Problematizing Puritan Play

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to evaluate several of the most commonly used American introductory textbooks in the field of recreation and leisure studies with respect to their historical treatment of colonial recreation and the Puritans in the United States. Most of these texts contain numerous errors with respect to both recreation legislation and recreation practice, effectively perpetuating an ahistorical image of the dour Puritan. The dour Puritan, it is suggested, functions as a "myth"—i.e., an essentialized narrative that castigates the story's characters in order to serve the storyteller's present purposes. The Puritans thus function as a proxy for those who continue to advocate instrumental or oppositional recreation ethics, and as a foil to those authors advocating a more expressivist ethic. Finally, I suggest that this reductivist myth is not only a disservice to our historical understanding of the past, but also to the complexities and nuances of recreation ethics more generally.

Keywords. Puritans, textbooks, history, theology, historiography

Résumé. Le but de cette étude était d'évaluer plusieurs manuels de loisir utilisé au niveau d'introduction dans plusieurs universités américaines. Plus spécifiquement nous avons examiné l'interprétation puritaine du loisir. La plupart de ces textes perpétuent effectivement une image traditionnelle du puritain sévère qui s'oppose aux loisirs, ces images et descriptions puritaines contiennent de nombreuses erreurs en ce qui concerne la perception puritaine du loisir. Dans ce contexte, le puritain sévère, on suggère, fonctionne comme « mythe ». Le Puritanism fonctionne ainsi comme préposée pour ceux qui continuent à préconiser l'éthique instrumentale ou oppositionnelle de loisir. En conclusion, je propose que ce mythe de l'opposition aux loisirs par les puritains ne reconnait pas les faits historiques et néglige le contexte sociohistorique.

Mots-clés. Puritains, manuels, histoire, théologie, historiographie

In a review of commonly used textbooks in the field of recreation and leisure studies with respect to their treatment of anthropology, Chick (1999) finds "numerous errors of fact and interpretation" (p. 19). While

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two of the texts were generally accurate, three of them reflected "Western ethnocentric, especially progressivist, biases," and one of them was downright "cartoonish" (p. 29). "What is true for text presentations of anthropological facts and issues," he concludes, "may well also be true for presentations of facts and issues from psychology, sociology, history, economics, and other fields.... Whether they are valid for other disciplinary areas is now a question that should be addressed" (p. 32). The purpose of this study, following Chick, is similarly to evaluate introductory American recreation and leisure texts with respect to their historical treatment of colonial recreation and the Puritans in the United States. Originally a term of derision, "Puritan" refers to those persons who sought to further reform or "purify"worship and doctrine in the church, especially the Church of England, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Puritanism in general, and Puritan attitudes toward recreation and leisure in particular, have been long contested (Dawson, 1984; Hall, 1968). In the early nineteenth century, many regarded the Puritans as proto-liberal democrats who successfully reconciled religion and republicanism. During the culture wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the image of the devout Puritan gave way to an image of the Puritan as killjoy. Mencken's quip that Puritanism is "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy" (quoted in Perry, 1944, p. 239) was only the pithiest of many such remarks. Once credited with establishing democracy and religious freedom in the New World, the Puritans came to be blamed not only for witch trials but also for Victorian prudery, Prohibition, McCarthyism, and anti-intellectual fundamentalism. Already in 1906, an *Atlantic* article suggested "Probably no more difficult task is imposed upon the historical imagination than that of representing the Puritan mind in the seventeenth century without caricature or repugnance" (quoted in Dawson, p. 91). Then, in the middle of the twentieth century, the Puritans' fate changed again, this time at the hands of professional historians. Morison (1936/1956; 1992) described the Puritans as maintaining taverns rather than prohibiting alcohol; Miller (1939/1953) depicted Puritans as social and happy, enjoying food, sex, and a variety of relaxing pastimes; and Morgan (1944/1966) more specifically emphasized that Puritans were not opposed to play. In short, the Morison-Miller-Morgan school renewed the image of the happy Puritan, raising the question as to whether the Puritans were themselves puritanical (Daniels, 1995). Although these revisionists are now themselves being revised, the image of the dour Puritan has persisted in the

popular consciousness, representing a divergence between academic and popular literature.

The juxtaposition of the dour Puritan and the happy Puritan raises both substantive and methodological issues. Substantively, the contradiction of the images raises the question as to which image is more "correct"—i.e., which has a more accurate correspondence to Puritan reality. Indeed, one image may be more accurate than the other. But it is also possible that both images capture different aspects of a more complex Puritan reality without doing justice to the fullness of that complexity. How we negotiate between these images, accepting or rejecting each in varying degrees, is at least in part a methodological question. Responsible historiography requires asking how we know what we think we know about history, which entails, among other things, interrogating our sources, and considering the normative assumptions we bring to the material we study.

This juxtaposition also raises difficult questions for non-specialists, including the authors of ambitiously broad introductory textbooks. Textbook authors are not responsible for generating new knowledge with primary sources, but only for synthesizing what already has been made available by specialists—in this case, colonial and leisure historians. While small errors in textbooks are understandable, textbook authors do have a responsibility to provide information that is generally accurate and up to date, even if not comprehensive. Introductory textbooks, after all, are very influential, and in some cases may be the only information students ever encounter on a particular topic.

The rationale for focusing on the Puritans is several-fold. First, because history plays a large role in these texts, the focus is necessarily narrow—i.e., on one aspect of history rather than on the texts' uses of history more generally. Second, the Puritans are commonly considered to have been very influential in contributing to American attitudes toward recreation and leisure (and, for this reason, all of the texts address Puritanism at least in some measure). Third, there is recent research on Puritan play that can help shed light on and bring clarity to some of these issues.

