



## New World, Inc.: How England's Merchant Adventurers Created America

*John Butman , Simon Targett*

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# **New World, Inc.: How England's Merchant Adventurers Created America**

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**New World, Inc.: How England's Merchant Adventurers Created America** John Butman , Simon Targett

**A bold new telling of the founding of America that reveals America's forgotten origins as a business-driven enterprise**

American business writer John Butman and British historian and journalist Dr. Simon Targett roll back the clock to reveal that America had been in the making for seventy years before the Mayflower sailed.

And while religion played a role, the driving impulse of the American initiative was commercial. Yes, America was the most ambitious start-up ever attempted.

New World, Inc. is neither a straight history nor a conventional business book. Through the stories of this extraordinary group of pioneers--which have been all but forgotten--Butman and Targett show that the America of today--what it is and what it isn't--was largely created in those years before the Mayflower even set sail.

## **New World, Inc.: How England's Merchant Adventurers Created America Details**

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## **From Reader Review New World, Inc.: How England's Merchant Adventurers Created America for online ebook**

### **Kaethe says**

ARC from publisher

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### **Christopher Obert says**

A great book on US history with info that you won't get in school.

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### **Ionia says**

I was pleasantly surprised after beginning to read this book, that it wasn't just another history of the beginnings of America. This book is filled with information on the people of England that began trying to find a way through Cathay, and offers more than a glimpse into the thoughts and ideas of the time on how that could become possible. The authors went to an incredible amount of work and did some very detailed research to produce this account of pre-colonisation and colonisation.

I found the detailed sections on the wool trade fascinating and found that this book was really useful for research into this period as well as for entertainment purposes. The way this is written, it was fun to read, unlike a lot of other dry, historical accounts that deal with this period. The authors' inclusion of quotes and passages from a variety of different contemporary sources allows the reader to experience life in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in both England and Early America, making for a very connected reading experience.

I was rather intrigued at all the names mentioned in regards to the various ventures that were undertaken that you don't see mentioned other places. As a student of Colonial American studies, you become familiar with certain names, and it was nice to see the roots for these families mentioned with some detail. This book humanised these people for me, in a way that no other has.

This was a fantastic book, with a lot to offer anyone who wants to know more about this important historical period. I can see how this would be beneficial to students and teachers, and anyone else who wants to know the truth about England's desire to colonise the New World and the motivations behind their decisions.

Definitely recommended.

This review is based on a complimentary copy from the publisher, provided through Netgalley. All opinions are my own.

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## Matt says

**“I am not so simple to think that ever any motive than wealth will ever erect there a Commonwealth...”**

- John Smith, *A Description of New England* (1616)

**“The Plymouth story, serving as America’s default founding myth, derives its power from the fact that it reflects what America wants to be, how it wants to see itself and be seen. But in its popular conception the story is misleading because there is one major feature of American life that has been often left out, ignored, overlooked, or downplayed. Commerce. Business. Enterprise...Looking back, we see that business and business people played a critical role in creating and establishing the earliest American settlements, laws, and civic institutions. Even the Pilgrims, those paragons of virtue, were funded by merchants, entrepreneurs, business leaders – both great and modest – and were organized as a commercial enterprise. Without the funding and the backing of a business organization, albeit a badly managed one, the Pilgrims might never have left Leiden...”**

- John Butman & Simon Targett, *New World, Inc.*

*New World, Inc.* starts with a very simple premise and ends up striking a surprisingly rich vein of history. The stated purpose given by John Butman & Simon Targett is to revise our concept of America’s founding. The schoolhouse story, the one that every American kid learns at some point, is that the Pilgrims came to present-day New England’s shores in search of religious freedom, and that once here, their intent was to build, in John Winthrop’s phrase, a “city upon a hill,” built for God’s glory. In reality, Great Britain’s colonization of the eastern seaboard of North America resulted from a long line of risky business decisions, in which high risks (up to and including your death and/or disappearance) promised high rewards (land and timber, silver and gold, furs and fish). This goes as well for the Pilgrims who, as Butman & Targett note, had all the religious freedom they wanted in Holland. What they did not have was jobs.

In all honesty, *New World, Inc.* did not grip me with its thesis. A new interpretation of American history meant to celebrate *businessmen*? Really? As we linger in the long shadow of the Great Recession, the last thing I’m looking to do is pay homage to investors and speculators. The book’s first lines (“This story begins with sheep”) also did not act as a natural hook. Businessmen and sheep. Where is this going?

Exciting places, actually.

