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The American Way: A Mayflower Descendant

In 1620 a brave group of English settlers risked their lives to protect a right that modern-day Americans see as innate. That right was the freedom to practice any religion. Most Americans know these settlers as the Pilgrims who boarded the ship the *Mayflower* bound for the "New World." But what many don't know is how the Pilgrims' values from 1620 are at the core of distinctly American values in 2014.

The Pilgrims' story is not just the romanticized version told at Thanksgiving tables around the country, but also one centered on religious persecution. The Separatists were prohibited from practicing their religion in England, so they sought a place with no restrictions on religious freedom. This right to exercise any religion remains one of the most fiercely protected American rights today. As part of the First Amendment, it is fundamental to the relationship between the U.S. government and American citizens. The Pilgrims were the initial catalyst to creating the American viewpoint that religious freedom is a right that all citizens have. Americans continue to risk their lives to protect this belief, just as the Pilgrims did in 1620.

Once the Pilgrims successfully landed in the "New World," they created a document now known as the Mayflower compact. It established a provisional government that was designed to protect the safety and freedom of the settlers. The Pilgrims travelled across the Atlantic to ensure no entity would infringe on their personal freedoms. They understood that without an individual's consent to be governed, that government would have no validity. So the men aboard the *Mayflower* voluntarily signed that compact and held an election for the group's leader. Those acts are the predecessors of today's American government. American citizens do not stand by as the government runs society; they run for election to public office so they take action to influence the decisions of their government.

Three years after arriving in Plymouth, the settlers received their own tracts of land from the colony. The Pilgrims prospered and began trading with neighboring Native American tribes. This trade fostered amicable relations between the English settlers and the natives, helping the colony's infant free-market economy to strengthen and grow. The US Government repeated this land-granting act again with the Homestead Act of 1862.

The American Way: A Mayflower Descendant Continued



Then the West saw an exponential increase in land development and a correlating growth spurt in the economy. Today, American citizens still have the Pilgrims' entrepreneurial spirit. Small business owners are the backbone of the US economy, and that's due to the Pilgrims' belief that the individual is integral to the economy.

Culturally, the individual remains an important player in the American way of life. Individualism is encouraged in the American culture. Citizens do not worry about infringement on their personal beliefs because the Pilgrims established protection for them when they arrived in Plymouth. That boundary allows Americans to flourish across all aspects of society. And while cultural norms have changed since 1620, what hasn't changed is the belief in oneself that the Pilgrims must have had in order to set out for the unknown. Today that unknown is much more intangible, but Americans still push the boundaries of the human experience.

Like modern-day Americans, Pilgrims had an insatiable desire to achieve their destiny. They saw the need for a radical change in the way individuals perceived their religious rights and took action to secure those freedoms and to design a government that would not violate them. The founding fathers reinforced those principles by establishing a democratic republic and creating the Bill of Rights. Economically Americans continue to develop new ideas and prosper from them, making the economy one of the strongest in the world. And culturally, today's Americans inherited the Pilgrims' values that influence how they see the world, each other, and themselves. Those beliefs were crucial to creating a new way of life in 1620, and endure now as the foundation of the American way.