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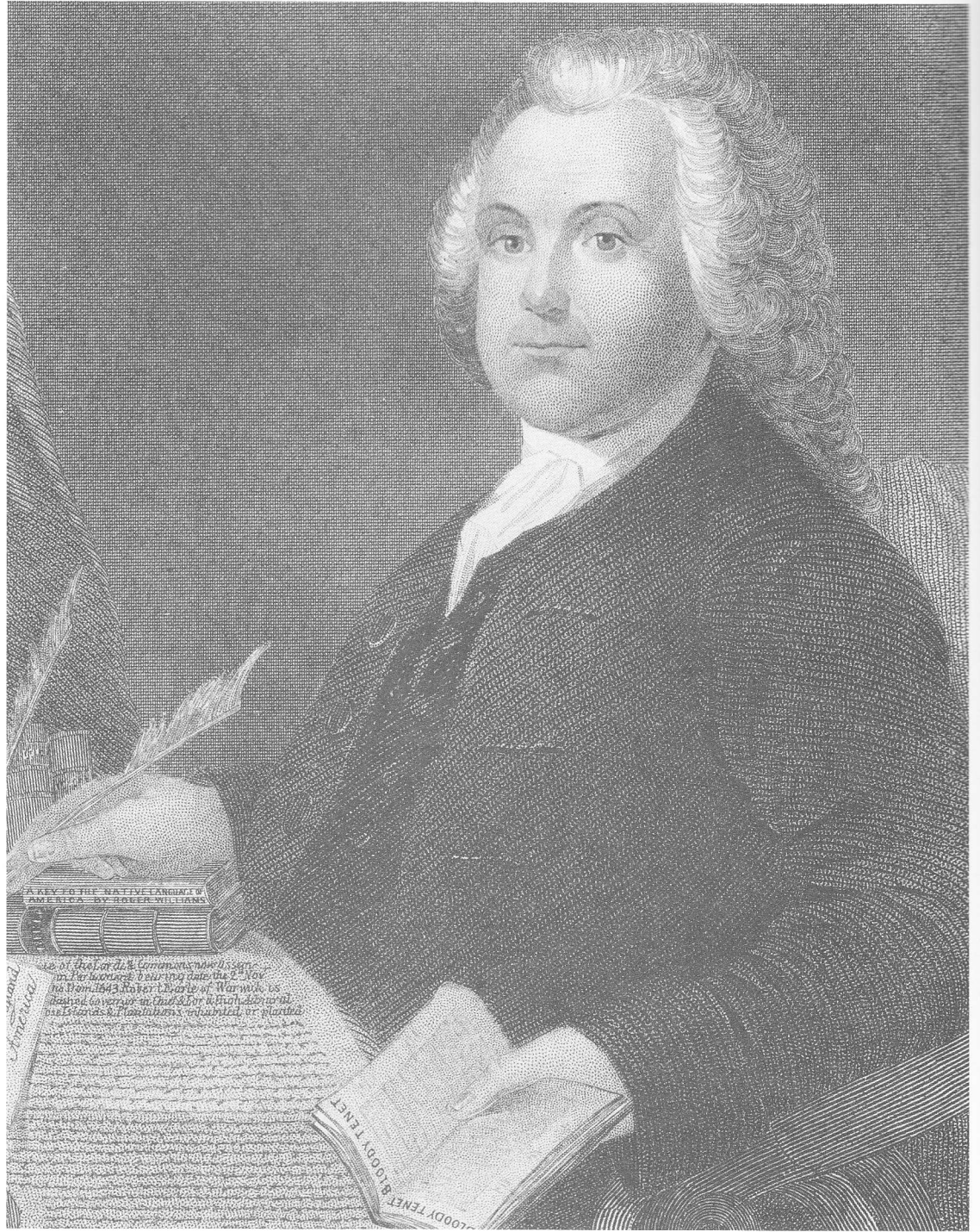
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## Roger Williams and His Place in History: The Background and the Last Quarter Century

ANTHONY O. CARLINO

In November 1994 the Republican party won a majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate for the first time in forty years. Many Republicans believed that one reason for their victory was a longing of Americans for a return to the traditional values that the country seemed to have left behind. These Republicans promised that legislation would be passed that would strengthen those values and the American family. Among their proposals was one to amend the Constitution to allow school-sponsored prayer. Over 85 percent of Americans favored such an amendment, they claimed. God needed to take his rightful place in public life once again—a proposition that many endorsed, including all of the candidates for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination.<sup>1</sup>

The question of school prayer is complex and imbued with deep emotion; but the issue cannot go forward without the voices of two Americans from the past shouting a resounding “No!” through the House and Senate chambers to any form of state-sponsored religious worship. One of the voices is that of Thomas Jefferson, whose views on religion were shaped by the Enlightenment and by a latent animosity toward any restrictions upon freedom of thought. Many who support a prayer amendment believe that Jefferson’s “wall of separation” between church and state has been misunderstood, and that a non-preferential application of religious liberty was what he really meant. They contend that the country in Jefferson’s time was predominantly Christian in character and tone, and that the Europeans who migrated here came to establish a Christian nation, a light for all others to see and to emulate.<sup>2</sup> After all, John Winthrop declared that New England would be “as a City upon a Hill,” wherein England and all the world would see true Christian charity and purity of worship.<sup>3</sup>

But even among those earliest settlers there was one who offered an even louder protest—not on the grounds of Jefferson’s supposed secularism, but in support of the sacred. It was Roger Williams, 150 years before enactment of the First Amendment, who first used the “wall of separation” metaphor. When religious leaders of his day tried to compel others to worship, or even sought to mix religion and the state (e.g., with oaths of allegiance), Williams denounced their efforts: no one, he insisted, had the right to force anyone to worship against the dictates of his own conscience. For many, that contention, passionately advanced over three centuries ago, remains as relevant for our time as it was for his. Those who would mix church and state must contend with Williams still.

Roger Williams has been somewhat of an enigma for historians, and certainly an elusive figure to most Americans. His name conjures up many images. Although he was a man of the seventeenth century, bound to it in word and deed, residents of other centuries and other cultures have embraced him as a symbol of democracy and religious liberty. Others, however, have argued that he was of little significance outside of Rhode Island when he was alive, and that he is of even less significance today.<sup>4</sup> The perspectives that have been brought to bear on him have been as varied as the periods from which they have come. Many of his contemporaries berated him; some who knew him well, and

*No contemporary likenesses of Roger Williams exist, but many later artists have attempted portraits or sketches of him. This engraving was done by F. Halpin in 1847. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 19).*

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might have known better, saw him as insolent, sometimes to justify their own filiopietism. Later he was depicted as an admirable champion of the Baptist faith, as well as a champion of church-state separation. Some twentieth-century historians argued that he never really cared about religion at all, or that he was a man trapped in his times, wanting nothing more than that religion be left to one's own conscience. Some regarded him as a defender of democracy and the common man, a democrat persecuted by narrow-minded oppressors. Attempting to dispel earlier inaccurate images, recent efforts have sought a more balanced view of Williams and his times, placing him within the context of his seventeenth-century world while achieving a fuller understanding of this complex and often enigmatic man.

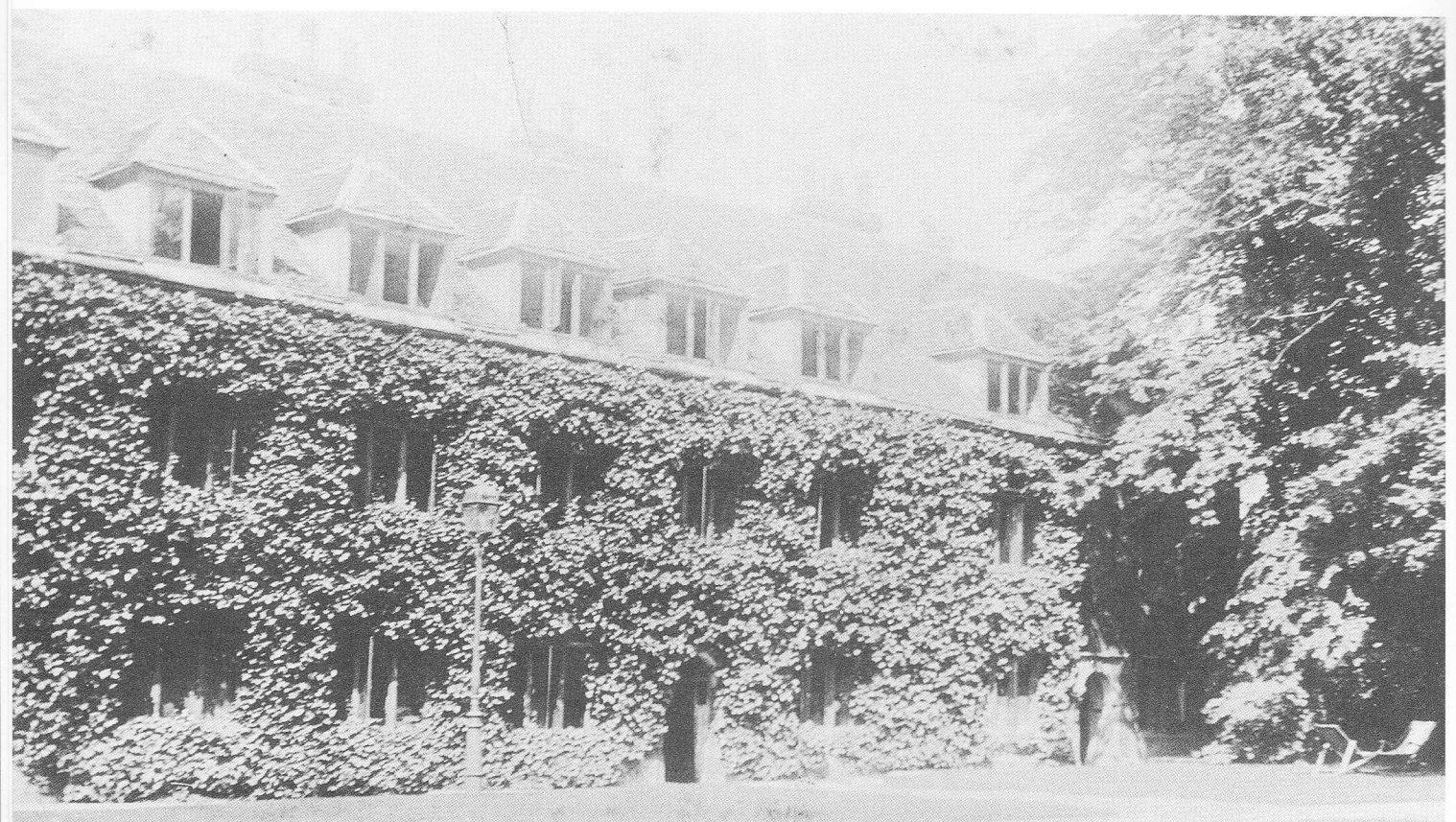
Such has been the journey of Roger Williams through history, a journey that has seen him labeled a heretic, a champion of "soul liberty" and democracy, and even the purest of Puritans. Why has his image changed so throughout history? How could someone who had borne such a stigma of obstinacy and incorrigibility come to be portrayed as the truest and greatest champion of religious liberty for the nation? Has the change resulted from better scholarship, or is it the product of the different social and cultural vantage points from which scholars have viewed him? To begin to answer these questions, it is necessary first to understand Williams within the context of his times and within the Puritan movement.



