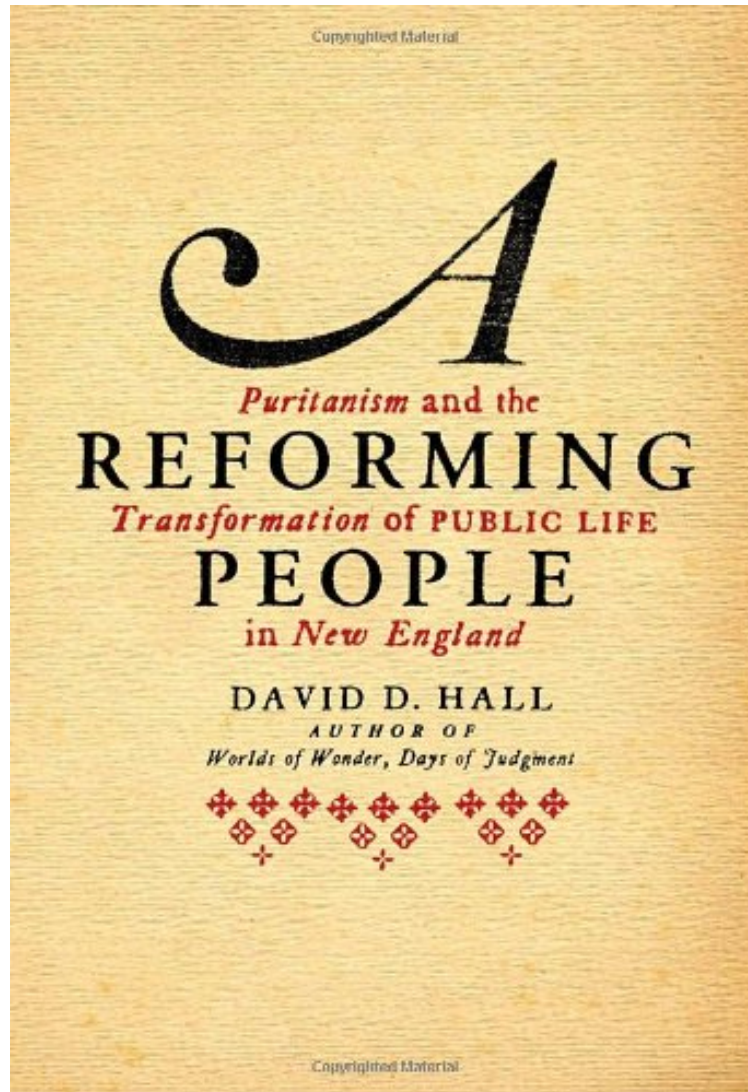


(Get free) A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England

# A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England

David D. Hall

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**David D. Hall : A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Politics and Government in Puritan New England By Frank Bellizzi This is a different sort of book about the Puritans. Instead of focusing on theology and religion, it looks at politics and government. It's also different in another regard: instead of asserting that Puritan government was

authoritarian and anti-democratic, historian David D. Hall argues that so much of the Puritan political experiment actually ran in the opposite direction. From the very beginning of *A Reforming People*, it's clear that Hall wants to stick up for the misunderstood and much-maligned Puritans. "The argument that runs through this book," he writes, "is plain enough: the people who founded the New England colonies in the early seventeenth century brought into being churches, civil governments, and a code of laws that collectively marked them as the most advanced reformers of the Anglo-colonial world" (xi). Hall notes that during the 1620s and 30s, the search for a proper balance between liberty and order was a huge question in both England and New England. Along these lines, the big advances emerged in New England, not old England (4). Looking back on the Puritans of the seventeenth century, he explains, observers and historians have taken one of two opposing views. According to some, the Puritan impulse was essentially top-down and authoritarian. They suggest that the Salem witch trials should come as no surprise. According to others, the Puritan outlook was essentially democratic and anti-authoritarian. They point to the development of democratic ideology in nineteenth-century America. Hall argues that both of these common, popular views of New England Puritans are seriously flawed. No, they weren't proto-liberals. But neither were they unfeeling, authoritarian despots.

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Excellent  
By J. Aronson  
This very excellent book is not for the casual reader. It seems one cannot begin to understand 17th C. Anglo-American history until you have been both Catholic and a Calvinist and been to law school and thought the first year curriculum in law school was the most interesting thing ever. In this very excellent work David Hall approaches the first 20 years or so of the Bay Colony from the religious and cultural point of view. Through out the book, Hall presents his conclusions from his research into how the town and colony government developed and functioned roughly between 1630-50. The words that came to my mind to describe the process was "iterative" or perhaps "dialectic" The first issue was who or what was sovereign. Following Hall, it seems the king was never mentioned; that the presbyterian system of bishops was rejected out of hand; and the result was that first Christ and then His godly people speaking both personally and through their representatives were sovereign. Hall suggests that the populism implicit in all this was tempered by Winthrop who, in Hall's excellent observation, was just the right man to ensure that the governor and his assistants retained just enough magisterial power to prevent the colony from coming apart. Hall's Winthrop reminded me strongly of Henry Ireton and Sir Thomas Fairfax. Hall advances the thesis (which I strongly endorse) that the Puritans who founded the Bay Colony are properly considered as the most successful and historically important of the many factions and sects that emerged from the Puritan Revolution that had been simmering in England since the short reign of Edward VI and that exploded into civil war when Charles I raised the royal standard in Nottingham on August 22, 1642. Politics and religion were completely enmeshed everywhere in Europe during the 17th C. So, first and foremost, the culture of Bay Colony's Puritans was that of yeoman and minor gentry English Calvinist Independents (Congregationalists) from the Heart of the Eastern Association; the sort that attracted Bishop Laud's particular and unfavorable attention after 1626. Some were separatists, some were not but whether or not to separate from the Church of England was certainly on all of their minds at the time. I think it was not until the reign of William of Orange that the C of E was first grudgingly tolerated in Boston. In plain English, Hall argues that while the Levellers wanted to establish a constitutional democratic republic, Winthrop and his settlers succeeded in doing just that. Certainly, every Leveller or Grandee who supported the Agreements of the People, the Heads of Proposals and the Westminster Confession could have happily found a home in one New England town or another. Hall takes care to remind us that the written record, which is extensive in New England, must be read carefully as it is often one sided and self-serving. Hall argues and demonstrates that the "magisterial" tendencies of proto-whig Grandee like figures such as Winthrop, Endicott, Dudley and Vane were, in fact, successfully resisted by what can be easily described as the "republican" or "Leveller" tendencies of the great majority of the settlers. I look forward to re-reading T H Breen's "The Character of a Good Ruler" (cited by Hall) and Louise A. Breen's "Transgressing the Bounds" in light of this book.