The Puritans According to Leisure Texts

The texts considered in this paper include Cordes and Ibrahim's *Applications in Recreation and Leisure* (1999); Edginton, DeGraaf, Dieser, and Edginton's *Leisure and Life Satisfaction* (2006); Godbey's *Leisure in Your Life: An Exploration* (2003); Kelly's *Leisure* (1996); Kraus' *Leisure*

in a Changing America: Multicultural Perspectives (2001); *Kraus' Recreation and Leisure in Modern Society* (McLean, Hurd, & Rogers, 2005); Russell's *Pastimes: The Context of Contemporary Leisure* (2005); and Shivers and deLisle's *The Story of Leisure: Context, Concepts, and Current Controversy* (1997).

These texts are not entirely consistent in their portrayal of the Puritans. Some authors (e.g., Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999, p. 30; Kelly, 1996, p. 140) describe the Puritans as ascetics, while Godbey (2003) writes "the Puritan Protestants who came to America from England had little of the fatalism and otherworldly asceticism that had been associated with Roman Catholicism since medieval times" (p. 112). Regarding the relationship between the New England and southern colonies, Kraus (McLean et al., 2005) emphasizes their similarity—"the southern colonies had similar restrictions during the early years of settlement" (p. 64)—while Shivers and deLisle (1997) describe dissimilarity—"Two essentially different settlements, guided by opposite views of life and religion" (p. 77). And whereas some texts depict many colonial New Englanders rebelliously enjoying their drink and recreation despite various legal and moral restrictions, Shivers and deLisle go even farther: "In a society where survival pressed the inhabitants daily, the people readily accepted legislation suppressing activities of a recreational nature" (p. 78).

These differences notwithstanding, the picture of the Puritans that comes through these texts in varying degrees, with one notable exception, is that of the dour Puritan. This is usually accomplished not by discussions of actual recreational practice—indeed, some texts hardly mention recreational practice at all—but rather by reference to various legal restrictions placed on recreation in the colonies. Kraus (McLean et al., 2005) writes "Puritan magistrates attempted to maintain curbs on amusements long after the practical reasons for such prohibitions had disappeared" (p. 64)—he mentions ordinances against drunkenness, idleness, gambling, dancing, drama, nonreligious music, Sunday recreation, and the celebration of Christmas and Easter. According to earlier editions of this text (e.g., Kraus, 1990), "The theater was completely prohibited in several colonies during the seventeenth century. A number of New England colonies banned dice, cards, quoits, bowls, ninepins, and similar pastimes" (p. 139). In his other text, Kraus (1994) writes "throughout the New England colonies, dice, cards, bowling, and other 'unlawful' games were banned, as were 'unprofitable fowlers' and 'tobacko takers,' along with singing and dancing, theatrical entertainment, and similar pursuits" (p. 36). Russell (2005), citing Kraus, also refers to ordinances banning "drama, nonreligious music, card playing, bowling, and shuffleboard" (p. 291). According to Kelly (1996),

> The theater and other such entertainments were banned along with an assortment of games such as dice, cards, and gambling. In Connecticut the ban included bowls, ninepins, and shuffleboard as well as the wasting of time in the public smoking of tobacco. (p. 143)

Cordes and Ibrahim (1999) write that the Puritans "established and enforced stringent prohibitions against what they viewed as ungodly amusements such as cards, dice, dancing, dramatic performances, and other leisure activities" (p. 123). Godbey (2003), without mentioning any specific ordinances, simply states "The Puritans who settled in America were opposed to most forms of recreation" (p. 171). Again, Shivers and deLisle (1997) go further still: "in New England, almost all forms of recreational experience were prohibited by law, partly because of their leisure base and decidedly because they were enjoyable" (pp. 77–78).

Among the texts that qualify the emphasis on anti-recreational legislation with information on the colonial New Englanders' actual recreational practices, some describe recreational practice as a form of resistance or rebellion exercised against Puritan ideals. "It would be incorrect," Godbey (2003) writes, "to assume that the Puritans were successful in halting recreation and leisure activity" (p. 171). Correctly noting that many New England colonists were not Puritans, he mentions that taverns sprang up among those unsympathetic to Puritanism. In a similar vein, Kraus (McLean et al., 2005) writes "despite these restrictions, many forms of play continued" (p. 64); he mentions football, card-playing, drinking, and "bundling" (sometimes including premarital sexual activity) as activities that resisted stated norms. According to Shivers and deLisle (1997), various recreational practices emerged over time among the wealthy and new immigrants "despite denunciations from the pulpit" and "despite being censured by both the Congregational and Calvinist churches" (pp. 78–79).

Other authors discuss colonial recreational practices without implying that recreation was altogether discontinuous with Puritanism. Kelly (1996), for example, writes that only "some kinds of activity were generally condemned," and "all this regulation did not mean that no pleasure was to be found" (p. 143). He notes that colonists' leisure included eating, drinking, hunting, fishing, courting, and attending fairs and militia gatherings. Russell (2005) similarly states "In spite of religious

dictates and the hard work to be done, the early European colonists did have some fun" (p. 291). Without distinguishing Puritans or even New Englanders from colonists more generally, she notes that colonists enjoyed football and hunting, as well as activities that mixed recreation with work such as barn raisings and quilting bees. Taverns were places not only for drinking but also for dancing, cockfighting, and places "where the British love of games and sports was carried on" (p. 291).

The text by Edginton et al. (2006) stands alone in acknowledging that the depiction of Puritans as anti-recreation is contested territory. "One view of the Puritans was that they were legalistic and did not permit leisure" (p. 81), the authors write, and they cite a Massachusetts Bay colony law against idling as evidence for this view. The authors note "this view of the Puritans is widely held" (p. 82), but also that there is an alternative view that the Puritans in their work ethic strove for balance and made ample accommodation for leisure. As evidence for this view, they list a number of recreational practices enjoyed by the Puritans that were never outlawed, including "fishing, hunting, bowling, reading, music, swimming, skating, and archery."

