

How were puritan families organized
what roles were assigned to men and women how...



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The paper "The Puritan Family - Religion and Family Relations in 17th Century New England" is an exciting example of a term paper on history. Puritan families were organized around the church. A man was submissive to God, a woman submissive to her husband, and children to their parents. Men were the providers. Women took care of the household and children. The property was owned by men. The Puritan family worked to glorify God through their righteous behavior. Thus the Puritan communities were taught to live for God, not the pleasures of this earth.

A Puritan family's goal in life was to live righteously using individually interpreted Biblical instructions. Puritans believed the Bible showed that men were superior to women. Not only were men superior to women, but men were superior to each other depending on their station in life (Morgan, 1966: 18). For example, a rich man was superior to a poor man; a white man was superior to a black man, and so forth. Old men were superior to younger men (Morgan, 1966: 18). This leads to the assumption that the patriarch of a Puritan family was the dominant force in the family. Men were the head of their households, while their wives and children were submissive to their husbands or father's will. In turn, the head of the household was submissive to God's will.

Puritan men had to provide for their wives and children. They were the money makers. It was considered shameful not to feed or provide a roof over their family's heads. These men were farmers, carpenters, merchants, and keepers of other various trades. The Puritans were honest in their jobs

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and dealings, like with the rest of their lives. They would never engage in illegal trade, own a tavern, or other seedy occupations.

Puritan families did not work on Sundays. They would attend a meeting house in the center of the village or town. Men would sit on one side, while women and children sat on the other. Ministers were speaking to the men. It was a man's responsibility to explain theological matters to their wives. Women could not speak in churches. They could speak amongst themselves but had to defer to their husbands on major Biblical issues.

Women in Puritan families were the keepers of the home. Poor women concerned themselves with the children, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and other household duties. Richer women oversaw their servants in doing these household chores. Women were considered the weaker sex. Their husbands dictated every part of their lives, including the religious aspect. Women were too delicate to understand the Bible. They could not interpret the Bible but had to have their husbands instruct them (Morgan, 1966: 44). Puritan women did not have jobs outside their homes.

The relationship between a Puritan husband and wife was unique. Men needed women to bear children, keep their homes, and perform wifely duties. However, men were suspicious of women. Since a woman had sinned first in the Garden of Eden, all women were more sinful than men (Demos, 1999: 84). Women had to be protected from their wanton selves. Men, especially a husband, had to protect their women from their natural

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sinful nature.

Puritan women had little or no recourse in their station. Disobedience or rebellion would have been squashed by the head of the woman's household. More importantly, the majority of Puritan women did not want to rebel. Rebellion or disobedience was not seen as being toward their husband but against God. It was not worth going to hell in order to have disobedience. Obeying God meant first obeying one's husband.

Puritan children were respectful towards their parents, especially their fathers. They were taught to read by their mothers or tutors. Puritans, rich or poor, believed that idle hands could be influenced by the devil. Children as young as five were assigned chores. Young boys between ten and fourteen would choose their trade and become apprentices (Morgan, 1966: 68). Girls would help their mothers with household chores, learning how to sew, cook, milk, and take care of children, in order to become potential good wives for their future husbands.

Puritan families were nuclear families. A family generally made up a father, mother, and children (Demos, 1999: 62). When a child reached maturity or married, they moved into their own home. This home might not be far from the parent's house, but there was a separation of the households. This is due to a popular passage in the Bible that states when a person is married, they should cleave unto their spouse and leave father and mother. Puritan families took this to heart. The exception to this rule was elderly parents, no

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longer able to care for themselves. Elderly parents would go to a grown child's home to stay (Demos, 1999: 75). However, in Puritan families, two or three families did not share dwellings.

Property was owned and controlled by men. If a man died, his property went to a son or brother, with the understanding that beneficiary would take care of the man's wife and children. A married woman "was virtually without rights to own property, make contracts, or sue for damages on her own account" (Demos, 1999: 84). The property could be passed to sons, but not daughters. If a man only had daughters, her husband could receive the property. Wills could have stipulations. For example, one man stipulated that his property could only be inherited if his wife could stay until her death (Demos, 1999: 25). Men were in control, no matter the will. Women did not have a say.

Puritan families were nuclear families. The man was the head of the household. Women and children were submissive to their patriarch. Women could not hold property or jobs. Puritan families were organized around the Bible and God. Submission was the key. Men were submissive to God's will, women submissive to men, and children submissive to their elders. Puritans believed that this type of family was dictated by God.