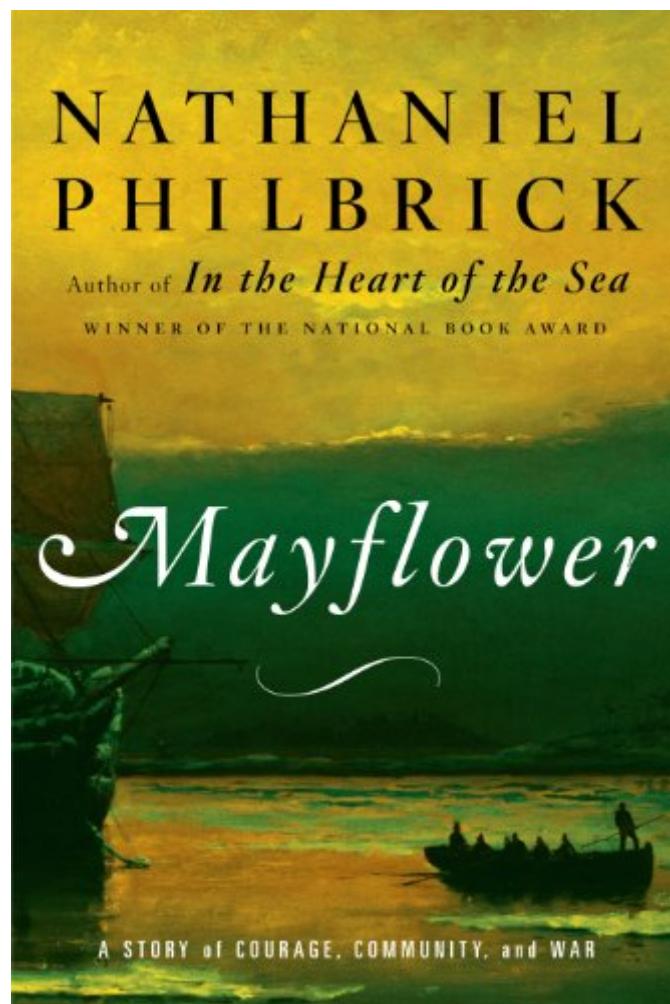


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Mayflower



Synopsis

"Vivid and remarkably fresh...Philbrick has recast the Pilgrims for the ages."--The New York Times Book ReviewFinalist for the Pulitzer Prize in historyNew York Times Book Review Top Ten books of the YearHow did America begin? That simple question launches the acclaimed author of Bunker Hill and Valiant Ambition on an extraordinary journey to understand the truth behind our most sacred national myth: the voyage of the Mayflower and the settlement of Plymouth Colony. As Philbrick reveals in this electrifying history of the Pilgrims, the story of Plymouth Colony was a fifty-five year epic that began in peril and ended in war. New England erupted into a bloody conflict that nearly wiped out the English colonists and natives alike. These events shaped the existing communities and the country that would grow from them.From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Nathaniel Philbrick's remarkable "Mayflower" is everything you'd hope a history book to be: illuminating, lively, and authoritative. This was simply a terrific read, a fascinating glimpse into the events and people serving as the first bricks in our nation's foundation.Beyond the fairytale images of "The First Thanksgiving", most basic American history skips from the Mayflower's 1620 landing in

Plymouth the American Revolution, glossing over the rich and brawling century-and-a-half spanning these two events. Philbrick zeroes in on the first half-century, stripping away the myth and homily typically associated with the Pilgrims and laying bare a fascinating tale of courage and deceit, of trusts forged and broken, of politics, religion, brutality, and war. All the familiar figures are there - William Bradford, Miles Standish, Pokanoket Indian chief Massoit, Squanto, and Edward Winslow, but Philbrick focuses on less celebrated figures like Benjamin Church and Massoit's son Phillip, who while hardy household names today leave behind legacies that helped shape what would become a century later the United States of America. This is a story ripe with opportunity for politically correct revisionism, but the author walks a balanced line, alternately praising and condemning the deeds and players of both the English and the Native Americans. We learn, for example, that near-starvation in the first two years had as much to do with the Pilgrim's failed experiment in socialism as it did with harsh winters and poor soil. This led Bradford to adopt a policy allowing each family to grow and hunt not for the "commonwealth", but for themselves. Thanks to Bradford's newly discovered spirit of capitalism, the colony is soon producing a surplus of food.

I enjoyed *Sea of Glory* by Nathaniel Philbrick, so picked up his latest, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War*. *Mayflower* is actually two books in one. The first part details the story of the Pilgrims and their establishing Plymouth Colony. The second part deals with an Indian war since named King Philip's War. Unfortunately, I enjoyed the first section much more than the second. Philbrick's account of the Pilgrims is a fascinating tale, and I'm not sure how much is new to me and how much I've just forgotten. The author starts with the Pilgrims in England and chronicles their beliefs, their escape to Holland, their grueling voyage, the establishment of Plymouth Colony and their befriending of the Pokanoket Indians and especially, their leader Massasoit. The first year was especially perilous and over 50% of the settlers died within the first six months. Some of the original colonists were not religious men (Strangers as opposed to Saints). But they quickly realized that they all had to work together to survive. One of the most remarkable achievements by the Pilgrims was the drafting of the *Mayflower Compact*. Before they even landed in the New World, these men recognized the need to set up a civil government in which all must agree to obey laws set up by their elected officials. Today, the *Mayflower Compact* is a "document that ranks with the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution as a seminal American text." The Pilgrims are also to be admired for their ability to adapt and they were willing to try almost anything to survive. In this way, they "proved to be more receptive to the new ways of the New World than nearly any English settlers before or since."

Superbly crafted and even fast-paced much of the way, Philbrick has turned in a great nonfiction narrative, tying together pure history with delicate, artful commentary and engaging storytelling. The first 150 or so pages bring you from Leiden to Plymouth and recount the first years of the Plymouth settlement. Philbrick's account of the story behind the pilgrimage - including a regrettably brief examination of the Leiden expatriate community - are enlightening, crisp and for many I suspect, new. He leans a little too heavily on Indian fighter Benjamin Church and the events surrounding King Philip's War in the second half of the book, and the narrative lags. Not only because it seems that in the martial history Philbrick finds himself, certainly not over his head, but, out of his element; but also because the war years begin to feel like a story further separated from the Mayflower/Plymouth one than Philbrick supposes or intends to show. Philbrick's research and recount are impeccable and are taken in large part from his work with the native oral history of the time. This approach informs a new understanding of the motivations and explanations for the events that transpired beginning in the early seventeenth century and continued into almost the early nineteenth. The English conquest of the New World was not only a triumph of technology, but was indeed the ascendancy of an economic system, as global capitalism and its realities and rigors began to exert themselves in an onslaught that continues through this very day.

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