The Puritans According to the Colonial Historians

Although many of the historians most interested in recreation and leisure have focused on the social, cultural, and economic transformations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians also have generated a more richly textured understanding of colonial New England, including Puritan recreation (e.g., Daniels, 1995; Struna, 1977, 1996; H.-P. Wagner, 1979). Although these specialists render problematic both the image of the dour Puritan and that of the happy Puritan, all of them emphasize the need for a correction to the popular image of the Puritans as opposed to all forms of recreation.

Colonial recreation and leisure included reading, socializing, singing, dancing, courting, archery, shooting, hunting, fishing, fowling, football, vaulting, wrestling, martial competitions, nine-pins, bowling, tennis, horse-racing, gambling, billiards, backgammon, card games such as whist and other games of chance, eating, and a lot of drinking at most every social occasion—including but not limited to weddings, funerals, militia training days, and even ministers' ordinations. According to Mary Beth Norton (quoted in O'Keefe, 2002), a colonial historian and author of a major work on the Salem Witchcraft Crisis,

> There's now a complete consensus that the popular image of the Puritans is almost totally inaccurate....The Puritans were typical people of their time in that they enjoyed the pleasures of the 17th century. They liked to drink. They liked to sit and talk. They liked to eat well when they had the food to eat. They enjoyed sex. They also liked to play games, like an early version of shuffleboard. (para. 5,6)

How can we square all of this with the picture of the Puritans as opposed to recreation? Although the Puritans were not opposed to recreation in general, they did restrict some forms of recreation. Because much of the controversy over "Puritan recreation" regards legislative history, let us pursue the question of what was outlawed when and where.

Clergy and magistrates in colonial New England were concerned primarily not about recreation but about idleness and Sabbath-breaking, as evidenced by legislation passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1633 and 1635 respectively. (The other colonies tended to follow Massachusetts in these among other matters.) Law and custom restricted all kinds of activities on the Sabbath, including physical recreation, unnecessary travelling, and marital intercourse. Penalties for crimes committed on the Sabbath were especially harsh. Regarding recreation in general, however, there was virtually no legislation during the early decades of settlement in New England. In fact, the colonies of "Puritan New England" actually passed *less* legislation restricting recreation during this time than the colonies of Virginia and Maryland. "Unlike the situation in the Chesapeake," Struna (1996) writes,

> neither laws nor brutal masters can account for the infrequency or irregularity of recreations in Massachusetts. Through 1645 the colonial assembly, the General Court, directed only one piece of legislation against recreational practices, an order for all householders to get rid of cards and other gaming devices in 1631, and owners and employers apparently did not forcibly coerce servants and wage laborers into unrelenting work. (p. 59)

Clebsch (1968) agrees that during the colonial era "legislation concerning Virginians' religion reveals even keener interest in morality than do New England laws" (p. 145).

Only later, with the reemergence of Old World style recreations accompanying a measure of economic security in the 1650s and 1660s, did the northern colonies pass legislation restricting recreation. In the years around 1650, all five New England colonies passed laws against "gaming" (i.e., gambling) in "ordinaries" (i.e., taverns). Included in such legislation were the games that commonly served as occasions for gambling, such as shuffleboard, bowling, cards, dice, and other games

of chance. In Plymouth Colony alone gambling and games of chance were also banned in private. Regarding dancing and drinking, the colonies similarly adopted laws that restricted them in public, but did not outlaw them altogether. The General Court of Massachusetts, for example, "was not willing to go all the way and forbid dancing in Massachusetts. As a matter of fact, the laws of New England never disallowed dancing in private houses" (H.-P. Wagner, 1979, p. 155). In the 1670s and 1680s Plymouth Colony and the Essex County Court of Massachusetts banned horse racing, with an emphasis on racing on "the Lord's Day" and within proximity of the meeting house. Contrary to many of the textbooks under review, there were no laws against theatrical performances (public disapproval was sufficient) until 1762 (Rhode Island) and 1767 (Massachusetts)—after what is commonly considered the Puritan era. Blood sports were similarly discouraged by popular opinion, not by law. Also untouched by legislation were other forms of "legitimate" recreation, such as fishing and hunting. It should also be noted that recreation-related legislation increased during the late seventeenth century not only in New England but also in (largely Quaker) Pennsylvania (Jable, 1974).

Regarding the actual practice of recreation, the colonists, as some of the textbooks correctly note, did not always follow pulpit pronouncements. Neither, however, is the social history of colonial leisure a simple story of resistance against an oppressive regime. Most of these texts are typically cursory in their failure to acknowledge the diversity of colonial New England. According to one specialist, "Americans have never since been as culturally pluralistic as they were in the seventeenth century" (Holifield, 1989, p. 6).[1] Indeed, there were five different colonies and different kinds of communities—urban, rural, and frontier—within each of them, not to mention differences within each of those communities. There existed distinctions among clergy, a larger committed core of believers, and so-called "horse-shed Christians" (who talked about their horses, not theology, after services), as well as distinctions within each group. Commonly glossed over in discussions of "Puritan New England" is that church membership was voluntary, and a majority of colonial New Englanders were not members of a church. Moreover, New England clergy were not agents of the state, and so lacked the formal power of magistrates that is sometimes ascribed to them. The stridency of Puritan sermons is best understood in light of this formal disempowerment, as magistrates were often unwilling to legislate according to clerical preference. For most people, then, religious practice consisted

neither of blind obedience nor of blatant rebellion, but rather "a subtle process of *selection* between choices that the clergy helped articulate" (Hall, 1989, p. 11). These realities necessarily complexify any simplistic generalizations about Puritans and leisure. Indeed, no less a historian than David Hall sometimes avoids the term "Puritan" altogether for its lack of precision (p. 17).