Roger Williams was perhaps colonial America's most famous dissident.<sup>5</sup> Some were more eccentric (and perhaps more interesting); others championed particular innovations within the Protestant and Reformed Christian movements in America; but it is Williams's witness that has survived, largely because of his sincere and tenacious example in dedicating himself to the purification of the Christian Church.

*Williams studied at Pembroke College in Cambridge, England. Undated photo. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9140).*

Born about 1603, Williams was exposed to the rising tides of Christian reform almost from his youth. He received his degree from Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1627, and



though he took the oath of an Anglican minister, sometime between 1627 and 1630 he became a Puritan. In 1631 he sailed with his wife from Bristol, England, to Massachusetts. Almost from the moment he arrived, he began to entreat the Bay Colony's elders to break all ties with the corrupt Anglican Church and to put away all resemblance to "worldly Christendom." He went on to challenge the ecclesiastical and civic authority of the elders by refusing to acknowledge their jurisdiction over the consciences of individuals in matters of belief and worship. He also challenged the authority of the Crown, preaching against the presumed right of the king to seize and grant land without proper compensation to the Indians. During the English civil war he challenged the authority of Parliament by opposing the establishment of a religious state in England, and in doing so he produced his most provocative writing. All of his protests—his *Queries of Highest Consideration*, his *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, and even his refusal to bow his head before meals<sup>6</sup>—came not from a haughtiness of heart but from a deep concern for the purity of the Christian Church. This concern made it impossible for him to commit himself to any denomination. In 1839 he helped found the first Baptist church in America, but he withdrew from it just a few months later when he came to doubt the purity of its doctrine.

The Puritan movement—which sought to "purify" the Anglican Church of all remaining forms of Catholicism—grew out of the religious turmoil that roiled England when the Reformation finally reached its shores in the sixteenth century. The Puritans' demand that the church be reformed according to the Scriptures (as the Puritans saw them), and their desire to live a godly life in accordance with those same scriptural principles, brought the Puritans into deep conflict with the Crown. Subjected to persecution and hardship, many chose to leave England in 1630 to plant their form of Christianity in the New World. There were, it is true, other reasons for their flight, but those were secondary. The Puritans viewed economic and social hardship and the drastic changes that came with the growth of English mercantilism primarily as religious and moral threats, not economic or social ones. Even in the New World they viewed their eventual prosperity as a gift from God, a sign that they were his covenant people.<sup>7</sup>

The Puritans saw themselves as part of a larger drama, one that placed them in the center of the divine plan for England and the whole world. The Puritans would reform the church: if ten could save Sodom, the Puritan movement, no matter how few or persecuted its numbers might be, could save England from God's wrath. With Europe and England hopelessly steeped in corruption and sin, only the New World seemed to hold any hope for the millennial fulfillment of God's promises to the church. The English poet and Anglican priest George Herbert summed up the opinion of many when he said that England had sunk so low in "prodigious lusts" and "impudent sinning" that there was only one escape: "Religion stands on the tiptoe in our land, / Readie to passe to the American strand."<sup>8</sup>

The Puritan mission in the New World can be described in two key words: *escape* and *witness*. The Puritans were part of God's faithful remnant and his great plan to bless the whole earth with Christ's reign. But these blessings depended upon Puritan faithfulness, and for this the unity of community and congregation was absolutely necessary.<sup>9</sup> With the Scriptures for their guide, Puritans sought the purer Christian worship of the first century as they saw it, and they enforced that vision. Whoever would not conform to this pattern of worship and community was seen as a threat to the whole divine experiment and had to be dealt with accordingly. Religious dissidents were seen as civil threats, and the threats came almost from the beginning. The first of these threats appeared in the person of Roger Williams.

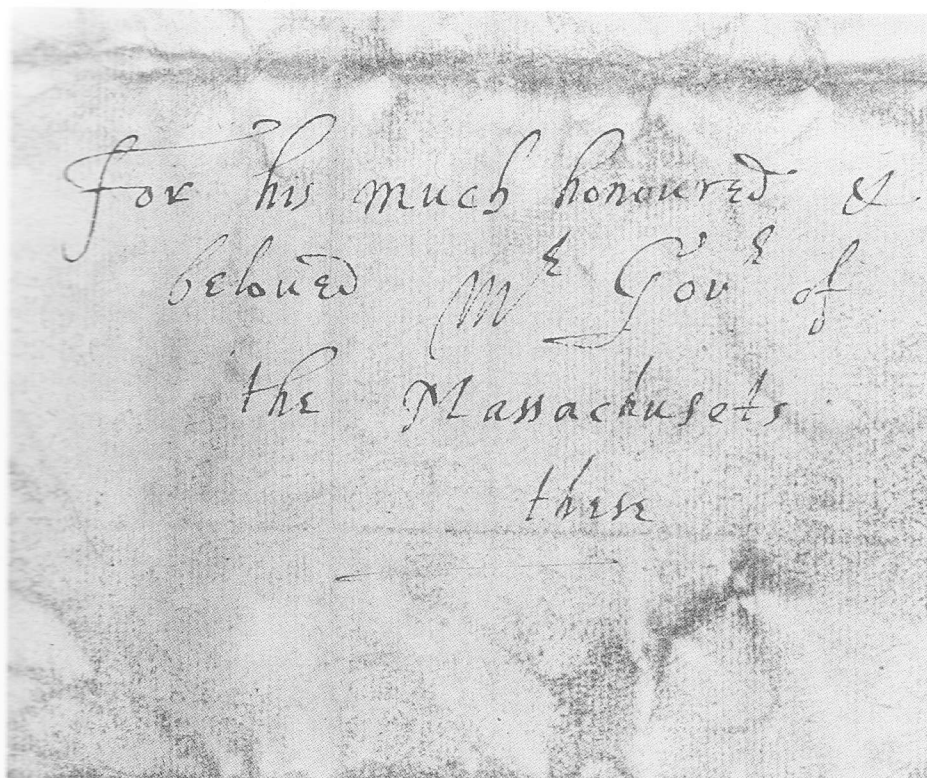
Williams threatened the ordained unity by challenging the power that the Puritan magistracy held over the citizenry in religious matters. However proper it might be for a citizen to observe the Sabbath, for example, for Williams it was wrong for a state to compel its citizens to do so. History had shown that such compulsion brought only misery to the True Church, and Williams would not have the same mistake repeated in the New World, where Christianity had the best and purest chance for a new beginning. Matters of conscience should be left to the individual and to God. The state had no business dictating how one was to worship; had not Bishop Laud attempted to do that and caused the Puritans to flee England in the first place? Williams's passion was to purify the church and to protect Christians from civil oppression and worldly entanglements. At the center of this belief lay his certainty that Christianity must be a matter of the heart, free from external ceremony and from church and political pressures. For Williams, only God could bring about a genuine spiritual transformation. There could be no Christian England, or Christian Massachusetts Bay, or Christian Rhode Island; any attempt to force a state to conform to the Christian gospel was dangerous to the True Church and an abomination to God.<sup>10</sup>

Needless to say, for the Puritans Williams soon became an example to be avoided and even shunned. He was seen as a subversive, one who wanted to overthrow every precious connection between church and community that the Puritans stood for. After moving about among different Massachusetts and Plymouth Colony settlements, and after much controversy and civic defiance, Williams was finally banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in October 1635. The reasons given were sedition, heresy, and refusal to take an oath of allegiance to the colony. The magistrates mercifully wanted to defer the banishment until the following spring, but finding that the sentenced Williams remained unrepentant and unrelenting in his opinions, they decided that he needed to be deported as soon as his transportation back to England could be arranged. Before that could be done, however, in January 1636 Williams departed from the Bay Colony for the wilderness to the south.



Roger Williams did not fare well with his contemporaries. Despite some praise of his character and his piety, nearly all of the contemporary accounts of Williams share a marked negative tone. Plymouth Colony governor Edward Winslow, who spoke highly of Williams's character and prayed for his reclamation, supported his banishment.<sup>11</sup> William Bradford, another Plymouth governor, was likewise sympathetic to Williams, but he too supported the decision. Describing Williams as a godly man with great gifts, but "very unsettled in judgment, who fell into strange opinions and practices," Bradford believed that Williams was to be pitied and prayed for, and that the Lord might show him his errors.<sup>12</sup> Massachusetts governor John Winthrop also concurred in the banishment, though he remained Williams's friend and continued to correspond with him. The tone of their letters to each other was for the most part warm, friendly, and respectful, even when the correspondence was about the banishment. But Winthrop wrote unsympathetically about Williams in his journal, which became a chief source for many of the histories written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; there he called Williams and his followers an "infection" that might spread through the whole colony, especially since others might be taken in by Williams's apparent godliness.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Williams's greatest enemy in the Bay Colony was Boston minister John Cotton. Williams held Cotton chiefly responsible for his banishment and wrote that "only the blood of Jesus Christ could have washed [Cotton] from the guilt."<sup>14</sup> During the 1640s Cotton and Williams exchanged polemic pamphlets that were subsequently published



Although Massachusetts governor John Winthrop concurred in Williams's banishment, the two continued a friendly and respectful correspondence. Williams's esteem for Winthrop is reflected in the address of his 2 May 1639 letter to him. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6276).

and distributed in England. Part of the debate concerned a letter from Cotton to Williams written shortly after Williams was banished. Cotton claimed that it was Williams's own stubbornness and pride that had brought banishment upon him, and he described Williams as conceited, stubborn, dogmatic and "un-lamblike," turbulent, and arrogant in spirit.<sup>15</sup> The Bay Colony leaders had been extremely patient with Williams, Cotton claimed; they had not dealt with his errors until all hope for his repentance was lost. Cotton insisted that it was not for his ideas on religious liberty that Williams was banished, but for his civil disobedience and the resultant "searing of his conscience."<sup>16</sup> In his reply, issued while he was in England to secure a charter for Rhode Island, Williams accused Cotton of persecution of conscience, of persecuting all other ways of worship other than his own. Williams was particularly incensed with

