

# 2450 Lecture 3:

The Puritans, cont.

The Salem Witch Trials

(Mather) and Revivalism (Edwards)

# Mather



- Cotton Mather was among the most influential Puritan writers and thinkers.
- Probably the most influential of his numerous works was *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), composed of seven books, many of which depict biographical and historical narratives. Later American writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Elizabeth Drew Stoddard and Harriet Beecher Stowe would turn to these volumes in describing the cultural significance of New England for later, post-Revolution readers.

# The Reality of the Devil

- Mather drew heavily on Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus: or, Full and plain evidence concerning witches and apparitions. In two parts. The first treating of their possibility. The second of their real existence* (1681) in his writings on the occult and witchcraft. Glanvill's book affirmed the existence of witches with malign supernatural powers, and attacked scepticism concerning their abilities as impiety or infidelity. Glanvill likened sceptics to the Sadducees, members of a Jewish sect from around the time of Jesus who were said to have denied the immortality of the soul. In short, to disbelieve in the powers of the Devil was akin to disbelieving in God.

# Mather and the Salem Witch Trials

- Many historians are sharply critical of Mather, asserting that he caused the trials because of his 1688 publication *Remarkable Providences*, and attempted to revive them with *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692) (see for example Richard H. Werking (1972). *Reformation is our only preservation: Cotton Mather and Salem Witchcraft* (1972).
- Others portray his influence as one of restraint and moderation upon the proceeding, pointing to his position on the admissibility of “spectral evidence.”

# Spectral...

- Mathers, along with other Puritan thinkers of his time, believed in the Devil's power to assume the shape of any person. However, there was an ongoing theological debate concerning the volition of the person so employed; some maintained that the Devil could only assume someone's form with their consent, others, that his powers were not dependent upon permission.

# ...Evidence?

- The former tended to emphasize the sufficiency of “spectral evidence” during the trials; that is, the testimony that the Devil had appeared in someone’s form should be sufficient grounds for their conviction.
- Others, including Cotton Mather, argued that, while such apparitions were certainly “real,” they were not of themselves sufficient evidence for a conviction.
- Thus, many historians view Mather as having a restraining influence upon the trials.

# The Return

- On June 15, 1692, twelve local ministers including Increase Mather, Samuel Willard, and Cotton Mather submitted *The Return of several Ministers to the Governor and Council in Boston*, cautioning the authorities not to rely entirely on the use of spectral evidence:
- "Presumptions whereupon persons may be Committed, and much more, Convictions whereupon persons may be Condemned as Guilty of Witchcrafts, ought certainly to be more considerable, than barely the Accused Persons being Represented by a Spectre unto the Afflicted"

# Jonathan Edwards



- Considered by many historians to be the most original and influential theologian of 18<sup>th</sup> century America, Edwards was at the centre of the religious movement known as “the Great Awakening.”

# Edwards's Theology

- Much of Edwards' work circulates around four linked philosophical claims:
- 1) The absolute sovereignty of God and the total dependence of humanity and nature upon God.
- 2) The beauty of God's holiness; the basis of moral action is not in human rationality but in the emotional (ie, the soul's) desire for the beauty of virtue and grace.
- 3) The pre-determined nature of all events and human actions in accordance with God's will; Edwards married Calvinist predestination to Newtonian mechanical causation in his picture of the world. Just as the world is entirely dependent on God's continued creation of it, so our wills are entirely dependent on the causes that God has predestined for them.
- 4) That physical objects are only collections of sensible "ideas" while human minds are mere concatenations of "thoughts" or "perceptions;" God, "the sum of all being," is in a sense the only real being.

# 2450 lecture 4:

Drawing Toward the Declaration:  
Franklin, the Adams, Crevecoeur,  
Paine

# Franklin



- Franklin is widely known as one of the foremost shapers of American values and character. He was an advocate of thrift, hard work, education, community spirit, self-governing institutions, and opposition to authoritarianism, whether political or religious. He is also credited with the scientific and rationalist values of the Enlightenment.