According to recent research in the field of Puritan studies, the dour Puritan and the happy Puritan "are equally ahistorical and fail to personify the complexity of Puritan attitudes toward leisure and recreation" (Daniels, 1995, p. xii) because they both "presuppose a more or less monolithic New England Puritanism with certain tenets that everybody adhered to" (H.-P. Wagner, 1979, p. 19). Unfortunately, most of the texts under consideration not only embrace the dour Puritan at the expense of diversity and subtlety, but also contain gross errors of fact. For example, the mention of "bans" against recreational activities such as cards, shuffleboard, gambling, and theater, fails to distinguish between activities that were illegal and harshly punished (e.g., idling), illegal but generally ignored (e.g., gambling), legally restricted but not prohibited (e.g., drinking and dancing), denounced but not illegalized (e.g., theater), or restricted because of "ancillary evils" (e.g., cards, shuffleboard, and ball sports). Claims that "The Puritans who settled in America were opposed to most forms of recreation" (Godbey, 2003, p. 171), or that "almost all forms of recreational experience were prohibited by law" (Shivers & deLisle, 1997, p. 77) are wildly inaccurate.

Explaining Puritan Play

Although historians of the colonial era reject the caricature of the Puritan as killjoy, they also acknowledge that work was privileged over against recreation and leisure in colonial New England. Why? How shall the data regarding colonial and Puritan recreation and leisure most helpfully be interpreted?

There are several contextual matters—including environmental, economic, political, and theological—that contributed to Puritan views on recreation and leisure. First, and most obviously, the physical environment of the colonies was harsh and demanded long, hard work just for survival. Especially in the early years of settlement, New Englanders "lacked two of the props that underlay recreational practices in their homeland, a critical mass of material goods and upper-rank patrons" (Struna, 1996, p. 61). Moreover, wages were high—in some cases double what they had been in Britain. By making labour so remunerative,

the economy thus "operated to undermine or at least to delay the gratification of whatever interests workers may have had in recreations" (p. 65).

Second, "Puritan New England" must be understood in relation to England. With respect to how they recreated, but also to how they restricted recreation, Puritan New Englanders were acting largely as Elizabethans (Hall, 1989, pp. 11, 210; H.-P. Wagner, 1979, pp. 29–30). Puritan taste for various leisure pursuits, such as hunting and fishing, drinking, and (later) card playing, were imports. But restrictions on recreation were also imported, and in most cases not distinctively Puritan. In an early argument against the myth of the dour Puritan, Scholes (1934) noted "The English Puritans' attitude to recreation in general was exactly the same as that expressed in the long-popular *Whole Duty of Man*," (p. 132) an Anglican work stating that recreations must be lawful, moderate, and not a diversion from necessary employment. British monarchs, moreover, sometimes punished those who disobeyed class-based hunting restrictions with castration, dismemberment, and even death. Royal decrees also prohibited the lower classes from playing ball sports, as they were believed to promote indolence. This inheritance of Puritan views from Anglicans and Elizabethans is true not only of attitudes toward recreation but also of attitudes toward idleness (A. Wagner, 1985). To the extent that Puritans were more restrictive about recreation, even these attitudes are best understood as a reaction against the Anglican Church and the Crown. For example, the Puritans found offensive the violence of "bloodsports," including bearbaiting, cockfighting, and boxing. The most distinctively Puritan attitude toward recreation clearly concerned recreation on Sunday, which Puritans understood to be the Christian Sabbath. Even here, Puritan Sabbatarianism was intensified by the Anglican *Book of Sports* published in 1618, which advocated recreation on the Sabbath, and which was clearly an attack on Puritan practice. "This royal support identified sports in the Puritan mind with both the Anglican apostasy and overweening political power" (Daniels, 1995, p. 166).

It should also be noted that Puritan departure from Catholic and Anglican practice sometimes moved in the opposite direction—i.e., *toward*, rather than away from, festivity and indulgence. The Catholic Thomas More, noting that Puritans abolished not only saints days but also Lenten fast days, described English Puritans as those who "eat fast and drink fast and lust fast" (quoted in Ryken, 1995, p. 113). Quaker founder George Fox (1694/2007, p. 151) similarly criticized Puritans for their

sports, feasts, games, plays, shows, pastimes, and ornate and costly apparel. C.S. Lewis (1969), whose expertise was in sixteenth-century literature, concluded

> the quarrel between the Puritans and the Papists was not primarily a quarrel between rigorism and indulgence, and that, in so far as it was, the rigorism was on the Roman side. On many questions, and specially in their view of the marriage bed, the Puritans were the indulgent party....The idea that a Puritan was a repressed and repressive person would have astonished Sir Thomas More and Luther about equally. (pp. 116–117)

Perhaps the most obvious evidence that the English Puritans were not opposed to recreation is the 1647 ordinance, passed by the Puritan or "Long" Parliament, requiring masters to give servants the second Tuesday of every month off from work solely for the purpose of recreation. There is some evidence that the tradition of Tuesday recreation was imported to Massachusetts (Struna, 1996, p. 87).

A third factor contributing to the Puritans' view of leisure was their theology. The degree to which Calvinism, with its emphasis on the doctrines of original sin and predestination, contributed to the Puritan anxiety about leisure is not easily determined. There is little question that the Reformation doctrine of calling privileged work over leisure. Nevertheless, current scholarship suggests that Puritan attitudes toward recreation were more pragmatic than ideological.