Cotton for calling the banishment righteous and just in the eyes of God. These exchanges in private and public forums revealed the deep bitterness between Williams and Cotton, a bitterness that lasted even after Cotton's death.<sup>17</sup>

The eighteenth century saw Williams's reputation sink even lower, because the most prominent historians in New England were generally defenders of the Bay Colony. In an ecclesiastical history of New England called *Magnalia Christi Americana*, published in 1702,<sup>18</sup> Cotton Mather, the grandson of John Cotton, compared the Williams crisis to an event in Holland in 1654, when high winds drove a windmill faster and faster until it became so hot that the windmill and then the entire town caught fire. In 1634, said Mather, all of America had been in danger of being set on fire by the likes of Roger Williams, who had less light than fire in him. Mather particularly held Williams in contempt for his opposition to the magistracy's authority to enforce the "first table," or the first four commandments of the Decalogue, which deal with the worship of Jehovah. Had Williams prevailed, Mather said, the Bay Colony would have been opened to "a thousand profanities" and the commonwealth ruined. Mather did give Williams credit for his work with the Indians and for opposing the Quakers, but overall Mather's assessment was not flattering.<sup>19</sup>

As the century wore on, some Rhode Islanders and Baptists (who considered Williams as one of the founders of their church, although his connection with it was relatively brief) sought to rescue Williams's reputation from his Puritan critics. In *An Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode Island* (1739), John Callender, a Baptist minister in Newport and Harvard graduate, praised Williams and the principles for which he fought. Williams, said Callender, was one of the most heavenly-minded men who ever lived, one whose fight for the consciences of men was truly directed against a "most monstrous disorder." Proud of Williams's stand for religious liberty, Callender believed that Williams's "hot headedness" was really only his desire to do the will of God.<sup>20</sup> In 1760 Williams won the approbation of Stephen Hopkins, a gov-



ernor of Rhode Island and a Quaker, who applauded him in “An Historical Account of the Planting and Growth of Providence” as the first legislator in the world to establish full, free, and absolute liberty of conscience. Knowing all too well that his colony was criticized as a hotbed of licentiousness, wrong-headed thinking, and general disorder, Hopkins nonetheless declared that the liberty of conscience Williams advocated shone through in the steady, virtuous perseverance of the good citizens of Rhode Island.<sup>21</sup>

Until the late 1700s these efforts on Williams’s behalf were easily dismissed by nearly everyone as mere sectarian scribbling and boosterism from “Rogue’s Island,” but eventually the climate of opinion began to change. One of the main reasons why Williams became more valued for his stand on liberty of conscience was the general movement towards religious toleration that occurred in mid-eighteenth-century New England. As different religious sects multiplied in America, it became clear that none of the colonies—not even in New England—would be dominated by a single sect. Along with the passage of the Toleration Act in England in 1689 and the influence of the Enlightenment ideas of John Locke and others, this multiplicity moved the colonies toward greater religious freedom and tolerance, at least for Protestants. Moreover, the first

Great Awakening brought to American Christianity a new sense of piety and democratic leadership that disrupted, challenged, and even split the established churches.<sup>22</sup>

By the time of the Revolution support for religious tolerance had grown much stronger, and writers from Baptist and other denominations were emboldened to proceed even further on the principles that Williams had championed. For example, the Rhode Island College, founded in 1764 by colonial Baptists as a Baptist response to other collegiate formations, echoed the newfound spirit of Williams in its charter, which rejected any religious tests for membership and proclaimed uninterrupted, full, free, and absolute liberty of conscience.<sup>23</sup> In 1771 Morgan Edwards, a Baptist minister in Philadelphia, placed all of the blame for Williams’s banishment upon the Massachusetts magistrates who wanted to be “kings” in Christ’s kingdom, and whose bigotry and rage against the principle of religious liberty led them to malign, persecute, whip, and hang Christ’s servants. For Edwards, Williams was a loyal Baptist who founded the first Baptist church in America, a man of the highest moral and spiritual character.<sup>24</sup>

Williams’s reputation received strong additional support with the publication of *A History of New England, with Particular*

*Banished from the Bay Colony, Williams carries his Bible as he sets out into the wilderness in this painting by Peter Frederick Rothermel. Oil on canvas, circa 1850. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 3102).*



*Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists* by Isaac Backus in 1777. Backus, a Baptist convert and revivalist from Middleborough, Massachusetts, argued that Williams's long neglect was undeserved. Writing during the harrowing days of the Revolution, he contended that Williams might serve as an example for all who fought for liberty, and he denounced the Bay Colony's leaders as solely responsible for Williams's banishment. Backus gathered many of Williams's own writings for his history, which called Williams "the first founder and supporter of any truly civil government upon the earth" and the first champion of religious liberty in the colonies.<sup>25</sup> Although much of Backus's work was more hortatory than historical, it was the most complete, carefully documented, and competent account of Williams yet to appear.



Despite the considerable impact of Backus's work, many nineteenth-century historians continued to support the Puritans' treatment of Williams. John Palfrey's 1858 *A Compendious History of New England* defended Williams's banishment as necessary for the colony's survival, a choice between government and anarchy. Had Williams's ideas of government and church-state separation been allowed to take root, argued Palfrey, the civil stability of Massachusetts would have been disastrously undermined.<sup>26</sup> But Baptist sympathizers continued to see Williams as a champion of religious toleration and liberty of conscience.

The first full biography of Williams appeared in 1834, written by Baptist minister James D. Knowles. Knowles's *Memoir of Roger Williams, the Founder of the State of Rhode Island* tried to elevate Williams to an appropriate place amongst the New England patriarchy. Knowles used many of Williams's own works as well as the more conventional secondary sources. Less disparaging toward the Bay Colony elders than other Baptists had been, Knowles believed that the Massachusetts authorities were sincere in their attempts to protect their theocracy, but that they failed to see the deep piety of Williams and the unselfish and benevolent zeal he had for all humanity. For Knowles, Williams was not hotheaded or incorrigible, but was labeled such because of his ideas, not his demeanor. Knowles depicted Williams as a truly pious person, one whose unselfish zeal was driven only by a desire for the truth. Williams's spirit was too elevated and enlarged for most people to comprehend, Knowles said. Comparing Williams to Galileo, who suffered persecution for a truth that was both visionary and reasonable, Knowles emphasized Williams's belief in separation of church and state and the struggle that Williams endured for that belief.<sup>27</sup>

Knowles's biography reflected the views of writers and historians who were turning to the past to find models for the emerging democratic populism that was to dominate early-nineteenth-century American politics.<sup>28</sup> These authors mirrored the new nation's widely felt need for a national identity, complete with inspiring heroes and events from America's past, while they also instructed and encouraged readers in patriotism and civic responsibility and promoted the old Puritan claim that America had a divine purpose for the world. There was, indeed, progress toward greater liberty in America, they said, and among all mankind as well, with America lighting the way.<sup>29</sup> The best example of this view of America's mission to its people and the world may be found in the writing of George Bancroft.

The first volume of Bancroft's monumental *History of the United States* appeared in 1834, and it set the tone for historic interpretation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bancroft's work reflected the dramatic changes under way in nineteenth-century America. Frontier expansion was in full swing, and despite the persistence of

government-sponsored denominations in some states, religious liberty had become more the rule than the exception on the frontier. For Bancroft, frontier churches, with their tendency toward informality and evangelicalism, embodied the free spirit of the frontiersman more than the established denominations did. Bancroft believed that America's greatness was best championed by those imbued with the frontier spirit, and looking for such heroes in America's past, he found one in Roger Williams.<sup>30</sup> Bancroft represented both the Puritans and the New England dissidents as heroic and essential parts of the American tradition. Although emphasizing Williams's political and philosophical views rather than the theology that eventually got him expelled from Massachusetts, Bancroft's assessment of Williams was fair and balanced. Bancroft called Williams the first person in modern Christendom to advocate a government embracing the principles of liberty of conscience and equality of opinion before the law. Nevertheless, said Bancroft, Williams's advocacy of church-state separation threatened the Bay Colony's stability, and although the magistrates may have been arrogant and overbearing, his banishment was justified.<sup>31</sup> Too much disorder was something that even Bancroft feared, and respect for the Puritan fathers still lingered in his assessment of Williams.

Not everyone accepted Bancroft's view of Williams's place in history. One dissenting opinion was expressed by John Quincy Adams, who defended his Massachusetts forefathers as kind and patient in their dealings with Williams. Speaking before the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1843, Adams criticized those historians who, especially in their portrayal of Williams, treated the Puritans harshly and unfairly. In a journal entry Adams called Williams inflexible and contentious, a dangerous religious enthusiast, factious and seditious.<sup>32</sup> According to Adams, Williams was the aggressor, not the Bay Colony. Such polarized views of the Puritans and Roger Williams continued though the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup>



In 1894 a second biography of Williams appeared, this one by Oscar Straus, a diplomat and later secretary of commerce and labor for Theodore Roosevelt. *Roger Williams: Pioneer of Religious Liberty* portrayed Williams in heroic terms as one who wrestled against the forces of darkness, who fought against evil and the powers of an oppressive government that would rob humanity of true liberty, and who maintained a sweet temperament all the while, repaying good for evil.<sup>34</sup> Like Bancroft, Straus stressed Williams's political views, bluntly stating that Williams was more concerned with the blessings of liberty than with the blessings of heaven.

Straus's portrait of Williams would become the dominant one in the years to follow. With the emergence of the Progressive Era at the turn of the century, there came a host of "progressive" historians and other writers who sought the same inspiration from the past that Bancroft and others had. These Progressives, however, concentrated on the struggle against forces that attempted to crush the human spirit. Arguing that those forces were aligned with the power, ambition, and search for profit of the upper classes, they saw those who struggled against them as true heroes. When the Progressives looked back to the colonial period, they saw the Puritans as the oppressors and such men and women as Williams and Mary Dyer as authentic examples of the American spirit.<sup>35</sup> Williams now began to emerge as a "true democrat," one whose views were more like Jefferson's than like those of the seventeenth-century Puritans.

