William Tyler | Until the Butter Melts English Colonization in America

- So, it's one minute past the hour, so I'm going to hand over to you. Just to say welcome to all our participants, welcome back. And William, always a pleasure to have you with us. Thank you. Over to you.

Visuals are displayed throughout the presentation.j

- Thank you very much, and welcome, everyone. And if you haven't Zoomed with me before, you are more than welcome to join us. Well, here in England, it's what? Five o'clock in the afternoon. This is the story of the establishment of a New England on the far side of the Atlantic from the old England. It is from the settlements in New England that in the last quarter of the 18th century, a new and to become a very powerful nation emerged, the United States of America. So then, the question has to be, who were these settlers who sailed across the Atlantic in almost indescribable conditions at sea, huddled together in small wooden boats? And if you've ever been on a replica of, say, the Mayflower, ever so small. It defies belief that they managed to do it, men, women, and children. And what drove them?

Well, what drove them to the other side of quite literally an unknown world? Some of you may remember from childhood, the line and directions in James Barrie's "Peter Pan," how do you get to Never Neverland? And the answer was, you go to the second star to the right, and then you go straight on to the morning. Well, those who set sail in the early 17th century from England to New England, they also sailed in much the same way. One of the sailing instructions was you sailed south until the butter melted, and then you turned right and north. It's not much different than James Barrie wrote in "Peter Pan." It must have been terrifying for them. But the first point to make about these men, women, and children was they were ordinary, that there was nothing that special about them. They were ordinary men, women, and children from ordinary English villages, nothing that necessarily made them special, except their belief in God and in themselves, plus an overriding and burning desire to be free, free to worship as they chose, and free from the suffocating state of Charles I England. T

hey wanted freedom, and they linked religion and politics very closely together. If you were equal in the sight of God, then surely you should be equal in the sight of the king. We call these folk Puritans and their beliefs Puritanism. But those two words, Puritan and Puritanism, are extremely difficult to define. If you were doing a university postgraduate course, we'd spend a week arguing about what the words mean. I'm short-circuiting that by using a very small work by an American historian, Francis Bremer, simply called "Puritanism." And it's on my blog. In his book, he agrees with me that it's really a very difficult term. He writes this, "Among the most fundamental yet disputed aspects of the subject is the definition of Puritanism. Whereas other religious movements of the 16th and 17th centuries, Lutheranism, Catholicism, Genevan Calvinism, among others, became institutionalised so that there were official statements of faith and formal membership of churches. Puritanism never achieved that type of clear identity.

It was a movement defined in part by the self-identification of men and women who refer to themselves as the godly, and partly by their enemies, who scorned them as precisians and hypocrites. The actual label Puritan was originally a term of opprobrium used by their enemies, though eventually they adopted it themselves." It was a way of thinking about religion. It was a way of thinking about politics. It was thinking in terms of I and not we. Some of you may have read the dystopian novel, written in the early part of the 20th century by the Russian writer, Yevgeny Zamyatin, called "Yes." And in that novel, "Yes," he talks about how societies politically can be divided into we societies and I societies. And the Puritans were very much an I society, the emphasis upon the individual. The individual is responsible for their own faith, for their own relationship to God, and they believed the individual was responsible in terms of their governance. I, it was a very much an I community.

The best definition I can give, I think, of Puritanism, comes from the 19th century American fiction writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who's best remembered for that brilliant novel, "The Scarlet Letter." And if there's anyone who's not read "The Scarlet Letter" and wants to understand what these these people were about, then read it. But he wrote lots of short stories, and one of them was called "The May-Pole of Merry Mount." And in that, he describes, really, Puritanism, he gets it to T. And he writes this, "Not far from Merry Mount was a settlement of Puritans, most dismal wretches, who said their prayers before daylight, and then wrought in the forest or the corn-field till evening made it prayer time again. Their weapons were always at hand to shoot down the straggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians.

Their festivals were fast days, and their chief pastime the singing of psalms. Wo to the youth or maiden who did but dream of a dance! The selectman nodded to the constable; and there sat on the light-heeled reprobate in the stocks; as if he danced, it was round the whipping-post, which might be termed the Puritan Maypole." We think of the Puritans as a dull people with no fun. It's not entirely true. In fact, Oliver Cromwell, back in England, one of his pleasures, one of his hobbies was actually dancing, believe it or not. But they have this aura about them. And certainly, in many cases, they deserve that aura. So, the year then is 1620, and the month is November, and the date is the 11th of November. And it's taken this little boat, the Mayflower, two months to cross the Atlantic, two months on one of those tiny little boats. And they land, they land at Cape Cod in what is to become Massachusetts.