Take, for example, sports and games. Although almost all Puritans detested sports, by "sport" they meant only ball games and bloody contests, not fishing, hunting, and other activities now considered sport. According to Daniels (1995), whose work on this topic is especially helpful, "Puritan rhetoric seemed to condemn all sport, though in fact it did not" (p. 166). Noting seven reasons that served as their basis for opposition to sport, Daniels concludes that Puritans "based their contempt for sport (as they defined it) on sociological, humanitarian, and historical grounds as well as their belief that it failed their basic test for all recreations of being moderate and useful" (p. 166). Blood sports were opposed because they were violent, and opposition to ball sports "derived not from the intrinsic activity of playing with a ball itself, but from what were regarded as the inevitable ancillary evils that accompanied ball playing and from the historical evils associated with it in England" (p. 167). Like ball sports, cardplaying was a source of concern because of its "ancillary evil," gambling (Daniels, pp. 176–183). Most Puritans thus made distinctions between games like piquet, which was associated

with gambling, and games like whist, which "met all the criteria for useful recreation"—it was quiet, social, required skill, and did not lend itself to gambling. "To a degree that would surprise most casual students of Puritanism," Daniels writes, "cardplaying in New England became a commonplace, respectable activity in the early eighteenth century" (p. 178). Gambling, the addictions to which were well known from its sweep through Restoration England, was outlawed, but was neither a major concern nor harshly punished. Daniels describes it as presenting "only minor problems" (p. 177), and as "a relatively minor weakness in which many people indulged [that] became a scourge only in association with more serious offenses such as wasting time, losing large sums of money, or neglecting duty" (p. 176).

Scholes' (1934) conclusion—that "Puritan and High Anglican were at one on this subject: *there was, in fact, no special Puritan attitude to recreation*" (p. 313)—is very nearly correct. Daniels (1995), putting a finer point on the matter, concludes that Puritans evaluated sports and games "by historical and empirical criteria, not by scriptural or theological argument....Ideological considerations played a small role in deciding which sports and games to accept and which to reject" (p. 183). Observing that most recreation-related legislation in New England was not passed until the third quarter of the seventeenth century, Struna (1996, pp. 68–69) similarly concludes that the legislation was more pragmatic than principled—i.e., it was designed to protect lives and property, to minimize drunkenness, and to protect and facilitate proper preparation for the Sabbath. In any case, Puritan theology did not operate independently of economics and other factors, and Puritan anxiety over leisure, whatever its source, inevitably found its expression in theological language.

By contrast, most of the leisure texts provide explanations that are unnecessarily reductivist, attributing Puritan recreation primarily to Puritan distinctives, especially ideology.[2] Although most of the textbooks acknowledge the contribution of harsh physical circumstances to the Puritans' world view, most also single out ideology—i.e., theology—as the primary causal factor in Puritan attitudes toward leisure. Kraus (McLean et al., 2005) writes "the most important hindrance to the development of recreation was the religious attitude" (p. 63). Kelly (1996) writes "restrictions on merriment seem to have been more a matter of religious rigor than community need" (p. 142). In his discussion of the Puritans' belief in original sin, Godbey (2003) writes "They believed that humans were not worthy of pleasure" (p. 171). According to Shivers and deLisle (1997), the New England colonies were "based on Calvinist theology" and therefore "denied the need for leisure and human enjoyment" (p. 77). Whether due to a more updated source base or a briefer treatment of the topic, the other texts are less wooden in their explanations. Russell (2005), for example, in her explanation of colonial recreation, more accurately notes "the religious heritage of the new settlers also played a role" (p. 291).

Resisting the temptation to suggest that the Puritans were some middling compromise between the dour and the happy Puritan, Daniels portrays Puritan attitudes toward play as complicated and conflicted—as characterized by "ambivalence." The interesting aspect of Puritan leisure, he argues, is not the tension between rhetoric and reality, but the tension contained within the ideals expressed in their preaching. Contrary to several of the textbooks at hand, Puritan preachers had little opposition to recreation in principle, and even stressed the need for it. As foreign as their standards may seem to modern sensibilities, it was precisely because of their desire to affirm recreation as good in principle that they took such pains to articulate criteria distinguishing "lawful" and "unlawful" recreation. In practice, however, their fears of idleness and sinfulness, not primarily of fun, led the Puritans to so severely qualify endorsements of leisure as to nearly negate principled affirmations. Recreation was supposed to serve a purpose, which is to say that their recreation ethic is best understood as instrumental, not oppositional—a subtle but important distinction.

Explaining Explanations: Puritan Killjoy as Myth

Most of these texts, then, have problems that are not only factual but also interpretive. Even where the facts are correct, the impression of the Puritans as being oppositional rather than instrumental in their views on recreation is misleading. Also misleading is the degree of attribution given to ideology in the determination of attitudes toward recreation and leisure relative to other contributing factors. What is interesting, however, is not just that there are problems of fact and interpretation, but that these problems take the shape of a pattern. To the extent that these texts give mistaken impressions, they do so with an almost singular voice. The present task is to explain this phenomenon, which entails turning attention from the consciousness of the Puritans to the consciousness of leisure scholars.

One possible explanation for the problems in these texts is an anachronistic understanding of leisure as the opposite of labour and

play as the opposite of work. Although such oppositional categories have some utility for studying industrial and post-industrial leisure, they are less applicable to pre-modern leisure in which the boundaries between labour and leisure were more fluid than fixed (e.g., Thomas, 1964). For the colonists, usefulness and enjoyment commingled in barn raisings, harvest festivals, corn-husking, and in contests such as hammer-throwing, now a popular "sport" divorced from its original context (Struna, 1996, pp. 67, 78–79; H.-P. Wagner, 1979, p. 33). It is difficult to determine the extent to which such misunderstandings may have influenced these texts. A few of the textbook authors acknowledge this pre-industrial mixing of labour and leisure (Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999, p. 31; Russell, 2005, p. 292), and the others can be expected to be familiar with the phenomenon. On the other hand, the tendency to define work and play oppositionally has become popular through influential theorists such as Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (1961).

