

Mayflower Compact - III

Lead: In the movement toward representative government in the English and American experience there were bumps in the road. Despite their intentions as expressed in the Mayflower Compact the Pilgrims' settlement in Massachusetts did not lead to greater democracy.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The main problem for the Pilgrims, the first of the puritan sects to immigrate to Massachusetts Bay after 1620, was that they needed

the talents and participation of all who settled there. Originally the voters in town meetings and eventually the General Court of the colony were called freeman, but being a freeman carried important obligations. You had to show up at the annual meeting of the Court to vote. To miss this resulted in a heavy fine. As the colony spread out and distance became an issue, it became clear that many settlers could not or would become freeman. Anxious to hold the loyalty of all colonists, in 1638 The General Court voted to allow communities to elect representatives or deputies to conduct the business of the colony. Though only freemen could serve as deputies or colonial officials, all male colonials

who had taken a loyalty oath and were head of a family could vote.

The great crisis for the Pilgrims came after the first generation of settlers began to die off. Long-time Governor William Bradford died in 1658 and was replaced by the orthodox puritan, Thomas Prence. He faced a powerful threat in that Quakers were trying to move into the colony and would later press for rights of citizenship and worship. Quakers were specifically denied rights of participation and even some of their supporters lost their status as freeman. Eventually a property requirement was imposed and as many as one third of the adult male population lost the right to vote.

Essayist George Langdon writes this probably contributed to the deterioration of civil authority in the 1690s, which in turn led to the dissolution of the colony. The trend toward broad-based democratic citizen participation among the early Pilgrims, in later years, collided with the need to maintain orthodox Christian ideological control of the colony.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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