Perhaps the best example of the Progressive interpretation of Williams is found in Vernon L. Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927-30). Seeking to trace the origins of democratic ideas that were uniquely American, Parrington found

Williams to be the true bearer of liberalism to America. According to Parrington, this line of liberalism began with Williams and ran through Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson to form the great principles of American democracy. Williams emerged in this portrait as magnanimous, warm, and truly human, eager to bestow his ideas of individualism and government upon humanity. He was so far superior to his time that the "gods had their jest" in placing him in the seventeenth century. Regarding him as the most generous, open-minded, and lovable of the Puritans, and the truest Christian among them, Parrington believed that Williams in fact had more in common with Emerson and the Transcendentalists, precisely because he saw beyond the narrow confines of the Puritans' religion to the loftier freedom and sanctity of faith, conscience, and human liberty.<sup>36</sup> John Cotton's dreams were buried with the man, but the dreams of Williams lived on, and it was in those dreams that the "true democracy" that the Progressives thought would reform American society had its origin.

This Progressive interpretation of Williams's life and thought remained the dominant view as the century went on. As democracy became more and more a central theme of American political thought in the 1930s and 1940s, Williams became increasingly important as an example of one who struggled for liberty and freedom. Clearly he was emerging as one of the great American heroes, while his oppressors were becoming symbols of narrow-mindedness and bigotry. The culminating expression of this interpretation came in 1940 with another biography, Samuel Brockunier's *The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams*. According to Brockunier, Williams dedicated his life to the promotion of democracy and the fight against the tyranny wrought by men like the Bay Colony leaders, whom Brockunier saw as an oligarchy established more by privilege than by piety.<sup>37</sup> Williams's fight was a fight against evil and tyranny not unlike those that were then emerging in Europe. Citing his protests against the king's supposed sovereignty over Indian lands, Brockunier even called Williams the first prominent leader to protest against imperialism. As portrayed by Brockunier, Williams was a humanist who trusted his own reason and conscience for guidance; neither a zealot nor a Calvinist, he was a man who believed in human perfectibility and freedom of the will.<sup>38</sup> By 1940 Williams had become the quintessential symbol of the democratic spirit in colonial America.

In the 1950s this view of Williams underwent serious challenge. By then, scholarship had begun to "rescue" the past from the Progressive historians and writers. One reason for this development was a disenchantment with the idea of human conflict as the catalyst for human progress, a central tenet of the Progressives. A second reason involved the coming of the Cold War, which brought a change in the national mood: with many Americans seeing the United States as bearing the chief responsibility for defending democracy against the threat of communism, there came a strong impetus for affirming America as a strong and unified nation, in the past as well as in the present. This thinking was reflected in the work of some historians, constituting what has been called the "consensus school," who favorably identified ideals and practices that had endured through much of the nation's history. As a result of this new perspective, certain links to the American past that had been considered oppressive and elitist by the Progressives were seen as stabilizing social forces instead.

Williams was now reinterpreted less as an idealist and a champion of democracy and more as an egotist and a religious extremist. Although his ideas on liberty of conscience were recognized as liberal and far-reaching, it was claimed that they had come not from civil concerns but from a desire for doctrinal purity in the church, a purity that was Christian, conservative, and orthodox. To the consensus school, Williams was more a religious dissident than the "irrepressible democrat" of the Progressives. Examining him in the context of his times, historians such as Mauro Calamandrei concluded that

Williams was not a humanist or a product of the Enlightenment but a Calvinist whose main concern was the spiritual purity of Christ's church.<sup>39</sup> Calamandrei's 1953 article "Neglected Aspects of Roger Williams's Thought" argued that Williams received his guidance from the Bible and accepted those truths that most Puritans held as orthodox; he did not believe in "individualistic" religious truth, but sought only the one True Church to which every true Christian must conform. While seeing Williams's theology as Puritan and conservative, Calamandrei did not deny Williams's status, in political terms, as an "irrepressible democrat."<sup>40</sup> Calamandrei's article has been identified as the first serious work to examine Williams within the parameters of seventeenth-century thought and the first to deal directly with the religious basis of Williams's ideas, and as such it marked an important milestone in Williams historiography.<sup>41</sup>

In 1953 Perry Miller, the most distinguished historian of Puritanism of his time, published *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition*. Stressing Williams's typological method for interpreting the Bible<sup>42</sup> as the key to understanding his thought, Miller argued that it was theology, not politics, that was central to understanding Williams and the Puritans. The Puritans, Miller contended, emphasized their "federal" interpretation of the Bible as foundational and essential for God's elect and for their mission in the world. Because they believed that Old Testament Israel provided civic as well as spiritual examples and prescriptions, they felt themselves obligated to imitate the theocracy of Israel in governing their commonwealth if they were to retain God's favor. According to Miller, Williams dissented from this theology by claiming that Israel was unique in history and thus should not serve as a model for imitation; Christ's New Covenant was different from, and superior to, the covenant that Israel had enjoyed, and since the New Covenant had replaced the Old forever, any attempt to return to the Old Covenant would be disastrous. In Williams's typology, the Old Testament was significant only in its prefiguration of the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> For Miller, then, the key to understanding the conflict between Williams and the Bay Colony authorities lay in an understanding of their differences over the purpose and place of the colonies in God's divine scheme. Seeing these differences as theological rather than political, Miller denied—in opposition to the Progressives—that Williams had any direct influence on religious liberty in America.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Miller's eminence as an authority on Puritanism, his assessment of Williams was soon challenged (albeit with some trepidation). For example, whereas Miller argued that Williams's break with Puritan biblical interpretation made him a radical dissident in both politics and religion, Alan Simpson, in "Salvation through Separation" (1955), saw Williams as far more orthodox and conservative, and largely in agreement with his Puritan brethren. Williams's social ideas, like those of the Bay Colony Puritans, emphasized order and strict structure, said Simpson; in fact, "nine-tenths" of Williams's opinions differed little from the opinions of those who banished him.<sup>45</sup>

*Master Roger Williams*, a 1957 biography by professor of English and Pulitzer Prize winner Ola Winslow, portrayed Williams as above all a deeply religious man. Yes, he *was* stubborn in his conflict with the elders of the Massachusetts Bay, said Winslow, but he quickly changed for the better after his banishment.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Miller, Winslow believed that Williams gave religious tolerance a strategic push at just the right moment in history, especially with his *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*. For Winslow, there was a greatness in Williams beyond even what the historical record could catch.<sup>47</sup>

Miller was given an opportunity to answer his critics and reassess his interpretation of Williams when he was asked to provide an essay for volume 7 of a 1963 reissue of Williams's complete writings. This time Miller was even more disparaging of Williams's supposed heroism, saying that Williams had "a maggot in his brain" that made him

interpret the Bible in an insane way, and that he was little more than a minor character who furnished an interesting episode for Massachusetts history.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, other scholars continued to challenge Miller's assessment of Williams. In "John Locke: Preparing the Way for the Revolution" (1964), Winthrop Hudson, a Baptist professor of church history at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, suggested that Miller was wrong in his assessment of Williams's influence upon America's religious liberty. Hudson attempted to show that John Locke's letters on toleration paralleled Williams's ideas, which were virtually identical with Locke's.<sup>49</sup> Hudson believed that Locke had read Williams and that the letters on toleration were nothing more than a reworking of Williams's ideas, albeit in a more cogent and orderly form. Hudson even asserted that knowledgeable people in the eighteenth century—notably Edmund Burke, James Otis, and John Adams—recognized this.<sup>50</sup> Williams's ideas won acceptance in the nineteenth century because the world was finally ready for them.<sup>51</sup>

Even Williams's typology, which Miller thought was heretical, was reassessed and found by some to be only a variant of the Puritans' typology. In 1967 Sacvan Bercovitch, a professor of English at Brandeis University, argued in "Typology in Puritan New England: The Williams-Cotton Controversy Reassessed" that Miller was mistaken in claiming that the Puritans "eschewed" typology; typology was used extensively by *both* parties. According to Bercovitch, the clash between Williams and the Bay Colony's elders was not between a typology and Puritanism, but between two different typological approaches: whereas Williams saw the Old Testament as expressing only spiritual truths, the Massachusetts Puritans employed a typological system that found civil precepts in it as well, precepts that justified their vision of New England as a New Israel that needed to be governed and nurtured in the pattern of Old Testament Israel. Typology had always been a part of Puritan epistemology, said Bercovitch, and Cotton, Winthrop, and other Puritan leaders were just as familiar with it as Williams was. Williams was closer to the mainstream of English and European ideas on the Reformation; his passion was for ending a church-state relationship heavily dependent upon the typological pattern of Old Testament Israel, not for propagating a new system of biblical interpretation.<sup>52</sup>

The investigation of Williams's ideas on church-state relations culminated in the 1967 publication of Edmund Morgan's *Roger Williams: The Church and the State*. Although a product of the consensus school (he was a student of Perry Miller), Morgan found that the political ramifications of Williams's ideas were far greater than previously thought, and that Williams was in fact a formidable intellectual whose ideas exhibited a remarkable, and previously unappreciated, balance. While portraying him as warm and friendly, with a temperament more inclined to agreement than to disagreement, Morgan nonetheless showed Williams to be tenaciously unbending in his convictions, a man who—more than anyone else in his century—was willing to go wherever his thinking led, pursuing ideas relentlessly to their logical end and exposing error no matter what the cost.<sup>53</sup>

Morgan argued that the means for understanding Williams was to be found not just in Puritan typology but in the broader realm of Puritan theology, and that Williams was more interested in the civil ramifications of the New Covenant than in the narrow theological issues of the day. "However theological the cast of his mind, he wrote most often, most effectively, and most significantly about civil government," said Morgan.<sup>54</sup>

Carefully analyzing Williams's position on Old Testament Israel and the uniqueness of the Old Covenant, Morgan extended Miller's view that Israel, for Williams, was no longer a model for the New Testament church to follow. Israel's relationship to the world and to God was, rather, unique to its time; Christ's kingdom was not of this world, and for the Christian Church to imitate Israel would be disastrous. Morgan

showed Williams's belief in church-state separation as stemming from the conviction that the present church was in a state of apostasy, a condition caused precisely by its alliance with the state. The state needed to stay out of spiritual affairs, for only a complete separation of church and state would ensure purity and true religious freedom.<sup>56</sup> Liberty of conscience would best allow even the simplest of believers to proclaim the truth of God; coercion of conscience did no good whatsoever for the cause of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Morgan's work concentrated less on the incidents leading to Williams's banishment and more on the theology that led to Williams's position on the separation of church and state. Morgan saw this theology as carrying with it profound political and ecclesiastical implications, and he believed that it was in these areas that Williams made his greatest contributions to the American tradition. Widely seen as a fine piece of intellectual history, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* reflected a marked change in Puritan historiography, with historians now beginning to address the intellectual and social contexts of the Puritan ideal.<sup>57</sup>

The last significant work of the decade was by John Garrett, a professor of church history at Pacific Theological College in the Fiji Islands. Garrett's *Roger Williams: Witness beyond Christendom*, published in 1970, incorporated all of the latest scholarship. Like Morgan's work, it helped clarify the complex nature of its subject, but it moved beyond that work with a particular emphasis on the spiritual nature of Williams's ideas and motives. According to Garrett, Williams was a thoroughgoing biblicist, and this was the true key to understanding his fervent dedication to his convictions. Whereas Morgan emphasized the political nature of Williams's ideas, Garrett's biography sought the primary motivation that brought those ideas to the surface. These ideas were spiritual, even devotional, at their core, said Garrett, and Williams was willing to suffer rejection and banishment because he suffered for the cause of Christ. Garrett argued that it was Scripture that defined Williams's motivations best.<sup>58</sup> He also emphasized that Williams was a gentle man despite his stubbornness, and sensitive where his contemporaries were not.<sup>59</sup> Although the work offered nothing groundbreaking or new to Williams scholarship, it was nevertheless a fine intellectual biography, well organized and eloquently written.



