

# Puritan Laws And Character



## Puritan Laws and Character: Shaping a Society Through Strict Regulation

The Puritans. The very name conjures images of stern-faced individuals, rigid morality, and a society governed by unwavering religious principles. But beyond the often-simplified narratives, lies a complex interplay between Puritan laws and the shaping of their unique character. This post delves deep into this fascinating relationship, exploring the legal frameworks they established, their impact on individual behavior, and the lasting legacy they left behind. We will examine how their laws reflected their deeply held beliefs, and how, in turn, those laws helped define their collective identity. Prepare to uncover a nuanced perspective on a pivotal chapter in American history.

## The Religious Foundation of Puritan Law

### The Covenant Theology and its Legal Implications

The Puritans' legal system stemmed directly from their theological beliefs, particularly the concept of the covenant. They viewed themselves as bound by a covenant with God, a promise to live according to His divine law as revealed in the Bible. This covenant extended to their social structure, shaping their laws and influencing their daily lives. Breaking this covenant, whether through personal sin or societal transgression, was considered a serious offense with significant consequences.

# **Interpreting God's Law: The Role of Clergy and Magistrates**

Unlike modern secular legal systems, Puritan laws were heavily influenced by the clergy. Ministers interpreted biblical passages to determine legal precedents and often advised magistrates on the application of the law. This close intertwining of religious and legal authority meant that moral transgressions were frequently viewed as legal infractions, leading to a highly regulated society.

## **Key Aspects of Puritan Legal Codes**

### **Moral Policing and Public Order**

Puritan laws heavily emphasized moral conduct. Activities deemed sinful – such as drinking, gambling, dancing, and attending theatrical performances – were strictly prohibited and punished. The maintenance of public order was paramount, with laws aimed at preventing idleness, enforcing Sabbath observance, and regulating family life. This emphasis on public morality reflected their belief in a community bound by shared religious convictions.

### **Economic Regulations and Social Control**

The Puritans also implemented economic regulations to ensure social stability and prevent economic inequality. Laws were put in place to control prices, regulate trade, and support the community's collective good. These economic measures were intertwined with their moral code, reflecting a belief that economic prosperity should be achieved through hard work, thrift, and adherence to religious principles.

### **Punishments and the Concept of Retribution**

Punishments under Puritan law were often harsh, reflecting a belief in retributive justice. Whippings, fines, banishment, and even execution were common penalties for various offenses. The severity of the punishments reflected the Puritans' unwavering commitment to upholding God's law and maintaining the moral fabric of their society. The public nature of these punishments served as a deterrent and a reminder of the consequences of violating societal norms.

# **The Impact of Puritan Laws on Character**

## **Developing a Strong Work Ethic and Self-Discipline**

The strict regulations and emphasis on hard work fostered a strong work ethic and self-discipline within the Puritan community. The belief that idleness was sinful encouraged individuals to dedicate themselves to their labor and pursue productive endeavors. This emphasis on industriousness played a significant role in the economic success of early New England.

## **Fostering a Sense of Community and Collective Responsibility**

Despite the strictness of their laws, Puritan society also prioritized community and collective responsibility. The emphasis on shared religious beliefs and mutual support fostered a strong sense of community, evident in their cooperative efforts in agriculture, trade, and charitable activities. This sense of collective responsibility was crucial to their survival in a new and challenging environment.

## **The Seeds of Dissent and Individual Liberty**

Ironically, the very strictness of Puritan laws ultimately sowed the seeds of dissent and contributed to the development of individual liberty. The constant pressure to conform to rigid religious and social norms led some individuals to question the authority of the church and the state, eventually contributing to the growth of religious tolerance and individual freedoms in later years.

## **The Enduring Legacy of Puritan Laws and Character**

The Puritan legacy extends far beyond their era. Their emphasis on hard work, self-discipline, and community responsibility continues to resonate in American culture. While the harshness of their legal system is largely a thing of the past, the values they espoused continue to influence the social and political landscape of the United States. Understanding their laws and the character they shaped provides invaluable insight into the development of American identity and institutions.

# Conclusion

The relationship between Puritan laws and their character is complex and multifaceted. Their legal system, a direct reflection of their deeply held religious beliefs, shaped their individual lives and the collective identity of their communities. While their methods may seem harsh by modern standards, their enduring impact on American values and institutions is undeniable. By studying their legal codes and societal structures, we gain a deeper understanding of a formative period in American history and the lasting influence of a unique and influential culture.

