



Between Two Worlds: How the English Became Americans

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In the 1600s, over 350,000 intrepid English men, women, and children migrated to America, leaving behind their homeland for an uncertain future. Whether they settled in Jamestown, Salem, or Barbados, these migrants—entrepreneurs, soldiers, and pilgrims alike—faced one incontrovertible truth: England was a very, very long way away.

In *Between Two Worlds*, celebrated historian Malcolm Gaskill tells the sweeping story of the English experience in America during the first century of colonization. Following a large and varied cast of visionaries and heretics, merchants and warriors, and slaves and rebels, Gaskill brilliantly illuminates the often traumatic challenges the settlers faced. The first waves sought to recreate the English way of life, even to recover a society that was vanishing at home. But they were thwarted at every turn by the perils of a strange continent, unaided by monarchs who first ignored then exploited them. As these colonists strove to leave their mark on the New World, they were forced—by hardship and hunger, by illness and infighting, and by bloody and desperate battles with Indians—to innovate and adapt or perish.

As later generations acclimated to the wilderness, they recognized that they had evolved into something distinct: no longer just the English in America, they were perhaps not even English at all. These men and women were among the first white Americans, and certainly the most prolific. And as Gaskill shows, in learning to live in an unforgiving world, they had begun a long and fateful journey toward rebellion and, finally, independence

Between Two Worlds: How the English Became Americans Details

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Robert Hopcke says

The actual specifics of this whole era of early American history were unknown to me, so this book was very informative in a general way. I definitely enjoyed the particular perspective brought to it in which the author systematically showed how political and social developments in England from 1600 to around 1750 were refracted through the American colonies. I learned a great deal about the difficulties of the early decades and a lot about the true nature of the Puritan culture in New England. However I didn't find the book especially easy to read, as the author recounted story after story of specific individuals as illustrations but without really encompassing them in a clear larger analytical frame. The stories themselves were memorable but I did often think, "and why am I reading about him or her?" So in the end it was a bit like a mosaic of a lot of pieces you have to draw back and look at to get a sense of what the overall point or significance was. That said, it was stunning to me that issues at the center of the culture wars of that time, over 400 years ago, are STILL as hot as ever. If there were ever an argument for reading history, this is it.

Adam Cohen says

WSJ article was great - both content and style, but book is pretty dry and lacks cohesion and engaging style. Has the feel of an unedited research project with tons of historical data, but unclear organization despite the deceptively "clear" three-part approach. Although there is a story to tell, the thesis of that story is repeated over and over, but an actual story isn't told. Needs a rewrite if it comes to a second edition.

Diana says

I very much enjoyed this book. It is a different perspective on the settling of the United States, working back and forth from England to the Colonies and showing how changes in the two countries shaped the Colonies. I listened to the audiobook and while the narration was dispassionate it was not boring. The book was long but held my interest throughout.

Tamee says

insightful

Carolyn Johnson says

I had to skim this book, as the history of the colonies in the early US of the 1600's makes such gruesome reading. The different groups of colonists fought with each other about religion, were periodically attacked by disease or Indians, and it is a wonder that they survived the first hundred years, and were eventually able

to come together in the 1700's to fight for independence.

It appears that the early settlers came for economic reasons and for their own personal religious freedom, not for anyone else's freedom. The ideals of freedom of expression which we cherish, did not apparently exist at that time. Superstition was rampant, and the accusations of witchcraft, and the subsequent witch trials, are well documented.

This book is well written and well documented, however, the stories involve so much contention, disease and death, that I confess I was not at all comfortable reading it. The brutal and bloody attacks on the settlers by the Indians, and on the Indians by the settlers, are especially difficult to read.

I was raised with the stories of the happy, smiling Pilgrims, helped by the kind Indians, which stories unfortunately, were exaggerated and the rough edges smoothed over in the 1950's, when I began my formal schooling. The realities of the 1600's in this country are hard for me to face. I feel fortunate that some of my ancestors survived, and some of my ancestors came in the 1800's in quieter times.

Karen says

Ugh what dry history. I couldn't get past the Preface. Check this sentence:

"Even English political unrest, notably the civil wars of the 1640s, sprang not from failure and despair but from pragmatic self-reflexivity: the creative urge of those quasi-republican citizens and office-holders to confront change and pursue compromise." What?

Not one of the early reviewers gave this book five stars.

Ross says

I got through this whole big book so by my rules I have to give it 2 stars. I really did not get much out of it, however.

Basically the book is a whole lot of quoted material from the 17th century from the settlers who were colonizing North America and the Caribbean, but not an organized history. The author doesn't tell us what all these quotes mean.

A second major problem is the material of this period is really terribly, terribly sad. Settlements dying out like Jamestown. Slaughter and war with the Indians, and finally the horror of the witch trials and executions. So I cannot recommend this work to anyone.

Mark says

Beginning with the unknown at Roanoke and ending with the madness of witch trials at Salem, this is an excellent account of British settlement in America (including Newfoundland, Jamaica, Barbados, etc. and not just the future United States). Attitudes in England are themselves studied. And the two-sided trauma of relations with Native Americans is the tragedy front and center, with the blood-soaked years of King Philip's War as a cinematic climax. Well-documented and engaging.

Simon Reid says

A good history of English settlers in America during the 17th century. As well as carefully explaining what possessed these people to cross the vast, unforgiving ocean and endure the numerous hardships they were met with on the other side, Gaskill goes deep into the complex to-and-fro of English colonial politics and faith in the Atlantic world. He makes it clear that it wasn't so clean-cut a 'New World' for the pilgrims, prospectors and adventurers who started to build America.

In places I found the writing a little dry and hard-going, but Gaskill makes events like the Indian massacre in Virginia (1622), the battles of King Philip's War (1670s) or the raid on Deerfield (1704) quite vivid and gripping when it's called for, and there was enough that was new to me that it held my interest throughout.

Patreesha says

Interesting and well researched take on the Europeans coming to the Americas from an English perspective. This book might have been 4 stars but for the reader who did an excellent job bringing the brief dry sections to life.

Jessica says

I considered abandoning this book many times. I stuck with it. The premise of the book is compelling - basically, the title and subtitle describe that premise - but the content is dry dry dry. Lots of facts but not presented in a very readable way. Too bad.

Shaun Freeman says

Very interesting look at English America, how it started, how it changed the people that went to be the antipathy of what they were. The book was difficult to read because of its use of language, being academically verbose at times, and quoting directly from the Old English. I felt the author could have made it easier by translating the Old English into modern English, but that being said I can understand why he didn't. But other than that it was a good over history of the time. I learned a lot, including new words!

Alex Bugaeff says

Viewpoint of a British historian about the 17th century New World is surprisingly similar to ours. He overcomplicated the story, though, with extraneous details. And, his attempt to portray the Colonies/United States as unexceptional didn't come together.

Aishuu says

Exactly the history I've been looking for - the interactions of England with her colonies, the political climate of the time and the development of different colonies. Definitely on the scholarly side, but it answered a lot of my questions about the time period and how the politics of England affected who came and went.

Aloysius says

This helps fill the blank in between Plymouth Rock and Pocahontas, and the rise of the 13 colonies that we see in the days of the French and Indian War.
