 61.6 for women among the second. Combined with relatively young ages for first marriages for women (19.0 for the first generation and 22.3 for the second) and a correspondingly high number of births per marriage, this low rate of mortality sent population surging upwards. Within a generation, population had doubled. By 1660, New England as a whole contained between 30,000 and 35,000 inhabitants of European descent, more than twice the number in the Chesapeake colonies, which had been in existence for a full generation longer. In vivid contrast to the Chesapeake, moreover, most of these people were native born, New England becoming the first region of Anglo-American settlement to develop a predominantly creole population.²

1 Terry L. Anderson and Robert Paul Thomas, "White Population, Labor Force and Extensive Growth of the New England Economy in the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of Economic History*, XXXIII (1973), pp. 639-41; T.H. Breen and Stephen Foster, "Moving to the New World: The Character of Early Massachusetts Immigration", *William and Mary Quarterly* [hereafter *WMQ*], XXX (1973), pp. 189-222; Virginia Dejohn Anderson, "Migrants and Motives: Religion and the Settlement of New England, 1630-1640", *New England Quarterly*, LXVIII (1985), pp. 340, 346-67; N.C.P. Tyack, "The Humbler Puritans of East Anglia and the New England Movement: Evidence from the Court Records of the 1630s", *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* [hereafter *N.E. Hist. & Gen. Reg.*] CXXXVIII (1984), pp. 79-106.

2 Anderson and Thomas, "White Population", pp. 639-42; Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970), pp. 21-40; Kenneth Lockridge, "The Population of Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XIX (1966), pp. 318-44.

We have long known of course that the New England colonies had a much more deeply religious orientation than other English colonies; perhaps the most important finding of new scholarship is the considerable religious diversity among the early settlers. As William Stoever and Philip Gura have both stressed, participants in the great migration were far from being all of one mind with regard to theology, church government, and other religious questions, and the congregational church polity preferred by most of them was conducive to the accommodation of a wide range of religious opinion. At the same time, this scholarship has continued to emphasize, with Perry Miller, the extent to which leaders of these colonies were moved by the vision of establishing a redemptive community of God's chosen people in the New World. They saw themselves as a special group joined in a binding covenant with God and sent by Him into the wilderness to establish the true Christian commonwealth that would thenceforth serve as a model for the rest of the Christian world. In the societies they created, the church and the clergy thus necessarily had unusually powerful roles, the relationship between clerical and secular leaders was both intimate and mutually supportive, and full civil rights, including the franchise, were in many communities limited to church members.³

- 3 David D. Hall, "Understanding the Puritans", in Herbert Bass, ed., *The State of American History* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 330-49; Michael McGiffert, "American Puritan Studies in the 1960's", *WMQ*, 3d ser. XXVII (1970), pp. 36-67; and Anderson, "Migrants and Motives", pp. 367-83. David D. Hall, "A World of Wonders: The Mentality of the Supernatural in Seventeenth-Century New England", in Hall and David Grayson Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston, 1984), pp. 239-74; William K.B. Stoever, *"A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven": Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, Conn., 1978) and Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Scion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in Seventeenth-Century New England 1620-1660* (Middletown, Conn., 1984) stress the religious diversity among puritan settlers. See also Stephen Foster, "New England and the Challenge of Hersey, 1630 to 1660: The Puritan Crisis in Transatlantic Perspective", *WMQ*, XXXVIII (1981), pp. 624-60; "The Godly in Transit: English Popular Protestantism and the Creation of a Puritan Establishment in America", in Hall and Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, pp. 185-238; and "English Puritanism and the Progress of New England Institutions, 1630-1660", in David D. Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad W. Tate, eds., *Saints & Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York, 1984), pp. 3-37; J.F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXII (1975), pp. 223-60; and Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, 1978), pp. 3-61. Relations between church and state, ministry and magistracy in early New England are treated in David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1972); George Selement, *Keepers of the Vineyard: The Puritan Ministry and Collective Culture in Colonial New England* (Lanham, Md., 1984); and B. Katherine Brown, "The Controversy over the Franchise in Puritan Massachusetts, 1954 to 1974", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXIII (1976), p. 228. Other works on the complex issue of the franchise are T.H. Breen, "Who Governs: The Town Franchise in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXVII (1970), pp. 460-74; Stephen Foster, "The Massachusetts Franchise in the Seventeenth Century", *ibid.*, XXIV (1967), pp. 613-23; Arlin I. Ginsberg, "The Franchise in Seventeenth Century Massachusetts: Ipswich", *ibid.*, XXXIV (1977), pp. 444-52; Robert E.

If most of these conclusions are generally compatible with the work of an earlier generation of historians, recent historians, especially Stephen Foster, have perhaps put more emphasis upon the social dimensions of the initial puritan vision. Puritan colonists came to America not only because they were unable to realize their religious aspirations in Old England. They were also driven by a profound disquiet over the state of contemporary English society. In towns and rural areas alike, new social and economic forces seemed to be producing a disturbing and ever-widening gap between inherited prescriptions of social order and actual circumstances of life, while the Crown and its agents were more and more intruding into many aspects of local affairs — civil as well as religious. To an important degree, the great migration to New England was an “essentially defensive, conservative, even reactionary” response to these developments. Hence, its members were determined not only to achieve perfection in the church but also to create a society that, in contrast to the seemingly increasingly anarchic and beleaguered world they were leaving behind, would conform as closely as possible to traditional English conceptions of the ideal, well-ordered commonwealth.⁴

This determination accounted for the peculiar social organization of New England. In their grand design of building the ideal traditional ordered English world in the untamed American wilderness, the puritan settlers tried to organize their new societies around a series of tightly constructed and relatively independent communities in which the inhabitants formally covenanted with each other to comprise unified social organisms. As David Grayson Allen and others have shown, there was considerable diversity in the form of these communities. Joseph Wood’s recent research shows that only a few, like Andover, seem to have been classical nucleated villages in which the inhabitants lived around the meeting house and went forth each working morning to fields arranged according to the traditional open field system that still prevailed in some areas of England. Most communities, like Sudbury, quickly broke up into dispersed rural settlements with the inhabitants living on individual farms. How any group of settlers organized themselves upon the land seems to have been determined to some significant degree by their own prior experience in

Wall, “The Franchise in Seventeenth Century Massachusetts: Dedham and Cambridge”, *ibid.*, pp. 453-58, and “The Decline of the Massachusetts Franchise, 1647-1666”, *Journal of American History*, LIX (1972), pp. 303-10; and James A. Thorpe, “Colonial Suffrage in Massachusetts”, *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CVI (1970), pp. 169-81.

- 4 T.H. Breen, “Transfer of Culture: Chance and Design in Shaping Massachusetts Bay, 1630-1660”, *N.E. Hist. & Gen. Reg.*, CXXXII (1978), pp. 3-17, and “Persistent Localism: English Social Change and the Shaping of New England Institutions”, *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXII (1975), pp. 3-28; Andrew Delbanco, “The Puritan Errand Re-Viewed”, *Journal of American Studies*, XVIII (1984), pp. 342-60; Allen Cardin, “The Communal Ideal in Puritan New England, 1630-1700”, *Fides et Historia*, XVII (1984), pp. 25-38. The clearest and most perceptive discussion of puritan social goals in New England is Stephen Foster, *Their Solitary Way: The Puritan Social Ethic in the First Century of Settlement in New England* (New Haven, 1971).

England.⁵ But everywhere, at least in the three "orthodox colonies" of Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Haven, the end of their settlements was the same. Although they were by no means disinterested in achieving sustenance and prosperity, they put enormous emphasis upon establishing well-ordered communities knit together by Christian love and composed only of like-minded people with a common religious ideology and a strong sense of communal responsibility. These tightly-constructed and communally-oriented villages were only one means of achieving order and harmony. Strong extended and highly patriarchal families, Greven's work on Andover suggests, also helped to preserve social control and guarantee a relatively high degree of peace throughout the first generation of settlement. So also did the quick establishment of an educational system that was both designed to promote religious and social cohesion and extraordinarily elaborate for a new colonial society.⁶

The puritan colonial experiments in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven were also unusual in the extent to which they were presided over by a numerous and highly visible group of established secular and clerical leaders. To a far greater extent than any other English colonists in America, the puritans brought their leaders with them to New England. Political and religious authority and social status survived the Atlantic crossing and the process of reimplantation in the New World without serious disruption. Unlike the hothouse elites that sprang up among the winners in the race for profits in other early colonies, New England leaders at both the local and the provincial levels during the first decades were to a significant degree people who had brought all the traditional attributes of socio-political authority with them to the New World.

As Stephen Foster has pointed out, the political societies of the New England colonies were based not upon the customary engines of social coercion of early modern Europe, not upon a hereditary monarch, a titled nobility, a church hierarchy, and a landlord class, but upon a radical voluntarism derived out of the logic of the social covenants that served as the foundations for colonies and

5 Diversity among New England towns is admirably treated in David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transfer of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1981). See also Joseph S. Wood, "Village and Community in Early Colonial New England", *Journal of Historical Geography*, VIII (1982), pp. 333-46; Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, Conn., 1964); Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town, The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York, 1970); Greven, *Four Generations*; John J. Waters, "Hingham, Massachusetts, 1631-1661: An East Anglian Oligarchy in the New World", *Journal of Social History*, I (1968), pp. 351-70, and "The Traditional World of the New England Peasants: A View from Seventeenth-Century Barnstable", *N.E. Hist. and Gen. Reg.*, CXXX (1976), pp. 3-21.

6 Foster, *Solitary Way*, pp. 11-64, 99-152; Timothy H. Breen and Stephen Foster, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement: A Study of Social Cohesion in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts", *Journal of American History*, LX (1973), pp. 5-22.

communities alike. Because all freemen, initially defined as church members who had assumed full civil rights, were theoretically parties to those covenants and because the percentage of freeman usually ran as high as 60 to 70 per cent of the adult male population in most towns, the potential for political participation was — by English standards — extraordinarily high. Most of the time, however, they willingly deferred to the magistrates, who assumed the dominant role in establishing political institutions, allocating land, making laws, dispensing justice, and reinforcing the position of the clergy and churches.⁷

A comparatively slow pace of economic development was also an important element in enabling the puritans to succeed in their socio-religious goals in New England. Many immigrants, including even some of the clergy, certainly had economic as well as religious and social reasons for coming to New England and, although the economy of the region seems to have been reasonably prosperous and even to have enjoyed a considerable rate of economic growth over much of the 17th century, neither the soil nor the climate were conducive to the development of staple agriculture. Very early, fish, timber, furs, and shipping brought some people more than ordinary returns, and in seaboard towns the proportion of the population engaged in fishing was substantial. But most settlers had no alternative source of income than cereal agriculture and animal husbandry, which yielded only modest profits. Hence, except in the emergent port centers of Boston and Salem, the wealth structure of the New England colonies, at least down to 1660, remained far more equitable than in other colonies. Nor, except perhaps in the fishing industry, did New Englanders have either the need, the incentive, or the resources to recruit a large force of unfree laborers. The labor of family members and perhaps a few servants who resided in the nuclear family households was all that was either necessary or profitable for most economic enterprises in the region.⁸

7 Greven, *Four Generations*, pp. 41-99; James Axtell, *The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England* (New Haven, 1974), pp. 166-244; Robert Emmet Wall, Jr., *Massachusetts Bay: The Crucial Decade, 1640-1650* (New Haven, 1972), esp., pp. 21-40; Foster, *Solitary Way*, pp. 67-98, 155-72; T.H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630-1730* (New York, 1970), pp. 1-86.

