



The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony

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The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony James Deetz , Patricia Scott Deetz James Deetz, who until his death was a leading expert on the archaeology of Plymouth Colony, and his wife, cultural historian Patricia Scott Deetz, give a realistic and fascinating picture of life in colonial America as they recount, in colorful detail, the true story of Plymouth Colony.

The Pilgrims were not the somber, dark-clad historical figures children learn about in school. Nor were they nearly as pious as we've been led to believe: they wore brightly colored clothing, drank heavily, had adulterous affairs, and committed both petty and serious crimes against their neighbors. Using court transcripts, wills, probate listings, rare first-hand accounts, and archeological finds, the Deetzes delve into everyday life in Plymouth Colony, accurately recasting one of the most cherished chapters of American history.

The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony Details

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From Reader Review The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony for online ebook

Lynette Lee (J.Kirby) says

Offers great background story of the Pilgrims, how the myths were formed, and the issues of teaching those myths today in public school settings. Furthermore, it goes into legal court cases, documents, such as wills, to illustrate how these individuals preserved life and what they had to survive. For me, the last chapter was the best. It described archeological digs and what they found at the Plymouth site. Every artifact found illustrates the life that these people led. It's a must have for a historians library.

Christopher Sturcke says

The content of the book is much better than the writing. The author presents some very interesting findings from court records, probate inventories, first-hand accounts, and archaeological digs. These findings give the reader good insight into the behavior and folkways of Plymouth colony which were quite different from those of their Puritans neighbors to the north in Massachusetts Bay. Some of the findings from the court records regarding behavior in Plymouth colony are actually quite shocking. Unfortunately the author presents the findings in such a chaotic and unprofessional (for the lack of a better term) fashion that it overshadows these valuable insight. James Deetz is a college lecturer and most of this book reads like a college lecture and other times like a term paper. The writing is choppy and the author ruins the flow of the book with quirky modern anecdotes as if he were giving a lecture while attempting to keep his students awake, very annoying. The last chapter is about the Plymouth Colony historical site and seems to belong more in a travel brochure than in a history book. Deetz also misuses past and present tense. Summary: this book has some good insight and therefore some value but is poorly written.

Tami says

I really enjoyed this up until the section about the housing. At that point, the authors lost me... Not having a background in architecture, I think the general reader would have benefited from additional sketches to supplement the detailed written description of the building types.

Karyn says

This book is a much more factual account of the lives of the settlers of Plymouth Colony, rich in details that draw a clear picture of real people and not mythical pilgrims. Included are court cases, wills, and archeological descriptions that illustrate many physical aspects of their every day experiences.

After this book I attempted to read The Mayflower by Nathaniel Philbrick, and was unable to follow along with his rather sensationalized version that from the beginning failed to mention much essential information.

Shirley Brown says

This wasn't quite what I thought it was going to be, but nonetheless I found it interesting because of my connection to the Plymouth Colony through John Alden, Priscilla Mullens, her parents, Edward Doty and George Soule who were all passengers on the Mayflower. The archaeological digs were most interesting and the court transcripts wills, probate listings were informative. Over-all the book was a little slow, but I would recommend it to any one who is interested in the "Pilgrims".

Particle_Person says

James Deetz was one of the founders of the field of historical archaeology and was one of the people who helped set up Plymouth Plantation. This book describes the history of Plymouth Colony from the Mayflower's landing to the 1690s with an emphasis on everyday life rather than the big historical events. It is a very idiosyncratic book, mostly by James I think, but completed by his wife Patricia. The text is entirely in the third person, which sounds ridiculous when James is talking about himself and even MORE ridiculous when Patricia is talking about her husband! There are four main sections.

The first part spends half a chapter talking about Thanksgiving and dispelling the standard Pilgrim myths. The first "thanksgiving" was really the 17th century English holiday of Harvest Home; the settlers were outnumbered by the indians at the feast; Plymouth rock was just some rock that an old guy — 121 years after the event — swore up and down his dad said was THE rock the forefathers stepped on, and so forth. After the debunking, Deetz gives a blow by blow of the events of 1620/21. This is riveting, reads like Swiss Family Robinson, and is worth the price of the book by itself.

The second part is about the historical record and gives detail on stuff like what the crimes were in Plymouth colony: adultery, sodomy, buggery (not to be confused with sodomy — buggery was what we'd call bestiality), fornication, witchcraft, rape, and murder. In many respects Plymouth's legal system, while harsh and unreasonable by modern standards, was reformed compared to the English system they'd left behind. There's also discussion of how the worldview of the 17th century differs from the present. People tended to blame inanimate objects, belief in witchcraft and superstitions were rampant, etc. The two cases of witchcraft in Plymouth colony are discussed. Nobody was put to death, a nice example of how Plymouth's laws were far more lenient than England's or the Massachusetts Bay Colony's. This part of the book gets a little dull since it is full of lists of objects from probate inventories, but the stories about the settlers and their legal disputes are worth it. Trust me, you want to read about that case of buggery.

