



## **PURITANISM VALUES AS THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MATERIALISM**

### ***NILAI-NILAI PURITANISME SEBAGAI DASAR DARI INDIVIDUALISME AMERIKA DILIHAT DARI PERSPEKTIF MATERIALISME***

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#### Abstract

*This paper explores the profound impact of Puritanism on the cultural and societal foundation of the United States, with a focus on its role in shaping individualism and materialism. Originating in England, Puritanism emerged as a reform movement rejecting ecclesiastical hierarchy and emphasizing direct communication with God. Upon migrating to America, Puritans established communities centered on religious freedom, self-reliance, and moral responsibility, significantly influencing democratic ideals and the American ethos of personal autonomy. Through historical records and scholarly works, this study highlights how Puritan spiritual practices transitioned into secular ideals, fostering materialism. The Puritan work ethic, rooted in doctrines of predestination, equated material success with divine favor, a concept persisting in contemporary culture. This paper argues that Puritanism's emphasis on hard work and moral discipline created a trajectory prioritizing individual achievement and wealth. By examining this transformation, the research sheds light on the legacy of Puritan values in shaping the complexities of American identity, from democratic foundations to materialistic tendencies.*

**Keywords : Puritanism, Individualism, Materialism, Democracy.**

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#### Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi dampak mendalam Puritanisme terhadap fondasi budaya dan sosial Amerika Serikat, dengan fokus pada perannya dalam membentuk individualisme dan materialisme. Berasal dari Inggris, Puritanisme muncul sebagai gerakan reformasi yang menolak hierarki gerejawi dan menekankan komunikasi langsung dengan Tuhan. Setelah bermigrasi ke Amerika, kaum Puritan mendirikan komunitas yang berpusat pada kebebasan beragama, kemandirian, dan tanggung jawab moral, yang secara signifikan memengaruhi cita-cita demokrasi dan etos otonomi pribadi di Amerika. Melalui catatan sejarah dan karya ilmiah, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana praktik spiritual Puritan bertransisi ke nilai-nilai sekuler, mendorong materialisme. Etos kerja Puritan, yang berakar pada doktrin predestinasi, menyamakan kesuksesan material dengan anugerah ilahi, sebuah konsep yang bertahan dalam budaya kontemporer. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa penekanan Puritanisme pada kerja keras dan disiplin moral menciptakan jalur yang memprioritaskan pencapaian individu dan kekayaan. Dengan memeriksa transformasi ini, penelitian ini menjelaskan warisan nilai-nilai Puritan dalam membentuk kompleksitas identitas Amerika, dari fondasi demokrasi hingga kecenderungan materialistik.

**Kata Kunci: Puritanisme, Individualisme, Materialisme, Demokrasi.**



## **INTRODUCTION**

America, with its democratic ideals, offers a compelling vision of equality and opportunity for all individuals. The Declaration of Independence (1776) famously asserts that “all men are created equal” and endowed with the unalienable rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson, 1776). These principles have their roots in the early settlers, particularly the Puritans, who sought religious freedom and established foundational values that continue to shape American culture.

Puritanism was not merely a religious reform movement but a transformative force that left an indelible mark on the American national character. The Puritans’ rejection of ecclesiastical authority, their focus on direct communication with God, and their emphasis on moral responsibility contributed to the development of a society rooted in individual autonomy and democratic governance. As Bremer (2009) highlights, Puritanism’s principles were deeply embedded in the social and political structures of the colonies, fostering a culture of self-reliance and moral discipline. This paper investigates how Puritanism’s core principles influenced the rise of American individualism and its eventual transition into materialism, offering insights into the historical and cultural dynamics that continue to define the United States.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a historical and interpretative framework to examine the impact of Puritanism on American culture. By analyzing primary sources such as theological writings, historical accounts, and records of Puritan practices, the paper reconstructs the ideological and cultural shifts introduced by Puritan settlers. Additionally, secondary sources, including scholarly analyses of Puritanism, individualism, and materialism, provide theoretical grounding and contextual depth to the study. As Eide (2010) suggests, understanding the progression from religious idealism to secular materialism requires a multidisciplinary approach that considers theological, sociopolitical, and cultural perspectives.

The research focuses on three key areas: the historical development of Puritanism, its role in fostering individualism, and the transition from religious to material pursuits. By synthesizing these aspects, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how Puritan ideals have shaped American societal values over time.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Historical Origins of Puritanism**

Puritanism emerged in late 16th and early 17th-century England as a response to the perceived corruption and rigidity of the Church of England. Dissatisfied with the institutionalized doctrines and reliance on traditions, Puritans sought to purify the church and emphasize personal faith and direct engagement with Scripture. As Bremer (2009) notes, Puritans believed that “the Scriptures were the direct revelation of God” and rejected ecclesiastical intermediaries, focusing instead on individual interpretation and spiritual autonomy.