8 Terry Lee Anderson, *The Economic Growth of Seventeenth Century New England: A Measurement of Regional Income* (New York, 1975); Anderson and Thomas, "White Population", p. 661; Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 1-111; Daniel Vickers, "Work and Life on the Fishing Periphery of Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1675", in Hall and Allen, ed., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, pp. 83-117; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), pp. 127-56; Charles F. Carroll, *The Timber Economy of Puritan New England* (Providence, 1973); Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Chapel Hill, 1965), pp. 164-201; William I. Davisson and Dennis J. Dugan, "Commerce in Seventeenth-Century Essex County, Massachusetts", *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CVII (1971), pp. 113-18; Davisson, "Essex County Wealth Trends: Wealth and Economic Growth in 17th Century Massachusetts", *ibid.*, CIII (1967), pp. 291-342; Donald W. Koch, "Income Distribution and Political Structure in Seventeenth-Century Salem, Massachu-

Along with the strong cohesive force exerted by the church, family, school and visible and authoritative leadership structures that characterized the New England villages, the absence of exceptional economic opportunities inhibited the urge to scatter that was so powerfully manifest among the settlers in the Chesapeake. The early colonists moved about during the first two decades of settlement, and people who either had tenuous ties to the community or lived in the economically most active areas tended to be highly mobile. But those with close economic, family, political, and religious involvement seem to have developed a deep emotional attachment to their communities, an attachment that in turn seems to have fostered a degree of persistence and spatial immobility that may have been lower even than in most established village populations in England.⁹ These same conditions also helped to produce several decades of relative social peace. Notwithstanding the well-known theological controversies between Bay Colony magistrates and religious rebels such as Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, the challenges presented by the arrival of the Quakers in the mid-1650s, and the presence of considerable controversy in the churches and contention in the courts, major social discord was rare and conflict restrained throughout most of the 17th century. As Timothy Breen and Stephen Foster have aptly observed in regard to Massachusetts, this characteristic of New England society placed it in contrast not only to the Chesapeake but to virtually the whole of the contemporary civilized world and constituted perhaps the single most startling accomplishment of the orthodox puritan colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven.¹⁰

The picture that emerges of the puritan colonies during the first generation of settlement then is of a self-conscious and successful effort to recreate a traditional society in the New World. With low mortality, rapid population growth, a benign disease environment, and a far more fully and rapidly

setts", *ibid.*, CV (1969), pp. 50-71; Terry L. Anderson, "Wealth Estimates for the New England Background of the First Generation of the New England Clergy", *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, XIV (1975), pp. 473-88; Breen, "Transfer of Culture", pp. 3-17; Stephen Innes, "Land Tenancy and Social Order in Springfield, Massachusetts, 1652 to 1702", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXV (1978), pp. 33-56.

- 9 Breen and Foster, "Moving to the New World", pp. 209-13; David Grayson Allen, "Both Englands", in Hall and Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, pp. 77-80; Linda Auwers Bissell, "From One Generation to Another: Mobility in Seventeenth-Century Windsor, Connecticut", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXI (1974), pp. 79-110; W.R. Prest, "Stability and Change in Old and New England: Clayworth and Dedham", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VI (1976), pp. 359-74; John M. Murrin, "Review Essay", *History and Theory*, XI (1972), p. 231.

- 10 See David Thomas Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts, 1629-1692* (Chapel Hill, 1972); Paul R. Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, 1976), pp. 1-57; Carla Pestana, "The City upon a Hill Under Siege: The Puritan Perception of the Quaker Threat to Massachusetts Bay, 1656-1661", *New England Quarterly*, LVI (1983), pp. 323-53; Breen and Foster, "Puritans' Greatest Achievement", esp. pp. 5-6.

articulated old-world style society, the intensely religious colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven, moved by powerful millennial and communal impulses, exhibited rapid community and family development. With strong patriarchal families, elaborate kinship networks, and visible and authoritative leaders, localities quickly developed vigorous social institutions, including many schools, and deeply rooted populations. Mostly involved in cereal agriculture and with no generalized source of great economic profit, the puritan colonies displayed a relatively egalitarian wealth structure and an extraordinarily low incidence of social discord and contention.

Increasingly after 1660 and in a few places even before, this carefully constructed and coherent social and cultural order began to change. To many contemporary puritan settlers, in fact, these changes seemed to portend failure, and they interpreted them as evidence of social and moral declension, a pervasive and steady turning away from the original goals of the founders by their descendants. The explanatory structure they articulated to make this development comprehensible to themselves still provides the basic framework for the declension model that modern historians have conventionally employed to characterize the process of historical change in colonial New England. Positing a largely linear process of change from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, from community to individualism, from traditional to modern, this model has come under sharp attack in recent years.

Among the most important of the conditions pushing the orthodox New England colonies into social patterns that suggested declension to contemporary inhabitants was their rapid demographic growth. Immigration continued low, in all probability amounting to no more 10,000 to 12,000 for the last half of the 17th century and never averaging more than a few hundred per year before the American Revolution. Yet population grew rapidly in response to highly favorable conditions of life. With an abundant food supply, a relatively equal sex ratio, a low population density, and a low incidence of epidemic diseases, New England settlers, especially in the rural areas that were the homes of all but five to ten per cent of them, enjoyed low mortality and exhibited a high percentage of married women and a vigorous birthrate that, for most of the 17th century, produced completed families averaging in excess of seven children. Notwithstanding considerably less favorable conditions in seaport towns such as Boston and Salem, the number of people of European descent in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Plymouth, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire soared from just over 30,000 in 1660 to over 90,000 by 1700.

During the 18th century, the rate of population growth slowed significantly in New England. For the quarter of a century beginning in 1690, one case study has shown, the age of marriage rose, while the number of children per completed family fell by nearly 40 per cent to 4.6 before rising again to around seven in subsequent decades. At the same time, mortality increased, partly as a result of periodic epidemics that were in turn, to an important degree, probably a

function of higher population density and closer ties with the outside world. Declining life expectancy seems by mid-century to have brought mortality figures closer to both those long characteristic of Britain and those recently achieved in the Chesapeake. Despite these developments, natural population growth remained vigorous, averaging between 26 and 28 per cent per decade through the first seven decades of the 18th century. Total numbers, surpassing 115,000 by 1710 and 215,000 by 1730, had reached nearly 450,000 by 1760.¹¹

The effects of this burgeoning population were profound. Intensifying an already powerful demand for land, it supplied the energy for the rapid expansion of settlement. Although King Philip's War in the mid-1670s and the first set of intercolonial wars between 1689 and 1713 operated as a temporary brake on expansion, by the early 18th century New Englanders had occupied a broad band extending 50 to 70 miles inland and from New York to southern Maine. Driving out the Indians or shunting them off to marginal areas, settlers were rapidly replacing the forests with a European-style landscape of farm buildings, fields, orchards, pastures, and fences. By 1700, the four New England colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire contained about 120 towns. This expansive process accelerated after 1713. Over 100 new towns were founded during the next 50 years, and the area of settlement both became far more compact in areas of older occupation and spread over all of southern New England and north and east into New Hampshire, Maine, and Nova Scotia.¹²

11 Henry A. Gemery, "Emigration from the British Isles to the New World, 1630-1700: Inferences from Colonial Populations", *Research in Economic History*, V (1980), pp. 193, 195; James H. Cassedy, *Demography in Early America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 40, 175; Clifford K. Shipton, "Immigration to New England, 1680-1740", *Journal of Political Economy*, XLIV (1936), pp. 225-39; Philip J. Greven, Jr., "The Average Size of Families and Households in the Province of Massachusetts in 1764 and the United States in 1790: An Overview", in Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 545-60, and *Four Generations*, pp. 185-97; Anderson and Thomas, "White Population", pp. 639, 647-8; Daniel Scott Smith, "The Demographic History of Colonial New England", *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII (1972), pp. 165-83; Maris A. Vinovskis, "Mortality Rates and Trends in Massachusetts before 1860", *ibid.*, pp. 195-202; Lockridge, "Population of Dedham", pp. 324-6, 332-9; Susan L. Norton, "Population Growth in Colonial America: A Study of Ipswich, Massachusetts", *Population Studies*, XXV (1971), pp. 433-52; Douglas R. McManis, *Colonial New England: A Historical Geography* (New York, 1975), pp. 66-72; Robert Higgs and H. Louis Stettler, III, "Colonial New England Demography: A Sampling Approach", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXVII (1970), pp. 282-94; Stettler, "The New England Throat Distemper and Family Size", in H.E. Klarman, ed., *Empirical Studies in Health Economics* (Baltimore, 1970), pp. 17-27; Rose Lockwood, "Birth, Illness, and Death in 18th Century New England", *Journal of Social History*, XII (1978), pp. 111-28.

12 McManis, *Colonial New England*, pp. 46-66; Douglas E. Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* (New York, 1966); Charles E. Clark, *The Eastern Frontier: The Settlement of Northern New England 1610-1763* (New York, 1970); Bruce C. Daniels, *The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development, 1635-1790* (Middletown, Conn., 1979), pp. 8-44,

Already by the 1660s within the oldest settlements, population growth had led to the dispersal of people out from the early clusters of settlement. In the few places that had been initially settled as nucleated villages, this process sometimes resulted in the physical and social disintegration of the original village centers. Instead of settling together in close proximity, people tended more and more to establish their families on individual farmsteads, while some people moved so far away from the original meeting houses that they found it desirable to form new semi-independent and sometimes antagonistic settlements. Contrary to the designs of the original puritan leaders, they thereby helped to destroy the prescriptive unity of the towns and perhaps to weaken the bonds of neighborhood and the authority of political and social institutions. Despite this dispersion, second and even third generation settlers may have been more rooted and less mobile than those of the first generation. When they moved, they did not usually leave the political jurisdictions in which they had been born and even then often stayed within 15 to 30 miles of the places of their birth. With growing population, however, land in the older agricultural communities was by the third and fourth generations usually all taken up, and young people coming into their maturity found that they either had to go into non-farming occupations or move to new towns to the north, west, or east. Outmigration from old communities and the founding of new towns proliferated after 1715, as New Englanders became increasingly more mobile. Although a significant proportion of long-distance migrants consisted of middle-aged people who moved with their children only after the death of their parents to what they hoped would be better lands, many others were young, unmarried adults who, by the 1730s and 1740s, displayed little resistance to moving away from their homes and families. This willingness to migrate by young adults in turn seems to have weakened parental authority and pushed children more and more towards the imperatives of autonomy and independence that had been so powerfully manifest everywhere else in the English American world throughout the 17th century.¹³

and *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay: The Colonial Rhode Island Town* (Middletown, Conn., 1983), pp. 23-47; Eric H. Christiansen, "The Emergence of Medical Communities in Massachusetts, 1700-1794: The Demographic Factors", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, LIV (1980), p. 66; Jere R. Daniell, *Colonial New Hampshire: A History* (Millwood, N.Y., 1981), pp. 133-64; David E. Van Deventer, *The Emergence of Provincial New Hampshire, 1623-1741* (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 62-82; Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison, 1968), pp. 330-69. Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, pp. 54-81, 127-70, suggestively discusses the changing social landscape of New England during the colonial era.

