

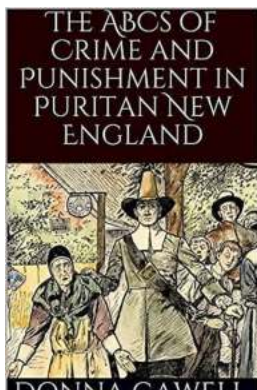
The ABCs of Crime and Punishment in Puritan New England

In the early days of American colonial history, Puritans migrated to New England seeking religious freedom and a chance to create a pure society. However, the strict religious beliefs and moral codes of the Puritans impacted every aspect of life in the New England colonies. One area where their influence was especially evident was in their approach to crime and punishment.

The Puritan Justice System

The Puritans firmly believed in a theocracy, meaning that they believed their society should be governed by religious laws. In their eyes, breaking these laws was not just a civil offense but also a sin against God. This perspective led to a justice system that heavily relied on biblical teachings and punishments.

Crimes committed in Puritan New England were categorized as either moral or civil offenses. Moral offenses included acts such as adultery, blasphemy, witchcraft, and even wearing extravagant clothing. Civil offenses were considered violations of public order or economic regulations, such as theft or selling goods at unfair prices.



The ABCs of Crime and Punishment in Puritan New England by Allan W. Eckert (Kindle Edition)

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Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 127 pages



The Pillory and Stocks

The Puritans' preferred form of public punishment was the pillory and stocks. The pillory was a wooden structure with holes for the head and hands, where offenders would be placed to be publicly humiliated and scorned by their community. The stocks, on the other hand, were similar but restrained only the legs and feet.

Offenders placed in the pillory or stocks would endure verbal abuse, physical assault, and even the throwing of rotting vegetables or dead animals. This public shaming was intended to not only punish the guilty but also serve as a deterrent for others.

Fines and Whippings

Fines were also a common punishment in Puritan New England. Offenders could be required to pay a specified amount of money depending on the severity of their crime. These fines were often used as a means of generating revenue for the community.

Whippings were another popular form of punishment. Offenders would be publicly lashed with a whip or rod, usually in the town square. The severity of the whipping varied based on the severity of the crime, with more serious offenses resulting in a greater number of lashes.

Excommunication and Banishment

For crimes deemed particularly heinous or repeated offenses, Puritan society had harsher penalties in place. Offenders could be excommunicated from the church, which meant they were stripped of their membership and denied access to religious sacraments. This was a severe punishment, as religion played a central role in the lives of Puritans.

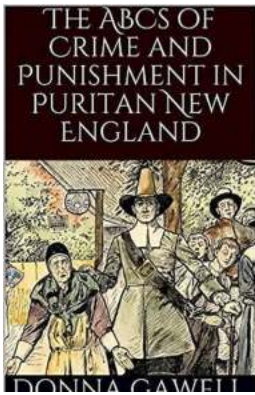
Banishment, the most extreme punishment, meant that an individual was expelled from the community and forced to leave the colony altogether. This sentence was reserved for serious criminals who were considered a threat to the Puritan way of life.

Legacy of Puritan Punishments

The rigorous Puritan system of crime and punishment served as a foundation for the development of American legal systems. Their approach to justice, shaped by religious beliefs and moral values, influenced future legislation and an emphasis on community regulations.

While the methods used by the Puritans may seem harsh by modern standards, they reflect the prevailing attitudes and conditions of their time. Understanding the ABCs of crime and punishment in Puritan New England provides valuable insights into the early roots of legal systems in America.

The Puritans' strict adherence to their religious beliefs fundamentally transformed the legal landscape of New England. From public humiliation through the pillory and stocks to fines and whippings, their approach focused on both punishment and deterrence. The legacy of the Puritans' crime and punishment system continues to shape theories of justice and the evolving legal systems in the United States.



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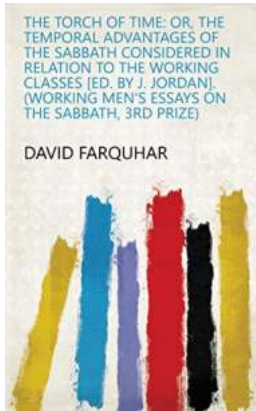
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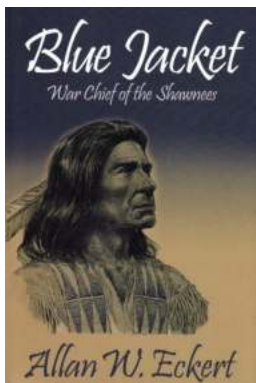


The ABCs of Crime and Punishment in Puritan New England explains the legal system impacted the Puritan society of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The men who wrote and enforced these laws believed that every aspect of their lives should be aligned with the teachings of the Holy Bible. Adultery, common punishments, witchcraft, spectral evidence, etc. are explained in historical context. We might think of Puritan laws and practices as harsh, but they were perhaps more “civilized” compared to the general population back in the Motherland. Puritans chose to resolve their disagreements in a court of law rather than with raucous and revengeful behavior in the streets. This book describes the more negative aspects of life in early colonial New England. The first colonizers were very moral and upright citizens holding the Godly goal of establishing “A City on a Hill.” Even from the beginning, there were those who did not hold these beliefs and standards and never had. The majority of those who migrated were indentured servants and suffered under the harsh realities of life in the New World. Despite their different views, they were forced to live under the demanding expectations and laws of the Puritan church.



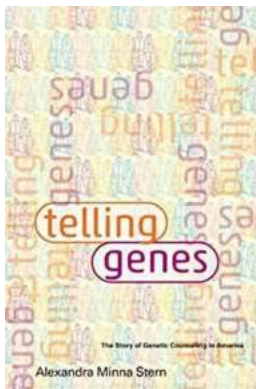
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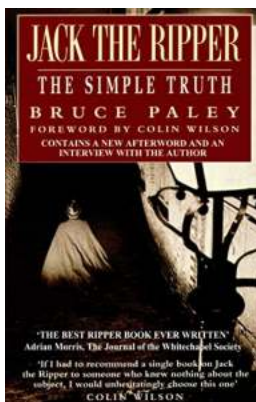
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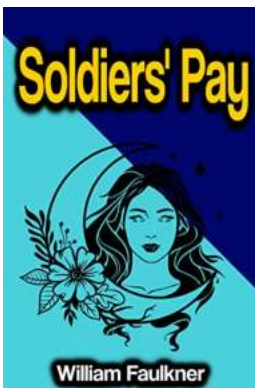
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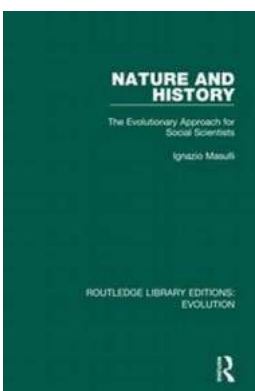
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