The political and religious environment of England during this period was hostile to Puritan reforms. The refusal of King James I to accommodate their demands for church reform led to increasing persecution. Many Puritans sought refuge in the New World, where they envisioned a



society governed by their principles of religious freedom and moral discipline. Their migration to America marked the beginning of a cultural transformation, as they sought to establish a “city upon a hill” (Winthrop, 1630) that exemplified their values. The foundation of these communities was a shared commitment to religious practices that prioritized personal responsibility and direct engagement with God, laying the groundwork for a distinctly American ethos.

### **Puritan Values and the Rise of Individualism**

The Puritans’ emphasis on individual responsibility and moral autonomy laid the groundwork for American individualism. They believed that every person had the capacity to establish a direct relationship with God without intermediaries, fostering a sense of personal accountability and self-reliance. As Mingiuc (2010) asserts, “without some understanding of Puritanism, there is no understanding of America.” This theological stance was mirrored in their social practices, which valued hard work, self-discipline, and community responsibility. The Puritans’ theological beliefs about predestination and personal salvation encouraged individuals to act as moral agents accountable for their own spiritual and worldly success.

The Puritan rejection of hierarchical authority and emphasis on personal faith resonated with the democratic ideals that later became central to the American political system. Over time, these principles evolved into a broader cultural ethos that championed individual freedom, privacy, and self-determination. Gustavsson (2008) notes that “individualism as a normative doctrine... is the same as an ideal of individual freedom.” This notion of personal liberty has been instrumental in shaping the American cultural identity. Puritanism’s legacy in fostering these ideals is evident in the enduring emphasis on autonomy, a core tenet of American society.

Additionally, the Puritans’ commitment to community and moral governance ensured that individualism did not lead to isolation. Rather, it was intertwined with a collective responsibility to uphold shared values. This balance between personal autonomy and community accountability became a defining feature of the American democratic framework, influencing political and social institutions that prioritize both individual rights and collective welfare.

### **From Religious Individualism to Materialism**

The transition from religious individualism to materialism represents a significant shift in the American cultural landscape. Eide (2010) argues that the democratic ideals of equality and individualism encourage the pursuit of material goods as a means of achieving personal fulfillment and social recognition. In a society where moral values are often contested, material success emerges as a tangible and universally accepted indicator of achievement. This dynamic highlights the interplay between Puritan spiritual values and the evolving cultural priorities of American society.

The Puritan work ethic, rooted in the doctrine of predestination, played a crucial role in this transformation. Puritans believed that hard work and material success were signs of divine favor and evidence of one’s election by God. Kang (2009) observes that “American Puritans linked material wealth with God’s favor,” equating economic prosperity with spiritual salvation. This association has persisted in American culture, where wealth and success are often seen as markers of individual merit and moral worth. The emphasis on industriousness and frugality, initially



grounded in religious convictions, evolved into a secular framework that prioritizes economic achievement.

Eide's (2010) analysis further highlights how the uncertainty surrounding moral goods in a democratic society drives individuals toward material pursuits. In a culture that values equality and individual autonomy, material goods provide a sense of stability and certainty that moral or spiritual values may lack. As Tocqueville noted, democracy tends to isolate individuals, turning their focus inward and directing their energies toward tangible, material rewards. This tendency reflects a cultural adaptation of Puritan values to the broader context of American democracy.

Moreover, Puritanism's legacy in linking moral discipline with worldly success reinforced the cultural acceptance of materialism. The belief that success is evidence of virtue and effort continues to shape American attitudes toward wealth and social status. As material goods became increasingly associated with personal achievement, the pursuit of economic prosperity became a dominant cultural narrative, blending spiritual aspirations with secular ambitions.

Despite critiques of materialism's dominance, it is essential to recognize its roots in the Puritan emphasis on work as a means of honoring God. This cultural trajectory underscores the complex interplay between historical religious values and contemporary societal priorities. The transformation of Puritan ideals into a framework that celebrates individual success and material wealth reveals the enduring influence of these early settlers on the American identity.

## CONCLUSION

Puritanism has left an enduring legacy on American culture, shaping its democratic ideals, individualism, and materialistic tendencies. The Puritans' quest for religious freedom and their emphasis on personal responsibility laid the foundation for a society that values autonomy and self-reliance. However, this individualism has also given rise to a culture that prioritizes material success as a measure of achievement and identity.

While some critiques highlight the contradictions in Puritan practices, such as their intolerance of other religions, their contributions to the American national character remain significant. Understanding these historical roots offers valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary American culture, where the pursuit of freedom and success continues to be intertwined with the values of individualism and materialism.

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