A related explanation is linguistic. As mentioned, the word "sport" was used differently in the seventeenth century than it is today. So too with "recreation," which formerly was used more broadly to include intellectual recreation, non-physical games, and social gatherings (H.-P. Wagner, 1979, pp. 6, 13–16, 32–47). It is likely that these texts, like those of earlier sport historians, are "project[ing] terms and ideas into an age in which they were either not known or denoted something different from the contemporaneous meaning" (H.-P. Wagner, p. 14). Similarly, whereas Puritans commonly employed the term "unlawful" to mean "illegitimate" (i.e., unlawful with respect to natural law), one wonders if some scholars are not mistaking the term to signify the more specific meaning of "illegal" (i.e., unlawful with respect to civil law).

Other possible explanations for some of the problems in these texts have to do with their sources. First, most authors appear to take sources such as laws and sermons at face value, thereby discounting not only the significance of social historians' contribution to reconstructing everyday life, but also the significance of the forms, traditions, and ideological context in which various sources were generated. The jeremiad, to take just one example, was a literary genre that employed castigation and (in America) exultation not as an end, but as a means toward the end of establishing a national narrative or civil religion (Bercovitch, 1978). The texts communicate little to no understanding that seventeenth century sermons represented an idealized faith that had a complicated correspondence to the everyday life of churchgoers (Hall, 1989, pp. 138–139), or that jeremiads often unintentionally reinforced rather than opposed the tide of change "by reducing social conflicts to questions of individual morality" (Lears, 1981, p. 6).

Second, though textbooks are derivative by definition, a look at the citations in the chapters dealing with the colonial era reveals that most of these texts are woefully out of date. The clearest exceptions are Edginton et al. (2006), and Russell (2005), in which the majority of citations are within the last 20 years. Among the most reprinted texts (Godbey, 2003; McLean et al., 2005), by contrast, the majority of the citations are over 30 years old. Six of the eight sources cited by Kelly (1996) were over 30 years old at the time the text was published. In Shivers and deLisle (1997), the *only* reference among 13 works cited that was less than 20 years old at the time of publication is to another book by Shivers. A majority of these texts rely upon Dulles' *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play* (1940/1965), which is now over half a century old. Most also cite other non-historians in the field of recreation and leisure studies for their historical claims. Even allowing for the derivative nature of textbooks, most of these texts are not even close to the current state of scholarship. As Chick (1999) puts it,

> It is wise to be suspicious when text authors fail to cite recent literature, especially when they are not themselves experts on the topic at hand. Similarly, there is reason for concern when authors ignore primary sources but either cite only themselves or other authors from their field when they are addressing topics from other fields. (p. 31)

Third, the citations are not merely out of date but also selective. If the problem were merely that these texts are 30 years out of date, then we might expect them to be stuck in the Morison-Miller-Morgan school of the happy Puritan. Strangely, not one of these texts even cites the work of Morison, Miller, or Morgan; the happy Puritan makes no appearance in any of them. Whatever accounts for this collective failure, the greater curiosity is that only one of these texts even acknowledges that historians have disagreed about Puritanism or Puritan recreation at all. That these authors do not portray the Puritans with the subtlety and nuance of colonial historians is readily understandable. That the dour Puritan dominates these texts to the exclusion of the happy Puritan is not.

In order to explain the persistence of the dour Puritan, it is helpful to distinguish between the past as history and the past as myth. Although we tend to employ psychologized or other noncognitivist explanations in accounting for the beliefs and behaviour of those who lived in the past, we rarely apply the same standard to our contemporaries, much less to

ourselves (Novick, 1988, p. 12). One consequence of this double standard is that we tend to underestimate the extent to which seemingly objective explanations are entangled with various emotional and other appeals. Whereas historians seek to construct "as accurate and truthful an understanding of the past as possible," mythologizers do the reverse—they draw on their understanding of the past "to serve the political, ideological, rhetorical, and/or emotional needs of the present" (Cohen, 1997, p. 213). This distinction is less clear in practice, not only because many mythologizers often attempt to represent the past accurately, but also because the historian's pursuit of truth "tends to be highly relative." History is therefore the pursuit of truth that ends in partial truth inevitably if unintentionally shaded by presentist assumptions, and myth is the conscious use of the past for present purposes that usually, though not always, attempts to be truthful to the past. Distinct only as ideal types in theory, history and myth are overlapping categories in practice.

According to Cohen (1997), the process of mythologization has several characteristics. First, mythologizers often misrepresent their material through either a "shameless selectivity" (p. 283), or a failure to engage with sources critically. Second, mythologizers resist complexity, nuance, and ambiguity; "mythologizers generally operate with a one-dimensional view of the past, wrenching from the past single characteristics or traits or patterns that are then portrayed as the essence of past reality" (p. 214). Not too surprisingly, Cohen cites Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* as an especially effective example of mythmaking, not only because of the simplistic or essentialized portrayal of characters, but also because its purpose was to provide commentary on McCarthyism. Third, mythologizers treat the phenomenon at hand "as something to be praised or castigated rather than understood and explained" (p. 284). Myths thus become a source of energy in the present. Fourth, mythologizers only mythologize persons or events that have some current relevance or importance—"it is doubtful anyone would ever set out to mythologize price inflation in eighteenth-century China or agricultural change in northern Europe during the late feudal era" (p. 290). This connection to the past is sometimes made explicit, possibly with reference to the object of mythologization still being "alive." But whether implicit or explicit, the effect is that the past is invoked to serve as a proxy for the present—e.g., A was the direct cause of B; A is still widespread; we must do something about A or else B is bound to reappear (p. 229).

This framework of the past as myth helps explain the controversial nature of the Puritans' legacy in general, and their treatment in leisure

texts in particular. By way of qualification, the suggestion that the dour Puritan of leisure texts constitutes a myth, while a comment on the intentionality of the authors, is not necessarily a comment on *conscious* intentionality. Second, to reiterate Cohen (1997), while the dour-Puritan-as-myth thesis implies historical inaccuracy, its main point is that the myth serves a present purpose, not that the "myth" is "untrue." Third, none of these scholars (to my knowledge) are trained historians, and so their failure to engage the past as would professional historians is understandable. Finally, to be certain, not all of the abovementioned characteristics of myth are found in all of the leisure texts.

