

## The Dangers of the Mayflower Story as an Example for Today

The world of today is a very different place from the one of 400 years ago. One of the key differences between the periods lies in how people migrate from place to place. Before, the world was a largely stationary place. People mostly stayed in one place for their lives' duration, simply because there was no easy way out. The most advanced travel machines were boats, which required huge amounts of work to go as far as cross country. Now, sea travel is generally more safe and accessible, and the existence of cars and planes make travel simple for many. More people are traveling than ever before, and the reasons they migrate are plenty. In America, one of the biggest reasons is for safety from an oppressive country. These people, who move from their country because of violence, are known as refugees, and over 200,000 of them entered the US in 2018 alone<sup>[1]</sup>. When people think of refugees, the first example they often think of is the Mayflower, and its journey from England. However, this example is flawed in many aspects, and is not an applicable or relevant example for today's refugees. This is because of differences in the immigrants' reasons for leaving their home, their knowledge of existing society, and more isolated nature.

Today, most refugees move to America because of wars in their own nation, such as those from Syria and Afghanistan<sup>[2]</sup>. They had lived in areas where violence was common and brought it upon themselves to leave for a better life. They leave their homes with almost nothing. The Pilgrims did not leave a war torn place, or one with lots of violence. They left England, which was under a relatively stable monarchy at the time. Their reason for leaving was religious in nature, but not the one of "religious freedom" that is accepted by many. They left England because they wanted a society where everyone had the same religion that they did, which was a different form of Christianity than that of the Anglican church. While this cause may or may not be just, it is certainly a far cry from those immigrants who leave

awful turmoil in hopes of a brighter future in America. To equate these two cases is not casting nearly enough light on the troubles refugees must face.

When the people of the Mayflower moved to America, they went to a place they thought to be mostly uninhabited: America, a mostly unexplored continent for Europe at the time. They did this completely on purpose- they wanted to start society anew, create a society totally separated from the place they knew. Migrants to today's America think no such thing; many of them merely want to make a living and find a new home among other people, and want nothing more than to be away from their former nation. America has grown into one of the largest nations in the world, with little uncultivated land, especially near shores where most migrants would be arriving. The Mayflower's story of finding completely new land simply doesn't apply here anymore, certainly not for refugees struggling to find homes anywhere in the world.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Pilgrims was their sense of togetherness. They were a very religious group, and many of them knew each other. They farmed together, worked together, fought together, and lived together. They had astronomically better odds of survival traveling in a group, as they did. This is not nearly the case for refugees. Of the children who escape from North Africa to Italy, about 90% do so completely alone<sup>[3]</sup>. No adults to care for them, or help them through their strange new land at all. They are prone to being taken advantage of, or even beaten by the smugglers who cross the sea with them. Of course, this also applies to many adults. Being alone is an awful thing. Prolonged periods of time of complete isolation from those you know can cause severe mental strain that the Pilgrims simply did not have to deal with. No matter what happened, they knew they had people fighting in their corner. Most refugees have no such thing.

The Mayflower's journey, while being inspirational in some regards and an interesting subject of study, should not be used as an example when seriously speaking about the refugees of today. While some aspects of their journeys (such as cramped and unhygienic conditions of travel and high death toll) are

similar, the people of the Mayflower had many differences to the refugees that complicate the metaphor. They left their native England with little stopping them, and with sufficient supplies; most refugees leave home with only a few belongings, if anything. The Mayflower residents sought out new land, while the refugees are content being anywhere except the place they were. And the Pilgrims, most importantly, had others to guide them through their rough times, whereas most refugees must face their demons completely alone. The Pilgrims had many advantages today's refugees do not, and comparing them is ignorant of that. After all, if the Pilgrims could do it in the 1600s, people may argue, why shouldn't the refugees so easily? These arguments ignore just how hard it is to leave certain places, and the prices one must pay for doing so. Refugees must go through so much hardship in their lives, and in many cases, at a terribly young age. They deal with violence and oppression at every step. The Mayflower story has little to no relevance to today's migrants, and may in fact close people off to the common and awful plight of refugees.

#### Works Cited

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