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The Puritan Gentry of Early Stuart England

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the idea and role of the Puritan gentry of early Stuart England, especially in the period between the accession of Charles I and the outbreak of the Civil War.

There is a tendency among present-day historians, whether Marxist or otherwise, to portray the religious loyalties of Puritan gentlemen as little more than a reflection of their economic or political aspirations. Religion, however, was a potent force in seventeenth-century England. In the course of this study an attempt has been made to answer a number of important questions concerning the Puritan gentry.

Why did persons of wealth and position profess Puritanism? What were the major characters of their religions? And what were the major influences of their actions, especially their connections with New England?

A recurring theme throughout this paper is the character of the relationship which existed between the Puritan gentry and the godly divines. The latter appear in various roles: as authors, university dons, chaplains, parish clergy and lectures. The Puritan squire, for his part, had the key role of patron.