- 13 Wood, "Village and Community in Early New England", pp. 333-46; Greven, *Four Generations*, pp. 41-71, 175-221; Lockridge, *New England Town*, pp. 79-118, and "Land, Population, and the Evolution of New England Society 1630-1790", *Past & Present*, No. 39 (1968), pp. 62-80; Bissell, "From One Generation to Another", pp. 79-110; Thomas R. Cole, "Family, Settlement, and Migration in Southeastern Massachusetts, 1650-1805: The Case for Regional Analysis", *N.E. Hist. & Gen. Reg.*, CXXXII (1978), pp. 171-81; John W. Adams and Alice Bee Kasakoff, "Migration and the Family in Colonial New England: The View from Genealogies", *Journal of*

Even before population growth had helped to accelerate the general processes of dispersion and mobility, the intense spiritual energies and utopian impulses that had been so central to the founding generation of puritan colonists began to attenuate. Relative to population growth, church membership seems to have declined from about 1650 until 1675. Although absolute numbers remained fairly steady and there was even a revival of spiritual interest and church membership during the last quarter of the 17th century among the third generation, the clergy throughout these years decried the decay in Godliness and the growth in worldliness among the laity. In response to this situation, many ministers sought to broaden the base of church members beyond merely the visible saints. Though it was never adopted by all congregations, the half-way covenant of 1662 permitted baptized but unconverted children of church members to be "half-way" members and to have their children baptized. By the 1680s and 1690s, a few clergymen like Solomon Stoddard of Northampton advocated even further liberalization of membership requirements. Discovering "that a pure membership was a flimsy foundation on which to construct an ecclesiastical system, and that the restraining influence of the church on the entire community was more important than the preservation of a [pure] congregation of saints", the churches opted to sacrifice purity to community.¹⁴

Problems involving church membership were compounded by dissension within and among churches. By the 1660s, the search for a single orthodox and uniform way in theology and church government to which the emigrants had

Family History, IX (1984), pp. 24-44, and "Migration at Marriage in Colonial New England: A Comparison of Rates Derived from Genealogies with Rates from Vital Records", in Bennett Dyke and Warren T. Morrill, eds., *Genealogical Demography* (New York, 1980), pp. 115-38; Darrett B. Rutman, "People in Process: The New Hampshire Towns of the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of Urban History*, I (1975), pp. 268-92; Douglas Lamar Jones, *Village and Seaport: Migration and Society in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Hanover, N.H., 1981); John J. Waters, "Patrimony, Succession, and Social Stability: Guildford, Connecticut in the Eighteenth Century", *Perspectives in American History*, X (1976), pp. 131-60; Charles S. Grant, "Land Speculation and the Settlement of Kent, 1738-1760", *New England Quarterly*, XXVII (1955), pp. 51-71.

- 14 Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 128-36, 210-11, 233-5, 276; Gerald F. Moran, "Religious Renewal, Puritan Tribalism, and the Family in Seventeenth-Century Milford, Connecticut", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXVI (1979), pp. 236-54; Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Puritan Family and Religion: A Critical Reappraisal", *ibid.*, XXXIX (1982), pp. 32-42; David M. Scobey, "Revising the Errand: New England's Ways and the Puritan Sense of the Past", *ibid.*, XLI (1984), pp. 3-31; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, 1982), p. 242; Selement, *Keepers of the Vineyard*, pp. 43-59; Perry Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth", in *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 25-30, and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953); Joseph J. Ellis, *The New England Mind in Transition: Samuel Johnson of Connecticut, 1696-1772* (New Haven, 1973), p. 11.

been committed had already been revealed to be a chimera. While the autonomy of individual congregations rendered any attempt to achieve regional religious uniformity impossible, disagreements — among the Godly — over baptism and other sacraments, predestination, and the proper form of church government revealed deep fissures and contradictions within the puritan movement. Whether or not, as Paul Lucas has argued, these disputes “made dissension a way of life” in New England during the last half of the 17th century, they certainly unleashed “a continuing struggle for control of church government”. By seriously eroding “the community’s power to suppress dissent”, they also eventually forced colony and community leaders into a grudging acceptance of it.¹⁵ Nor did ministers of the second and third generations enjoy the stature and immediate influence of those of the first. Although it is certainly an exaggeration to speak of the “collapse of clerical authority”, strife among the clergy, disputes between the clergy and the laity, and what David Hall has called the “diminished charisma” of the ministers who replaced the first occupants of the pulpits of New England combined to undermine clerical authority. It may be true that “the clergy’s involvement with the mental images of the laity was as intense as ever after 1660” and that “the ministry remained the most important calling in New England”, but the clergy no longer exerted such a profound influence in defining life in the puritan colonies, and many congregations even revealed a growing reluctance to support their ministers in the style to which their predecessors had been accustomed. By the early decades of the 18th century, it was a general lament among ministers that they “did not enjoy the prestige, influence, and social status” of their 17th century predecessors.¹⁶

All of these developments stimulated the clergy to articulate a broadly diffused sense of religious decline. Increasingly after 1660, declension became the omnipresent theme in sermons, and the jeremiad, which publicly reviewed the “shortcomings of society” and called on the people to renounce their sins and return to the primitive religious and social purity of the emigrants, became the standard form of sermon on all “the great occasions of communal life, when the body politic met in solemn conclave to consider the state of society”. Few modern historians accept these contemporary laments at face value. They recognize that New England was not declining but only changing, merely

15 E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven, 1974), pp. 169-230; Scobey, “Revising the Errand”, pp. 19, 30; Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, p. 205; Lilian Handlin, “Dissent in a Small Community”, *New England Quarterly*, LVIV (1985), pp. 193-220; Sydney V. James, “Ecclesiastical Authority in the Land of Roger Williams”, *ibid.*, LVII (1984), pp. 323-46; Pope, *Half-Way Covenant*, p. 260.

16 Foster, “Godly in Transit”, in Hall and Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, p. 237; Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, p. xiii; James W. Schmotter, “Ministerial Careers in Eighteenth-Century New England: The Social Context, 1700-1760”, *Journal of Social History*, IX (1975), pp. 249-67; Hall, *Faithful Shepherd*, p. 181.

undergoing a series of intellectual and institutional adaptations to reflect the changing needs of the churches and society. As, more and more through the middle decades of the century, hope fell victim to experience and the "ideal of community" dimmed before "the shortcomings of community life", the original New England way, in Stephen Foster's words, simply dissolved "into unrelated, often irreconcilable parts". In the process, as Perry Miller noted nearly a half-century ago, it became "something other than it had started out to be, in spite of the fact that many...still desired with all their hearts that it remain unchanged".¹⁷

If the jeremiads of the late 17th century cannot be read as literal indications of New England's declension, they certainly revealed a widespread discontent with contemporary religious and social behavior that gripped the laity as well as the clergy. By the 1660s, in fact, few colonists any longer had any very vivid sense of the urgency of the original mission that had brought their parents and grandparents to New England. As the "formulations of the first two decades" lost "their near monopoly position as the fulcrum for their members' imaginative lives", New Englanders seemed — to themselves — to be irresistibly carried "away from the original dedication to holiness and the will of God". The Crown's assumption of control over New England in 1684 effectively shattered "any lingering sense among the colonists that they formed a special, divinely chosen community". By that action, the Crown at once destroyed the old government that had theoretically "bound the whole community in Covenant with God", rendered impossible any further efforts to enforce a religious orthodoxy by requiring toleration of all Protestant religions, and "left the third generation of settlers with no clear definition of the status" to which their grandparents and even parents had aspired "as the chosen children of God". Subsequently, the founders' prophetic vision of establishing God's city upon a hill became little more than "a pious memory, faithfully recorded by Cotton Mather [and other clergymen] but [largely] exotic to the religious life of the province" as a whole. During the first six decades of the 18th century, the idea of New England's special place in God's plan for human kind increasingly lost force and was gradually merged with the more general conception of the whole Anglo-American Protestant world as the bulwark against popery.¹⁸

17 Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth", pp. 23, 43; Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, 1978), p. 16; Foster, *Their Solitary Way*, pp. xiv-xv; Pope, *Half-Way Covenant*, pp. 261, 275-76, and "New England Versus the New England Mind: The Myth of Declension", *Journal of Social History*, III (1969-70), pp. 95-108.

18 Foster, "Godly in Transit", in Hall and Allen, eds., *Seventeenth-Century New England*, p. 214; Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth", p. 25; Breen and Foster, "Puritans' Greatest Achievement", p. 20; Pope, "New England Versus the New England Mind", p. 105; Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York, 1966), p. 157; Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy", p. 258; Bruce Tucker, "The Reinterpretation of Puritan History in Provincial New England", *New England Quarterly*, LIV (1981), pp. 481-98,

Especially during the late 17th century, this declining sense of mission, this pervasive feeling of having fallen away from the faith of the fathers, may have contributed to alter still other aspects of the religious landscape of New England. By stirring "severe feelings of inadequacy and insecurity", it may have been largely responsible for driving people more and more "into the terrible wilderness of their own inner selves" and into an excessive preoccupation with the internal strife of the local communities in which they lived. Certainly, the ancient corporate religious impulse was no longer sufficiently strong to provide a vehicle through which communities could join together to contain the astonishing degree of contention and aggression that was so vividly manifest in the rise in criminal prosecutions for deviance and in the various witchcraft episodes, especially the one that occurred at Salem in 1692-93.¹⁹

Although, as Perry Miller has emphasized, New England religious culture remained vital and adaptable throughout the years from 1670 to 1730, it no longer held its former pre-eminence in New England life. Despite some occasional local revivals, the spiritual life of New England seemed to the clergy throughout the first three or four decades of the 18th century to have become ever more "shamelessly secular". The continuing diminution of religious concern seemed to be indicated by further declines in both the proportion of the population who were full and active church members and in the authority and status of the clergy and by the persistence of religious discord in many communities. For the first time, moreover, the Anglican church began to make significant inroads among the formerly almost wholly Congregational population. Already by the 1720s, some prominent ministers had defected to the Anglicans, who by 1770 had 74 congregations in New England and numbered as many as 25,000 adherents drawn from all segments of the population.²⁰

Even more subversive of the old New England way was the moderate acceleration and changing character of the economy during the last half of the 17th century. Economic goals had never been absent from the puritan settlements.

and "The Reinvention of New England, 1691-1770", *ibid.*, LIX (1986), pp. 315-40.