In 1976 an article by Nancy Peace, "Roger Williams: A Historiographical Essay," summarized the major scholarship on Williams up to the early 1970s. In it Peace noted that historians since the 1960s had agreed that the key to understanding Williams lay in his Christian convictions; that is, that Williams's biblicism dominated his approach to Christian truth and all of life. After centuries of an image that fluctuated from "troublemaker" to "democratic hero" to "biblical extremist," historians such as Calamandrei and Miller had put Williams into a more theological framework.<sup>60</sup> Since so many reasonably accurate assessments of his life and work had recently appeared, Peace asked, was there anything left to learn about Williams? In a suggestion in accord with newly developing social history, she proposed that historians begin concentrating on more particular and peculiar aspects of Williams's life and work: for example, a systematic study of the social, economic, and spiritual support bases for Williams and his associates after they settled in Providence might fill some gaps in the historical record.<sup>61</sup> Such study might go far toward helping us better understand Roger Williams the man, who, apart from his ideas and his controversies, has remained a rather elusive figure.

Although the extant material on Williams's personal life is scant, many historians have responded to Peace's suggestion over the past quarter century and have painstakingly expanded our understanding of Williams's life and work. The most significant of this

scholarship has focused upon the setting and circumstances of his life in England and America. Historians have further examined his early training in rhetoric and theology, his biblical primitivism, his periods spent as a Separatist and a Baptist, and his position on the separation of church and state. More than ever, they have emphasized that Williams must be studied within the context of the seventeenth-century Anglo-American world if his contribution to the American character is to be fully appreciated.

"The Worlds of Roger Williams," a 1978 article by Sydney James, attempts to understand Williams's thought in the context of his public life. Having examined Williams's career and writings, James argues that Williams's ideas did not have the changeless consistency of an obsessive fanatic, but rather evolved and developed under the influence of the different "worlds" of his public life. The higher ranks of English society, the Puritan movement, New England colonization, the Narragansetts, the colony of Rhode Island, and the town of Providence each had an impact on Williams's intellectual and theological development, as did his roles as judge, diplomat, civil advocate, and colony president. James believes that Williams grew in public stature and emotional and spiritual maturity throughout his experiences, evolving from a sort of social climber early in his career to an unselfish champion of the interests of Rhode Island.<sup>62</sup>

James does not really provide evidence that Williams ever sought social position through his experiences and appointments; indeed, everything that we know about Williams suggests that he deliberately moved away from such aspirations. More convincing is James's summation of the compelling forces in Williams's life. One of these was the Puritan movement. Although Williams may not have agreed with the form of Puritanism that Massachusetts embraced, he nevertheless saw the New World as a haven for the religiously persecuted and a place for the establishment of God's kingdom. Williams's careers as theologian and colony official directly flowed from Puritan influences. Even his relationship with the Indians was checked by his desire for purity of worship and Christian truth. Williams was not rigid in his thinking, which could change in response to changing circumstances; for example, although for the sake of unity and the comprehensive government of New England he once sought a closer relationship between Rhode Island and Massachusetts, he cooled to the idea when Massachusetts persisted in persecuting Baptists and Quakers. His attitude toward the Indians also changed when they seemed to him to become more and more hostile in their dealings with the colonists, so that by 1649 he had lost all hope for their conversion.<sup>63</sup>

According to James, Williams's experiences all helped mold his character and decision making throughout his life. In religion, Williams eventually became a "groping spirit" who searched for the True Church in a worldly wilderness. In his political career, on the other hand, he was more successful, a kindly, fatherly figure to his fellow citizens in Providence, honest and unselfish in his dealings with others. Williams's world was not, for James, as simple as it has sometimes been portrayed as being, nor was Williams "the serene gray giant that extends a granite benediction over Providence from [the city's] Prospect Terrace"; he was, rather, "an intense man, active on many stages in a long public life."<sup>64</sup>

An even more intensive look at the social and cultural aspects of Williams's life appeared in 1987 in Glenn LaFantasie's "A Day in the Life of Roger Williams." Drawing from information about Puritan life in general and Williams's life in particular, LaFantasie constructs an interesting portrait of what Williams's daily routine might have been. Likening his task to "an experiment in Biographical Paleontology," LaFantasie imagines how Williams might have spent his time when he was not "battling" the Puritans.<sup>65</sup>

LaFantasie focuses on Williams's letters, particularly one that Williams wrote to John Winthrop, Jr., from his trading post at Cocumscussoc in 1649.<sup>66</sup> Compelled by financial necessity, during the later 1640s Williams usually resided at Cocumscussoc from late



NAR: 22. 11. 50 (So called)

Well beloved friends: So respect to each of  
you presented with heartie desires of y<sup>r</sup>  
present & eternall grace. I am sorry  
I am occasioned to trouble you in y<sup>r</sup> midst  
of many y<sup>r</sup> other troubles. Yet upon y<sup>r</sup> expe-  
rience of y<sup>r</sup> wonted Lo: kindness & gentle-  
ness toward All men & my selfe also I  
pray you hear me patiently // I had  
possid to have personally attended the Court  
& to have presented (my selfe) these few  
Requests following, but being much Lamed  
& broken with such travells I am forced  
to present you in writing <sup>these</sup> Requests

PROVIDENCE

043

TOWN PAPERS

The first & concerne others living & dead amongst us  
the 2<sup>d</sup> concerne my selfe // First then I pray be  
pleas'd to review y<sup>r</sup> propositions betwixt us &  
o<sup>r</sup> dead friend John Smith, & since it hath pleas'd  
y<sup>r</sup> God of all mercies to vouchsafe this Town & other  
such a mercie by his means: I beseech you studie  
how to put an End to y<sup>t</sup> controuersie depending  
betwixt us (as I may so speak) & his. For true you  
have refer'd y<sup>t</sup> Business to some of o<sup>r</sup> Lo: Neighbors  
amongst you: But since there are some Obstruction  
I beseech you put forth y<sup>r</sup> wisdoms who know  
more waies to y<sup>e</sup> wood then one: ease y<sup>r</sup> first &  
appoint others or some other course, y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>r</sup> Dead  
clamour not from his Graue agst us, but y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>r</sup> Coun-  
try about us may say y<sup>t</sup> Providence is not only  
a wise but a gratefull proph<sup>t</sup> to y<sup>r</sup> God of Mer-  
cies & all his Instrum<sup>t</sup> of mercy toward us. /

summer to late spring. Williams clearly cherished his solitude there, which offered him months of quiet spiritual reflection and renewal; "Seclusion at Cocumscussoc placed him in command of his daily concerns, freeing himself from the strife of the world, and he clung to his beloved privacy."<sup>67</sup> Motivated by a desire to be closer to God and by tenacious self-examination, Williams filled his days with prayers and meditations, always in his own words, while attending as well to the chores required by a self-sufficient life on the frontier.<sup>68</sup> Unlike James, LaFantasie believes that Williams was not concerned with social or economic status, but instead preferred the simple life that he thought consistent with being one of Christ's disciples.<sup>69</sup>

It was in the wilderness setting of Cocumscussoc, says LaFantasie, that Williams fully developed his ideas on the separation of church and state, his abiding respect for the Indians, his rejection of war, and his sincere belief that all men are equal in the eyes of God and should be tolerated with Christian patience and understanding.<sup>70</sup> Arguing that the frontier spirit played a strong part in Williams's development, LaFantasie sees Williams as reflecting an individualism and a daily struggle for survival that were distinctly "American."<sup>71</sup> For LaFantasie, Williams's life embodied the qualities of self-sufficiency and independent habits of thought that were so important to the shaping of the American character.