14 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Our Kinsmen, the Puritans  
By William Stott  
David Hall's New England Puritan colony is both new and familiar. New because it isn't like Perry Miller's, where blear-eyed theologians agonize over a certain Peter Ramus, nor like Nathaniel Hawthorne's and Arthur Miller's, where men in black snoop out sex and witchcraft. Rather, it is a community of other-directed souls conscious of and concerned about the least among them--and also many wayward pigs--and laboring to build a place that's just and humane. What Hall recreates for us is the American small town that for so long was the center of our lives and aspirations.

A revelatory account of the aspirations and accomplishments of the people who founded the New England colonies, comparing the reforms they enacted with those attempted in England during the period of the English Revolution. Distinguished historian David D. Hall looks afresh at how the colonists set up churches, civil governments, and methods for distributing land. Bringing with them a deep fear of arbitrary, unlimited authority grounded in either church or state, these settlers based their churches on the participation of laypeople and insisted on consent as a premise of all civil governance. Encouraging broad participation and relying on the vigorous use of petitioning, they also transformed civil and criminal law and the workings of courts. The outcome was a civil society far less authoritarian and hierarchical than was customary in their age indeed, a society so advanced that a few dared to

describe it as democratical. They were well ahead of their time in doing so. As Puritans, the colonists also hoped to exemplify a social ethics of equity, peace, and the common good. In a case study of a single town, Hall follows a minister as he encourages the townspeople to live up to these high standards in their politics. This is a book that challenges us to discard long-standing stereotypes of the Puritans as temperamentally authoritarian and their leadership as despotic. Hall demonstrates exactly the opposite. Here, we watch the colonists as they insist on aligning institutions and social practice with equity and liberty. A stunning re-evaluation of the earliest moments of New England's history, revealing the colonists to be the most effective and daring reformers of their day.

From Publishers Weekly  
In the popular imagination, the New England Puritans are often portrayed as dour and authoritarian individuals out to quash social liberties and enforce conformity to particular religious principles. Hall's captivating study of American Puritanism between 1630 and 1650 challenges this view and offers instead a portrait of a group of people deeply engaged in fostering vital alliances between civil government and ecclesial government. Drawing deeply on colonial records, the Harvard historian demonstrates that the Puritan colonists asked questions about who should have the vote and what kind of rulers they wanted, how the inheritance of property should be arranged, what role the civil state should play in religion, and how land should be distributed. He shows that the colonists, in contrast to their contemporaries in England, were ambitious to restore the religious practice of the earliest Christian communities, the Congregational Way. Hall's first-rate book offers a glimpse of a small slice of American religious history, challenging prevailing ideas about the nature of reform in Puritan New England. (Apr.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. "David Hall shapes mounds of evidence into a depiction of New England unlike any we have ever seen. His Puritanism is neither authoritarian nor democratic but something of its own. Hall makes Puritanism intelligible to the 21st century." Richard Lyman Bushman, author of *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* "In this elegant and richly nuanced book, David Hall rescues the New England Puritans from the dark myths of repression. By recovering their probing ideas and eloquent debates, Hall reveals our original revolutionaries in search of equity, justice, and community." Alan Taylor, author of *The Civil War of 1812: A Reforming People* powerfully transforms our understanding of the role of Puritanism in the re-making of political culture and institutions in seventeenth-century New England. A model of elegance and erudition, David Hall's thought-provoking book re-opens the testing question of the roots of modern politics in the Anglo-colonial world. It tells a compelling story that has immense resonance for our understanding of the past but also the present." Alexandra Walsham, author of *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England 1500-1700* "In *A Reforming People*, David Hall reminds us of the political accomplishments of New England's founders, their radical remaking of the nature of public life, through their commitment to self-government and their ethic of equity and mutual obligation. With an authority rooted in his unmatched mastery of the sources, Hall provides an elegant and heartfelt testament to the continuing relevance of the Puritans." Mark Peterson, author of *The City-State of Boston, 1630-1865* "Thanks to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Arthur Miller, Puritan New England is popularly identified with authoritarian theocracy. In this book, a brilliant historian of early New England takes us beyond the stereotype, and reveals how the first Puritan settlers enacted their own English Revolution in public life. Hall depicts a society that (despite its failings) prized and institutionalized accountability, participation and equity. Never before have we had such a compelling account of the New Englanders' civic achievement." Professor John Coffey, co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*  
About the Author  
David D. Hall is Bartlett Research Professor of New England Church History at Harvard Divinity School. He is the author or editor of numerous books on American religious and cultural history.