## FAQs

1. Were all Puritans equally strict in their enforcement of laws? No, there was considerable variation in the enforcement of laws across different Puritan communities and even among individual magistrates. While the overall framework was similar, the degree of strictness varied depending on local circumstances and individual interpretations.
2. How did Puritan laws impact women's lives? Puritan laws significantly restricted women's roles and opportunities. They were largely confined to domestic roles and had limited legal rights compared to men. However, women did play important roles within the community, particularly in religious and charitable activities.
3. Did Puritan laws contribute to the development of democracy? While Puritan laws were not democratic in the modern sense, their emphasis on covenant theology and community governance laid some groundwork for later democratic ideals. The idea of a social contract based on shared religious principles helped shape the development of self-governance and representative institutions.
4. What were the most common crimes punished under Puritan law? Crimes punished under Puritan law often involved violations of religious tenets, such as Sabbath breaking, drunkenness, and adultery. Crimes against public order, such as theft and assault, were also frequently prosecuted.
5. How did Puritan laws compare to laws in other colonies? Compared to other colonies, Puritan laws were generally stricter and more focused on religious conformity. Other colonies had greater religious diversity and less centralized control, resulting in less uniform and often more lenient legal systems.

**puritan laws and character:** *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction* Francis J. Bremer, 2009-07-24 Written by a leading expert on the Puritans, this brief, informative volume offers a wealth of background on this key religious movement. This book traces the shaping, triumph, and decline of the Puritan world, while also examining the role of religion in the shaping of American society and the role of the Puritan legacy in American history. Francis J. Bremer discusses the rise of Puritanism in the English Reformation, the struggle of the reformers to purge what they viewed as the corruptions of Roman Catholicism from the Elizabethan church, and the struggle with the Stuart monarchs that led to a brief Puritan triumph under Oliver Cromwell. It also examines the effort of

Puritans who left England to establish a godly kingdom in America. Bremer examines puritan theology, views on family and community, their beliefs about the proper relationship between religion and public life, the limits of toleration, the balance between individual rights and one's obligation to others, and the extent to which public character should be shaped by private religious belief. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

**puritan laws and character:** The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1898

**puritan laws and character:** **A Reforming People** David D. Hall, 2011 Distinguished historian Hall presents a revelatory account of New England's Puritans that shows them to have been the most daring and successful reformers of the Anglo-colonial world.

**puritan laws and character:** Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts George Lee Haskins, 1984 Originally published by the Macmillan Company in 1960, this book is intended as an introduction to the history of Massachusetts law in the colonial period, 1630-1650. This volume first traces the evolution of the colony's institutions and instruments of government and, second, describes in broad outline certain aspects of the substantive law that developed in these first two decades.

**puritan laws and character:** *Common Law and Natural Law in America* Andrew Forsyth, 2019-04-11 Presents an ambitious narrative and fresh re-assessment of common law and natural law's varied interactions in America, 1630 to 1930.

**puritan laws and character:** *The Puritan Experiment* Francis J. Bremer, 2013-01-08 The comprehensive history of a system of faith that shaped the nation.

**puritan laws and character:** *Puritanism and Liberty* Arthur Sutherland Pigott Woodhouse, 1974-01-01

**puritan laws and character:** **Dangerous Nation** Robert Kagan, 2007-11-06 Most Americans believe the United States had been an isolationist power until the twentieth century. This is wrong. In a riveting and brilliantly revisionist work of history, Robert Kagan, bestselling author of *Of Paradise and Power*, shows how Americans have in fact steadily been increasing their global power and influence from the beginning. Driven by commercial, territorial, and idealistic ambitions, the United States has always perceived itself, and been seen by other nations, as an international force. This is a book of great importance to our understanding of our nation's history and its role in the global community.

**puritan laws and character:** History of the United States of America Henry William Elson, 1904

**puritan laws and character:** The Crucible Coles Publishing Company. Editorial Board, Arthur Miller, 1983 A literary study guide that includes summaries and commentaries.

**puritan laws and character:** **The Puritan Commonwealth** Peter Oliver, 1856

**puritan laws and character:** **The Common Law in Colonial America** William E. Nelson, 2008-08-05 Drawing on groundbreaking and overwhelmingly extensive research into local court records, *The Common Law in Colonial America* proposes a new beginning in the study of colonial legal history, as it charts the course of the common law in Early America, to reveal how the models of law that emerged differed drastically from that of the English common law. In this first volume, Nelson explores how the law of the Chesapeake colonies--Virginia and Maryland--differed from the New England colonies--Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, New Haven, Plymouth, and Rhode Island--and looks at the differences between the colonial legal systems within the two regions, from their initial settlement until approximately 1660.

