

## 1623, The Real History



**1623**

*When Socialism Lost, and Free Markets Won*

By David Leeper – June 19, 2020

In August, 2019, the *New York Times* began driving an ill-conceived propaganda campaign surrounding the year 1619, when slavery first came to America in the Jamestown, Virginia colony.

It is that year, argues the *Times*, that defines our national character — *not* the iconic 1776.

The *Times* has already won a Pulitzer prize for 1619, so it joins the *Times*' Holocaust- and Ukraine-Famine-denying reporting, both of which won Pulitzers and now live in journalism infamy forever. Those prizes have never been recalled or returned.

So congratulations, *New York Times* — you did it again!

With their new prize as a stamp of credibility, the *Times* is now ramming this America-hating 1619 vision into K-12 and college curricula. Should Americans accept that?

I argue we should not.

If the *Times* wants to go back that far in search of our national character, it is the **Year 1623** that they should be featuring. It was in that year that the Pilgrims, starving and dying under *socialism*, abruptly switched to private property and free markets. That switch really did establish a national character because afterwards, the Pilgrims moved from starvation to prosperity, paid off their debts to English sponsors, and **established a national character** that survives to this day despite the Left's 100-year campaign to discredit and crush it.

It is *that* new national character that drew a massive migration to America — *not* the sad introduction of the fusty 10,000-year-old institution of slavery.

**The Pilgrim experience of 1623 stands as the most authentic-ever, real-life, before-and-after comparison of socialism versus private property and free markets. Socialism lost. Free markets won.**

It is with this thought that I write this article with hope.

Namely —

I hope our American conservative media will develop our own positive **1623 Project counter-narrative** to the one that the *Times* is now ramming into our media, schools, and our children's minds. At a bare minimum **both narratives should be taught side-by-side** in our schools.

And in the near term, as the Democrat Party slides ever-more-leftward toward socialism, it is the 1623 narrative that is far more relevant today for *We the People*.

**The 1623 Project narrative:**

In November, 1620, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. They promptly lost half their population to starvation, sickness, and exposure that first winter, and they fared little better the second winter. We were all taught that a Native American named [Squanto](#) taught the survivors to fish, plant corn, use fertilizer, and hunt deer. While mostly true, it is the lesser half of the story.

What most of us *never* learned (or glossed over) was that the [original contract](#) the Pilgrims brokered with their London sponsors required that everything the Pilgrims produced was to go into a common store, and every member was to be allotted one equal share. Further, all the land they cleared and all the buildings they constructed were to belong to the whole community rather than to any individual.

To those with visions of Utopia, this must have sounded like the ideal society. Free of outside evil influences from old England and Europe, private property and greed were to be banished. Everyone was to work hard for the common good. Each was to contribute all that one could and take out only what one needed. In modern terms, it was to be a kind of [Bernie Sanders](#) neo-Marxist paradise.

So how did it all work out for the Pilgrims?

**Horribly!**

In the two winters beginning in 1621 & 1622, a great many died from starvation, pneumonia, or both. Here are excerpts from Governor [William Bradford](#)'s own [retrospective summary](#) of the community's experience with what we now variously call collectivism, socialism, or communism:



*This community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort.*

*For the young men, that were most able and fit for labour and service, did repine that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children without any recompense.*

*And for men's wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meat, washing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery, neither could many husbands well brook it.*

...

*Let none object this is men's corruption, and nothing to the course itself. I answer, seeing all men have this corruption in them, God in His wisdom saw another course fitter for them.*

In other words, said the Governor, it simply *didn't work*, even when their very survival depended on it. Mankind's inherent nature simply wouldn't accommodate it, no matter how "ideal" it may have seemed to its proponents.

Simply put, Bradford had discovered that ***even the most idealistic of peoples have no reason to put in any extra effort without the motivation of personal incentives to do so.***

Wisely, **in April, 1623**, Bradford abruptly abandoned socialism. Instead, he assigned a plot of land to each family, permitting them to keep everything they produced and to market anything they didn't consume themselves. He actually harnessed all that supposed human "greed" and put it to work in a *free-market* system of the type Milton Friedman was to espouse so eloquently in the 20th-century [Free to Choose](#) series of books and videos.

So ... for the Pilgrims, how did free markets and private property work out for the **same people** in the **same place** under the **same circumstances**?

**Boffo!**



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The Pilgrims soon had more food than they could eat or trade among themselves. They set up trading posts and exchanged goods with the Native Americans. They paid off their debts to their London sponsors and soon attracted a great European migration. Their new society still had its problems, but hunger was never again one of them.

As Bradford summarized the new approach:

*The women now went willing into the field, and took their little ones with them to plant corn, while before they would allege weakness and inability, and to have compelled them would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.*

...

*This [new approach] had very good success, for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content.*

Most importantly for us today, Bradford wrote about the bitter lessons learned from the failure of original socialistic plan:

*Let none argue that this is due to human failing rather than to this **communistic** plan of life in itself ...*

Note even circa 1630, when he began writing his notes, Bradford used the term “communistic.”

In modern times, when confronted with the undeniable historical record of socialism’s many failures, the Left usually argues that the “right people” weren’t in charge, and if only they had been, their utopian socialist vision would have succeeded. If Bradford could speak, he would surely disagree based on the Pilgrims’ real-life experience. **It wasn’t human failings that were the problem — the fault was in the communistic plan itself.**

So ...

**Why isn’t this 1623 lesson featured up front, in neon lights, in American history classes?** Why isn’t it the lead story of the Pilgrim experience? Why has the history even been [falsified](#) and its most important lesson ignored? Why has the New York Times overlooked it and focused on the 1619 introduction of slavery instead?

Perhaps it's because the people who write our history textbooks *still* don't want to believe it. Perhaps those authors still cling to the hope that some form of their beloved utopian socialism, collectivism, Marxism, communism, progressivism, or whatever-ism will one day triumph over private property and free markets.

Perhaps the *New York Times* hopes their ill-conceived 1619 Project will somehow humble and shame Americans into voting for Democrats(?) as compensation for long-ago slavery that their ancestors had nothing to do with — or even fought to eliminate.

Unfortunately for all those stubborn Leftists, [the historical record couldn't be clearer](#). For Americans, the Pilgrim experience should rightfully be *Exhibit One* in our classrooms as a **1623 Project** counterpart to the *Times*' desultory 1619 Project.

**On Election Day, November, 2020, it will be exactly 400 years** since the landing at Plymouth Rock. As we cast our votes that day, all Americans will do well to remember the hard-earned lessons learned by the Pilgrims about *socialism* versus *free markets*.

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*The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings;  
the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries.*  
Winston Churchill

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Afterword: I do hope in my lifetime to see new children's books, history books, some novels, a TV mini-series, and a movie or two devoted to the story of the Pilgrims' real-life experience with socialism and free markets. Conservatives should demand at least equal time with the neo-Marxists who think their wretched ideology should rule in American K-12 schools and universities.

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[Deplorable David](#)