

# Moral Rivals: The Intersection Between Puritanism and Piracy in the 17th and 18th Centuries

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### Moral Rivals: The Intersection Between Puritanism and Piracy in the 17th and 18th Centuries

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#### Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between American colonial Puritans and Atlantic pirates in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Due to their conflicting views on morality and faith, Christianity and piracy consistently tested the other's resilience for what they believed. Their contrasting moralities intersected in countless ways throughout the colonies, evident through an increasing pattern and shift towards piracy and seafaring in the subject matter of Christian sermons, as well as the introduction of execution sermons that presented an opportunity for preachers to minister to pirates, giving them a final chance at redemption before they were sentenced to hang on the gallows. Cotton Mather was one of the leading Puritan ministers that challenged the sins of seafarers, simultaneously preaching against the dangers of the Atlantic while also appealing to convicted pirates that eternal life awaited them if only they repented. Whether the intentions of Mather and other Puritan preachers were made in good faith or for their own benefit is additionally brought under examination. Overall, this thesis explores themes presented to history that provide interesting insight into the growing complexity of the Atlantic world at the turn of the 18th century. Religion, morality, and justice were key components to the expanding territories of North America, and pirates sought to oppose those formal structures in any way they could. Between 1680 to the late 1720's, Puritan ideals were challenged by the ethical freedom of pirates, thus a sense of urgency was born that lived on in the minds of the infamous preachers of the First Great Awakening that began in the mid 18th century.

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The Puritans were English Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who sought to purify the Church of England of Roman Catholic practices, maintaining that the Church of England had not been fully reformed and should become more Protestant. Puritanism played a significant role in English history, especially during the Protectorate. Puritans were dissatisfied with the limited extent of the English Reformation and with the Church of England's toleration of certain practices associated with the Roman Catholic Church. At the start of the 17th Century, there were a few major players on the High Seas as Spain, Portugal, France and The Netherlands had their share of naval power in the beginning, while England was reasonably powerful. Portugal, being a smaller country with less resources than France or Spain may have been slightly less of a power than them. It was only in the late 17th Century that Britain (After 1707, The Acts of Union combined England, Scotland and Ireland into the UK. With no threats on land to distract them, their navy became one of the powers. - Now you see the difference between England a Generalization: In Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, monarchs and rulers sought to increase their power both domestically within their own states and internationally by adding to their territories and populations. Both in consolidating their power internally and expanding their power externally, they employed three aspects of state-building: control, extraction, and integration. Assess this generalization by marshaling specific evidence that supports or questions it. Context and Connection: the 17th Century Crisis. Rebellions in France, England, Catalonia & Portugal, Naples, and t