**puritan laws and character:** *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625-1660* Samuel Rawson Gardiner, 1906

**puritan laws and character:** *American Jezebel* Eve LaPlante, 2004

**puritan laws and character:** **The Witch of Blackbird Pond** Elizabeth George Speare, 1958

Sixteen-year-old Kit Tyler is marked by suspicion and disapproval from the moment she arrives on the unfamiliar shores of colonial Connecticut in 1687. Alone and desperate, she has been forced to leave her beloved home on the island of Barbados and join a family she has never met. Torn between her quest for belonging and her desire to be true to herself, Kit struggles to survive in a hostile place. Just when it seems she must give up, she finds a kindred spirit. But Kit's friendship with Hannah Tupper, believed by the colonists to be a witch, proves more taboo than she could have imagined and ultimately forces Kit to choose between her heart and her duty. Elizabeth George Speare won the 1959 Newbery Medal for this portrayal of a heroine whom readers will admire for her unwavering sense of truth as well as her infinite capacity to love.

**puritan laws and character: A Concise History of the Common Law** Theodore Frank Thomas Plucknett, 2001 Originally published: 5th ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1956.

**puritan laws and character: The Puritan Culture of America's Military** Ronald Lorenzo, 2016-02-24 This book explores Puritanism and its continuing influence on U.S. and military law in the Global War on Terror, exploring connections between Puritanism and notions of responsibility in relation to military crimes, superstitious practices within the military, and urges for revenge. Engaging with the work of figures such as Durkheim, Fauconnet and Weber, it draws on primary data gathered through participation and observation at the U.S. Army courts-martial following events at Abu Ghraib, Operation Iron Triangle, the Baghdad canal killings and a war crimes case in Afghanistan, to show how Puritan cultural habits color and shape both American military actions and the ways in which these actions are perceived by the American public. A theoretically sophisticated examination of the cultural tendencies that shape military conduct and justice in the context of a contemporary global conflict, *The Puritan Culture of America's Military* will appeal to scholars across the social sciences with interests in social theory and sociology, cultural studies, politics and international relations and military studies.

**puritan laws and character: The Puritan Republic of the Massachusetts Bay in New England** Daniel Wait Howe, 1899

**puritan laws and character: Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination** John Corvino, Ryan T. Anderson, Sherif Girgis, 2017 This book explores emerging conflicts about religious liberty and discrimination. In point-counterpoint format, it brings together longtime LGBT rights advocate John Corvino and rising conservative thinkers Ryan T. Anderson and Sherif Girgis to debate Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRAs), anti-discrimination law, and age-old questions about identity, morality, and society.

**puritan laws and character: Studies in World History Volume 2 (Student)** James P. Stobaugh, 2014-03-18 *The New World to the Modern Age (1500 AD to 1900 AD)* Chronologically based, but focused more on skill development Meant to be a 30 to 45 minute experience every day World history is combined with social studies in a one-year course. The middle school student will see history come to life no matter what their pace or ability. Developed by Dr. James Stobaugh, the courses grow in difficulty with each year, preparing students for high school work. This is a comprehensive examination of history, geography, economics, and government systems. This educational set equips students to learn from a starting point of God's creation of the world and move forward with a solid biblically-based worldview. Volume II Covers - Clash of Cultures, Europe and the Renaissance, Reformation, Revolutions, and more.

**puritan laws and character: Albion's Seed** David Hackett Fischer, 1991-03-14 This fascinating book is the first volume in a projected cultural history of the United States, from the earliest English settlements to our own time. It is a history of American folkways as they have changed through time, and it argues a thesis about the importance for the United States of having been British in its cultural origins. While most people in the United States today have no British ancestors, they have assimilated regional cultures which were created by British colonists, even while preserving ethnic identities at the same time. In this sense, nearly all Americans are Albion's Seed, no matter what their ethnicity may be. The concluding section of this remarkable book explores the ways that regional cultures have continued to dominate national politics from 1789 to

1988, and still help to shape attitudes toward education, government, gender, and violence, on which differences between American regions are greater than between European nations.

**puritan laws and character:** *Writing New England* Andrew Delbanco, 2001 From John Winthrop and Anne Bradstreet to Emerson, Hawthorne, Dickinson, and Thoreau to Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and John Updike, this anthology provides a collective self-portrait of the New England mind from the Puritans to the present. 9 halftones.

**puritan laws and character:** *John Winthrop* Francis J. Bremer, 2005 Providing a path-breaking treatment of the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Bremer explores the life of America's forgotten Founding Father. 18 halftones & line illustrations.

