

forefathers of this nation also needed John Alden's patience, loyalty, strong-will and industry in order to form the constitution and create a democratic society. Of course, no country would be complete without the boldness of the women with virtue, courage and industry. Each of these virtues has been evident in every stage of the growth of this country seeing that these characteristics have remained through the generations. Longfellow was successful in obtaining the American character in these early versions of people today. The character of Americans today is dependent on those who came before and settled this country because without their virtues, this country would not have succeeded.

first when Miles Standish speaks of how she lost her family in the first winter. Miles Standish so openly admired Priscilla when he told John of his feelings for her:

“She is alone in the world; her father and mother and brother
Died in the winter together; I saw her going and coming,
Now to the grave of the dead, and now to the bed of the dying,
Patient, courageous, and strong,” (p. 32)

These words provide the reader with an understanding of Priscilla’s courage and her ability to endure hardships. She displays additional courage when she so boldly stated her feelings to John Alden as she said, “Why don’t you speak for yourself, John?” (p. 38) This type of audacity was uncommon for a Puritan woman of the time and she later apologizes for her boldness, pleading her case to John; nevertheless, she is forward and audacious.

Mentioned several times throughout the poem is Priscilla’s ability to weave and spin thread, which is an example of her industriousness. The reader is first introduced to Priscilla as she is spinning, “She, the Puritan girl, in the solitude of the forest, / Making the humble house and the modest apparel of homespun / Beautiful with her beauty, and rich with the wealth of her being!” (p. 35) This is further supported by an analogy that John Alden makes comparing Priscilla to Bertha the Beautiful Spinner:

“Truly, Priscilla,” he said, “when I see you spinning and spinning,
Never idle a moment, but thrifty and thoughtful of others,
Suddenly you are transformed, are visibly changed in a moment;
You are no longer Priscilla, but Bertha the Beautiful Spinner.”
.....
She was so thrifty and good, that her name passed into a proverb. (p. 55-56)

The characteristics of these three characters were crucial to the development of this nation. The early Americans needed Miles Standish’s stalwart, fighting spirit that led them to revolution and eventual freedom from England. Standish’s convictions and unwillingness to yield would also necessary during the harder times of the Civil War and the depression. The

John further reveals his strength when, after the insults of the night before and Captain Standish hastily declaring war on the Indians, he prepares himself to board the Mayflower but decides to stay and suffer through the anguish of his betrayal.

He too was eager to go, and thus put an end to his anguish,
Thinking to fly from despair, that swifter than keel is or canvas,
Thinking to drown in the sea the ghost that would rise and pursue him.
But as he gazed on the crowd, he beheld the form of Priscilla
Standing dejected among them, unconscious of all that was passing.
Fixed were her eyes upon his, as if she divined his intention,
Fixed with a look so sad, so reproachful, imploring, and patient,
That with a sudden revulsion his heart recoiled from its purpose,
As from the verge of a crag, where one step more is destruction. (p. 45)

John's entire purpose of leaving was the reason he stayed. He reveals further strength and patience when he and Priscilla decide to remain friends saying, "Yes, we must ever be friends; and of all who offer you friendship / Let me be ever the first, the truest, the nearest and dearest!"

The Pilgrims were very quick in establishing a civilization and a community in which they were self-sufficient. Ships continued to come with more people as well as cattle and corn to help sustain them. Men continued to improve the land with houses and farms, while they hunted the forest for food. The house that he was able to build makes John's gift of industry evident:

Meanwhile Alden at home had built him a new habitation,
Solid, substantial, of timber rough-hewn from the firs of the forest.
Wooden-barred was the door, and the roof was covered with rushes;
Latticed the windows were, and the window-panes were of paper,
Oiled to admit the light, while wind and rain were excluded.
There too he dug a well, and around it planted an Orchard:
Still may be seen to this day some trace of the well and the orchard.
Close to the house was the stall, where, safe and secure from annoyance,
Raghorn, the snow-white bull, that had fallen to Alden's allotment
In the division of cattle, might ruminant in the night-time
Over the pastures he cropped, made fragrant by sweet pennyroyal. (p. 55)

The epitome of the Pilgrim woman is Priscilla. Her strength of courage, virtue and industry is evident throughout the poem. Her strength of courage becomes apparent to the reader

Priscilla saw Standish's inability to settle when she said, "Now that our terrible Captain has gone in pursuit of the Indians, / Where he is happier far than he would be commanding a household," (p. 50) She realized that she was better off not marrying Standish because he is more the type to put his priority on expanding the territory rather than settling what was already established.

John Alden represents the industrious, loyal, patient, gentle but strong-willed side of America. He is the tender, romantic youth that chooses to fight with his pen, words and heart rather than with the sword. This is the very reason that Standish asks, or rather pleads with John that he propose marriage to Priscilla for Standish. His will wins over his heart and he chooses to be loyal to his friend.

Then made answer John Alden: "The name of friendship is sacred;
What you demand in that name, I have not the power to deny you!"
So the strong will prevailed, subduing and moulding the gentler,
Friendship prevailed over love, and Alden went on his errand. (p. 33)

"Let not him that putteth his hand to the plough look backwards;
Though the ploughshare cut through the flowers of life to its fountains,
Though it pass o'er the graves of the dead and the hearths of the living,
It is the will of the Lord; and his mercy endureth forever!" (p. 35)

However hard he tries to convince himself that God willed this course in his life, his heart betrays him and Priscilla is able to perceive how he truly feels. He runs from her presence and his first impression is to abandon the situation and leave on the Mayflower when it leaves the next morning. With this prospect in mind, John reports to Captain Standish the events of his visit with the fair maiden. He endures the accusations placed on him and in quiet strength John "Lifted his eye to the heavens, and, folding his hands as in childhood, / Prayed in the silence of night to the Father who seeth in secret." (p. 41)

In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish", he portrays the three main characters as the representatives of early American character. The characters Miles Standish, John Alden and Priscilla are accurate depictions of early American settlers; they each have unique characteristics that express Longfellow's idea of the American character. Taking Longfellow's idea of what the American character was and applying those ideas to today, one gains a better sense of the American character as a whole and not only pertaining to one situation.

The three characters Miles Standish, John Alden and Priscilla are all archetypes of the American character where Miles Standish is the brave conqueror that insists on expanding the community rather than settling down while John Alden is the opposite, he wants to settle down and create a family. Priscilla is the ultimate Puritan woman; she is strong, courageous and virtuous. The attributes found in these three characters embody all of the traits that were distinctive to Puritans and were later necessary for Americans to fight for our freedom and establish democracy.

Miles Standish represents the pride and determination of America, the very traits, which allowed the forefathers to fight for justice. These characteristics are good in that they helped America strive for what seemed impossible. Standish held firm Puritan values, particularly the belief that they had a covenant with God to set up a model community, which is evident by his stalwart faithfulness in conquering the Indians:

God had sifted three kingdoms to find the wheat for this planting,
Then had sifted the wheat, as the living seed of a nation;
So say the chronicles old, and such is the faith of the people! (p. 41)

"Leave this matter to me, for to me by right it pertaineth.
War is a terrible trade; but in the cause that is righteous,
Sweet is the smell of powder; and thus I answer the challenge!" (p. 42)

Within Miles Standish's strengths, lie his faults. His pride is what leads him to jump to conclusions that John Alden betrayed him, while pride and stubbornness lead him to run away from his problems. Perhaps if Priscilla had accepted his offer of marriage, he would not have been so hasty in making a decision to go to war against the Indians.

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“The Courtship of Miles Standish” as a Representation of the American Character

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April 15, 2002
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