And one of the leaders is William Bradford. And Bradford kept a journal in which he tells us what was happening, and he tells us the scene as he and some of the men set off to explore this new land. Entirely new. They had no idea what they would find. Would they find unicorns around the next bend? That they had absolutely no idea. "About 10 o'clock," he writes, "We came into a deep valley, full of brush, wood-gaile, and long grass, through which were found little paths or tracks, and there we saw a deer, and found springs of fresh water, which we were heartily glad, and sat us down and drunk our first New England water with as much delight as ever we drunk drink in all our lives." They made it to shore. And it must have been an enormous relief to stand

on firm ground once more, even if it was ground they didn't know. And they had no idea, really, on how they were going to survive there. They had literally walked into the unknown. And this is what Bradford wrote, "Some signs where the Indians had formerly planted their corn." They discover that they are not the first people there. But the Indians don't count. They regarded the Indigenous peoples they came across as uncivilised. Uncivilised was the word they used. And they were glad of it. Glad because they were ripe for conversion.

And one of the things Puritans were committed to doing was converting those who did not share, either other Christians, who did not share their particular beliefs, or non-Christians who could be brought, as they would say, to the light. So, why do we talk about these people from all those years ago, 400 years ago? Why are they still important here in Britain? And some of you are listening to me in the states, why are they important there? They had a fundamental impact on both the country they'd left, England, and the country that they had sailed to, which is going to become the United States of America. And Bremer writes this about them in that, in this way, he says, "Their understanding of God's will led them to promote education, to redefine marriage and other institutions, and to adopt participatory forms of government." It's that last bit that's important. Forget the morality. The morality, as we'll see in a moment, is often hypocritical. But the important thing, both here in Britain and in the United States, is it led them to promote and adopt participatory forms of government. "While Puritans, as a specific group, are no longer with us," says Bremer, "the impact of those initiatives on America and England continues to be felt." And it does.

They are so important to the history of the English speaking peoples, as Churchill would've said. And then they did something really quite remarkable. The leaders, I'm sorry, this is a very male-dominated society, the leaders, men, drew up a document, and we call it the "Mayflower Compact." And it's such an important document here in Britain, and of course in America. It's a statement from the emergence of democracy and the concept of democracy in 17th century England, exported across the Atlantic to New England. We fight a civil war, and our history goes down a different path, nevertheless, to arrive at parliamentary democracy in the same way that America's landed up in the same place. But the path to it was different. The "Mayflower Compact" wasn't a constitution. No, but it's a big, big step towards a constitution. 41 men signed it. "In the name of God, amen," they wrote. Well, of course they would.

They're doing everything in the name of God because God has chosen them. They feel that they are God's chosen people. It's why none of them could ever go back to England. They could not fail God. They had to make a success in this new land. "In the name of God, amen, we whose names are underwritten," and then, these are not revolutionaries in one sense, they say, "the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and having undertaken for the Glory of God, and the Advancement of the Christian Faith," hence their view of the uncivilised Indigenous peoples they met, "and Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of Virginia." Now, they're in Massachusetts. They'd actually intended to land in Virginia, and they'd sort of missed it.

Whether they missed the point at which the butter melted or not, or they got the wrong star and turned right too soon or too late, who knows? You see, it was a very, in the 17th century, to set out across the Atlantic, this is an extraordinary difficult thing. They don't have GPS. They don't have maps even, charts. They have nothing. They, it's just, you just hope that you've got someone on board who may have made the journey before and has some sort of feel for when you turn the boat in a particular direction. And they said, "We solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves into a civil Body Politick." And that's why it's so important, a civil body politic. This is not about religion, except that religion underpins their political beliefs. This is about politics. And although they say they're loyal subjects of King James, in fact what they're doing, free to do it, no one's going to come and knock on their door as it were from Westminster and say, "Hang on, you can't do this."

They can do what they like where they are. And they are doing it. And they're setting up what they believe is a modern political structure in which they will discuss, men will, okay, men will discuss. And they didn't have it easy. They had to face the hostility of the Indigenous people. They had to face disease, and they had to face weather, and they had to face the pressing problem of food. In 1622, they ran out completely. The Americans call it the starving time. Anyone of any sense would've given up. They could not give up, because if they did so, they were admitting that God had failed, and God can't fail. And they are God's instrument. They have to succeed. It's incredible to think, they were so isolated, isolated from other Europeans in North America, isolated from Europe, and yet, and suffering death amongst their own. They have to make it. And of course, where the pilgrim fathers led, others soon followed.

The immigration to New England went up enormously. In 1630, the numbers had risen to 3,000. By 1660, when Charles II returns to the throne in England, New England has a population of 33,000. It's grown tenfold in 30 years. By the turn of the century, 1700, it's grown another threefold to something in the region of 90,000. And by 1790, shortly after the independence of the United States, it's over a million. It proved to be, indeed, a fruitful land, a fruitful land. A New Jerusalem, they called it. And they referred to it, a city built upon a hill, they referred to Boston. One thing which distinguishes Protestantism from Catholicism is a propensity to branch off. If I am so important, well, if I don't agree with you, well, to hell with you, I'm going. And I'll go. And I may be charismatic. Many of these ministers of the Puritan faith were charismatic men. So, if I go, well, my family doesn't have any choice. They have to go. And we're talking about big families. And I might have a brother, or I might have a sister there, or both.