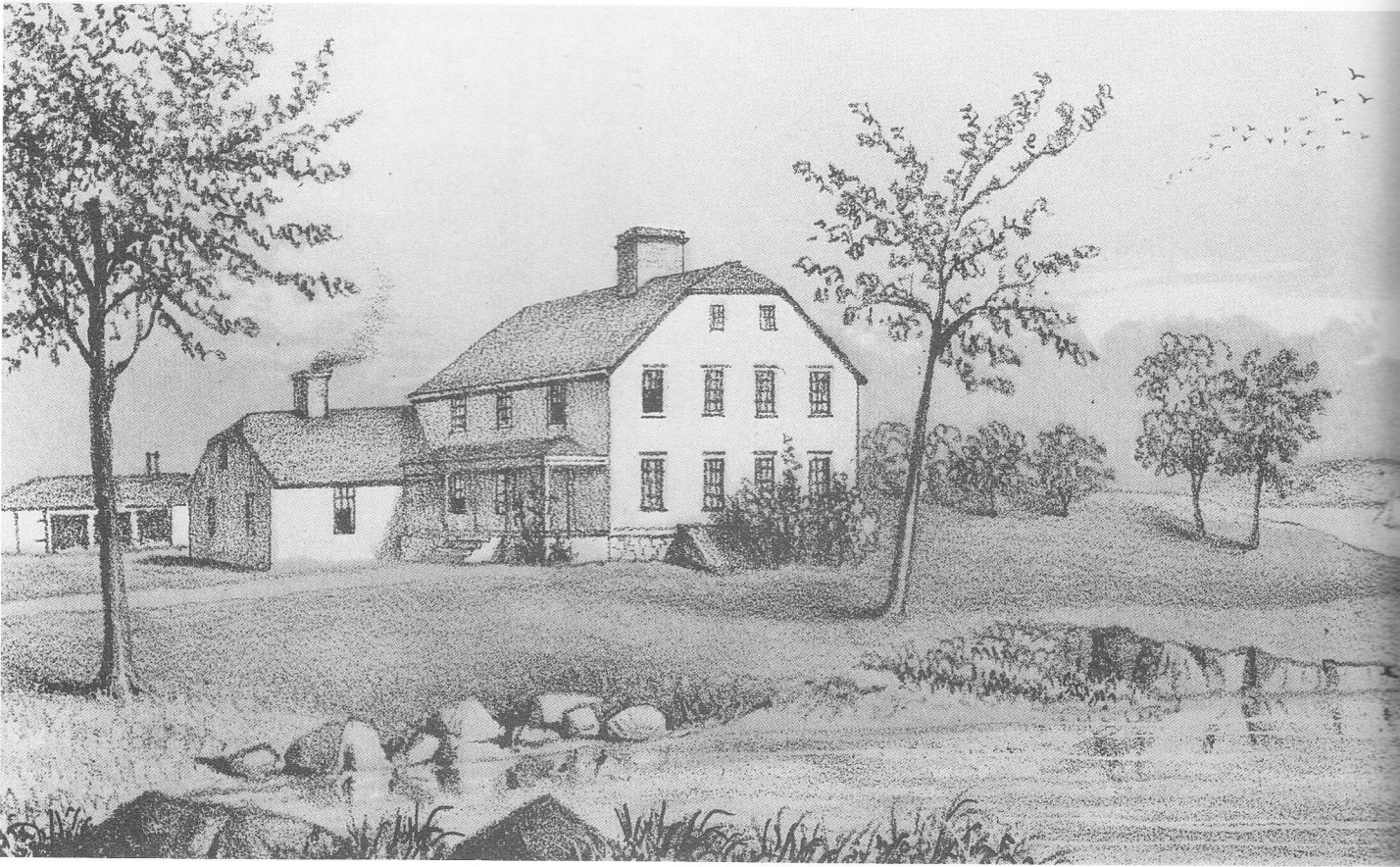
A second article by LaFantasie, "Roger Williams and John Winthrop: The Rise and Fall of an Extraordinary Friendship" (1989), explores Williams's friendship with John Winthrop. Although there was a significant disparity between Winthrop the friend and Winthrop the official, Williams always considered Winthrop a true friend. (It was, in fact, Winthrop who suggested Narragansett Bay as a place where Williams might live beyond the legal arm of the Massachusetts colony.)<sup>72</sup> Although Winthrop could be intolerant and self-righteous and Williams bold and unbending, the two were brought together by their common Puritan beliefs.

LaFantasie explains how complex their relationship was. Winthrop was disappointed with Williams almost from the day Williams stepped off the *Lyon*; Williams's refusal to become the Boston church's teacher revealed a rigidity that Winthrop had not seen before, and it caught him completely off guard.<sup>73</sup> But their relationship showed that Williams was not the insurgent that many have supposed. Even after his banishment Williams looked to Winthrop as a father, and Winthrop to Williams as a son; when Winthrop became more distant, LaFantasie suggests, it was the aloof self-righteousness of a father toward an errant son. As complicated as the friendship was, each seemed to benefit from the other, even politically. Williams was often Winthrop's eyes and ears on the frontier, and Winthrop in turn was often the only link that Williams had to other colonies and to England for supplies and communications. Williams's later correspondence with Winthrop's son testifies to the deep feelings he had for the elder Winthrop, and to his regret that their differences had not been bridged in this life.<sup>74</sup>

LaFantasie has also edited a two-volume edition of Williams's letters, published in 1988, with an extensive introduction and editorial notes and annotations throughout. The letters give us the closest, most intimate look into Williams's life thus far. Above all, they show that Williams was a man of the seventeenth century. Williams wrote as the other Puritans did; the harshness of his tone, the flowing metaphors, the spiritual allusions were all a familiar part of Puritan writing. But Williams attached particular importance to precise language, as he did in his famous distinction between "Christendom" and "Christianity." Twisting words, especially the words of Scripture, he considered an abomination.<sup>75</sup>

The piety evident in Williams's writings gave even his most personal communications an air of formality. Strangely, his letters contain little introspection, perhaps because

*Among other matters in his 22 January 1650/51 letter to the Providence Town Meeting, Williams asked the town to pay him its share of the debt due him for his expenses in obtaining the colony's parliamentary patent of 1644. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3) 2339.*



*Williams established a trading post just north of the present-day village of Wickford in the late 1630s. Cocumscussoc—also called Smith's Castle or Updike House—now stands at the site. Lithograph from Edwin Whitefield's *The Homes of Our Forefathers* (Boston, 1882). RIHS Collection (RH X3 1113).*

Puritans were expected to show less and less of their selves and more and more of God's hand in their lives. Truth and commitment were to be found not in personal speculation but in Scripture.<sup>76</sup> Yet despite these constraints, Williams went his own way, especially in his personal Bible study and piety. Williams believed that the doctrine of "soul liberty" brought deep responsibilities to his personal walk with God. LaFantasie finds Williams to have been particularly concerned with inner spirituality, with soul liberty as a means of gaining personal spiritual freedom. "In his search for hidden truths," says LaFantasie, "Williams demanded the right to think out his problems in his own way, to reach his own conclusions, and to live a solitary life within the quiet places of his own soul. Soul liberty was for Williams as much a private necessity as it was a public creed."<sup>77</sup>

Williams refused to be a hypocrite. He could not hold to any doctrine that he came to believe was untrue. As LaFantasie emphasizes, the letters clearly illustrate how Williams's faith sustained him, comforted him, and encouraged him to press on. The expulsion from Massachusetts took on a symbolic meaning for him; he had been banished, like prophets and apostles before him, for speaking the truth. Always Williams seemed to see the greater good in his circumstances.<sup>78</sup> Whereas his more formal writings reveal his theology, Williams's letters reveal his more personal side, one that struggled with the material, social, and civic consequences of his beliefs. The value of LaFantasie's work lies precisely in the intimate look it gives us of Roger Williams the man.



In an attempt to keep in step with the New History and its emphasis on interdisciplinary analysis, some scholars have sought to fill in the gaps in our understanding of Williams by examining him through the eyes of another discipline. One such study is *Roger*

*Williams: God's Apostle for Advocacy* (1989), by L. Raymond Camp, a professor of communications at North Carolina State University. Camp examines Williams's skills as a communicator by analyzing Williams's rhetoric against the backdrop of his times. According to Camp, previous works on Williams have failed to take into account the importance that the written and spoken word played in his life. Indeed, says Camp, Williams lived in a period of Christian history marked by verbal contention, when Christian clerics underwent a rigorous study of the rhetorical disciplines in order to develop their style and skill. These disciplines shaped Williams as much as the politics and religious reforms of the period did.<sup>79</sup>

Camp's chief contribution to Williams scholarship lies in his analysis of the disciplines of rhetoric in the seventeenth century. This analysis greatly expands our understanding of the tone and methods in Williams's writing. From early childhood Williams was rigorously educated in the principles of rhetoric and reasoning, the structure of which tended to discourage original thinking. The rules that governed these disciplines were systematic and fixed, and any failure to conform to them, especially in the academic disciplines, was frowned upon.<sup>80</sup> Williams continued studying these disciplines through college. Later, during his apprenticeship to the English barrister Edward Coke, he saw firsthand the application of such learning in the practice of law. Camp believes that Coke exerted a strong influence on Williams by seeing all of life through the eyes of a lawyer, and by pressing Williams always to observe the processes of persuasive argument. Coke's emphasis on the importance of precedents in argumentation also seems to be reflected in Williams's writings.<sup>81</sup>

Camp takes issue with scholars who believe that Williams was an unoriginal thinker. Liberty of conscience, certainly, found unique expression with Williams's pen. That Williams's rhetoric and inspiration came from the same sources as those of his contemporaries does not mean that he was unoriginal. Williams's style of expression came from the customary education of his time, and his inspiration from the Bible, but with these he developed a unique interpretation of the place of the church in the seventeenth-century world. Williams's rhetorical training did not hamper his originality, as some scholars believe.<sup>82</sup> As for the brooding, self-effacing tone of his writings, and their abundance of deeply religious allusions, these were typical of Puritan writing of the time; they were not the imperious expression of a self-willed fanatic, as has sometimes been supposed.<sup>83</sup>

The study of Williams's rhetoric has also produced two articles that focus on his phraseology. In "Roger Williams's Most Persistent Metaphor" (1976), Bradford Swan examines Williams's nautical metaphors, which he believes show Williams's fascination with the sea. Williams often employed such expressions as the famous "ship of state" metaphor, which appeared prominently in a letter of his to Providence colonists in 1655. Swan acknowledges that at times it is hard to determine whether Williams should be taken literally or figuratively, but he believes that the distinction can be made through careful study of the context.<sup>84</sup>

In "Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood: Roger Williams, Persecution, and the Discourse of the Witness" (1993), English professor Anne Myles declares that every phrase Williams wrote was poignant and pregnant with meaning. The language of the Puritans, including Williams, was precise in expressing spiritual meanings, says Myles. In his dissent from the Puritan orthodoxy, however, Williams shut off all meaningful dialogue with the Massachusetts Bay elders, making any real persuasion by him impossible. The effectiveness of his communication was further undermined by his banishment, for while Williams saw that banishment as a vindication of his beliefs and wrote accordingly, the leaders of the Bay Colony felt that his words served only to vilify them and

thus justified their decision to banish him. To the Massachusetts Puritans, Williams's actions robbed his words of all credibility; to Williams, the language of the Bay cities was the "language of Babel," words that were contradictory and deceptive and that polluted the Christian faith in New England.<sup>85</sup> Both refused to budge from their positions. Williams's writing and preaching represented an entirely new order for the church in New England, Myles concludes, and that was the reason why Williams encountered such fierce opposition.<sup>86</sup>



By far the largest body of work on Williams in recent years has focused on his place in the Baptist and Separatist traditions, most notably in regard to the separation of church and state. Drawing on earlier scholarship, this work began with the rediscovery of church history as a viable discipline for historians in the 1960s.<sup>87</sup> It is within the context of religious history that the debate over the meaning and application of the First Amendment finds its roots, and it is here that Williams's legacy is most strongly felt: along with the rediscovery of American church history, there inevitably comes a rediscovery of Roger Williams as one of its patriarchs.