*New World, Inc.* begins in the 1550s, at a time when Great Britain was not yet the sprawling global empire upon which the sun never set. To the contrary, it was a politically tumultuous backwater that relied heavily on the woolen cloth industry (hence, the sheep). And that industry was in decline. Meanwhile, Spain and Portugal were the two superpowers dominating world trade. Just in case you doubted them, they actually signed a treaty (the Treaty of Tordesillas) dividing the New World between them. The Pope even signed off on it.

It was in these bleak times that a small group of English merchants got together and formed...a joint stock company! (I know, be still, my heart). This company, pithily named *The Mysterie, Company, and Fellowship of Merchant Adventurers for the Discovery of Regions, Dominions, Islands, and Places Unknown*, set its sights on finding new trading partners and new trading markets. At first, they looked to the east, towards China. While sailing the Northeast Passage, they ended up opening relations with Russia, then ruled by a pre-terrible Ivan the Terrible. Eventually, the gaze of the China-focused company turned westward, in hopes

of finding the fabled “Northwest Passage” that would deliver them to Cathay.

When I review a history book, it helps to be upfront about how familiar I am with a subject before I read the first page. In this case, I knew very little. Early North American history is not my forte (I only really start paying attention around the beginning of the French & Indian War). I have read a couple books about the Pilgrims (including Philbrick’s *Mayflower*), I know a bit about John Smith (watching *Pocahontas* with my kids counts, right?), and I’ve heard of Sir Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh (spelled Ralegh, here), but otherwise, most of this subject is new to me.

For instance, I had never heard of Hugh Willoughby, who led an eastward expedition to Cathay in 1553. Three hundred years before Sir John Franklin’s doomed polar expedition, Willoughby tried to spend the winter in an inlet to the Barents Sea and ended up freezing to death with all his men. Or Martin Frobisher, a sometimes-privateer who led three expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage; he brought back to England tons of ore (which never yielded appreciable gold) and one Inuit man, whom he kidnapped (poisoning relations immediately).

These tales were not what I had expected. Indeed, I had partly feared this would be a dry explanation of 16th century financial instruments, or a treatise on mercantilism. It most certainly is not. Instead, this is a rousing, engrossingly written, fast-paced account of an age of English exploration that turned Great Britain into an overriding force in world history. Sure, you learn a bit about charters and patents, but there is also daring seamanship, court intrigue, and a great assemblage of characters, a compilation of pirates, adventurers, gamblers, and dreamers. There is Drake vs. the Spaniards, the “lost colony” of Roanoke, and John Smith and the founding of Jamestown.

This could have been a complex topic, especially for a newcomer. There are a lot of names to remember, a lot of allegiances to keep straight. The reign of Elizabeth I, for instances, can fill entire volumes. Here, Butman and Targett have to simplify without being simplistic, and they manage that trick quite nicely. This is only 316 pages of text, yet it felt complete. This is a testament to the authors’ keen grasp of their narrative.

*New World, Inc.* is greatly helped by a couple things that I feel should be required in most history books. First, there is a “cast of characters,” that give names and descriptions of the personages covered by the text. This is super helpful, especially if you’re like me and relatively new to this slice of the past. Whenever I got my Cecils confused, I could just flip to the front and recall the difference between William and Robert. Second, there is a chronology at the end. Between these two value add-ons, you really can’t get lost. In terms of illustrations, *New World, Inc.* includes an inset of full-color plates, which is also a nice touch. The only thing I would have wanted was more maps. There is a master map printed on the paste-down, which is handy in its own way (you know exactly where to find it). However, there are a lot of specific voyages chronicled here, and it would have been nice to have some of them mapped.

A book like *New World, Inc.* always runs the risk of attempting to prove too much. Butman & Targett do a good job of suggesting a new way of looking at the early settlement of North America without imposing a monolithic framework. There are definite limits to their storytelling. Particularly, the deep and tragic impact of colonization on the Indians living on the continent are only hinted at. Overall, though, there is not much to complain about. The best history books are both well-researched and well-written. *New World, Inc.* sits at that intersection.

There is a classic scene from *The Simpsons* when Homer and Mr. Burns are snowbound in a cabin, drinking champagne together. “You know, Mr. Burns,” Homer says, as his boss fills his flute, “You’re the richest guy I know.” “Ah yes,” Mr. Burns breezily replies, “**But I’d trade it all for a little more.**”

I thought of that line while finishing up the last few pages. It seems apt. A group of wealthy, successful people of business, risking their fortunes, their reputations, sometimes their lives, all for the chance at a little bit more. In doing so, they helped nudge the course of history.

*I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Sandi says**

What a story about all those people who helped our children colonies

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### **Conor says**

This was my first ARC! I'm excited to review it.