And part of the congregation follow me. And they're always splitting and splitting again. And that's a phenomenon that's seen in England as well as in America. It's one of the characteristics of Protestantism, but it's one of the characteristics, particularly, of evangelical Protestantism, if I can use a term loosely, of Protestantism of the left wing, rather than the right wing, theologically speaking. But there's one big difference between old England and New England. In old England, I can go off in a huff, but where do I go? It's, there's people all around me. I live in a flat now. If I have a rack with my wife, where do I go? When I lived in a house, it was either I'd storm

upstairs. I can't storm upstairs, there's no upstairs. And there was no upstairs in England to storm off to. In America, they could storm off, and storm off they did, and set up a new community. And in that way, the community spread. It didn't mean they were happy to live, as it were, together, in any union, having split. That's another story. It's Oliver Cromwell who talks in 1655, back here in England in, I think, a fascinating way. Let me just read you what Cromwell said. "Is there not yet upon the spirit of men a strange itch?

Nothing will satisfy them, unless they can put their finger upon their brethren's consciences, to pinch them there." In other words, they get a huge kick out of religious and political arguments. They like arguing. They like trying to get one over on the rest of the congregation. That's what he's saying. Is it ingenuous to ask liberty and not to give it? Well, we believe in, no, I'm very sorry. Rachel, you may not speak. Women may not speak. I'm running this meeting. Women can come, but you must not speak. I'm talking about liberty. Don't you understand? I'm talking about liberty, but not for women, not for Indigenous, and not for the slaves, because slaves come into New England too. It's the hypocrisy. And it's fascinating that Cromwell should point this out, I think. "Is it ingenuous to ask liberty, and not to give it? What greater hypocrisy than for those who were oppressed by the Bishops to become the greatest oppressors themselves, as soon as their yoke was removed?"

And one thing these Puritans love was having rules, that I should admit, at this point, I was educated in an English public school, boarding school, which was evangelical Christian. I'm not an evangelical Christian today. But to have experienced that was to experience Puritanism. An example, we had a huge and beautiful new assembly hall with a wonderful floor. And we asked if we could join with a girl's school, which we often met with on sort of occasions for debates and all sorts. Could we have a dance? And the school was horrified. Dancing left us, led to sexual impropriety. It's the Mayflower Puritans at work when I was at school in the 1960s. And they're full of hypocrisy. We had a sermon given by a member of parliament, a conservative member of parliament from the very conservative area, Bournemouth, on the South Coast. And he lectured us on morality. And didn't we half laugh when the following week on the front pages of the popular press, he'd been identified as having an affair with his secretary, who was 30 years younger than him.

And Hawthorne would've said, "You are spot on," because in "The Scarlet Letter," who is the father of the illegitimate child, Hester? The minister, of course. The minister. Hypocrisy, not every Puritan was hypocritical, but there was an element of hypocrisy, particularly of those in charge, the men, the ministers who ran it. As I said, they always were splitting, splitting from their original church, from their original township, in other words, because the church and town were the same in that early New England. In 1631, a Puritan minister called Roger Williams had arrived in New England, and he began to stir things up. He would began to be awkward, you might say. He argued that the churches in America needed to make a break with the Church of England. And don't pretend that the Church of England is anything to do with us. We want to get rid of the Church of England in its entirety.

Well, that was bad enough for some, but he went further than that, because he wanted a new form of political organisation as well as a religious organisation. And in 1636, the Massachusetts Colony had had enough of this man. He was a firebrand. He was upsetting people. Well, he was upsetting the status quo of those who were leading in Massachusetts, and they planned to send him back on a ship to England, presumably bound. He wouldn't have gone voluntarily. They'd have bound him, put him on a ship, wow. Got rid of it, problem solved. And he was tipped off. So, he decided to move out of Massachusetts and take part of the congregation with him. And he went to Rhode Island, and he founded the new township of Providence, Rhode Island, where he was free to pursue his own ideas, and his supporters followed him with those ideas. And he turned his back on Massachusetts.

Now, he's an interesting man, and Massachusetts is interesting, and Rhode Island particularly so. Rhode Island, which is to break away, on the 4th of May, 1776, Rhode Island became the first part of what is shortly going to be the United States of America to renounce its allegiance to George III. Williams would've been so proud of them. They renounce their allegiance to George III on the 4th of May, 1776 in a general assembly. And today, Rhode Island celebrates, it says, Rhode Island's Independence Day, of which, of course, they are rightly proud. And there is something else important about Rhode Island in this, which also links to Williams. Williams is such an interesting man. In March, 1784, so that's in the emerging United States, Rhode Island became the first part of the United States to begin the emancipation of slaves. They said that after a period of apprenticeship, slaves would become free. Although they also said that existing slaves were not granted their freedom under the legislation. But it's a first step forward. Now, that's important. And it's important because the timeline in Rhode Island follows the timeline in England over the question of slavery and the slave trade.