19 Emory Elliott, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton, 1975), p. 8; Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, pp. 157-9, 163-81; John Demos, "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England", *American Historical Review*, LXXV (1970), pp. 1319-22, "John Godfrey and His Neighbors: Witchcraft and the Social Web in Colonial Massachusetts", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXIII (1973), pp. 242-65, and *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York, 1982). See also David D. Hall, "Witchcraft and the Limits of Interpretation", *New England Quarterly*, LVIV (1985), pp. 253-81.

20 J. William T. Youngs, Jr., *God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700-1750* (Baltimore, 1976); Laura L. Becker, "Ministers vs. Laymen: The Singing Controversy in Puritan New England, 1720-1740", *New England Quarterly*, LV (1982), pp. 77-96; Ellis, *New England Mind in Transition*, pp. 55-122, and "Anglicans in Connecticut, 1725-1750: The Conversion of the Missionaries", *New England Quarterly*, XLIV (1971), pp. 66-81; Bruce E. Steiner, "New England Anglicanism: A Genteel Faith?", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXVII (1970), pp. 122-35.

Despite some religious scruples against excessive profiteering, the colonists had been responsive to economic opportunities from the beginning. If, throughout the 17th century, most of them were involved in agriculture, they successfully sought not simply to produce enough food to feed their families but a surplus to exchange for tools and other finished goods that they were unable to produce efficiently themselves and that had to be imported from England or some other major processing center. This surplus, at first consisting primarily of grains but increasingly composed of meat, dairy, and orchard products, served both to sustain a growing non- or semi-agricultural population in the coastal seaports that developed to handle the exchange but also acted as "a primer for overseas trade". Nor, in contrast to most other early British colonies, was agricultural produce the principal item of trade. Already by the late 1630s and the early 1640s, Boston, Salem, and Charlestown were also developing a vigorous trade in furs, fish, and timber products, including planks, barrel staves, shingles, oars, naval stores, and masts. With the rapid dwindling of the fur supply at mid-century, the fur trade had declined to insignificance by the mid-1670s. But the fish and lumber industries expanded to meet the demands of new markets in the West Indies, the Wine Islands, and the Iberian peninsula. Far and away the most important export industry, fishing employed large numbers of people throughout the colonial period, perhaps never less than 10 per cent of the population, and by the early 18th century in Salem fishing exceeded the value of timber exports, "the second most valuable export", by twelve to one. Because most exports in all these areas had to be processed and packed in barrels, they all generated significant local processing industries that provided a livelihood for substantial numbers either in the localities where they were produced or in the points of export, while a growing shipbuilding industry emerged along the coast to produce the vessels that carried these products across the seas.²¹

Never a purely subsistence society, the New England colonies were thus from early in their histories and increasingly during the 17th century heavily involved in trade. By 1660, it was already clear that, to an important extent, the emerging economy of New England, as Terry Anderson has observed, would "be centered around" its "shipping sector and that many institutions" would have "to be developed or changed to meet the needs of a commercial society". The merchants who presided over this process of commercialization became leading agents of change. Aggressively seeking out new markets in North America, the West Indies, England, and Europe, they first acquired and then supplied the capital and managerial expertise needed to link the "producers and consumers

21 McManis, *Colonial New England*, pp. 86-122; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 91-110; Davisson and Dugan, "Commerce in Seventeenth-Century Essex County", pp. 113-42; Allen, *In English Ways*, p. 228; Bruce C. Daniels, "Economic Development in Colonial and Revolutionary Connecticut: An Overview", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXVII (1980), pp. 429-34; Carroll, *Timber Economy of Puritan New England*, pp. 57-128; Van Deventer, *Provincial New Hampshire*, pp. 93-106.

of [the] interior towns" of New England to "the larger world economy" and, when the resource base of the region proved insufficient to support continuous long-term economic growth, they increasingly began to supply "shipping services to major parts of the Atlantic world". By the second and third decades of the 18th century, they had thereby "created a well-integrated commercial economy based on the carrying trade".²²

Nor were the economic activities of this rising commercial elite limited to trade. Especially after King Philip's War in the mid-1670s, they were among the heaviest land speculators and developers, many of them acquiring several thousands of acres which they hoped eventually to sell for a profit to those segments of a burgeoning population eager to move to new lands. In the rich Connecticut River valley, the Pynchon family, as Stephen Innes has recently shown, turned Springfield into a company town by engrossing a large proportion of the land and exerting a near monopoly of the region's trade. Owning the only store and all the town's corn and saw mills and employing a significant proportion of the adult male population as workmen in their various agricultural, processing, and trading enterprises, the Pynchons presided over a process of progressive social and economic stratification in which by 1680 at least one-half of the adult males in Springfield lived as tenants, renters, and dependents in a socio-economic system that contrasted sharply with the egalitarian villages envisioned by the first settlers.²³

As an ever enlarging circle of towns became involved in producing foodstuffs and other items for export during the last half of the 17th century, the hinterlands of both the larger ports and commercialized towns such as Springfield seem to have enjoyed substantial economic growth, to have become far more diversified in terms of occupational structure, and to have experienced substantial economic stratification. Some experts have suggested that economic growth may have averaged as high as six per cent per annum in some of the more dynamic areas. At least in Connecticut, Jackson Turner Main has recently shown, opportunity to acquire wealth actually seems to have declined for several decades after 1660 before it began to rise again in 1690. But for New England as a whole during the second half of the century, this commercially- and demographically-driven economic growth, it has been estimated, contributed between 1650 and 1710 to a substantial rise in per capita real income at an annual rate of about 1.6 per cent and to a 295 per cent increase in real aggregate economic output. Over the same period, these same areas supported a growing number of artisans and craftsmen, many of whom continued to engage in

22 Anderson, *Economic Growth of Seventeenth Century New England*, pp. 21, 23; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 107. Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, is the classic study of the role of the merchants in the developing New England economy.

23 Theodore B. Lewis, "Land Speculation and the Dudley Council of 1686", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXI (1974), pp. 255-72; Stephen Innes, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton, 1983) and "Land Tenancy and Social Order", pp. 33-56.

farming, and exhibited growing concentrations of wealth in the hands of its richest inhabitants. In Salem, for instance, the amount of inventoried wealth owned by the most affluent ten per cent of the population rose from 21 per cent before 1661 to 62 per cent thereafter.²⁴

A far cry from the closed, cohesive, and contained villages originally envisioned by puritan leaders, Boston, Salem, and other ports and commercial towns thus became prosperous mercantile centers with relatively large, concentrated, heterogeneous populations, many new economic opportunities in non-farm occupations, significant concentrations of wealth in the hands of their leading merchants, marked social and economic distinctions, considerable contact with the outside world, and a rising spirit of enterprise that gradually spread outward to the surrounding countryside. The growing intensity of economic activity and the emerging complexity of social patterns in these more dynamic areas of New England operated to undermine the communal unity, corporate and religious orientation, and social goals of the first settlers. In these dynamic areas, the old religious-based corporatism began to give way to the atomistic pursuit of wealth and self-interest.²⁵ As Bernard Bailyn has written, the ethos of the mercantile groups which dominated these commercial centers "represented the spirit of a new age. Its guiding principles were not social stability, order, and the discipline of the senses, but mobility, growth, and the enjoyment of life". Among this strategic segment of the population, the desire to "succeed in trade" and to emulate the lives of their London trading associates was far "stronger than any counterforce the clergy could exert". Increasingly after 1670, successful merchants and farmers comprised a new *economically*-based elite which exerted an influence greatly disproportionate to their numbers in the public life of Massachusetts and to a lesser extent in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Certainly at the provincial and, in many areas, also at the local level wealth and property, rather than piety, became the basis for political leadership and participation. Moreover, as rival groups among the elite vigorously competed with one another within the political arena for profits, land, and influence, the old consensual politics gave way to division, conflict,

24 Innes, *Labor in a New Land*, pp. 72-122; Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 68-9; Anderson, *Economic Growth of Seventeenth Century New England*, pp. 114-9; "Economic Growth in Colonial New England: 'Statistical Renaissance'", *Journal of Economic History*, XXXIX (1979), pp. 243-7; and "Wealth Estimates for the New England Colonies", pp. 151-76; Davisson, "Essex County Wealth Trends", pp. 291-342; Koch, "Income Distribution and Political Structure", pp. 50-71; Richard P. Gildrie, *Salem, Massachusetts 1626-1683: A Covenanted Community* (Charlottesville, 1975), pp. 155-69; James M. Henretta, "Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXII (1965), pp. 75-92.

25 See, in this connection, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 60-109; Gildrie, *Salem, Massachusetts*, pp. 145-69; Innes, *Labor in a New Land*, pp. 123-50.

and discord.²⁶

Accompanying this contention and discord in public life was a rising volume of litigation, most of it concerning economic issues involving property and debt. Denounced by many contemporaries in the orthodox puritan colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut as an indication of creeping "*Rhode Islandism*", the acrimony and divisiveness produced by these developments certainly revealed the long-term ineffectiveness of religious and social communalism as devices to preserve social harmony in communities undergoing substantial demographic and economic growth and social diversification. "The force of ideological commitment alone", Stephen Foster has noted, "could [not] maintain a system of political and social subordination for which the traditional material and institutional bases were lacking". As David T. Konig has recently emphasized, however, the founders of New England had never expected to achieve their social vision without viable legal institutions, which they carefully incorporated into the governmental structure during the 1630s. As the force of that original vision continued to attenuate in the face of continued economic growth and the "intensified resentments of compact town life", Konig shows in his analysis of patterns of litigation in Essex County, Massachusetts, individuals increasingly found it useful "to turn to the outside authority of extra town institutions like the courts" to resolve their differences, and such legal institutions, he persuasively insists, "were to [a] large degree responsible" for the fact that Essex County continued throughout the 17th century to be a "remarkably stable society". If, in their passage from "communalism to litigation", the residents of Essex County had become a contentious and disunited people, they were still fundamentally a "well-ordered people". So far from being an indication of social disruption, increasing litigation, Konig contends, was "an agent of orderly social change and economic growth".²⁷

Existing largely on the margins of — if by no means entirely cut off from — this increasingly bustling economic and social world, much of rural New England was relatively untouched by these social and economic developments

26 Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, pp. 139-42; Innes, *Labor in a New Land*, pp. 151-70; Breen, *Character of the Good Ruler*, pp. 87-202; "Who Governs", p. 473; and "War, Taxes, and Political Brokers: The Ordeal of Massachusetts Bay, 1675-1692", in Breen, *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York, 1980), pp. 81-105; Richard P. Gildrie, "Salem Society and Politics in the 1680s", *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CXIV (1978), pp. 185-206; Robert deV. Brunkow, "Officeholding in Providence, Rhode Island, 1646-1686: A Quantitative Analysis", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXVII (1980), pp. 242-60. Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England Colonies 1675-1715* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1981), provides an excellent account of the imperial context of these developments.