"New World, Inc." tells the staccato history of England's colonization of the northern half of the New World. Despite the Pilgrim lore we've been fed throughout the 20th Century, the truth is much less vaunted--jealous of the Spaniards and without a route to Cathay (China), the Brits decamped for North America to enrich their realm. It was only after some ill-fated and mysterious fits and starts that the colonies took in the early 17th Century. It just so happens that one of those was the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, and though they were outstripped in importance and success by their Boston neighbors the Puritans, some famous New England scion ascribed some lofty ideals to them that he hoped would be emulated by his latter-day contemporaries, and thus our dowdy forebears were ennobled and lionized as our spiritual exemplars.

The authors of this text take issue with that characterization, given that it was really pretty baldfaced greed and adventurism that animated the first explorers, pillagers, and satraps of the New World. It was only after they had scoped out the fantastic loot to be had in America that they retconned the whole marauding experience as some sort of missionary sortie.

I liked this book because it is loaded with trivia and lots of colorful additions to the motives and less famous explorers of the New World, I just am not sure the authors needed 300 pages to make this point. I also would have been interested in a bit of a deconstruction of the Pilgrim ideal in its actual historic context, as well as an examination of how the mercenary character the authors impute to the earliest settlers and founders of this country manifested itself in its early culture, customs, and laws. But this is a good book for buffs of esoteric history; consider it for a Father's Day gift next month!

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### **Tom Schulte says**

I've read a lot of early American history; more in the past than recently. While few subjects cause so much ink to be expended, what more can really be said? This book really does bring, for me, a new perspective. Reaching back to the 1558 end of the Pale of Calais and the English wool trade interests, this book sets up the economic and social motivations for reaching out to the markets of "Cathay" through -- whatever would work -- the Northeast or Northwest passage. On the surface, this seems rather dry, but the social motivation are an unruly populace exemplified by Robert Kett. Kett's Rebellion was a revolt in Norfolk, England during

the reign of Edward VI, largely in response to the enclosure of land. It began with a group of rebels destroying fences. One of their targets was yeoman farmer Robert Kett who, instead of resisting the rebels, agreed to their demands and offered to lead them. This is a small part, and Kett does not even rate an entry in the largest "Cast of Characters" I have seen, but it is one of the spicy tales of unrest that shows how England, certainly by the time of Elizabeth I, truly needed to find a new market for its wool goods. This economic need may seem easy to satisfy in a globe being conquered and colonized left and right, but England was much behind the game compared to Spain, Portugal, and even France. In probing around the New World looking for a toehold, the first came about (and this is something I learned here) as New Albion claimed by Sir Francis Drake for England in 1579 on the coast of what is now California. So, this was years before Roanoke, Jamestown, etc. Of course those more well-known settlements get their due, which seems rather anti-climactic and back into the familiar territory. The author here spices this up with some insight by explaining how the impact and perceived relevance of The Pilgrims (Plymouth Colony) versus the Puritans (Massachusetts Bay Colony) began to be crafted as a sort of American forefather mythology, really in the days after The Civil War. (The Pilgrims offering an ideal; The Puritans a pragmatism so loose as to even admit slavery.) Either way, all were ultimately after lucre...

[I received a copy of this book from the publisher to review.]

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### **Paul Vogelzang says**

Loved this book!

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### **Richard Subber says**

New World Inc. is yet another revelation about the extensive backstory of the Pilgrims setting up housekeeping at Plymouth Colony in 1620. The Pilgrims weren't the first Europeans to make their mark in the New World, despite what you may have been told in the 10th grade.

Butman and Targett make it clear that, in simplistic terms, the quest for gold and wealth and prestige is what drove European exploration of the two "new" continents—huge, well-populated land masses that hardly any of the Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and English royals and elites imagined in the early part of the 16th century.

The authors provide deep insights by quoting extensively from primary sources.

The last line of New World Inc. tells the tale. It's a quote from Capt. John Smith, a leader of the Jamestown settlement, written in 1616: "For I am not so simple to think that ever any other motive than wealth will ever erect there a Commonwealth; or draw company from their ease and humours at home, to stay in New England to effect any purpose."

The motives of the typical earliest colonists were, of course, diversely personal and significantly basic: get free land, do the hardscrabble work, make food, survive the winter.

New World Inc. makes it clear that the motives for the first 100 years of exploration and venturesome plans for the newfound lands were also significantly basic: get rich, and control more wealth and power. The

players were kings, queens, courtiers, noblemen, merchants and a few rich guys. They never tried to hide what they were doing.

Note: Butman and Targett include an instructive chronology, illuminating notes, and an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

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[www.richardsubber.com](http://www.richardsubber.com)

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### **Anthony Cleveland says**

Slow to develop. Thought I was going to really enjoy it. Some parts were informative and well written. But the story tends to ramble.

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