

0. WHO WERE THE PURITANS? - Story Preface

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Puritans, who believed they could "purify" the Church of England from within, migrated to the "New World," settling in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. George Henry Boughton created this illustration which Thomas Gold Appleton then engraved. This mezzotint was published circa March 31, 1885. The work is [maintained at the Library of Congress](#). Click on the image for a full-page view.

When [Elizabeth I](#) became [Queen](#) of England in 1558, the people once again had a Protestant ruler on the throne. Many of her subjects believed British life (both secular and religious) should be based on Martin [Luther's concept](#) of [Sola Scriptura](#) - on the Bible alone. With increasing fervor, religious leaders pressed for this approach.

Shrewd and pragmatic, the new queen wanted to reestablish stability in her kingdom. She viewed extremism, of any nature, as inherently destabilizing.

If she agreed to govern all the country's affairs based only on the authority of the Bible, she would have to simultaneously ignore her country's traditions. Elizabeth's view was to blend tradition, reason, and the Bible's teachings as a rational way to broadly, and inclusively, govern her people.

Within a dozen years after Elizabeth ascended the throne, there were two schools of thought in the country. One group embraced the [monarch's view](#); the other insisted that English church and state must be purified consistent with Biblical principles. The first group coined the term "Puritan" as a derisive description of the second.

In 1630, when the Puritans left England for their new life in Massachusetts, they considered themselves "English." They planned to conduct their religious affairs through the Church of England but expected to govern themselves.

Unlike [the Pilgrims](#), who focused on *individual* righteousness before God, the Puritans focused on *corporate* righteousness. That meant the entire community - their "city on a hill" - had to conform to the same Biblical precepts.

Despite their differences, however, Puritans and Pilgrims agreed on this fundamental concept: Salvation was by God's grace alone, through individual faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone. In that sense, they were *all* products of Luther's Protestant Reformation.

Implementing Old-World beliefs in a New-World environment, the Puritans maintained their focus on education and their strict sense of "right behavior." For the first time in recorded history, children were provided with a free education when, in 1635 (the year of [The Great Hurricane](#)), the Puritans established the [Boston Latin School](#).

They founded America's [first college](#) - Harvard - across the Charles River, in Cambridge, the following year.

Puritan life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony was harsh. Actions mattered, since outward behavior reflected inward religious faith. With that in mind, woe unto anyone who ran afoul of the community's standards. Such a person could easily, and quickly, end up in the pillory!

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Puritans Going to Church in Massachusetts Bay Colony

Mezzotint maintained at the Library of Congress. Illustration by George Henry Boughton, artist; Thomas Gold Appleton, engraver. Public Domain.

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Elizabeth I - Coronation Portrait

Image online, courtesy the National Portrait Gallery website.

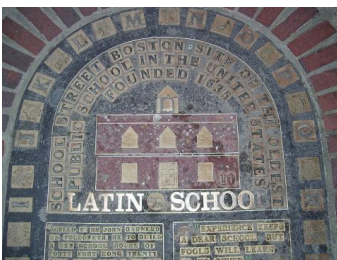
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Signature of Elizabeth I

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Boston Latin School - America's Oldest Existing School

Photo of Latin School plaque by "Swampyank," online via Wikimedia Commons.

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