

New England: A Matter of Perspective

John Smith's *A Description of New England* and William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* both present a picture of the same pre-colonial land of New England. Mr. Smith's writing, out of necessity, painted a rosy picture of the new land, while Bradford's historical account shows early New England was not Heaven on Earth. Mr. Bradford and Mr. Smith are writing about one land, but they present two different accounts of the life in the land.

John Smith's writing is his ideal vision of what the new land could be with the best of people colonizing the new land. John Smith's fine piece of literature may also be considered a beautifully worded, finely tuned piece of propaganda. Mr. Smith wrote this selection to influence people to leave their lives in England and cross the globe to start a new life in a strange land. John Smith described a land where little work was needed, and riches could be easily acquired. A man with little fishing ability could catch one hundred, two hundred, or three hundred fish a day. He tells of animals perfect for hunting that give plenty of food to live on, and rich furs that could be traded for money. Mr. Smith declares the land free, so anyone could come to the New World and accumulate great wealth. John Smith envisioned a land where all men would live in peace and harmony, a vision that would not be fulfilled in New England or any of the New World.

William Bradford's history of the Pilgrims, in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, sheds a uniquely different light on life in colonial New England. Bradford's account depicts many hardships that had to be overcome by the Pilgrims, before their ideal land began to take shape. Bradford describes arriving in New England in the late fall as fatal for many of the Pilgrims. The first winter took its toll on the colonists. Forced to live on the boat, many people died of scurvy or starved. When they finally were able to stay on land, they found the Indians less than sociable, and the land too rugged to develop large farms. The Pilgrims kept their faith though, and with time, the Lord blessed them. They made a pact with the Indians, learned how to grow native crops, and developed industries. William Bradford believed that God helped them through His bountiful grace, and turned the New England wilderness into a Heavenly Paradise.

The similarities between *A Description of New England* and *Of Plymouth Plantation* are so few that it is hard to believe they are even about the same general area. Both men see the colonization of the new land as a great religious expression of faith and virtue. After the pact is made with the Indians, the Pilgrims begin to reap some of the benefits promised by Smith, but it all takes much work. The Pilgrims begin to grow crops, catch fish, and hunt plenty of food. It all took work though, and was never as easy as John Smith tried to lead people to believe.

John Smith's ideal vision of the land and the grim reality of what William Bradford faced are very different. The Pilgrims found that their basic physical needs had to be attended to before the smallest of John Smith's promises of ease could be noticed. The unity that Smith envisioned for all men in the new land was never realized either. The settlers were not treated kindly by the sailors, and the Indians were not very welcoming at first. Many of these differences would be erased over time, but Smith's vision did not come to fruition quickly or easily for these pioneers.

With time and God's grace, John Smith's propaganda would become a near truth in Providence, but it was not easy for the Pilgrims. Indian help and much hard work was needed before the Pilgrims' holy, virtuous experiment came close to the life Smith promised to those adventurous souls willing to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

