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Monica D. Fitzgerald
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Puritans Behaving Badly

Tracing the first three generations in Puritan New England, this book explores changes in language, gender expectations, and religious identities for men and women. The book argues that laypeople shaped gender conventions by challenging the ideas of ministers and rectifying more traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity. Although the Puritans' emphasis on spiritual equality had the opportunity to radically alter gender roles, in daily practice laymen censured men and women differently – punishing men for public behavior that threatened the peace of their communities and women for private sins that allegedly revealed their spiritual corruption. In order to retain their public masculine identity, men altered the original mission of Puritanism, infusing gender into the construction of religious ideas about public service, the creation of the individual, and the gendering of separate spheres. With these practices, Puritans transformed their *errand into the wilderness* and the normative Puritan became female.

Monica D. Fitzgerald is a professor in the Justice, Community, and Leadership program at Saint Mary's College of California.

Puritans Behaving Badly

*Gender, Punishment, and
Religion in Early America*

MONICA D. FITZGERALD

Saint Mary's College of California



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To Frank, Megan, and Matt
(my Fab Fitzs)

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I started graduate school as a young mother, at a time when it did not feel normal, or entirely accepted, in the academy. A professor once told me I was just a “middle-class housewife exercising her brain.” While there *should* be nothing wrong with middle-class housewives exercising their brains, I wanted to be a professor and a scholar of history, and that comment was meant to convey to me that I was not a “real” or “serious” scholar. I hope my book plays some small part in continuing to break down expectations based on gender. However, being in higher education for two decades, I can say that women (and mothers), especially women of color, continue to face too many barriers and challenges. We need to look seriously at how we as historians and academics can deconstruct some of the formal and informal infrastructures that impede women. The path I chose to do this as a mom was a slower road, but my children grounded me and never let me forget what was important – living by your values and principles. Thank you to my amazing children, Megan and Matt. This book grew up with them (but they matured much faster). They always had patience with my weird history stuff and (almost) always allowed us to stop at historical points of interest on road trips. As young adults forging their own paths, they give me hope, and I am proud that they are solid feminists who can call out gender bias – even in Happy Meal toys.

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