

## Changes in Puritan Society

**KEY QUESTION** What factors helped weaken Puritan religious control?

New England society was changing rapidly by the late 1600s. One of the most noticeable changes was the decline of Puritan power.

**Economic Success and Religious Diversity** The Puritan values of hard work made many New Englanders rich. But some colonists now seemed to care more about business and material possessions than about religion. Puritan ministers noticed the change and used their sermons to condemn the new interest in worldly success.

### History through Art



Portraits of Elizabeth, Mary, and John Freake by an unidentified artist, from the collection of the Worcester Art Museum.

### A Changing Puritan World

These portraits, painted a few years before King Philip's War, are windows onto a changing Puritan world. Elizabeth, (shown with her daughter Mary) and John Freake were in their 30s when these portraits were painted in the 1670s. Elizabeth was one of the children of the first generation of Puritans, who arrived during the Great Migration. Elizabeth and John enjoyed the fruits of the prosperous society that their parents had created. Their clothes are richly decorated and expensive. For example, John's elaborate lace collar, gloves, and ruffled sleeves display his wealth.

**CRITICAL VIEWING** How do Elizabeth's clothes and surroundings reveal the wealth of Puritan society in the late 1600s?

### PRIMARY SOURCE

“We have changed our Interest. The Interest of New England was religion, which did distinguish us from other English [colonies]. . . . Now we begin to espouse a Worldly Interest and so choose a new God.”

—Increase Mather, from the sermon  
“The Day of Trouble is Near,” 1674

The arrival of non-Puritan immigrants also threatened Puritan control. The success of the colony began attracting different kinds of immigrants. Baptists and Anglicans established churches in Massachusetts and Connecticut, where Puritans had once been the most powerful group.

Political changes further weakened Puritan domination. In 1691, a new royal charter for Massachusetts guaranteed religious freedom for all Protestants, not just Puritans. The charter broke Puritan power by ending the churches' control of elections. The loss of power created great uncertainty for many Puritans, which may have contributed to one of the strangest episodes in American history—the Salem witchcraft trials.

**The Salem Witchcraft Trials** In 1692, a year after the new charter broke Puritan power, a terrifying series of events occurred in Salem Village, Massachusetts. Several girls,