And it emphasises how out of kilter the southern states were 80 years later in the time of the American Civil War and the question of slavery. Can we keep emphasising that New England is old England on the other side of the Atlantic? Gradually over the years and centuries, of course, it becomes quite separate and independent, but never, ever, never, ever have those old bonds been broken. And I don't mean religious, I mean political, and the outlook. The outlook. And I said, 1784, Rhode Island makes the first stand against slavery. But, very important, it isn't the first, it isn't the first action against slavery. As in England, there was a gradual development of opinion, so there was in the north, in the northern states. As early as 1700, an American called Samuel Sewall, although in 1700, of course, he was British, Samuel Sewall wrote a book, "The Selling of Joseph," in which he raised a moral objection to slavery.

And he was a Puritan, like Williams. 1700. So, this idea that certainly lots of people, I think, outside the states have that slavery was an issue of the 1860s, and had been, as it were, lost before, and it was a European or an British issue before, is simply not true, because in British America, in British New England, and then subsequently in American New England, voices were raised loud and strong against slavery in the 18th century. But not all Puritans were against the slave trade. I'm not saying that. But what I am saying is, out of the Protestantism in England and the Protestantism in New England does emerge a moral view about slavery. Interestingly, of

course, in England is the Quakers that take up that call. And the same is true in America as well. The Quakers are certainly not Puritan, but they're in that same strand of I. And, but Quakers had a concept of we as well. I make my peace with God and my relationship with the state, but as a community, we have responsibility. And so, it's Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic, which in the 18th century, take forward the moral issue such as this issue of slavery. And I suppose the big question for me, those of you who know me, some of you have heard me speak in Britain, and others have heard me on Zoom.

What always interests me as a historian is how the past relates to the present. And in a sense, talking about America, I'm interested in how the English roots of American society influence even the very different America of the 21st century. And you might rightly say how America in the 20th century has influenced Britain. We are still tied together by a common language and a common view of political affairs, whatever upsets there are from time to time. So, what is the Puritan legacy specifically in the States? The Puritan legacy here in Britain is pretty clear. The Puritan legacy here is the development, after the civil war, of a new arrangement between people and king in 1660, and in particular, in the Bloodless Revolution, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the beginning of parliamentary democracy from 1714 onwards, so that the king, the king reigns, but no longer rules. Reigns, but doesn't rule. And there's no doubt that in the states, the Puritans played a substantial part in the establishment, first of all, of a European society and an English society on the far side of the Atlantic.

They laid the basis for a new nation, forged under God, in 1776, that this new nation would have a written constitution. But as I said in an earlier talk, the written constitution of the United States came from the written Constitution of Connecticut and then of Massachusetts. And these aren't American documents. They're written in America by Englishmen, Englishmen who come to America to escape from England. But these are English documents. It's so annoying to me as a historian when people say, "Well, of course, England has never produced a constitution." Of course we produced a constitution, in Connecticut and Massachusetts. What do you think they were, that they're not constitutions? Of course they were. And so is that of 1776. It so happened that our path towards modern democracy diverged, and we, in Britain, for other reasons, never got round to a written constitution. Whereas in America, it was absolutely essential, because that's the way the Puritans had seen it when they'd landed at Cape Cod and founded the "Mayflower Compact."

And they signed it in the presence of God, they said. It's over one. It's not two. It's, Britain and America, this is the gift to the world of democracy. There's much wrong in the 21st century with Britain not having a written constitution. And many people in Britain think we should have. But there's much wrong also in the states with their written constitution. Nothing is perfect in this world. Of course, the Puritans would've disagreed with that, I think. I think they would've thought that God would make things perfect, and it was man that made them imperfect. Maybe they were right. Maybe the constitutions in both countries are imperfect because of human involvement. Maybe that's always going to be the flaw in any constitutional democratic document, is who draws it up. Puritanism is deep in American DNA. I've quoted Bremer. I'll

quote him again.

This is a little piece he wrote quite a long way into his book. "The Boston clergyman Jonathan Mayhew drew explicit comparisons between the Puritan resistance to the policies of Charles I and the resistance to George III's Stamp Act, on one occasion choosing the anniversary of the execution of Charles I, 30th of January, he gave a sermon in Boston and warned against the tyranny of unlimited powers." They were looking back, these forgers of American independence, to why they had come in the first place. They had come to escape from the authoritarianism of Charles I, and now, in the 1770s, against the authoritarianism, not of George III, that's a nonsense, but against the authoritarianism of the English parliament in Westminster. I've always said, what would've happened if we'd been able to have air flight, or even relatively fast trans-Atlantic crossings by sea between America and England, and we had sitting in the House of Commons, the MP for Boston North?