27 Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay*, p. 22; Foster, *Solitary Way*, p. 7; David Thomas Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts, 1629-1692* (Chapel Hill, 1979), pp. xii-xiii, 89-116, 188-89. That the enforcement of law itself became less exacting during the 17th century is suggested by R. W. Roetger, "The Transformation of Sexual Morality in 'Puritan' New England: Evidence from New Haven Court Records, 1639-1698", *Canadian Review of American Studies*, XV (1984), pp. 243-57.

during the 17th and early 18th centuries. Many inland towns, places described by Edward M. Cook as "small, self-contained farming villages", remained comparatively isolated, economically underdeveloped, socially egalitarian, and religiously homogeneous. Certainly during the 17th century, all but a few Connecticut towns seem to have belonged to this category: in Jackson Turner Main's words, they were "not very flourishing, predominantly agricultural and middle class, with few large property holders". In these "peaceable kingdoms", traditional institutions of community, family, and church continued to display a vitality that was considerably less evident either in the bustling market centers and seaport towns of New England or in the other Anglo-American colonies, and the corporate impulse probably remained strong.²⁸

With the further acceleration of the economy as a result of rapid internal population growth and the increasing integration of the New England economy into the larger Atlantic economy during the early decades of the 18th century, and especially after 1720, more and more of New England was drawn out of a relatively isolated existence and pushed in the direction of greater social differentiation, geographical and economic mobility, and individualism. The vast majority of New Englanders continued to live on farms, but recent scholarship has effectively challenged the ancient myth that these farms were self-sufficient and independent units of production on which yeomen families, concerned with little more than their own security, produced all that was required to meet their needs without the help of additional labor. As Bettye Hobbs Pruitt has recently shown in the case of the agricultural society of mid-18th century Massachusetts, "interdependence rather than self-sufficiency" is the concept that best describes that society. Although local communities were often self-sufficient, at least in foodstuffs and other primary services, most individual units were not. Only those few farms with relatively large amounts of both labor and land under cultivation did not have to involve themselves in local networks of exchange in which they traded products, labor, and skills simply to meet the subsistence requirements of their families. In this situation, Pruitt emphasizes, "production for home consumption and production for sale or exchange were complementary...objectives".²⁹

28 Edward M. Cook, Jr., *Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976), p. 179; Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 87-8; Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970); Christopher M. Jedrey, *The World of John Cleaveland: Family and Community in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New York, 1979).

29 Carole Shammas, "How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?", *Journal of International History*, XIII (1982), pp. 247-72; Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, "Self-sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XLI (1984), pp. 333-64; Winifred B. Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855", *Journal of Economic History* XLI (1981), pp. 283-314.

If virtually all New England agricultural communities were thus “not atomistic but integrated” into a series of “local networks of exchange involving all sorts of goods and services”, they were also increasingly “linked either directly or through...dealings with others” to the larger provincial and Atlantic worlds. New England’s rapid demographic growth not only generated dozens of additional rural settlements but also produced significant urbanization. New England had only two major cities: Boston, which, despite a decline in its population and relative importance as a commercial entrepot after 1740, continued to be the region’s primary urban center, and Newport, which developed impressively after 1710. As the second largest city in New England, Newport had more than two-thirds as many people as Boston by 1775. After 1715 and increasingly during the boom years of the 1740s and 1750s, however, a large number of towns, many of which had been little more than hamlets through most of the 17th century, developed into important secondary commercial centers. These included seaports — Portsmouth in New Hampshire; Salem, Marblehead, and Gloucester in Massachusetts; Providence in Rhode Island; and New Haven, New London, and Norwich in Connecticut — and inland commercial and administrative centers — Worcester and Springfield in Massachusetts and Hartford and Middletown in Connecticut. Perhaps as many as another two to three dozen places were distinctly urbanized by 1770.³⁰

To a significant extent, this urbanization was a function not merely of growing population but also of a steady expansion of external trade. Although New England’s exports were relatively unimpressive compared to those of all of the other regions of colonial British America, they were nonetheless substantial and underwent “an enormous expansion” during the century from 1660 to 1760. Not including the coastal trade, which may have accounted for as much as 40 per cent of the value of its total trade, New England annually exported products worth almost £440,000 by 1770. Fish accounted for around 35 per cent of the whole; livestock, beef, and pork for 20 per cent; wood products for 15 percent whale products for 14 per cent; potash and grain products each for five per cent; rum for four per cent; and a variety of other items for the remaining two per cent. Far and away the largest proportion of this trade — 63 per cent — went to the

30 Pruitt, “Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy”, p. 349; Gary M. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 111-8, 172-6, 180-97, 244-7; G.B. Warden, “Inequality and Instability in Eighteenth-Century Boston: A Reappraisal”, *Journal of International History*, VI (1976), pp. 585-620; Lynne Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany, 1984); Daniels, *Connecticut Town*, pp. 140-80, and “Emerging Urbanism and Increasing Social Stratification in the Era of the American Revolution”, in John Ferling, ed., *The American Revolution: The Home Front* (Carrolton, Ga., 1976), pp. 15-30; Cook, *Fathers of the Towns*, pp. 172-9; Jones, *Village and Seaport*; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts 1690-1750* (New York, 1984).

West Indies. Britain and Ireland with 19 per cent and Southern Europe with 15 per cent were, respectively, second and third, while Africa with only three per cent to four percent was a distant fourth.³¹

Though the growing populations that inhabited New England's increasing number of urban places produced some of their own food and necessities, they all required significant supplements of both food and timber products and, together with the additional demand for those products for export to the West Indies and elsewhere, these requirements inevitably acted to produce a lively commercial exchange between town and country, which were more and more linked together by a proliferating network of roads, bridges, and ferries. This exchange in turn helped to raise levels of agricultural production and to stimulate timber industries in the countryside, first in the immediate vicinities of the towns and then in areas farther away. By the mid-18th century, as Pruitt has remarked, few New England "communities existed wholly beyond the reach of [these] market forces", while most were inextricably tied into, and deeply affected by, not just the local regional markets with which they had long been associated but also "the larger provincial and Atlantic economies of which they were a part".³²

Compared with their counterparts elsewhere in colonial British America, 18th century New England farmers were, perhaps, "not highly commercialized". Yet the commercialization of agriculture and the expansion of the fishing, timber, and whaling industries in response to growing internal and external demand had a significant impact upon the social landscape of the region. That impact can be seen clearly in the development of regional specialization. Of course, fishing and whaling had always been confined to the coast, the former concentrated in the area north of Boston and the latter in the coastal and island area along the southeastern coast of Massachusetts. During the 17th century, most other products had been diffused throughout the region. As time went on, however, the timber industry came to center in New Hampshire and Maine, grain production tended to concentrate in the breadbasket areas of the Connecticut River valley and in Middlesex and eastern Worcester County in Massachusetts, grazing and livestock production in hilly and rocky regions and along the southern coast of New England, and dairying in areas near to urban centers. The Narragansett region of Rhode Island was particularly noted for its large estates, which concentrated upon stock, especially horses, and dairy farming.³³

31 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, pp. 107-10; James G. Lydon, "Fish for Gold: The Massachusetts Fish Trade with Iberia, 1700-1773", *New England Quarterly*, LIV (1981), pp. 539-82; David C. Klingaman, "The Coastwise Trade of Colonial Massachusetts", *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CVIII (1972), pp. 217-33.

32 Pruitt, "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy", pp. 362, 364; Rothenberg, "Market and Massachusetts Farmers".

33 Pruitt, "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy", pp. 359-61, 364; Van Deventer,

Although a few farmers in 18th century New England — the Narragansett planters and the owners of the larger farms in the rich Connecticut River valley and along the southern coast of New England — seem to have “crossed a line where commercial production brought sufficient returns to warrant a preponderant investment” in large landed estates and market crops, the principal beneficiary of the growing commercialization of New England seems to have been the expanding service sector of society. To an important extent the result of the population’s strenuous and purposeful efforts to wrest economic returns from disadvantageous circumstances as well as an indication of the growing economic and social diversity of the region, this development led to an increasingly complex occupational structure that provided new opportunities for young men who did not inherit land or did not want to stay on the farm. Most numerous of these service occupations were the artisans and craftsmen ranging, in status and wealth, from shoemakers, tailors, and weavers at the bottom through coopers, carpenters, and joiners in the middle up to millers and tanners at the top. The last two often operated comparatively large-scale enterprises. Representatives of all these occupations could be found in rural as well as urban areas. But some more specialized artisans — ship-wrights, distillers, silversmiths, printers, and rope and iron manufacturers — rarely resided outside the larger towns. Out of this proliferating body of skilled artisans derived the well-known New England penchant for mechanical ingenuity that during the closing decades of the 18th century would make such a powerful contribution to the beginnings of industrial change in the new American republic.³⁴

Two other groups, merchants and professionals, also expanded in numbers, wealth, and influence in the increasingly diverse society of 18th century New England. The mercantile group, consisting of large overseas traders, shipowners, ship captains, shopkeepers, and peddlers, was increasingly complex and prosperous. The large overseas merchants who organized and presided over the region’s commerce with the outside world and, as in the case of Rhode Island slave traders, provided freight and shipping services for other areas of the Atlantic commercial world were usually the richest people in the region. Professionals — ministers, doctors, and lawyers — were far fewer in number.

Provincial New Hampshire, pp. 93-106, 159-78; Bruce C. Daniels, “Economic Development in Colonial and Revolutionary Connecticut”, pp. 429-50; Elinor F. Oakes, “A Ticklish Business: Dairying in New England and Pennsylvania, 1750-1812”, *Pennsylvania History*, XLVII (1980), pp. 195-212; Karen J. Friedmann, “Victualling Colonial Boston”, *Agricultural History*, XLVII (1973), pp. 189-205; William D. Miller, “The Narragansett Planters”, *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, XLIII (1934), pp. 49-115; Christian McBurney, “The South Kingstown Planters: Country Gentry in Colonial Rhode Island”, *Rhode Island History*, XLV (1986), pp. 81-93.

- 34 Richard L. Bushman, “Family Security in the Transition from Farm to City, 1750-1850”, *Journal of Family History*, VI (1981), p. 240; Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 151, 241-56, 381; Daniels, “Economic Development in Colonial and Revolutionary Connecticut”, pp. 438-43.