**puritan laws and character:** *Worldly Saints* Leland Ryken, 2010-09-28 Ryken's *Worldly Saints* offers a fine introduction to seventeenth-century Puritanism in its English and American contexts. The work is rich in quotations from Puritan worthies and is ideally suited to general readers who have not delved widely into Puritan literature. It will also be a source of information and inspiration to those who seek a clearer understanding of the Puritan roots of American Christianity. -Harry Stout, Yale University ...the typical Puritans were not wild men, fierce and freaky, religious fanatics and social extremists, but sober, conscientious, and cultured citizens, persons of principle, determined and disciplined excelling in the domestic virtues, and with no obvious shortcomings save a tendency to run to words when saying anything important, whether to God or to a man. At last the record has been put straight. -J.I. Packer, Regent College *Worldly Saints* provides a revealing treasury of primary and secondary evidence for understanding the Puritans, who they were, what they believed, and how they acted. This is a book of value and interest for scholars and students, clergy and laity alike. -Roland Mushat Frye, University of Pennsylvania A very persuasive...most interesting book...stuffed with quotations from Puritan sources, almost to the point of making it a mini-anthology. -Publishers Weekly With *Worldly Saints*, Christians of all persuasions have a tool that provides ready access to the vast treasures of Puritan thought. -Christianity Today Ryken writes with a vigor and enthusiasm that makes delightful reading-never a dull moment. -Fides et Historia *Worldly Saints* provides a valuable picture of Puritan life and values. It should be useful for general readers as well as for students of history and literature. -Christianity and Literature

**puritan laws and character:** *The Puritan Dilemma* Edmund Sears Morgan, 1958

**puritan laws and character:** *American Quarterly Church Review, and Ecclesiastical Register*, 1851

**puritan laws and character:** *Natural Right and the American Imagination* Catherine H. Zuckert, 1990 Discusses ways in which works by James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner explore the central issue of political philosophy.

**puritan laws and character:** *The Handmaid's Tale* Margaret Atwood, 2011-09-06 An instant classic and eerily prescient cultural phenomenon, from "the patron saint of feminist dystopian fiction" (New York Times). Now an award-winning Hulu series starring Elizabeth Moss. In this multi-award-winning, bestselling novel, Margaret Atwood has created a stunning Orwellian vision of the near future. This is the story of Offred, one of the unfortunate "Handmaids" under the new social order who have only one purpose: to breed. In Gilead, where women are prohibited from holding jobs, reading, and forming friendships, Offred's persistent memories of life in the "time before" and her will to survive are acts of rebellion. Provocative, startling, prophetic, and with Margaret Atwood's devastating irony, wit, and acute perceptive powers in full force, *The Handmaid's Tale* is at once a mordant satire and a dire warning.

**puritan laws and character:** *The Religious History of American Women* Catherine A. Brekus, 2007 More than a generation after the rise of women's history alongside the feminist movement, it is still difficult, observes Catherine Brekus, to locate women in histories of American religion. In this collection of 12 essays, contributors explore how considering the religious history of American women can transform our dominant historical narratives. Covering a variety of topics--including Mormonism, the women's rights movement, Judaism, witchcraft trials, the civil

rights movement, Catholicism, everyday religious life, Puritanism, African American women's activism, and the Enlightenment--the volume enhances our understanding of both religious history and women's history. Taken together, these essays sound the call for a new, more inclusive history.

**puritan laws and character: The Rise of the New Puritans** Noah Rothman, 2022-07-05

"Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." -H.L. Mencken The Left used to be the party of the hippies and the free spirits. Now it's home to woke scolds and humorless ideologues. The New Puritans can judge a person's moral character by their clothes, Netflix queue, fast food favorites, the sports they watch, and the company they keep. No choice is neutral, no sphere is private. Not since the Puritans has a political movement wanted so much power over your thoughts, hobbies, and preferences every minute of your day. In the process, they are sucking the joy out of life. In *The Rise of the New Puritans*, Noah Rothman explains how, in pursuit of a better world, progressives are ruining the very things which make life worth living. They've created a society full of verbal trip wires and digital witch hunts. Football? Too violent. Fusion food? Appropriation. The nuclear family? Oppressive. Witty, deeply researched, and thorough, *The Rise of the New Puritans* encourages us to spurn a movement whose primary goal has become limiting happiness. It uncovers the historical roots of the left's war on fun and reminds us of the freedom and personal fulfillment at the heart of the American experiment.