Would that have made a difference? Possibly, but we deal with reality. And the reality is there was no way, there was no way that Britain was ever going to hold America as a colony. No way. Why? Because they're English in America, and they put two fingers up to anyone that tells 'em what to do. That's the very essence of Puritanism. How dare you tell me what to do? Only God tells me what to do. And God says, we don't want the Stamp Act. And we don't want the British government in Westminster, telling us how to behave. And we don't want British soldiers on the streets of Boston. They're English. That's why they react in that way. And it makes a story so fascinating, so extraordinarily fascinating to me, and I think to many people. Samuel Adams, at the time of the movement towards independence in the States, was described by fellow, and I'll say, use the word this time of fellow Americans. Samuel Adams is described as the Cromwell of New England, the Cromwell of New England.

People say that the British, and particularly the English, are obsessed with history. Here is America obsessed with history. Samuel Adams, the Cromwell of New England. Where do they get, where do they find analogies? In England, of course. In the England of the 17th century, which they left. And now England or Britain is trying to interfere in the States, and they're having none of it. And Adams is the Cromwell of New England. And when the revolutionary leaders met in Boston, where did they meet? Well, where does anybody in England meet? They met in a pub. They met in a tavern in Boston. That's where good Englishmen meet to plan and plot. They met in a pub, a tavern. And the name of the Boston Tavern was Cromwell's Head. Cromwell's Head. In England, it would've been called the King's Head. In Boston, it's Cromwell's Head. Puritanism and the Puritans are the bedrock of independence of the 13 colonies.

Okay, lots of waters flown under lots of bridges since, but that remains the fundamental basis of American society and American attitudes, Churchill would've said Anglo American attitudes. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer and thinker, wrote this. And I think this is, I rather like this. He identified two Puritan commitments, to liberty and religion. And he said, liberty and religion, that is what makes America unique. Liberty and religion, that's what makes America unique. If you were doing a postgraduate course at a university, that would be your essay for

next week. In no fewer than 8,000 words, comment on de Tocqueville's view of America, religion and liberty make America. And if you don't like that, write 8,000 words around the event, that revolutionary leaders in Boston met in the tavern called Cromwell's Head, discuss. By the 20th century, and the vast immigration to the states from Europe, okay, I know there's been immigration from far wider since in the 20th century, but let's stick with 19th century European immigration to America. And this is now not British. Yes, there's been Scottish, and in the 19th century, Irish, but in the latter part of the 19th century, we have the poor of Europe.

After all, what does it say on the Statue of Liberty? So, they come from places like Naples, and places like Poland. And Jews come who are in considerable danger in parts of the Russian Empire, for example, in Germany. People come right away from all across. And America changes. Inevitably it changes. Of course it changes. This small group of English men, women, and children that have first landed with the Mayflower and other ships, but their ideas are not swamped. There's a fascinating piece that I want to read you where Bremer quotes H. L. Mencken. Now, Mencken himself was born, H.L. Mencken was born in the States, but his parents came from Germany. They were German immigrants. So, he isn't by any means a Puritan. And he, let me just read you. "For the journalist and social critic, H. L. Mencken, Puritans were not only a people, quote, 'haunted by the fear that someone, somewhere may be happy,' but also people who not only tried their damnedest to shut out every vestige of sound information, of keen reasoning, of ordinary self-respect and integrity. They absolutely succeeded in shutting these things out." Oh, what a good essay that would be for you if you didn't like my other earlier suggestions of about 8,000 words, and applying that to the supporters of Donald Trump.

Let me read on. Mencken also played a role in the conflation of Puritanism with early 20th century American fundamentalism. This too became a feature of the popular image of the Puritans. And so, we now get quite a lot of confusion in mixing evangelicals, particularly southern evangelicals in the States, in terms of their political stance, think about Trump, with the Puritans of New England. And although there are connections, they're not the same people, and they do not have the same views. And it's a dangerous, I think that's a dangerous conflation. But you'll find American writers writing about that today. And I think they miss a lot. Of course, you can point to the hypocrisy in both. That's easy to do. And you can also point to the fact that they had, as Mencken said, their mind shut. They're looking blinkered at things. Yes, all of that's true, but there is a big difference. There is a huge difference between these Puritans who were really, did sincerely believe in a democracy. And if it wasn't one person, one vote, it was one man, one vote. But of course, Puritans are an easy target in the States.