The third part is about the archaeological digs, some of which James Deetz directly participated in. There's a lot of talk about how objects are dated, what kind of objects are typically found — lots of pipe stems! — and what conclusions can be drawn from them.

The book ends with a long description of how Plymouth Plantation, a living history museum, was constructed. Deetz was actually part of the events so it is a behind the scenes first-hand perspective, including some quiet criticism. The Plantation went through several stages of increasing realism. In the 1950s the Pilgrim myths were well represented, but as time went on the museum conducted actual archaeology and threw out the idiotic elements.

Overall I can recommend this book with a few misgivings. The tone of the book careens wildly from chapter

to chapter. Sometimes there are random personal reminiscences added that don't belong in the book. (Or maybe they should go in a foreword or afterword.) Finally, at one point Patricia cuts in with a lengthy ode to her husband that is embarrassing to read. These flaws make this a four star book rather than five.

Darrell Johns says

This book presented a much warmer and more human picture of the Pilgrims. It also gives a clear, detailed picture of their day to day lives. Extremely engaging narrative from an Anthropological perspective.

Kathy says

The second half of this book, about the archaeology of Plymouth, is the more engaging. Deetz is more interested in the archaeology as well--the writing becomes more energetic and fluid, his off-hand remarks funnier. This presupposes that you're interested in what sorts of houses the 'pilgrims' built, what spoons and dishes they used, what they drank out of and wore. If you're interested in the history of these early settlers, Philbrick's Mayflower is better.

Coralie says

This was a very interesting book. The James and Patricia Deetz are historians. James is an archeologist and Patricia is a cultural historian. They explain how artifacts, early building sites and primary documents can tell the tale of how the first settlers in Plymouth lived. I am a history major and can understand how some people would think this was dry. I loved it, and was actually annoyed at some obvious heavy-handed attempts to compare culture back then to popular culture today. Definitely read this if you want to get a whole different view of the "Pilgrims".

Barbara says

This was informative, but very dull reading.

dejah_thoris says

Thorough and well-researched but a bit dry at times. I really enjoyed the chapters on social history and crime within the colony but found those on archeology and the founding of Plimouth Plantation less than enthralling. Yes, this book does a fine job of debunking the Puritan myth both by contrasting the reality with the myth and also contrasting the different settlements against one another (Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, and Chesapeake Bay) where applicable. But my biggest problem was the formatting of the notes. For easier reading by laypeople, no notes are included in the text, which is fine, but the text also omits endnote numbers, forcing scholarly readers to read each chapter and then turn to the back to read the endnotes. From the notes, bibliography, and background given in the last chapter on Plimoth Plantation, you can tell the Deetzes have written a well-researched work, so if you're curious about the Separatists and those other

colonists who had no religious angle whatsoever, this book is definitely worth reading.

Rebecca says

This book is quite interesting. It is about the settlers who came over from England and landed at Plymouth, MA. I haven't finished the book yet, so I will complete my review later.

Chrissy says

Interesting facts not taught in school. For example; five young siblings whose 'father' determined they were the products of his wife's affair with another man...set them a sail on a dangerous voyage with presumably, strangers. Foreign land....strangers.....children. So hard to fathom an ego so big and a heart so small. The dark side of the colony was never presented in school as we made buckles for our shoes and feathers for thanksgiving headbands (and doesn't need to be). The book has in fact, many such unsanitized stories-not new to us if we have looked at the Salem Witch trial story in any depth.

I liked this book. I like all of my 3-star books but it reads like a text for college (and one I would have loved to read in college!) and I would pick up historical fiction on anyone of these American ancestors.

Natalia says

I found the first few chapters interesting when the authors discussed the travel to and first landings on the new land, but then the authors jumped ahead to the late 1600's after the colony is well established. I am more interested in the early years of the plymouth colony.

Bryan says

First, it's important to state that this book is well-written and appears to succeed at every goal the authors had. Second, I'm glad I read it.

Those statements aside, though, it is a very dry read and at times cumbersome. For me, it lacks the page-turning effectiveness I greatly enjoy in other works that conjure history. Having descended from one of the very people being described throughout (and specifically, at one brief point, much to my thrill), I am certainly in the camp of "willing to fight through it" when it comes to the dry nature and slow pace. But for most who lack that connection or simply aren't used to such a scholarly type of text (I'm not!), there may be other, better, choices. Or just go to the Plimoth Plantation and interact with a living recreation spawned by the author of this book!