Many general religious works place Williams within the Baptist and Separatist traditions. For example, in *The Dictionary of Christianity in America* (1990), R. D. Linder, a professor of history at Kansas State University, calls Roger Williams the first champion of religious liberty in America, one whose greatest influence was among the Baptists, who made him a nineteenth-century folk hero.<sup>88</sup> In *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (1992), Mark Noll, a professor of church history at Wheaton College, claims that it was not radicalism that drove Williams from his Puritan brethren but rather his "excruciatingly thorough" Puritanism, which logically compelled him to speak out for church-state separation and liberty of conscience. Williams's reputation as America's "greatest democrat" is not entirely unjustified, says Noll; it was under Williams's guidance that Rhode Island became the first colony to establish freedom of worship as a fundamental human right, with complete separation of church and state.<sup>89</sup>

A longer, more specialized history is *The Baptist Heritage*, published by Baptist historian H. Leon McBeth in 1987. McBeth argues that Williams's tenacious search for truth led him to the separatism he had embraced before he arrived in the Bay Colony in 1631. At the heart of Williams's contention with the Boston church was not only its incomplete separation from the Church of England but also its close connection with civil authority.<sup>90</sup> Williams's Providence was, from the first, a settlement built upon religious liberty, "democratic" and free of the kind of church-state union that prevailed in Massachusetts. McBeth cites an incident in which a Providence man was disenfranchised for beating his wife. The man claimed he had the right to beat her because she was "unsubmissive," but the court nonetheless disenfranchised him for violating her freedom of conscience. The man's religious convictions, right or wrong, were inconsequential in the matter.<sup>91</sup>

According to McBeth, Williams left the Baptists because he questioned whether anyone had special authority to administer the sacraments. However, Williams never questioned the mode of those sacraments, especially immersion for baptism, and he retained many Baptist beliefs for the remainder of his life. McBeth identifies four areas in which Williams contributed to the Baptist heritage. First was his missionary work among the Indians, which was unique and groundbreaking, especially in the fair and respectful way he treated them; Williams protested the ill treatment that they received at the hands of European settlers who subjected them to contemptuous cruelty and spurious conversions,



Roger Williams Received by the Indians. Undated engraving. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 5445).

sold them arms and liquor, and seized their land. Second was Williams's contribution to religious liberty. Third was his contribution to democracy in founding Rhode Island upon the principle that the seat of civil power lay with the people. Last was his role in founding the first Baptist church in America. As great an originator as Williams was, however, McBeth still believes he was somewhat erratic and abrasive, a man with "clay feet." McBeth agrees with William Bradford's assessment that Williams was a godly and zealous man, but unsettled in his judgment.<sup>92</sup>

A more significant examination of Williams can be found in *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (1985), by Martin Marty, a professor of Christian history at the University of Chicago. Marty believes that from the first settlements in America there existed a unique religious pluralism that allowed many forms of Protestantism to flourish. Marty calls Williams the first Dissenter on America's shore, one who sought the primitive purity of the church that had been lost since the days of early Christianity. Stories of martyrdom that Williams learned during his childhood, and later through *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, deeply affected him, says Marty, and his Dissenting views were fully developed by the time he arrived in Boston. Marty details the many specifics that eventually led to Williams's banishment, including his refusal to be Boston's minister, his unwillingness to say grace at his own table with his wife because she remained friendly with "uncompromising types," and his demand for the removal of the cross from the English flag that flew in the colonies. All of these issues seemed to reveal a fanaticism that alarmed and distressed his contemporaries.<sup>93</sup>

Marty contends that the roots of dissent for Williams and such others as Anne Hutchinson, the Baptists, and the Quakers lay in the Scriptures. Placing Williams at the center of the dissident tradition in America, Marty considers Williams's battles characteristic of the "restlessness" of America's religious experience. As a "sort of Seeker," Williams tolerated, at least civilly, the views of even the worst heretics, defending the civil right of all religious dissenters to propagate their views. For the sake of the purity of the church, however, he insisted on a line of separation that would keep the church out of the clutches of civil authority. For Marty, Williams was a driven man, resolute in his convictions to the end, partly because of his character and partly because of the way he was treated by his contemporaries. In the end, says Marty, Williams became a "fairly prosperous, crotchety old man," best remembered as the premiere apostle for soul liberty, though the religious freedom that later developed in America paid him little notice.<sup>64</sup>

Williams is placed within the Separatist and Baptist traditions in *New England Dissent, 1630-1833* (1971), by William McLoughlin, late professor of history at Brown University. However, McLoughlin believes that Williams has come to be seen as more of a Baptist prophet and hero than he actually was: he "became the Baptist's Bradford, Winthrop, Jefferson and Washington—all rolled into one." According to McLoughlin, the Baptists made Williams into the greatest expositor of religious liberty in Western Christendom. While finding the distinction not unmerited, McLoughlin nonetheless argues that the difference between Williams's idea of religious liberty and that of the Puritans was not that extreme—that it was a difference more of degree than of kind.<sup>65</sup> The Puritans believed that religious liberty was the liberty to be truly Christian, without hindrance from clerics or traditions or canonical laws; they had experienced such interference in England, and they sought to abolish it in America. But the Puritans also believed that the conscience needed guidance, both from the word of God and from the civil authorities. Errors of conscience warranted both the church and the state to act, on behalf of the community of believers, for the individual's own good. Maintaining unity and order was as much a task for the church as it was for the state.<sup>66</sup>

What so horrified the Puritans about Williams, McLoughlin says, was that Williams would let the conscience run free. As true Calvinists, the Puritans believed that conscience was seared and corrupted with original sin, and that only evil and every sort of infidelity could come from such freedom. Separating church and state would deprive society of the moral influence of the church, which in turn would lead to corruption and chaos. To the Puritans, Williams posed a threat to the civic order of Massachusetts because he believed that the conscience was not the responsibility of the state, and that only by verbal persuasion could anyone be truly brought to belief. The Puritans considered it their civic duty to sustain the colony's moral soundness lest the community suffer and fall out of favor with God, and they therefore thought it necessary to compel compliance with all of their society's ordinances, both religious and civil.<sup>67</sup>

Contrary to Baptist tradition, McLoughlin does not believe that Williams was the source of religious freedom in America. In his 1991 *Soul Liberty*, McLoughlin seeks to dispel the idea that separation of church and state came directly from Roger Williams; the struggle for separation was hard and long, he argues, and much too complex for any such simple explanation.<sup>68</sup> McLoughlin also labels Williams's "lively experiment" a dismal failure. Neither Roger Williams nor Rhode Island offers any special key to understanding either the history of the Baptists or the winning of soul liberty, he claims.<sup>69</sup> Other Baptists, with their own nuances and differences, were equally important, and lumping them together (as the seventeenth century did) hinders our understanding of the pluralistic sectarian movement. Williams's inability to define his beliefs or to remain with any one church or movement did not help his reputation; Williams seemed to

know more about what he was against than what he was for. He was railed against even in Rhode Island, and Rhode Island itself was held up by its Puritan neighbors as an example of the horrors that religious liberty would bring.<sup>100</sup>

These two works by McLoughlin are not without their problems. They seem to suggest that Williams and the early Baptists had little, if anything, to do with the development of religious freedom in America. Indeed, McLoughlin seems to find that all the struggles that really counted are traceable to the Enlightenment. But to imply, in recognizing the “wider scope” of the struggle, that Williams did not play a significant part in the battle for soul liberty is to underestimate his importance on the issue. Williams’s reputation as a champion of soul liberty is based on much more than Baptist propaganda, and his behavior and the hostility of his contemporaries, as McLoughlin recounts them, are surely beside the point. In its zeal to emphasize the unsung heroes of the struggle, McLoughlin’s history loses one of that struggle’s leaders.



Williams’s strongest legacy remains his advocacy of church-state separation. As closely associated with this issue as Thomas Jefferson, Williams is widely recognized as an early champion of religious liberty, albeit one who was committed to the cause for deeply religious reasons. Many scholarly studies of the First Amendment at least mention him, and some even go so far as to say that the impetus for the First Amendment began with him, that he got to the “root of the matter” when it came to the “first liberty” of freedom of religion.<sup>101</sup>

Recent controversies over prayer in public schools, state support of religious schools, school tax vouchers, and similar issues have forced a fresh look at the First Amendment and its true intent, and Williams’s name has figured prominently in these studies. For example, in *Church-State Relationships in America* (1987), University of Illinois law professor Gerald Bradley points out that the Supreme Court has consistently maintained the primacy of conscience in its definitions and deliberations on religion, and that non-preferentialists (those who believe that the First Amendment was intended to mean only that one religion should not be preferred over another) still have to deal with Williams.<sup>102</sup> Williams’s role as the “protector” of the church from the corruption of the state is emphasized in *The Supreme Court and Religion* (1972), by Richard E. Morgan, a professor of religious studies at Bowdoin College. Morgan argues that the “lively experiment” in Rhode Island became the model for Protestantism by the end of the eighteenth century, and that Williams in particular represented the devout dissenter intent upon protecting the church and the purity of the faith.<sup>103</sup>

During the 1980s the most influential interpreter of constitutional history was Leonard Levy of Claremont McKenna College. In *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment* (1986), Levy argues that the framers intended complete separation of church and state, with no support whatsoever for religion, however nonpreferential that support might be.<sup>104</sup> He contends that the original intent of the First Amendment can be best understood within the context of the American experience, and that the wisdom of the First Amendment may be traced to the original Dissenters, Roger Williams and John Clarke, who felt compelled to fight for church-state separation because they knew what a corrupting influence the government could exercise on religion.<sup>105</sup> Levy notes that Williams used the “wall of separation” metaphor before Jefferson employed it in his famous letter to the Baptists in 1802. By insisting upon the government’s freedom *from* religion and the individual’s freedom *of* religion, the doctrine represented by that metaphor owes as much to religious impulses as it does to secular ones, says Levy.<sup>106</sup>



Perhaps the best work yet written on the First Amendment is *The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic* (1986), by William Lee Miller, a professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia. This work maintains that the First Amendment secures religious conscience over any claims that the nation might make upon its citizens, guaranteeing religious freedom with no hostile intent toward religion whatsoever. Miller traces the history of the First Amendment to Thomas Jefferson's Bill No. 82, which went before the Virginia Assembly in 1779, but he argues that the issue of church-state separation extends back beyond the beliefs of America's Founding Fathers to a deeply religious tradition of Protestant dissent in England and colonial America. This tradition became mythically embodied in Roger Williams,<sup>107</sup> to whom Miller devotes a chapter in his book.