**puritan laws and character: The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New Haven and the False Blue-Laws Invented by the Rev Samuel Peters** J. Hammond 1821-1897 Trumbull, 2006-09-01

**puritan laws and character:** *The Church Review* , 1850

**puritan laws and character: Studies in World History Volume 2 (Teacher Guide)** James P. Stobaugh, 2014-03-18 Teacher guides include insights, helps, and weekly exams, as well as answer keys to easily grade course materials! Help make your educational program better - use a convenient teacher guide to have tests, answer keys, and concepts! An essential addition for your coursework - team your student book with his convenient teacher guide filled with testing materials, chapter helps, and essential ways to extend the learning program.

**puritan laws and character:** *The Church review, and ecclesiastical register [afterw.] The American quarterly Church review, an ecclesiastical register [afterw.] The American Church review [afterw.] The Church review* , 1851

**puritan laws and character: Criminal Justice in Colonial America, 1606-1660** Bradley Chapin, 2010-06-01 This study analyzes the development of criminal law during the first several generations of American life. Its comparison of the substantive and procedural law among the colonies reveals the similarities and differences between the New England and the Chesapeake colonies. Bradley Chapin addresses the often-debated question of the "reception" of English law and makes estimates of the relative weight of the sources and methods of early American law. A main theme of his book is that colonial legislators and judges achieved a significant reform of the English criminal law at a time when a parallel movement in England failed. The analysis is made specific and concrete by statistics that show patterns of prosecutions and crime rates. In addition to the exciting and convincing theme of a "lost period" of great creativity in American criminal law, Chapin gives a wealth of detail on statutory and common-law rulings, noteworthy criminal cases, and judicial views of how the law was to be administered. He provides social and economic explanations of shifts and peculiarities in the law, using carefully arranged evidence from the records. His treatment of the Quaker cases in Massachusetts and the witchcraft prosecutions in New England throws new light on those frequently misunderstood episodes. Chapin's book will be of interest not only to scholars working in the field but also to anyone curious about early American legal history.

**puritan laws and character:** *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* Jonathan Edwards, 2005 Echoes of The Great Awakening Jonathan Edwards is primarily remembered today as a gifted and influential theologian. But in eighteenth-century America, his preaching resounded from pulpits throughout New England, sparking the flame of revival that became the Great Awakening. As the fame of this Puritan pastor and preacher of revival spread far and wide, his sermons galvanized many of his



listeners into reexamining their lives and faith. Ever alert to the dangers of the religiously complacent--those who only observed the surface requirements of religion--Edwards tirelessly proclaimed the overpowering majesty and grandeur of God, and humanity's hopelessness for moral improvement short of his grace. This stirring selection of 20 messages allows readers to experience the words that swept through this young nation with a message of repentance and a call to action.

**puritan laws and character: Foxe's Book of Martyrs** John Foxe, 1899

**puritan laws and character: One in the Eye for Harold** Phil Mason, 2011-09-29 The problem with history is that much of what you learn in school simply isn't true! For instance, King Harold was NOT shot in the eye with an arrow at the Battle of Hastings, Neanderthals were not as dumb as you'd think, Britain had an Indian curry restaurant years before it had fish-and-chip shops and the American 'Wild West' really wasn't that wild. In many ways the history we casually accept as truth is full of mistakes. One in the Eye for Harold is a riotous romp through the centuries with revelations about the untruth of large swathes of history. It shows us how fictions have coloured our views of religion, politics, war and society - and shows us how some of our most solidly held beliefs are entirely false. In One in the Eye for Harold Phil Mason - author of Napoleon's Haemorrhoids - catalogues how myth and error have shaped our view of the past, and how the history our teachers handed down is often far from the mark. It is full of remarkable insights that entertain gloriously as they challenge the conventional view of history.

**puritan laws and character: History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647** William Bradford, 1912

**puritan laws and character: The Theatrical Public Sphere** Christopher B. Balme, 2014-06-12 The concept of the public sphere, as first outlined by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, refers to the right of all citizens to engage in debate on public issues on equal terms. In this book, Christopher B. Balme explores theatre's role in this crucial political and social function. He traces its origins and argues that the theatrical public sphere invariably focuses attention on theatre as an institution between the shifting borders of the private and public, reasoned debate and agonistic intervention. Chapters explore this concept in a variety of contexts, including the debates that led to the closure of British theatres in 1642, theatre's use of media, controversies surrounding race, religion and blasphemy, and theatre's place in a new age of globalised aesthetics. Balme concludes by addressing the relationship of theatre today with the public sphere and whether theatre's transformation into an art form has made it increasingly irrelevant for contemporary society.

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