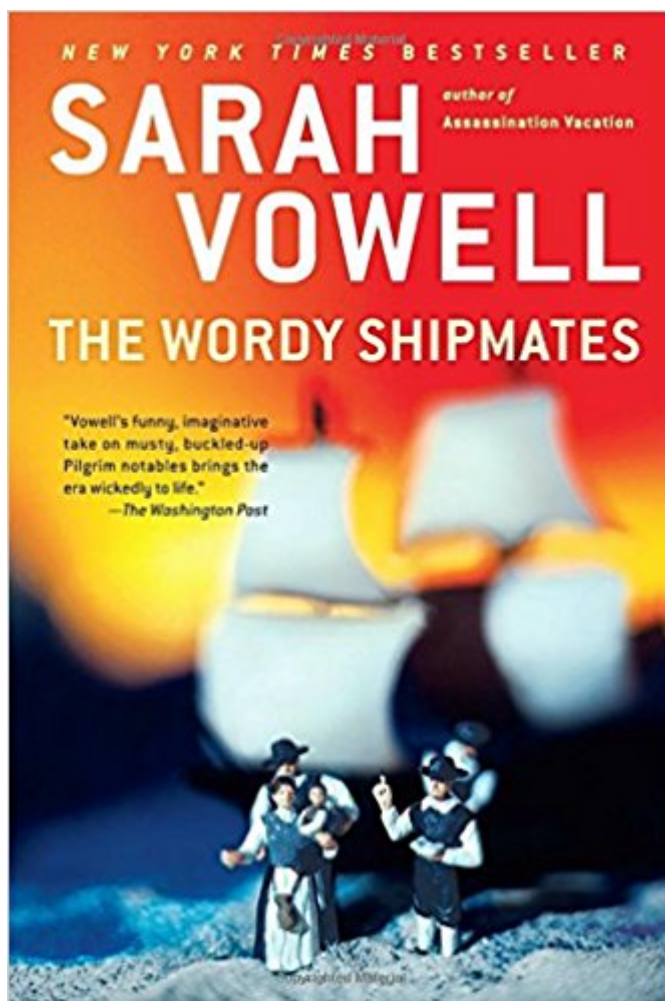


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# The Wordy Shipmates



## Synopsis

In this New York Times bestseller, the author of *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States* "brings the [Puritan] era wickedly to life" (*Washington Post*). To this day, America views itself as a Puritan nation, but Sarah Vowell investigates what that means-and what it should mean. What she discovers is something far different from what their uptight shoebuckles- and-corn reputation might suggest-a highly literate, deeply principled, and surprisingly feisty people, whose story is filled with pamphlet feuds, witty courtroom dramas, and bloody vengeance. Vowell takes us from the modern-day reenactment of an Indian massacre to the Mohegan Sun casino, from old-timey Puritan poetry, where "righteousness" is rhymed with "wilderness," to a Mayflower-themed waterslide. Throughout, *The Wordy Shipmates* is rich in historical fact, humorous insight, and social commentary by one of America's most celebrated voices.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Essayist and public radio regular Vowell (*Assassination Vacation*) revisits America's Puritan roots in this witty exploration of the ways in which our country's present predicaments are inextricably tied to its past. In a style less colloquial than her previous books, Vowell traces the 1630 journey of several key English colonists and members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Foremost among these men was John Winthrop, who would become governor of Massachusetts. While the Puritans who had earlier sailed to Plymouth on the *Mayflower* were separatists, Winthrop's followers remained loyal to England, spurred on by Puritan Reverend John

Cotton's proclamation that they were God's chosen people. Vowell underscores that the seemingly minute differences between the Plymouth Puritans and the Massachusetts Puritans were as meaningful as the current Sunni/Shia Muslim rift. Gracefully interspersing her history lesson with personal anecdotes, Vowell offers reflections that are both amusing (colonial history lesson via *The Brady Bunch*) and tender (watching New Yorkers patiently waiting in line to donate blood after 9/11). (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Most reviewers found Vowell to be a lively guide through the frequently misunderstood Puritan period. Several wrote that she will draw in readers who might not otherwise pick up a book on the subject: what could be better than history with the voice of Violet from *The Incredibles*? But others found Vowell's treatment to be less dexterous; she slips in jokes where they don't make sense and too often explains the past through pop culture references despite her clear understanding of it through original texts. Those who enjoy traditional history books may be dissatisfied. Yet, as one reviewer noted, Vowell's irreverence frees her to explore the lives of neglected figures such as Anne Hutchinson and to illuminate aspects of the Puritan era that more serious authors might have missed. Copyright 2008 Bookmarks Publishing LLC --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Sarah Vowell is just entertaining storyteller. This time she takes us to Massachusetts Bay Colony with Winthrop, Williams, Anne Hutchinson, and the Peqouts taking center stage. There is a dash of current events which ironically are probably even more impactful a decade later than they were originally. Learned quite a bit about Puritans through a different lens than the usual sense of Puritanical that modern America uses.