After all, Arthur Miller based his play, "The Crucible," on the witchcraft trials in Salem in 1692 as a way of attacking McCarthyism, which he couldn't attack directly. So, he attacked it by writing "The Crucible," and talking about that dreadful witchcraft trial in Salem. But the witchcraft trial in Salem in 1692 is no different than one 30 years earlier in Lowestoft in Suffolk in England. This isn't an American phenomenon, it's a Puritan phenomenon. It's a religious, witchcraft arose in society which was, had, where religion in that society had got to such a point that it became

irrational. I just want to read you one final thing here. It's the last piece that Bremer wrote in his book, "The story of the Puritans and their legacy remains a reference point as Americans debate the meaning their past has for their future." Now, that is important. History is very important, but the trouble is history can be weaponized. That's the new phrase some historians are using. And Donald Trump tried to weaponize history by his 1776 Commission, which horrified many American academic historians as it horrified people here too. But it's not just an American phenomenon. The government in Britain is trying to establish what it describes as an acceptable national history to be taught in schools. It's very dangerous. It's very dangerous. We should not leave the teaching of history and what is taught to politicians of whatever flavour, colour, or whatever, because they're using it, they're weaponizing it, and we mustn't weaponize it. We must understand it, as they said of Cromwell, warts and all.

So, in the States, as here, look at our history, where we've come from, particularly as now we live in a society across the western world in which liberal democracy is under attack from what is loosely called populism. And populism can be at an extreme end like that in Hungary, or a more moderate end like that in Britain under our present government. But populist it is. And we have to guard against populists misusing history. And it's very difficult. And we are living through, at the moment, the after effects of Black Lives Matter, not just in the States, but in Britain also. And questions about slavery. And we have to find a way through that that makes sense to our societies. Now, I didn't want to end on a negative note. What did the Puritans give to America? They gave this.

They gave the morality, the politics behind the statement of the Declaration of Independence, 4th of July, 1776, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation." This is terribly English. It's terribly English. It's we're going to declare independence, and we're awfully sorry. And we don't want to offend you. And perhaps we better lay out why we're doing it. It's a very English sort of document. I'm not sure that you could have found a Declaration of Independence anywhere else in the world like this. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

That is pure, pure 17th century Puritanism. English, American, call it what you will. We emerge from this on both sides of the Atlantic. This, to me, Americans hearing that will sit up a little straighter and be very proud of that declaration. But so can we who are in England sit up proud that Englishmen could write such a state so clear. It's nothing like anything in constitutions and declarations in continental Europe. This is beautifully written, clear, precise, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. What better definition can you have of a democracy than that? And then I've got a

final, I've got to come to an end in a minute, but I've got a final thought. I have to have a glass of water. I think I'm getting carried away. I've got a final thought for all of you.

Remember, if you've been with me before, you know I say this. If you haven't, then just listen a second. If I've said something like a date, I've tried hard to make sure all those dates and facts are 100% correct. We all make mistakes, but I set out not to. When I give an opinion, it's an opinion. And I don't expect you all to agree with it. It would be a dreadful world. I'm no Puritan minister expecting you all to vote for me. I want you to think for yourselves, which is partly what all of this has been about. And I'm English, and I'm male, and I'm Oxford educated, and my background is what it is, and I can't do anything about that. And some of you listening, many of you listening are Jewish, which makes a difference. And many of you are American, which makes a difference. And many of you are female. That makes a difference.

You do not have to agree. But the point about democracy is you listen, you judge, and you come to your own judgement , not what you are told to do, but what you think is the right thing. I mentioned this distinction between a we society and an I society that was specified in Yevgeny Zamyatin's book "Yes." Incidentally, "Yes" was the, it heavily influenced George Orwell's "1984." But in truth, there isn't a we and an I. There's we and I are interlinked across the English speaking world in terms of our governments. We talk about the rights of the individual, and we're concerned about the rights of the individual. If you are South African, Australian, whatever, if you come out of this tradition, you are concerned about you as an individual. But we've also come with a responsibility, a duty to wider society and to those less fortunate than ourselves, which is a core, both of evangelical Protestant Christianity and Judaism. It's a core of what we believe. And it's to get that balance between the I and the we.

And that's so difficult. That is so difficult. And it's why democracies have that ongoing never-ending debate about the power of central government. One of the things that the COVID crisis has taught us is that central governments had to act in such a situation. If we just take the United States, and under Trump, really washing his hands of it, and the federal government cannot wash its hands of it. And in Britain, well, in Britain, we saw a central government committed to not making mass public expenditure, actually forced to make billions of public expenditure, quite against what the conservative party traditionally believe. It's we and I, how do you balance it? So, we've given more power to central government during the COVID crisis. But it will have to be rowed back, because I.

Never forget that the Puritans of New England taught us is I is central, and the we emerges from the I, that the we is just a group of I's, is how they would've seen it. The debate continues. And we owe that debate and our democracy to the Puritans of old England and the Puritans of New England. Thanks very much for listening. I've enjoyed myself. I just hope somebody else has. I'll have to go and have a lie down after all of this. Thanks very much for listening. I think there may be some questions and comments.