Nevertheless, the texts' treatment of Puritans fits Cohen's framework remarkably well. For example, the unsystematic source base and general absence of nuance of these texts has already been mentioned. Moreover, by emphasizing ideology as a primary cause of Puritan attitudes toward leisure, and glossing over some of the more impersonal social and political contextual factors that contributed to Puritan attitudes, leisure scholars have perpetuated the essentializing of "the Puritan mind" as if it were a singular phenomenon.

In addition, some authors are clearly not content with understanding and explaining Puritanism, but move very easily into evaluation and even editorial-style commentary. These normative assumptions are especially evident when the present relevance of Puritan attitudes is made explicit. According to Godbey (2003), for example, "The Puritans who settled in America were opposed to most forms of recreation, and even today not all of their attitudes have disappeared" (p. 171). In a comment on the Puritans' Sabbatarianism in the first edition of her text, Russell (1996) writes "Such attitudes about the purpose of Sunday can still be found in some parts of the United States today" (p. 261). Kelly (1996) remarks "the conflict between life-affirming and life-denying value systems is real and continuing" (p. 147). Such comments are not necessarily surprising; disciplinary histories—i.e., histories written by those within a discipline rather than by "disinterested" historians—tend to be characterized by presentist assumptions (Novick, 1988, p. 12).

Among the many reasons the Miller school's happy Puritan never penetrated these texts, one is almost certainly a present "need" for the Puritans to remain dour—i.e., for the dour Puritan to serve as a proxy for those who continue to advocate oppositional or instrumentalizing views of leisure. The "projection of the present meaning of 'Puritan' into the seventeenth century, i.e., Puritan in the sense of prohibitive and austere," thus results in "the originally historical term los[ing] its denotative

value and becom[ing] an emotional outlet for a prejudiced opinion" (H.-P. Wagner, 1979, p. 16). As the Puritans defined themselves in reaction to the English aristocracy, some leisure scholars effectively define themselves in contrast to the Puritans.

Conclusion

Among the eight texts reviewed, some (e.g., Shivers & deLisle, 1997) have more problems than others (e.g., Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999; Russell, 2005), but only one (Edginton et al., 2006) even acknowledges that Puritan historiography and colonial recreation is complex or contested territory. Generally speaking, then, the majority of them do a disservice to the past and arguably are miseducative.[3]

How important are these historical inaccuracies? After all, if colonial New Englanders so disapproved of theatre that they needed no law to ban it, if dice games were banned because of "ancillary evils" such as gambling rather than disapproval of dice games *per se*, are these not minor errors that could be easily corrected without substantively changing these texts' coverage of colonial recreation? Sport historian Allen Guttmann, for example, revised his views in light of recent research. Although Guttman (1978, p. 83) formerly dismissed Puritans as "bitterly hostile to sports," his later work (Guttmann, 1988, pp. 23–34) devotes an entire chapter to new research on Puritan recreation and rightly concludes that Puritan attitudes toward sport are best understood as instrumental, not oppositional. And whereas he formerly referred to Brailsford's judgment that "'The Puritans saw their mission to erase all sport and play from men's lives'" as "a meticulously researched piece of scholarship" (Guttmann, 1978, p. 83), he now holds

> There is no reason to accept the popular notion that Puritan ministers were sullenly opposed to any kind of play. The Puritans were not "puritanical" in the twentieth-century Menckenesque sense of the word, and Brailsford certainly did them an injustice when he wrote that they saw it as "their mission to erase all sport and play from men's lives." (Guttmann, 1988, p. 32)

That is an admirable, albeit unusual, example of intellectual humility.

Unfortunately, such revision is not likely to come quickly to the texts at hand, partly because such texts tend to be reprinted with minimal revision, but primarily because of the way Puritan opposition to recreation functions as myth. Butterfield (1931/1965) defined Whiggish historiography as "the tendency in many historians…to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present" (p. v). This tendency to impose a progressivist narrative on the history of recreation is apparent in several of these texts, according to which colonial settlement in 1630 represented the height of recreational intolerance, and after which Americans "gradually" learned how to play. "Gradually, many of these rules and prohibitions were relaxed" (Kraus, 1994, p. 36); over time "play became gradually tolerated in the colonies" (McLean et al., 2005, p. 65); "organized religion…gradually came to promote many forms of [recreation and leisure]," and "Gradually the church began to realize that it could not impose its will on an increasingly urban population without some accommodation to prevailing conditions" (Godbey, 2003, p. 172). As we have seen, however, recreation-related legislation did not gradually move in any one direction, but rather emerged and changed over time as new (and old) forms of recreation emerged and changed.[4] The problem with these texts' treatment of the past is thus not merely that they are ahistorical, or even that they fail to do justice to the complexity and ambivalence of Puritan thinking about leisure. The deeper problem is that they employ Puritan opposition to recreation as a means to the end of supporting progressivist assumptions about history and about recreation ethics.

To complicate matters just a little further, however, setting aside all present concerns to discover the Puritans "as they really were" is no solution to this problem for the simple reason that it is not possible in any ultimate sense. As even early critics (Becker, 1932) of Butterfield's thesis noted, there is no "view from nowhere"—no complete escape from presentist assumptions. Cohen (1997) goes so far as to say that myth is ultimately no less valid than history "within its sphere" (p. 295).[5] And indeed, one would expect recreation and leisure scholars to be advocates, and not just disinterested scribes. Most of us agree and are not embarrassed to admit, for example, that recreation practice ideally should embody principles such as stewardship, sustainability, and equal access. There is nothing wrong with holding or advocating such values. This, however, is precisely where we encounter the deeper ironies of these texts. To the extent that these texts castigate the Puritans for their approach to recreation in light of more modern and progressive sensibilities, they not only distort the past but also provide a simplistic account of recreation and leisure ethics more generally.