But the last two became far more numerous during the 18th century, while lawyers were more and more often also among the wealthiest and most influential inhabitants. Together with some prominent officeholders, the wealthier lawyers, overseas merchants, and inland traders played an entrepreneurial role in New England's economic development and profited disproportionately from it. Often among the investors in industrial enterprises such as shipbuilding, distilling, and iron production, they were also frequently involved as land speculators in the development of new towns on the eastern, northern, and western frontiers.³⁵

The acceleration and growing complexity of the economy during the 18th century also helped to produce and to reinforce a more typically British social structure. The comparative economic equality that had characterized much of early New England had never obtained in Boston, where from the late 17th century onwards the concentration of wealth remained relatively high and relatively stable over time, with the wealthiest 30 per cent of property holders possessing around 85 per cent of the town's private wealth. By contrast, during the 18th century, rural areas experienced a slow but steady growth in the concentration of property until by the 1760s and 1770s the richest 30 per cent owned between 65 per cent and 75 per cent of total wealth. In urban areas, this trend toward wealth consolidation was even more pronounced, with towns like Portsmouth, Salem, Newport, Providence, New Haven, and Hartford already moving powerfully towards Boston levels by the early decades of the century. While it is undoubtedly true that, in comparison with most of the rest of the British American world, the wealthiest men in late colonial New England enjoyed only "moderate rather than large fortunes", had fewer servants and slaves, lived less genteelly, and had to share political office with men "entirely

35 Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 262-65, 278-313, 370, and "The Distribution of Property in Colonial Connecticut", in James Kirby Martin, ed., *The Human Dimensions of Nation Making: Essays on Colonial and Revolutionary America* (Madison, 1976), pp. 64-70; Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 123-32; Elaine F. Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1985), pp. 16-46; Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia, 1981); Alison Jones, "The Rhode Island Slave Trade: A Trading Advantage in Africa", *Slavery and Abolition*, III (1981), pp. 226-44; Van Deventer, *Provincial New Hampshire*, pp. 78-82, 174-8, 215; Christiansen, "Medical Communities in Massachusetts", pp. 64-77; John M. Murrin, "The Legal Transformation: The Bench and Bar of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts", in Stanley N. Katz, ed., *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development* (Boston, 1971), pp. 415-49; David H. Flaherty, "Criminal Practice in Provincial Massachusetts", *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, LXII (1984), pp. 191-242; McManus, *Colonial New England*, pp. 132-9; Grant, "Land Speculation and the Settlement of Kent", pp. 51-71, and *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent* (New York, 1972), pp. 55-65; Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 73-82; Julian Gwyn, "Money Lending in New England: The Case of Admiral Sir Peter Warren and His Heirs 1739-1805", *New England Quarterly*, XLIV (1971), pp. 117-34.

lacking in family connections and large estates", some individuals, especially in the towns, managed to accumulate impressive wealth. In New Hampshire, for instance, David E. Van Deventer has found that only two people whose estates were probated before 1740 had estates valued at more than £3,000 in New Hampshire old tenor currency, whereas 21 people who went through probate between 1741 and 1760 and 27 between 1761 and 1770 had estates exceeding that amount. Indeed, the wealthiest decedents after 1740 greatly exceeded that amount. The estate of Ebenezer Smith who died in 1764 was valued at just over £90,000, that of John Gilman in 1751 at nearly £48,000 and that of Nicholas Gilman in 1749 at just under £34,000. Three other decedents had estates valued at over £20,000, and twelve others at over £10,000.³⁶

If few New Englanders enjoyed such impressive wealth, those who did aspired, as did rising elites elsewhere in colonial British America, to recreate the genteel culture of contemporary Britain. To that end, they built larger and more commodious houses and filled them with English and continental furnishings and other fashionable consumer items, made charitable bequests, filled their towns with impressive public buildings, created a host of urban voluntary associations, and otherwise sought to reproduce the urban amenities of British provincial cities. The elite of Newport, where the old puritan sanctions against conspicuous consumption were less powerful, could carry this process farther than its counterparts in either Boston or smaller cities in the orthodox puritan colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Everywhere, however, elite behavior in New England was calculated to reinforce the traditional prescriptive association among wealth, social status, and political authority.³⁷

36 Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 122, 132-3, 278-366, 368, 381, and "Distribution of Property in Colonial Connecticut", in Martin, ed., *Human Dimensions of Nation Making*, pp. 77-90; Bruce C. Daniels, "Long Range Trends of Wealth Distribution in Eighteenth Century New England", *Explorations in Economic History*, XI (1973-74), pp. 123-35; "Defining Economic Classes in Colonial New Hampshire, 1700-1770", *Historic New Hampshire*, XXVIII (1979), pp. 53-62; "Money-Value Definitions of Economic Classes in Colonial Connecticut, 1700-1776", *Histoire Social*, VII (1974), pp. 346-52; and "Defining Economic Classes in Colonial Massachusetts 1700-1776", *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, LXXXIII (1973), pp. 251-9; Alice Hanson Jones, "Wealth Estimates for the New England Colonies about 1770", *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII (1972), pp. 98-127 and *The Wealth of a Nation To Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1980), pp. 50-194; G.B. Warden, "The Distribution of Property in Boston, 1692-1775", *Perspectives in American History*, X (1976), pp. 81-128, and "Inequality and Instability in Eighteenth-Century Boston: A Reappraisal", pp. 585-620; Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 123-32; Crane, *Dependent People*, pp. 25-9; Van Deventer, *Provincial New Hampshire*, pp. 173-8.

37 See Robert J. Dinkin, "Seating in the Meeting House in Early Massachusetts, *New England Quarterly*, XLIII (1970), pp. 450-64; Anthony G. Roeber, "'Her Merchandize...Shall Be Holiness To The Lord': The Progress and Decline of Puritan Gentility at the Brattle Street Church, Boston, 1715-1745", *N.E. Hist. & Gen. Reg.*, CXXXI (1977), pp. 175-91; Christine Leigh Heyrman, "The Fashion among More Superior People: Charity and Social Change in Provincial

To an increasing extent during the 18th century, New England's wealthy inhabitants, as Edward Marks Cook has shown in his study of political leadership in a large sample of towns, also monopolized public office. To be sure, patterns of officeholding in many small agricultural towns remained relatively egalitarian throughout the century. But towns with more developed economic structures all showed a powerful tendency towards oligarchy, with a handful of wealthy and prominent families, often as few as one to three, dominating both appointed and elective offices. In most towns, these family political dynasties were based, to an important degree, upon long association with the town's history. But in a few towns, those in which a coherent and continuous elite had been slow to develop — Marblehead provides one example and, perhaps, Portsmouth, New Hampshire another — a significant number of relative newcomers could be found among the 18th century elite. In large towns like Boston and Newport, the structure of local elites was too complex, too open, and too broadly based and economic power too often independent of political power to permit such heavy concentrations of political power in a few families. Whatever the local variations, however, most commercially-oriented towns displayed a strong correlation between wealth and officeholding. The growing number of Anglicans who held political office in communities where they were numerous testified to the diminishing importance of Congregational church membership in New England public life.³⁸

Increasing concentrations of wealth and the solidification of an economic and familial elite were also accompanied by the spread of both slavery and poverty. Slavery was a direct function of growing wealth. From early on in the settlement of New England, there had been a few Indian and black slaves. As late as 1690, however, there were fewer than 1,000 blacks — about one per cent of the total

New England, 1700-1740", *American Quarterly*, XXXIV (1982), pp. 107-24, and *Commerce and Culture*, pp. 143-81, 330-65; Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 13-50; Crane, *Dependent People*, pp. 47-62; Van Deventer, *Provincial New Hampshire*, pp. 217-25; Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 278-366.

- 38 Cook, *Fathers of the Towns*; Michael Zuckerman, "The Social Context of Democracy in Massachusetts", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXV (1968), pp. 523-44; Van Deventer, *Provincial New Hampshire*, pp. 218-23; Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 317-66; Bruce C. Daniels, "Family Dynasties in Connecticut's Largest Towns, 1700-1760", *Canadian Journal of History*, VIII (1973), pp. 99-110, "Large Town Officeholding in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut: The Growth of Oligarchy", *Journal of American Studies*, IX (1975), pp. 1-12, and "Democracy and Oligarchy in Connecticut Towns: General Assembly Officeholding, 1701-1790", *Social Science Quarterly*, LVI (1975), pp. 460-75; Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 9-111, 130-31; G.B. Warden, "Officeholding and Officials in Boston, 1692-1775", *N.E. Hist. & Gen. Reg.*, CXXXI (1977), pp. 267-90; Robert M. Zernsky, "Power, Influence, and Status: Leadership Patterns in the Massachusetts Assembly, 1740-1755", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXVI (1969), pp. 502-20, and *Merchants, Farmers, and River Gods* (Boston, 1971); Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, pp. 143-81, 330-65; Bruce E. Steiner, "Anglican Officeholding in Pre-Revolutionary Connecticut: The Parameters of New England Community", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXI (1974), pp. 369-406.

population — in the entire region. Over the next three decades, they increased slowly if steadily to over 6,000 — or about three per cent of the total population. Though their numbers continued to increase to over 15,000 by the early 1770s and though slavery was still an expanding institution in all the New England colonies on the eve of the American Revolution, the proportion of blacks in the population remained steady at around three per cent for the rest of the colonial period. These aggregate figures mask much greater concentrations of slaves in the more commercialized areas, particularly in the port towns, where they served as domestics, artisans, watermen, dock workers, and emblems of conspicuous consumption for urban elites. Although Jackson Turner Main is certainly right to point out that there were few incentives to develop a plantation-style agriculture with a large servile labor force in most parts of New England and although most rural slaves were distributed in small numbers of one or two among farm families for whom they performed agricultural or household labor, they were present in more substantial numbers on many of the commercial plantations in the Narragansett country of Rhode Island, where some estates employed as many as 20 slaves as stockmen and in the dairy industry. Indeed, as Louis Masur has recently emphasized, “slavery flourished in 18th century Rhode Island”. Slaves comprised as high as 18 per cent of the population of Newport in 1755, and as many as 30 per cent of white households in several Rhode Island towns in 1774 “contained slaves or blacks bonded in some manner”. For the colony as a whole, 14 per cent of households owned slaves. Without dispute, these figures represent “a substantial commitment to the institution”. If New England as a whole was not, like colonies farther south, heavily dependent on slave labor, it was certainly a society that condoned slavery, and it contained a few areas that had concentrations of slaves roughly comparable to those in the Chesapeake during the early period of its transition to a slave plantation system after 1680.³⁹

If the increasing social stratification of New England during the 18th century

39 Robert C. Twombly and Robert H. Moore, “Black Puritan: The Negro in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts”, *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXIV (1967), pp. 224-41; “Estimated Population of the American Colonies: 1610-1780”, in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society 1584-1763: A Documentary History of the American Colonies* (New York, 1966), pp. 238-9; Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay*, pp. 57-9; Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 71-3; Crane, *Dependent People*, pp. 76-83; Miller, “Narragansett Planters”, pp. 67-71, McBurney, “South Kingstown Planters”, pp. 81-93; Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 129-30, 176-82, 309, 378; Louis P. Masur, “Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island: Evidence from the Census of 1774”, *Slavery and Abolition*, VI (1985), pp. 140-50; Van Deventer, *Provincial New Hampshire*, pp. 113-4. On conditions of slavery in New England and the Black response to it, see Robert C. Twombly, “Black Resistance to Slavery in Massachusetts”, in O’Neill, ed., *Insights and Parallels*, pp. 11-2, and Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York, 1942). On the decline of slavery in Massachusetts after 1770, see Elaine MacEacheren, “Emancipation of Slavery in Massachusetts: A Reexamination 1770-1790”, *Journal of Negro History*, LV (1970), pp. 289-306.