"In Franklin could be merged the virtues of Puritanism without its defects, the illumination of the Enlightenment without its heat."  
Henry Steele Commager

# Poor Richard

- In 1733 Franklin began to publish Poor Richard's Almanac, writing from the point of view of a poor, but wise, character named "Richard Saunders, Philomath." "Richard" was a wellspring of advice, parables, and homilies. This series was one of the greatest best-sellers of its day, and is a fascinating example of the power of literary, quasi-autobiographical self-fashioning; it contributed, as much as did Franklin's later political persona, to the international perception of American character.
- From Richard's introduction to his readers:  
Courteous Reader, I might in this place attempt to gain thy favour by declaring that I write almanacks with no other view than the public good; but in this I should not be sincere, and men are nowadays too wise to be deceived by pretenses how specious soever. The plain truth of the matter is, I am excessive poor, and my wife, good woman, is, I tell, her excessive proud. She cannot bear, she says, to sit spinning in her shift of tow while I do nothing but gaze at the stars, and she has threatened to burn all my books and rattling-traps (as she calls my instruments) if I do not make some profitable use of them for the good of my family.

# *Father Abraham's Sermon, or The Way To Wealth*

- In 1757 Franklin left for London, where he would represent Pennsylvania to the British government. He retired Richard Saunders, but by way of a parting gift to readers, introduced a new character into the Poor Richard story, a white-haired old fellow who had been reading the almanac faithfully all these years and had taken in its many words of wisdom and advice. Father Abraham was asked what he thought of the modern world and he responded with a string of Poor Richard's pearls. He said:

We may make these times better if we bestir ourselves....*Industry need not wish*, as Poor Richard says, and *he that lives upon hope will die fasting. There are no gains without pains*....And as Poor Richard likewise observes, *he that hath a trade hath an estate*, and *he that hath a calling hath an office of profit and honour*....If we are industrious we shall not starve, for, as Poor Richard says, *at the working man's house hunger looks in, but dares not enter*. Nor will the bailiff and the constable enter, for *industry pays debts, while despair increaseth them*.

- Thus Franklin gave a second life (a “best of” album, if you will) to many of his Poor Richard sermons which made them even more widely known and commercially successful.

# 13 virtues

- Franklin sought to cultivate his character by a plan of thirteen virtues, which he developed at age 20 (in 1726) and continued to practice in some form for the rest of his life. His autobiography lists his thirteen virtues as:
- "TEMPERANCE. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation."
- "SILENCE. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation."
- "ORDER. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time."
- "RESOLUTION. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve."
- "FRUGALITY. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing."
- "INDUSTRY. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions."
- "SINCERITY. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly."
- "JUSTICE. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty."
- "MODERATION. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve."
- "CLEANLINESS. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation."
- "TRANQUILLITY. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable."
- "CHASTITY. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation."
- "HUMILITY. Imitate Jesus and Socrates."

# Epitaph?

- Franklin penned one of the most famous epitaphs in American history:
- The Body of  
B. Franklin,  
Printer;  
Like the Cover of an old Book,  
Its contents torn out,  
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,  
Lies here, Food for Worms,  
But the Work shall not be wholly lost:  
For it will, as he believed, appear once more,  
In a new & more perfect Edition,  
Corrected and amended  
By the Author.
- Franklin was 22 when he wrote these words, a testament to his wit; however, when the time came, he opted instead for simply his name and the date of his death, a testament to his cultivation of a rustic humility.

# John and Abigail Adams



- There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.

John Adams, notes for a speech at Braintree (1772)

- It is not in the still calm of life, or in the repose of pacific station that great characters are formed.... Great necessities call out great virtues.” Abigail Adams letter to John Quincy Adams (1780)

# Crevecoeur



- By the eighteenth century many Americans were fairly content that they had successfully transformed the wilderness into an agricultural garden where the human values so touted by Jefferson, the agrarian philosopher, would flourish.
- But a Frenchman, Michel-Guillame-Jean de Crèvecoeur, who transformed himself into Hector St. John as part of his quest to become an American farmer, showed in *Letters From an American Farmer* that those agrarian values, especially as they erupted into the internal conflicts of the American revolution, and the developing American identity were still deeply challenged by the forces of wilderness and not restricted to a relatively remote frontier. Wilderness still stood, especially for Crèvecoeur, not only as the physical embodiment of a profoundly disturbing existential reality that challenged civilized values, but as an internal chaos threatening one's moral and psychological identity.
- Anne M. Woodlief

# Thomas Paine



- Born in England, Paine’s “radical” visions of political equity and rationalism led him to numerous disputes with the English government. He met Franklin in London, and was aided by him in relocating to America, where the ideas he espoused in *Common Sense* (1776) and the series *The American Crisis* (1776-1783) were instrumental in leading many Americans to embrace the Revolution.