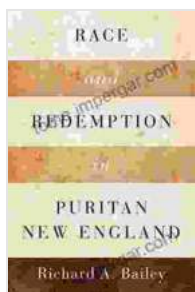


# Race and Redemption in Puritan New England: Religion in America

Puritan New England, a region renowned for its religious fervor, presented a complex and contradictory landscape where the tenets of Christianity intertwined with the prejudices of the time. This article delves into the intricate relationship between race and religion in Puritan New England, exploring the discriminatory practices that marginalized African Americans while simultaneously planting the seeds of abolitionism that would ultimately shape American history.



## Race and Redemption in Puritan New England (Religion in America) by Richard A. Bailey

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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## The Peculiar Institution of Slavery

From its inception, Puritan New England embraced the institution of slavery. Enslaved Africans, primarily from West Africa, were brought to the colonies to serve as a labor force, performing arduous tasks on farms and in households. The Puritans justified their participation in slavery by

invoking biblical passages that they interpreted as legitimizing the enslavement of non-Christians.

## **Theological Rationalizations**

Puritan theologians crafted elaborate arguments to justify their support of slavery. They cited Genesis 9:25-27, which depicts Noah cursing his son Ham and his descendants to be "servants of servants." They also drew upon passages in the Old Testament that described slavery as a punishment for sin. By framing slavery as a divine institution, Puritans assuaged their consciences while perpetuating a system of oppression.

## **Economic Exploitation**

Beyond theological rationalizations, economic factors played a significant role in the perpetuation of slavery in Puritan New England. The region's economy relied heavily on agriculture, and enslaved African Americans provided a cheap and abundant source of labor. As the demand for labor increased with the expansion of the colonies, so too did the importation of enslaved Africans.

## **The Seeds of Abolitionism**

Despite the pervasive acceptance of slavery, Puritan New England also witnessed the stirrings of abolitionist sentiments. Certain Puritan thinkers, influenced by Enlightenment ideals and the teachings of evangelical Protestantism, began to question the morality of slavery. They argued that all humans, regardless of race, were created in the image of God and deserved freedom.

## **The Role of Evangelicalism**

Evangelical Protestantism, with its emphasis on individual conversion and moral accountability, provided a fertile ground for antislavery ideas. Evangelical preachers denounced the evils of slavery and called for its abolition. They argued that the institution contradicted the Christian principles of love and justice.

### **The Emergence of Abolitionist Voices**

Notable Puritan figures such as Samuel Sewall, a prominent judge, and John Saffin, a merchant, emerged as vocal opponents of slavery. Sewall's powerful sermon, "The Selling of Joseph," condemned the slave trade as a "wicked practice." Saffin used his business connections to advocate for the abolition of the slave trade.

### **The Complex Legacy**

The legacy of race and religion in Puritan New England remains complex and multifaceted. The region's embrace of slavery stands as a testament to the pervasive prejudices of the time. Yet, the seeds of abolitionism that were sown within the Puritan community laid the groundwork for the eventual demise of slavery in America.

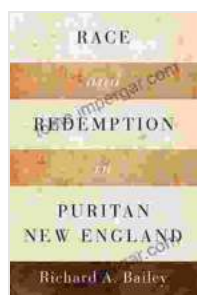
### **The Long Shadow of Racism**

The discriminatory practices of Puritan New England had a lasting impact on American society. The legacy of slavery and racial inequality continues to shape the fabric of the United States today. Understanding the historical roots of racism is essential for addressing its contemporary manifestations.

### **The Power of Redemption**

Amidst the darkness of slavery, the voices of abolitionists offer a beacon of hope. Their unwavering belief in human equality and their commitment to social justice remind us of the transformative power of redemption. The struggle for racial justice continues, but the seeds of abolitionism planted in Puritan New England serve as an inspiration for all who strive for a more just and equitable world.

The story of race and religion in Puritan New England is a complex and sobering one. It reveals the depths of human prejudice and the heights of human compassion. The discriminatory practices that enslaved African Americans left an enduring scar on American history, but the seeds of abolitionism that were sown within the Puritan community offer a glimmer of hope for redemption. By understanding this complex legacy, we can better grapple with the challenges of race and religion in our own time and work towards a future where all people are treated with dignity and respect.



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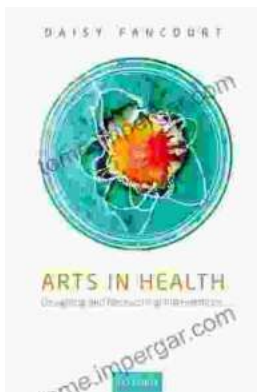
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