provided some families with the wherewithal to live a genteel life and to own slaves, it does not seem to have resulted in a manifest proletarianization of the population. To be sure, as Charles Grant, Kenneth Lockridge, and several other historians have observed, by the third and fourth generations in most towns vigorous demographic growth rendered existing land resources inadequate to enable many families to provide a viable farm for each of their male offspring. As a result, there was a sharp increase in the number of young adult males with minimal levels of property. By the mid-18th century, as many as a third of the adult males in most communities were landless laborers. As Jackson Turner Main has shown in the case of Connecticut, however, this development was very largely a function of age. Typically, laborers were young men who were either waiting a few extra years until they inherited land from their fathers or preparing themselves to enter a craft, a profession, or trade, while those who found inadequate opportunity within their own communities simply joined the stream of immigrants to new settlements or to urban areas. Whichever of these choices they made, Main has found, laboring was, for the vast majority of whites, only "a temporary line of work". If more and more young men began adult life with few assets, almost all of them could expect to obtain property "as they passed through the life cycle", and the "great majority of Connecticut's people fared as well in 1774 as in 1700 or 1670". "By contrast with most pre-industrial societies", Main concludes, "virtually all of the married men and their families...did not simply escape poverty but enjoyed real plenty". Main's findings have been reinforced by recent work on the changing diet of colonial New England by Sarah F. McMahon, who has found that changes in land use and improvements in food production and preservation over the course of the colonial period meant that the region produced enough food so that few families could fail to enjoy a "comfortable subsistence".⁴⁰

This is not to suggest that 18th century New England was without poverty. Poor relief had been a feature of New England life from the beginning, and it increased visibly during the 18th century as population growth, personal misfortune, the typically high loss of males in a seafaring economy, and other factors arising out of the increasingly complex character of New England society produced, in both city and country, an expanding class of both transient poor in search of employment and impoverished people unable to care for themselves.

40 Grant, *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town*, pp. 83-103; Lockridge, "Land, Population, and the Evolution of New England Society", pp. 62-80; Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, pp. 149-51, 377-78, and "Standards of Living and the Life Cycle in Colonial Connecticut", *Journal of Economic History*, XLIII (1983), pp. 159-65; Gloria L. Main, "The Standard of Living in Colonial Massachusetts", *ibid.*, pp. 101-8; Jones, *Village and Seaport*, pp. 103-21; Nancy R. Folbre, "The Wealth of Patriarchs: Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1760-1840", *Journal of International History*, XVI (1985), p. 208; Sarah F. McMahon, "A Comfortable Subsistence: The Changing Diet in Rural New England, 1620-1840", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XLII (1985), pp. 26-65.

The towns dealt with this problem either by “warning out” non-residents or providing public relief for residents. But the costs of placing poor people in families or caring for them in almshouses became so high in major urban centers that several of them — Newport in the 1720s, Boston in the late 1730s, Providence and other towns in the 1750s and 1760s — built workhouses in an effort to make the able-bodied poor pay for themselves. The extent of this problem is easy to exaggerate. A close examination of people in the ranks of the poor reveals that they contained a small number of adult male heads of households. Rather, the vast majority seem to have fallen into one or the other of two principal categories: first, young unemployed single men and women who, if Main’s findings for Connecticut can be extended to the rest of New England, presumably eventually found employment and rose out of the ranks of the poor and, second, members of traditionally dependent groups — widows, the aged, the sick, the disabled, the orphans, only the last of whom could usually be expected ever to escape their dependence upon the community for their support. Yet, while transiency and poverty were increasing all over New England in the 18th century, they were still far below levels exhibited by contemporary British or European cities. With never more than five to seven per cent of a given locality’s population receiving poor relief — and in most rural areas the percentage was much lower — New Englanders, as David Flaherty has observed, “had only limited experience with poverty in comparison with their fellow country men in Great Britain”, where as “much as one-third of the...population may not have been able to feed and clothe themselves adequately”.⁴¹

Along with the continuing internalization of puritan religious constraints and a “high standard of law enforcement”, students of legal records have cited this relative lack of poverty as at least part of the explanation for a low incidence of serious crime in New England. Throughout the last half of the 17th century, Roger Thompson has found in his study of sexual misbehavior in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, “New Englanders in general...were markedly more law-abiding” than English people in the home islands. Although crimes involving fornication, “by far the largest part of the criminal business” of local sessions courts, were being progressively and “effectively decriminalized” during

41 Charles R. Lee, “Public Poor Relief and the Massachusetts Community, 1620-1715”, *New England Quarterly*, LV (1982), pp. 564-85; Douglas Lamar Jones, “The Strolling Poor: Transiency in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts”, *Journal of Social History* VIII (1975), pp. 28-54, and “Poverty and Vagabondage: The Process of Survival in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts”, *N.E. Hist. & Gen. Reg.*, CXXXIII (1979), pp. 243-54; Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay*, pp. 57-9; Withey, *Urban Development in Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 51-71, 133-6; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, pp. 71-4, 88, 125-7, 185-9, 217, 245-6, 253-5, 263, 310, 326-8, 337; Allan Kulikoff, “The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston”, *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXVIII (1971), pp. 375-412; David H. Flaherty, “Crime and Social Control in Provincial Massachusetts”, *Historical Journal*, XXIV (1981), pp. 352-3.

the 18th century, the "rate of prosecution for crimes of violence, sexual offenses, and miscellaneous crimes", David Flaherty has found in the case of Massachusetts, was far higher than in England. But a much lower incidence of crimes against property, traditionally associated with poverty, meant that the per capita crime rate in Massachusetts was 43 per cent less than that in Essex County, England, and far below that in London.⁴²

A low crime rate did not necessarily betoken inactivity on the part of the courts. At least in Massachusetts, civil litigation increased dramatically throughout the 18th century. Though inhabitants of some more isolated communities continued to eschew the courts and to try to resolve differences through the church or the town government, litigation rose steadily, and at a much faster rate in rural areas than in towns, and there was a marked increase in the number of cases involving disputes across town boundaries. An indication of the penetration of the commercial economy into the countryside, the growing interdependence between urban and rural areas, and the further attenuation of the consensual communalism of the founders, these developments, together with low crime rates and high prosecution rates for criminal offenses, provide powerful testimony to the public acceptance and efficacy of the courts as "instruments of social control".⁴³

Increasing civil litigation may have been linked to a general "withering of traditional parental and community control". The first generation of rural New Englanders founded remarkably stable and closely integrated communities around a base of strong patriarchal families, while the second generation put down even deeper roots and developed a series of complex and overlapping extended kinship networks within the community. However, already by the third generation, which came to maturity in the early 18th century, and certainly by the fourth generation, which reached adulthood beginning in the 1730s and 1740s, the pressure of population growth, the decreasing availability of land, the opening up of new towns, and the emergence of many new opportunities for

42 Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649-1699* (Amherst, 1986), pp. 194, 198; Flaherty, "Crime and Social Control", pp. 339-60; Hendrik Hartog, "The Public Law of a County Court; Judicial Government in Eighteenth Century Massachusetts", *American Journal of Legal History*, XX (1976), pp. 282-329.

43 William E. Nelson, *Dispute and Conflict Resolution in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1725-1825* (Chapel Hill, 1981), pp. 13-75, and *Americanization of the Common Law: The Impact of Legal Change on Massachusetts Society, 1760-1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), pp. 13-63; Murrin, "Review Essay", *History and Theory*, XI (1972), pp. 250-1; David Grayson Allen, "The Zuckerman Thesis and the Process of Legal Rationalization in Provincial Massachusetts", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXIX (1972), pp. 456-9; L. Kinvin Wroth, "Possible Kingdoms: The New England Town from the Perspective of Legal History", *American Journal of Legal History*, XV (1971), pp. 318-27; Flaherty, "Crime and Social Control", p. 355; Bruce H. Mann, "Rationality, Legal Change, and Community in Connecticut, 1690-1760", *Law and Society Review*, XIV (1980), pp. 187-221.

young men outside agriculture in an increasingly varied occupational structure all contributed to a significant diminution of patriarchal authority and loosening of family ties. As evidence of these changes, historians have noted a rising proportion of impartible inheritances, a tendency to convey land to sons at earlier ages, a steady increase in the out-migration of sons, a sharp drop in the age of marriage among both men and women, a major rise in daughters marrying out of the birth order, a diminution of parental control in marriage and a corresponding rise in the importance of romantic love in mate selection, a surge in pre-marital pregnancy, a shift away from parent-naming and Bible-naming, the provision of more space — and, hence, more privacy — for individual members of households, and perhaps even a rise in female offenders in the courts. Along with an apparent improvement in the status of women as suggested by “their more frequent petitions for divorce and their greater success in obtaining it”, all of these developments have been interpreted as indications that the circumstances of 18th century New England life were forcing fathers and husbands to redefine their roles, changing the character of the family, and helping to accelerate a powerful process of individuation among children and young adults.

The effects of these changes upon the basic character of New England life were profound. No longer “patriarchs grandly presiding over an ancestral estate and minutely controlling the lives of their sons and heirs”, fathers now tended to act as “benefactors responsible for the future well-being and prosperity of their off-spring”. At the same time, the tendency for parents to find fulfillment “in the success of their children” has been alleged to have produced a “new and different type of family life...characterized by solicitude and sentimentality towards children and by more intimate, personal, and equal relationships” among members. Finally, this new “organization of family life contributed to the emergence of a liberated individual, a person who was exempt from all except voluntary ties to the family of his birth and free to achieve his own goals”.⁴⁴

44 Greven, *Four Generations*, pp. 125-258; John J. Waters, “Family, Inheritance, and Migration in Colonial New England: The Evidence from Guilford, Connecticut”, *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXIX (1982), pp. 64-86; Jedrey, *World of John Cleaveland*, pp. 58-94; Daniel Scott Smith, “Parental Power and Marriage Patterns: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts”, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XXXV (1973), pp. 419-39, and “Child-Naming Practices, Kinship Ties, and Change in Family Attitudes in Hingham, Massachusetts, 1641 to 1880”, *Journal of Social History*, XVIII (1985), pp. 541-66; Smith and Michael Hindus, “Premarital Pregnancy in America, 1640-1966”, *Journal of International History*, VI (1975), pp. 537-70; David H. Flaherty, *Privacy in Colonial New England* (Charlottesville, 1972), pp. 26-7, 34-5, 38; Nancy F. Cott, “Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts”, *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXIII (1976), pp. 586-614, and “Eighteenth-Century Family and Social Life Revealed in Massachusetts Divorce Records”, *Journal of Social History*, X (1976), pp. 20-43; Folbre, “Wealth of the Patriarchs”, pp. 199-220; C. Dallett Hemphill, “Women in Court: Sex-Role Differentiation in Salem, Massachusetts, 1636 to 1683”, *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXIX (1982), pp. 164-75; Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The “Weaker Sex” in*

