

## The 17th Century

Puritanism was a Protestant movement that emerged in 16th-century England with the goal of transforming it into a godly society by reforming or purifying the Church of England of all remaining Roman Catholic teachings and practices.

The Puritan migration (the Great Migration) to New England was marked in its effects in the two decades from 1620 to 1640. The term Great Migration usually refers to the migration in this period of English Puritans to Massachusetts and the West Indies, especially Barbados. They came in family groups rather than as isolated individuals and were motivated chiefly by a quest for freedom to practice their Puritan religion. Most of the Puritans who emigrated settled in the [New England](#) area. However, the [Great Migration](#) of Puritans was relatively short-lived and not as large as is often believed. It began in earnest in 1629 with the founding of the [Massachusetts Bay Colony](#), and ended in 1642 with the start of the English Civil War, when King [Charles I](#) effectively shut off emigration to the colonies.

In the early 17th century, thousands of English Puritans colonized North America, mainly in New England. Puritans were generally members of the Church of England who believed that the Church of England was insufficiently reformed, retaining too much of its Roman Catholic doctrinal roots, and who therefore opposed royal ecclesiastical policy under Elizabeth I of England.

This history of American [literature](#) begins with the arrival of English-speaking Europeans in what would become the United States. At first American literature was naturally a colonial literature, by authors who were Englishmen and who thought and wrote as such. [John Smith](#), a soldier of fortune, is credited with initiating American literature. These writings were avowedly written to explain colonizing opportunities to Englishmen. In time, each colony was similarly described. Many works praised America as a land of economic promise. Such writers acknowledged British allegiance, but others stressed the differences of opinion that spurred the colonists to leave their homeland. More important, they argued questions of government involving the relationship between church and state.