

# Still Puritan After All These Years

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## *The New York Times:*

“I THINK I can see the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritan who landed on those shores,” the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville wrote after visiting the United States in the 1830s. Was he right? Do present-day Americans still exhibit, in their attitudes and behavior, traces of those austere English Protestants who started arriving in the country in the early 17th century?

It seems we do. Consider a series of experiments conducted by researchers led by the psychologist Eric Luis Uhlmann and published last year in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. In one study, they investigated whether the work habits of today’s Americans reflected the so-called Protestant work ethic. Martin Luther and John Calvin argued that work was a calling from God. They also believed in predestination and viewed success as a sign of salvation. This led to belief in success as a path to salvation: hard work and good deeds would bring rewards, in life and after.

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Protestant attitudes about work may also influence how Americans treat their co-workers. Calvin argued that socializing while on the job was a distraction from the assignment God gave you. The psychologist Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks has found that Protestants — but not Catholics — become less sensitive to others’ emotions when reminded of work, possibly indicating a tendency to judge fraternizing as unproductive and unprofessional. He and collaborators have also found that Americans have a culturally specific tendency to view family photos and other personal items as unprofessional presences in the office.

Read the whole story: [The New York Times](#)