Increasing population growth and the changing character of religious, economic, social, and familial life provided, as Richard L. Bushman has argued, the necessary preconditions for nothing less than a behavioral revolution that stretched over and had a transforming effect upon all but the least dynamic areas of New England. Far from playing merely a passive role, people became active agents in this process. Increasingly ignoring traditional ideological and social restraints, they turned energies formerly devoted to religious and community endeavors to their own private pursuits of personal and individual happiness. By encouraging competitive behavior, this behavioral revolution also provided identity models and standards of personal conduct for the society at large that stood at marked variance with the original values of the leaders of the founding generation. No longer was the moral and psychological necessity of obedience to the authority of the community and its traditional leaders — magistrates, pastors, and fathers — automatically assumed. Rather, contemporary models of behavior emphasized the authority of self rather than the authority of community; individual economic achievement and success rather than ascriptive criteria for political leadership and social status; the fulfillment, privacy, and comfort of the individual rather than self-denial in favor of the common good; and the “capacity of the individual to direct his own existence rather than...an unquestioning response to public morality”. With this behavioral revolution, the pursuit of wealth and gentility became as important as the pursuit of salvation and even more important than the pursuit of consensus and community.⁴⁵

If all of these developments combined to push New England in the direction of greater individualism, personal autonomy, and social fluidity, the revolution in behavior exemplified by these developments was by no means universal. Nor did it produce a social environment that could be exclusively characterized in terms of “fluid, unstable social relations [that were] conducive [only] to individual mobility and a competitive ethos”. Not just rural areas like those described by Michael Zuckerman and Christopher Jedrey but also urban communities continued, throughout the colonial period, to show remarkable stability in family life and to exhibit many other powerful residues of their puritan cultural inheritance. “Rather than being at odds with the ideals of Puritanism or the ends

Seventeenth-Century New England (Urbana, Ill., 1980), pp. 345-6, 361, 366; James A. Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815: An Interdisciplinary Analysis* (Lexington, Mass., 1973), pp. 30-1; Winnifred B. Rothenberg, “Markets, Values and Capitalism: A Discourse on Method”, *Journal of Economic History*, XLIV (1984), pp. 175-6. Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex*, pp. 190-200, has recently persuasively questioned the coerciveness of patriarchal authority in late 17th century Middlesex County, Massachusetts

45 Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*. See also, Richard S. Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty of New England 1630-1717* (Princeton, 1962). The quotation is from Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt, *The Wish to be Free: Society, Psyche, and Value Change* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 31.

of communitarianism", Christine Heyrman argues in her recent study of 18th century Salem and Marblehead, "commercial capitalism coexisted with and was molded by the cultural patterns of the past". As Heyrman shows, New England communities could become more populous, stratified, complex, diverse, and mobile without lapsing into social disorder. In Salem and Marblehead, at least, civic consciousness, deference to leaders and institutions, church membership, "traditional patterns of association", and, perhaps, family authority remained strong. The abiding power of these traditional elements of the old puritan social order, Heyrman plausibly contends, testifies to both the resilience of that order and the enduring authority of inherited beliefs and values.⁴⁶

Certainly, the revolution in behavior suggested by the growing evidence of increasing individuation had not yet been accompanied by a revolution in values. In their quest for land and wealth, men might challenge traditional leaders and established institutions. What they could not challenge so easily, however, was the old system of values which deplored both self-oriented behavior and resistance to authority. Notwithstanding the continuing strength of so many aspects of the old social order, the increasingly palpable divergence between the values attached to that order and individual behavior produced a gnawing guilt that was evident in persistent demands, especially from the clergy, for a return to the traditional imperatives of community and obedience to authority. The fear that excessively atomistic behavior would lead to social chaos and loss of control and the belief that man could not tolerate freedom without strong societal restraints were still too deeply embedded in cultural consciousness and too easily activated to permit the development of an alternative morality that would more accurately reflect the new modes of behavior.

Although the old millennial impulses of the founders had been severely attenuated by the latter decades of the 17th century, they had been "replaced by a conservative determination to perpetuate the symbols and institutions of the colonial founders". Cotton Mather and others engaged in what Robert Pope has referred to as "an oppressive filiopietism that transformed the founding generations into paragons of social virtue, wisdom, and saintliness" who were constantly held up as a model for later generations and as a contrast that provided a framework for the interpretation of American Puritan history as a process of steady declension. The guilt felt by later generations over this declension and the disjuncture between the values of the founders and their own

46 Toby L. Ditz, *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut 1750-1820* (Princeton, 1986), p. 159; Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms*; Jedrey, *World of John Cleaveland*, pp. 58-94; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, pp. 15-9, 407-14. Laurel Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York, 1982), emphasizes the role of women in sustaining the communal impulse in New England communities.

behavior made men, as several scholars have suggested, peculiarly susceptible to the atavistic appeals of the mid-century Great Awakening, the first large-scale religious revival in American history.⁴⁷

Though it helped those men most deeply affected by it to cleanse themselves of guilt by throwing off their worldly ambitions, the Great Awakening did not result in a return to the old communal mode and the old values. Instead, as Bushman and other scholars have shown, it intensified religious divisions. Although some communities managed to contain those divisions within the existing church, many others split into rival congregations, thereby shattering all hope of religious unity. Such developments and the bitter enmity they engendered further undermined the authority of the church and the clergy and made it clear that "revivalism, the ministry's favorite panacea [for the restoration of the old puritan social order], could no longer be counted on to preserve [communal] order and harmony". Because they inevitably spilled over into politics and brought into the open personal and factional animosities which had previously operated beneath the surface of public life, the religious disputes generated by the Awakening also helped to transform politics by legitimizing factionalism and contention in the public realm and thereby weakening the traditional deference accorded magistrates. The egoistical impulses and frank pursuit of self-interest set free by the Awakening seemed to New England leaders of all persuasions to portend only social and political chaos. Many of them demanded a return to the old social order and decried attempts by a few "worldly individuals" to develop a new conception of the social order that, by giving "self-interest...a free rein" and making "the satisfaction of human desires the main end of government", would once again bring values and behavior into harmony. At best, however, such people were only fighting a delaying action. Already by the mid-18th century, the expansive impulses in New England economic and religious life had sufficiently "relaxed the restraints of men's feelings and actions" and sufficiently sapped the authority of traditional social institutions that they had significantly altered both the character of life and the character of the inhabitants. That the spread of autonomous behavior did not immediately lead to social chaos did, however, enable New Englanders to live with the behavioral revolution even when they could not bring themselves to endorse it.⁴⁸

47 Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy", p. 259; Pope, "New England Versus the New England Mind", p. 107; Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*. See also Axtell, *School Upon a Hill*, on the role of schools in perpetuating puritan social ideology and Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York, 1974), on one of the unintended modernizing effects of the widespread schooling.

48 Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, pp. ix, 276, 279; Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf, "James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London", *Journal of American History*, LXXI (1983), p. 577; Onuf, "New Lights in New London: A Group Portrait of the Separatists", *WMQ*,

Despite the enduring vitality of so many aspects of the original puritan social order, New England, recent historiography thus reveals, had changed dramatically between 1660 and 1760. Far more populous and more densely settled and stretching over a far larger area, it had a much more complex economy. Less reliant on family agriculture and more heavily involved in trade, it had developed a number of important urban areas that were closely linked by an already well-articulated transportation and marketing network with the countryside, many parts of which were engaged in more specialized and market-oriented agriculture and small-scale processing and natural resources manufacturing. Except perhaps in some isolated rural areas, its society was considerably more differentiated with greater extremes between the richest and poorest inhabitants and a more complex occupational structure. That society was also far less cohesive and solidary as the social agencies of church, community, and family had all become much less coercive while the individuation process had become considerably more powerful.

In the words of Perry Miller, this "progression of the communities from primitive simplicity to complexity and diversity...irresistibly" carried New England "away from the original dedication to holiness and the will of God". In the process, it not only, as Miller suggested, made religion less central to the lives of its people but also sapped the strength of the corporate impulse that had been so powerfully manifest during the first and even second generations of settlement and greatly loosened the old puritan social order. As New England society became both more complex and looser, it also lost many of the distinctive features it had exhibited during the 17th century. While it may be an exaggeration to say, as have John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, that by the late colonial period the region's well-integrated agricultural and commercial society "resembled nothing so much as old England itself", through the long process of social change over the previous hundred years it had certainly become by the middle decades of the 18th century far more demonstrably English than it had been during the decades immediately after its establishment.⁴⁹ To the extent

3d ser., XXXVII (1980), pp. 627-43; Stout, "The Great Awakening in New England Reconsidered: The New England Clergy", *Journal of Social History*, VIII (1974), pp. 21-47; James Walsh, "The Great Awakening in the First Congregational Church of Woodbury, Connecticut", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXVIII (1971), pp. 543-62; James W. Schmotter, "The Irony of Clerical Professionalism: New England's Congregational Ministers and the Great Awakening", *American Quarterly*, XXXI (1979), pp. 148-68; Robert D. Rossel, "The Great Awakening: An Historical Analysis", *American Journal of Sociology*, LXXV (1970), pp. 907-25; James W. Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening* (New Haven, 1973); Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York, 1979); Gregory H. Nobles, *Divisions Throughout the Whole: Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1740-1775* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 36-106.

49 Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth", p. 25; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 92.

that these changes can be seen, as so many clerical leaders at the time saw them, as an attenuation of the original puritan social order and can be represented as a decline from the radically traditional world envisioned and, to a remarkable degree, actually achieved, by the founding generations of orthodox puritans, the declension model can still plausibly be used as a framework for describing the social history of colonial New England. The process of social change in New England during the century after 1660, however, involved considerable demographic and economic growth as well as social elaboration, stratification, and consolidation, and such trends can be at best only partially and inaccurately comprehended within a declension model.

JACK P. GREENE

L.M. Montgomery and the Changing Times

LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY MAY NEVER BE hot property in academic circles, but new books and articles suggest that her prolific pen is finally receiving serious attention from critics. As more and more of Montgomery's writing is published and republished, critics and fans are reassessing her as letter writer, journal writer, autobiographer, poet, short story writer, and novelist. Partly because of the new materials, and partly because of Montgomery's continuing popularity, more critics are showing interest in the quality of Montgomery's creations as well as in Montgomery herself as a successful writer whose artistic choices deserve study within their personal and historical contexts.

The number of Montgomery fans has continued to grow in the 80 years since the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), but the critical reception of Montgomery and her works has always been, at best, mixed. Desmond Pacey, in *Creative Writing in Canada* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1952), identified Montgomery as one of the writers of the Canadian "age of brass" (p. 82), and then dismissed her and her most enduringly popular work in these now famous words: "*Anne of Green Gables* is a children's classic, and it would be silly to apply adult critical standards to it.... It had all the features of the kind of escape literature which a materialistic and vulgar generation craved..." (p. 98). Archibald MacMechan, Montgomery's own literature professor at Dalhousie, gave his verdict on *Anne of Green Gables* in *Headwaters of Canadian Literature* (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1924): "The Canadian book just misses the kind of success which convinces the critic while it captivates the unreflecting general reader" (p. 211). More recently, Sheila Egoff, in her important study *The Republic of Childhood* (2nd ed.; Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1975), has offered this irritated comment on *Anne*: "To denigrate the literary qualities of *Anne of Green Gables* is as useless an exercise as carping about the architecture of the National War