Take, for example, Kelly's (1996) caricature of a conflict between worldviews that value play and leisure as either a means to an end or an

end in itself. "The continuing conflict is between any set of values that stresses the serious against the pleasurable, the functional against the intrinsic, and the ascetic against the expressive" (p. 146). The binary oppositions continue, as he contrasts joy and sobriety, affirmation and denial, humanism and repression, Puritans and Renaissance humanists, and philosophies that begin with the individual and those that begin with "the institutions of society." With no sense of irony, he then writes that the real threat to freedom lies in "philosophies that divide life into dualisms of good and evil" (p. 147). And again, making explicit a progressivist or expressivist ideal echoed in other texts, Kelly concludes, "The basic question is simply: Can the expression and freedom of leisure be affirmed for its own sake or only as instrument? This issue is very much a part of our history" (p. 146). Needless to say, such binary oppositions are highly reductivist, for between the views of leisure as a means to an end, and leisure as an end in itself, there is some significant middle ground where use and enjoyment happily co-exist.

This interpenetrability of labour and leisure was almost certainly more common in Puritan times than it is today. Nevertheless, one of the ironies of judging Puritan times in light of modern sensibilities is that the Puritans are rendered as "other," and we fail to see continuities between the Puritans and ourselves where they legitimately exist. First, there is more continuity between the Puritans' instrumentalization of leisure and our own modern approaches to leisure than is commonly acknowledged. Although some authors advocate an expressivist or "autotelic" leisure ethic, most are also happy to note the benefits of recreation and leisure—e.g., to health and wellness. Most would be opposed to at least some forms of recreation, including the cruelty to animals that the Puritans opposed in blood sports. Most are also involved with training professional recreation educators for paid employment in recreation related work—not "pure" leisure by any definition. By failing to see this continuity, we fail to see that the Puritans were attempting, no matter how haltingly, to think critically about recreation—e.g., about the trappings of scheduled games, paying crowds, and spectatorship (see, e.g., Ryken, 1995, pp. 118–122). Moreover, to the extent that the Puritans are denounced rather than just described, the texts themselves sometimes assume a form and tone not unlike the Puritan jeremiad.

Second, not only are we more instrumental in our approach to leisure than we sometimes admit, but the Puritans were in some ways more modern than we usually recognize. The contemporary tendency to evaluate recreational experiences—like aesthetic experiences more generally—

according to internal, subjective criteria, has its roots in Reformation thought. Luther and Calvin initiated the process of privileging motive over action, and shifting the locus of spirituality from the external cosmos to the internal self (Taylor, 1989). The Romantic maneuver to divorce motive from action and self from cosmos—which finds expression in treating art and recreation as purely autonomous and autotelic—is therefore a legacy of the Reformation. Simply put, the theological tradition of the Puritans and the romantic-modernist framework of many modern leisure theorists are actually quite continuous.

Our attitude toward recreation and our attitude toward history, I would suggest, should be very much the same. On the one hand, we should value them not only for their usefulness but also for their own sake. To do otherwise—to mythologize the past, for example—is in fact to treat historical knowledge as the Puritans treated their leisure. On the other hand, we need not overreact to such instrumentalism. Simplistically privileging recreation that is "expressive" and pursued "for its own sake" is just as naïve as trying to discover the Puritans "as they really were." After all, the notion that ethical caveats regarding recreation necessarily yield an atrophied leisure ethic has no parallel in the world of play itself, where rules simultaneously restrain and enable.

Notes

1 Holifield (1989, p. 6) continues: "In the early colonial era the North American mainland contained a confusing array of distinct, though often overlapping, cultural and linguistic traditions: native American, Spanish, French, Dutch, Swedish, English, and African. And each of those large groupings comprehended a further array of cultural differences. The varying regional and local origins of both colonists and natives created subtle distinctions even among those who shared a common language and religion; religious conflicts divided even people from the same geographical background; and differing levels of literacy, social status, and economic standing also undoubtedly shaped distinctive ways of thinking."

2 As Perry Miller (1963, p. 7) put it, "most accounts of Puritanism, emphasizing the controversial tenets, attribute everything that Puritans said or did to the fact that they were Puritans; their attitudes toward all sorts of things are pounced upon and exhibited as peculiarities of their sect, when as a matter of fact they were normal attitudes for the time." Miller estimated that "about ninety per cent" of Puritan morals and manners were those "of all Englishmen." Wagner (1979, p. 32) makes the same point with respect to sport history: "While assessing recreation and sports in colonial New England, sports historians have frequently become the victims of the fallacious assumption that the attitudinal and behavioural differences, which a comparison with the twentieth century unearthes, are a product of Puritanism—and hence religion—rather than the consequence of substantially dissimilar socioeconomic conditions."

3 Although it is not an introductory text and therefore lies outside this analysis, Gary Cross' *A Social History of Leisure Since 1600* (1990) is an unusual example of a fine book by a historian working in the field of recreation and leisure studies.
4 Or taking Sabbatarianism as another example, Sabbath-related controversies did not decline gradually but ebbed and flowed for centuries, actually peaking with national legislation in both the United States and Canada at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—not coincidentally, the same moment in time that popular sentiment was turning against the Puritans.
5 Although historians "see it as part of their responsibility to distance their reconstruction of the past from…'vulgar,' mythologized understandings," the power and persistence of various mythic representations—"the emotional investment in an essentialized understanding of certain individuals and events that isolates out one strand from a complex picture and emphasizes it to the exclusion of all else"—suggest that myth is no less valuable than historical "truth" (Cohen, 1997, p. 295).

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