Having read some of the author's other books, I hadn't realized what a solid Biblical background Miss Vowell has until I read *Wordy Shipmates*. Her understanding of Scripture gives her an advantage in understanding the Puritans who looked to the Bible to find the answers to much of life's questions. When you learn about the Puritans and the Pilgrims in school, they seem so otherworldly - but the way this book reads you see that they could be petty and uncharitable but you still admire them for their willingness to face hardships in the name of their beliefs and also for how truly ahead of their time some of them were! The times were grim in the material sense but the colonial atmosphere proved to be a fertile and lively place for theological revolutionaries. The author is part Native American and naturally takes a harsh view of the way the original Americans were treated by

these "religious" newcomers - (although as I'm reading Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* just now I'm reading about some other cultures that did much worse) - the Massachusetts Bay Colony still managed to succeed despite some of the awful blunders committed. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to be entertained and educated at the same time!

First of all, had I not read Lafayette in the somewhat United States first, I probably would have rated this volume five stars as opposed to four. I personally found the aforementioned somewhat more entertaining and enlightening. That being said, my reading of this volume post the recent election was quite apropos. Though, for me, this volume seemed to get a bit more bogged down in minutiae, it will have the reader reflecting on the fact of religion's creation of vast in productivity, cruelty, and intolerance throughout our country.. We are fully reminded of the total religious baggage that arrived on our shores and still holds the country back from the truly enlightened city on the hill that it could have been. Howell's chronicle of these foundation's is, for the most part, concise and, as always, presented within today's state of mind and with some entertaining comedic judgementalism. Enjoy

I was hoping to like Sarah Vowell's writing after seeing her more than once interviewed on *The Daily Show* and hearing her read passages from her books. Her sizeable intellect, charming humor, and quick wit are the reasons I wanted to read *The Wordy Shipmates*; the lovely, unique mannerism of her voice is the reason I bought her audio book when I needed one for a bus trip -- and this set of 6 CD's (7 hours of Sarah occasionally interrupted by guest-read quotations) did not disappoint on any account. The book is mostly devoted to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay colony but also takes us through the beginning of Rhode Island and Connecticut. As deeply informed as it is possible to be about the spirituality, mentality, motivations, and the everyday happenings in the lives of the colonists -- not to mention the historical context surrounding them -- Sarah Vowell did not write an ode of praise to the Puritans nor a judgment of them from the hindsight of modernity. Her analysis of New England's roots, prides, and failures and what they mean for us today is nuanced, sensitive, and sophisticated, and her way of telling the story is so full of humanity that I found myself going from loving John Winthrop with a fervent love to hating him bitterly and back again. With the exception of, perhaps, a bit of choppiness in changing voices for very short quotes, I have no reservations in recommending this book to anyone with interest in American history, in religion, in politics or political science, or in the general questions of human nature and social coexistence. If you get this, however, be prepared to be challenged, to be provoked, to be questioned -- and to question in return. If you do not, you will have missed the point.

This is detailed history of the early history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony told from the funny, snarky but intelligent perspective of history writer and radio personality Sarah Vowell. I really am enjoying this book. I also read her previous book - Assassination Vacation which I thoroughly enjoyed and find the bits of the information it contained popping up in many other places and settings. She makes history fun and memorable.

If you don't know about Sarah Vowell's take on history and her engaging writing, then start your acquaintance with "The Wordy Shipmates" Wordy Shipmates? What kind of a title is that? Dive into the book and you will find a depth of research and perspective that comes from the "words" Sarah Vowell reveals from the earliest settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Her Native American ancestry imparts a perspective that is much appreciated but never "in your face." Her ability to deliver hard facts, serious irony, well-justified cynicism, and pointed humor make this book a delight. This was the first of Sarah Vowell's books that I discovered, and I have read all of her others and eagerly await more from this talented and insightful author. Well recommended and five stars from me.

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