- Excellent, William. Thank you. Yes, there are questions.

- Shall I get some up on my screen?

- [Wendy] Yeah.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Didn't the Puritans come from Holland?

A: Yes, they, what happened was that many of them left England and sought sanctuary in Leiden in Holland in particular. And from Holland, they often sailed. Massachusetts Bay Company did sail directly from Holland, but of course, the Mayflower did not sail from Holland. It sailed from here. Right. Yeah. You see, that's interesting that, you see, this is the core of what I've ended with.

Q: Rodney has asked, "Did their individualism conflict with a sense of community once they landed in the USA?"

A: Well, they had to work out for themselves how individualism, how I and we could be put together. And that of course is at the core of the United States Constitution. If you want to argue in that particular way, it's also at the core of the American Civil War. How far are you prepared to give up your, give up what you want to do in the interest of the wider community, whether the wider community is the township, as in New England at the beginning, or whether it's the state of Virginia, as against the federal government in 1860s? The question remains, and it remains today. But what we've seen in both the states and in Britain by the end of the 20th century, the power of the central executive has become stronger. The criticism made of Tony Blair by the left wing of the Labour Party when Blair was Prime Minister in Britain was he was becoming too presidential, i.e. too much like an American president.

But I remember a long time ago now, decades ago, I was walking in Yorkshire, and I walked a, I don't know why, but my family, my wife and the two children were behind, and I'd walked off. And I got chatting to an American who was on his own. And we both, we walked together. And he told me, he said, well, there was a presidential election coming up. And I said, you, is it, what's going to happen if X or Y wins? And he said, "You don't need to worry, because the president really doesn't have much power." Well, Trump has shown that president can have power. And what is interesting is whatever Biden said about Trump, he's actually issued all those executive orders, which Trump, except, of course, he would argue his executive orders are good, Trump's executive orders were bad. But we've got this centralization of government. And we had in Britain also, where in the beginning of the COVID crisis, the prime minister and the cabinet tried to ignore parliament.

So, the I and we question is a very important one, and I can't answer it, because it's got to be answered in all our countries. In Australia, for example, it's got to be answered by Australians.

It's got to be answered by Canadians on what sort of government do they want, and how can it be controlled? And do we want more involvement of people? That is, you need to endure a terrible mess. Fine. I'm quite happy to have a referendum every day if it's people like me that vote. That sounds very Puritan, people like me. But it doesn't work like that. Oh, yes.

Sorry, somebody's put I'm, I realise that when I said it, the book is not called "Yes," it's called "We," the Russian book. Thanks very much indeed. That was my fault entirely. It's called "We." I haven't got my copy here, but it, you are absolutely right. It's called "We." W-E. So, you can easily look it up. Look "We" up. And Zamyatin is Zed-A-M-Y-A-T-I-N.

Q: How did they react to people of other religions?

A: Badly is the answer.

Q: Didn't Christopher Columbus have maps?

A: No, because he didn't know where he was going. The interesting thing about maps is when John Cabot went to Newfoundland, and he was, of course, Italian, he landed up in my home city of Bristol. And there were only, there was the doctor was Italian because no one in their right minds would have an English doctor. And his son was with him. So, three of them were Italian. The rest of the crew he recruited in Bristol. And he might not have known where he was going, but the crew in Bristol knew where they were going because they'd been fishing for cod off the Newfoundland banks. And they knew exactly what time it took to cross the Atlantic. But with Columbus, no, he hadn't a clue what he was doing. Yes. Yeah.

Q: Sorry, somebody said, "Didn't the English land in Jamestown?"

A: Yes, as I said in my previous talk, of course, it's Virginia, and these Mayflower pilgrims were, thought they were landing in Virginia. That's why they referred to it when they found they weren't there as North Virginia. That's true, but it's not the people in Jamestown that matter. It's the people in New England that matter, because it's this group of purity. So, it's different.

Q: Did they have any sort of equipment?

A: The equipment they had on the ships was pretty basic. And when I said you sail south til the butter melts, they did. In fact, in some modern yacht races, when they're not allowed to use GPS, they use the same. It's amazing. They use the same instruction. They actually do follow that. No, they didn't have maps. And when they did have charts, the charts were pretty useless. Of course, once they get the other side, they begin, remember that if we're talking about charts, think about Canada. The St. Lawrence was charted at, by, later, Captain Cook, who charted the St. Lawrence. These things were charted very late.

Q: And no, they really did set out into the unknown. Yes.

No, they were saved by Native Americans. They were indeed, in terms of the food, they were.

Q: At the time of the Puritans, were there not Spanish colonists?

A: Yes, in the South, but not, the point, and the French, no one colonised like these Puritans, neither the Spanish, the Dutch, or the French, 'cause they could go home. The Puritans could not go home. And the others do have no impact on what is later to become the United States. That's why the Puritans are so important. No upstairs in English houses.

No, I live in a flat. That's why I've got no upstairs. Hang on. Yeah. Now, you see, that's a really good question.

This is from Ted. Seems to me that the Puritan compact, the "Mayflower Compact" and subsequent American manifestos were we documents, not I. The rule of aristocracy in Britain was the we from which they fled. Yeah. But the problem was, the problem is that you create another sort of elite. And they did. And this is what is difficult to reconcile, the I. It's the I who become we are the elite who write it. It's the ministers, the educated. Let me give you an example.

The difference between presidents and prime ministers, a prime minister can come from a very humble background. The last prime minister come from a very humble background was John Major. And he did come from a very humble background. In America, you've got to have large amounts of money and networking. So, it's an elite. The idea that in America, anybody could become president is at least dubious in theory, but not in practise. So, one of the problems with I and we is if you emphasise the I, you still have to deal with the we. And the we themselves become an elite. And that's quite worrying. It's interesting to look at politicians, both in Britain and America, of how many of them have come from so-called political families. So, yeah, there are elites, elites of where they're educated, elites in terms, or elites in all sorts of ways.

Oh, I've got a message from Carol Newman, who I haven't seen for decades. Hi. What can I find here?

Oh that's, sorry, Rashel has put, the first synagogue was in Rhode Island. Yeah, that's also interesting, isn't it?

Let me just sort of scroll down a bit and see if, there's so many people have asked a question, I'm sorry, I can't answer. Puritans were Calvinists. No, they weren't. No, no, they're not Calvinists. Calvinism is a very specific branch of Protestantism. Puritans were Anglican members of the Church of England. They didn't like the idea of bishops. They didn't like being told by bishops what to do. It was the structure of the Anglican church, which they objected to more than its theology. One of the differences between England and continental Europe is that England doesn't do intellectual philosophy very well, whether it's theological or anything else.

Q: Were there English parliamentarians who disagreed with George III's policies?

A: Absolutely, there were, absolutely.

My Oxford College had, has never had a Prime Minister, but it had a fantastic politician in George James Fox, and he certainly didn't agree. I'm not sure whether, is it Ellie, Ellie Straus? Am I assuming correctly you are American? The left is doing precisely that, imposing its anti-American view on schools and education programmes, denying anything good in American tradition. The 1619 Project does that and has been roundly criticised by historians. Yeah, well, you see you, whether it's the right or the left, when politicians start using history, you've got to be very careful because it can be weaponized. I like this concept of weaponizing history. Oh, I don't like weaponized history, but I like the idea that you can talk about it in that way. Oh, well thank, oh, well, thanks for saying you enjoyed it.

When was religion ever rational? I think you'd have to have 30,000 words to answer that.

Can I give a lecture on the early history of Canada? Well, I can if I'm asked, but Canada is quite, Canada is interestingly different in as much as the French were very prominent in Canada, much more so than in America, until some of them left for the South when Britain took over in the Seven Years' War. And it was touch and go, whether Canada would turn out to be French or British. There's also the attitude towards Native Canadians, Indigenous Canadians, which is interestingly different. There's also the large influx of empire loyalists from the States, at the end of the war, as Britain would say, at the end of the War of Independence. At the end of the Revolutionary War, many left and went up to Canada. So, there's very interesting links between the two, which explain why it's different. Just to annoy all my American friends, they, I'm glad most of you are Jewish, 'cause I can be rude about Catholics. In Canada, with the French, of course they're Catholics. And when Britain won the Seven Years' War and Canada became British and not French, a number of the French thought maybe they'd be better off in the United States. Remember that France was very much a supporter of American independence from Britain. And the church in Canada, the Catholic church told the French Canadians, better to be under the control, better to be under the rule of George III than, quote, "those damn Yankees." They felt that the Puritans of New England were just too much to take. And so, you were better to stay with the non Puritans in Canada than to go to... I love that story. It's just hilarious, really.

- William.

- Yes. I've got to stop, haven't I?

- We have another talk starting in about 45 minutes. So, do you want to take one more question or should we?

- Should we just sort of stop there, and say, if anyone wants to contact me, please email me.

And Judi's given you all those details on her emails. Do email me, and I will, I promise I will answer. And if you want to look at the blog, I've got some book lists on, I may put some more on, but there's all sorts of stuff on the blog that you might just be interested in.

- Great. Well, the information is on the emails I'll send out. So, thank you for that. And thank you, William. It was fascinating. Thoroughly enjoyed it. And thank you to everybody who joined us. And we will see you a little bit later today. Thank you.

- Bye. Bye-bye.

- Bye-bye. Bye.

- Bye. Bye, everyone.