When the Baptists looked back for their roots, they saw Williams as the original exemplar of their belief in voluntarism and religious liberty. This was not just Baptist mythmaking, Miller contends; Williams was in fact our first champion of religious freedom.<sup>108</sup> Identifying the principle of church-state separation as a foundation for the supreme right to individual conscience, and thus as a building block for all other freedoms, Miller argues that Williams epitomized this principle and thus should be esteemed as highly as Jefferson. The rapidly shifting Puritan and Separatist movements fostered a spirit of independence that encouraged Williams to go his way alone. Williams carried the vision of his Puritan brethren even further than they did, insisting upon a more complete church purity and congregational independence.<sup>109</sup> He also carried the spirit of Jesus of the Gospels further than his contemporaries, or even Calvin, did; Christians do not persecute, he wrote, and to kill anyone for religion was a pernicious evil.<sup>110</sup>

Miller believes that in our day Williams's legacy stands against those who would press too single-mindedly for their own agenda or their own way. Williams checks our excessive zeal, says Miller, and supports those who are guided as much by conscience as by doctrine. Possessing a rare spirit of human understanding, Williams did more to magnify human sympathy and Christ's love than John Cotton or his brethren ever did; he appealed to the common morality that all humans shared, and he based his civil designs on this appeal. Miller believes that Williams is an example who leads even today, and that in many ways America has not quite caught up with him.<sup>111</sup>

Political scientist Neal Riemer likewise finds that Williams played a crucial role in the development of American politics. In "Religious Liberty and Creative Breakthroughs in American Politics: Roger Williams and James Madison" (1988), Riemer argues that the religious liberty Williams advocated and secured for Rhode Island led to the first creative breakthrough in American politics: the establishment of the fundamental right of citizens to their own beliefs. Williams's ideas of religious liberty derived from the moral and civil argument against state persecution of religious dissidents. Religious persecution undermined the civil peace and destroyed the order and respect that were required for citizens to live peaceably and lawfully in society, said Williams; it succeeded only in martyring saints and damaging civility.<sup>112</sup>

Riemer contends that Williams effected change in four ways. First, Williams articulated a political philosophy that envisioned all faiths coexisting in civil peace and order, without fear of persecution. Second, his unprecedented "lively experiment" in Rhode Island became the pattern that the nation later followed. Third, his belief in religious liberty was enshrined in the First Amendment's espousal of separation of church and state. Fourth, his advocacy of liberty of conscience paved the way for American pluralism, which itself became a safeguard against political tyranny.<sup>113</sup>

Of course, Williams's lively experiment did not sit well with his Puritan contemporaries. One of the main criticisms directed against it was the claim that church-state separation

would lead only to anarchy and moral corruption. How Williams answered his critics, and what moral forces his religiously libertarian colony relied on, are the subject of "Love and Order in Roger Williams's Writings," a 1976 article by Robert Brunkow. Examining Williams's civic ideas, Brunkow finds that Williams was a social conservative, fully supportive of the ordered society of the seventeenth century. Williams considered order crucial to society's survival, and he believed that a strong government was necessary to enforce the "obedience and constraint" essential to that order. Brunkow sees this belief as rooted in Williams's Calvinism—specifically, the doctrine of the total depravity of man. Government was given by God to maintain order, which would otherwise be constantly imperiled by man's depravity. Government should not dictate personal beliefs, Williams insisted, but in civil matters it was to be obeyed for the good of society. Here was where Williams drew his distinction between the first and second table of the Ten Commandments, declaring that government had the authority to enforce only the second table, the commandments (five through ten) that deal with human relations.<sup>114</sup>

Yet Brunkow also shows how strongly Williams believed in the power of love. According to Brunkow, Williams was convinced that love, or selfless benevolence, should in fact govern all civil, social, and religious relationships in a religiously free state.<sup>115</sup> More optimistic than his Puritan brethren in his view of human nature, Williams held that love could work as well in the reprobate as in the regenerate. Throughout history there had been unregenerate men who were capable of good behavior, and although they might have been virtuous for earthly reasons, they had been virtuous nonetheless.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, the best leaders for society were, still, virtuous men; they did not necessarily need to be Christian, but they did need to be virtuous and sober, because they were responsible for the administration of justice. The nobler bond of love can outweigh any selfish interests for the greater public good, Williams believed; love can defeat pride, preserve peace and liberty, and triumph over most sources of social discord.<sup>117</sup> Brunkow's analysis shows Williams as a much more conservative and loving individual than his contemporaries said he was, or than many later writers have acknowledged.



In recent years scholars have attempted to understand the Puritan and Separatist movements by considering them against the backdrop of biblical primitivism. Simply put, biblical primitivism sought to restore to Christian worship and Christian living the elements and practices of the first-century Christian Church, which were seen as the most acceptable to God. Biblical primitivism arose in England and Europe because of the desire to carry the Protestant Reformation to its logical conclusion: anything that did not measure up to the prescriptions for worship and godly living found in the Scriptures was rejected as originating not with God but with fallible man. For the Christian Church to move forward, it was believed, it needed to move backward and recapture the zeal and purity of its roots. Both the Puritans and Roger Williams were clearly influenced by this belief.

Ironically, the Puritan search for purity eventually challenged not only English society at large but even the New England Way, the Puritans' own theocracy in the New World. Forced to leave England to escape its corrupting influences on their worship and their lives, in New England the Puritans saw the freedoms they espoused—the freedom to choose their leaders, the freedom to practice a simpler liturgy—catch fire in Williams, and such others as Anne Hutchinson, Samuel Gorton, and John Wheelwright, bringing new threats to the Puritans' own established order. In seeking the pure and truly spiritual worship of the early church, Williams and others like him came to far different conclu-

sions than their Puritan brethren did. This spiritual idealization of the Protestant past is explored by Leonard Allen and Richard Hughes in their *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (1988).<sup>118</sup>

Hughes and Allen argue that the Puritan hope, the vision of a community based on early Christian principles, embedded the idea of the “innocence of origins” in the American psyche.<sup>119</sup> This “innocence of origins” has been a beacon that at various times in its history has summoned America to a purer past, to a time when Americans “knew better” and when God blessed his people because they were faithful.<sup>120</sup> Americans have always considered the past sacred, a time when life was simpler, purer, and more godly. This primitivism began with the Puritan settlements and the belief that they were the “New Israel”; the New England Way and the primitivist idea were inseparable, the authors say.<sup>121</sup>

Whereas Old Testament typology was central to the Puritans’ effort to establish a “City upon a Hill,” in Roger Williams biblical primitivism took a different form; for him, the only true starting point for achieving religious purity was the New Testament. Christians in the first century had never felt compelled to set up their own governments, he said. Moreover, it was in the New Testament that the True Church was to be found: lacking in earthy splendor, it was a church blessed and dependent only upon Christ for its sustenance. In opposition to the Bay Colony’s intolerant effort to achieve religious purity by restoring the Old Testament past, Williams insisted that only religious tolerance could allow the conscience to pursue Christian truth. For Williams, say Hughes and Allen, divine certainty was an elusive truth; recognizing that intolerance could easily seep into any union of church and state, Williams would have agreed with Jefferson’s claim that the truth, if left to itself, would prevail.<sup>122</sup>

The close connection between Separatism and biblical primitivism in Williams’s life is examined in Hugh Spurgin’s *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition* (1989). Spurgin, a professor of religion at Unification Theological Seminary, links Williams to the broader Separatist movement that began in England and quickly spread to the American colonies. Williams saw himself as a “troubler of souls” and felt compelled to seek the separation of church and state to keep the truth free from worldly impurity, says Spurgin. The author calls Williams Separatism’s most articulate spokesman and the first to plead, on the basis of Scripture, for complete church-state separation and the tolerance of all religion.<sup>123</sup>

Spurgin also shows how Separatism and primitivism affected Williams’s social and civic thought. Massachusetts Puritans believed that government was as sacred as worship; for them, salvation was not only a personal matter but a communal one as well. Williams challenged this assumption. Spurgin finds their differences best exemplified in differing interpretations of the biblical parable of the wheat and the tares. John Cotton held that the wheat was the true believers and the tares were the unbelievers, and that the unbelievers would remain with the True Church until God separated them from the true believers. Williams, on the other hand, maintained that the wheat and the tares represented not the people within the church but the church and the world. To be of the world, rather than of the church, was, for Williams, an abomination. For him, reform of the church needed to be absolute, and it could be achieved only if the church was protected from the contamination of the world through church-state separation.<sup>124</sup>

Williams’s insistence that the church should have no special privilege before the magistracy, or exercise any civic authority over the consciences of individuals, went far toward the development of voluntary religious practice in America, says Spurgin. Williams argued more consistently than any of his Separatist predecessors, and he avoided the

ambiguities of previous Separatist thought by decisively dealing with the place of religion in the state. According to Spurgin, Williams brought Separation to its next logical step. With church and state separated, Williams believed, the True Church would flourish as it had in the first century, for it would not be bound by any magistracy. Williams saw that the only way Separatists could be guaranteed freedom to worship as their convictions compelled was by a complete church-state separation and full religious liberty. "Williams contributed . . . to the development of the modern concept of the impartial, secular state—an institution which allows for religious freedom and choice—by moving Separation intellectually from a preoccupation with personal freedom and faith to the espousal of broad-based political principles," Spurgin writes.<sup>125</sup>

Although many of Williams's contemporaries considered him an unorthodox rebel, Spurgin argues that Williams was radical only in arguing for soul liberty and the separation of church and state; otherwise, he was neither a fanatic nor a dissenter from any of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Another work that calls attention to Williams's orthodoxy is the 1984 *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660*, by Philip Gura, a professor of English at the University of North Carolina. Exploring the world of the Puritans, Gura in fact challenges the notion, prevalent in standard histories since the publication of Perry Miller's *The New England Mind* in 1953, that conformity was the rule and dissent the exception in New England; instead, he shows that Puritan culture was filled with dissenting enthusiasts—Seekers, Quakers, Baptists, Ranters, Antinomians, Familists, and the like—who insisted on personal religious experience that was often at odds with the religious and civil traditions of the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay. The Puritan establishment faced more opposition than that of Williams and Anne Hutchinson; conflict, not conformity, defined and shaped the New England religious experience.<sup>126</sup>

Gura places Williams in the orthodox Puritan camp (Williams's contempt for Hutchinson's beliefs and for Samuel Gorton is, in fact, well documented).<sup>127</sup> Although driven by his mission to restore the church to its primitive piety, a goal to be achieved only by a separated church, Williams did not abandon Puritan orthodoxy or the disciplined "Christian walk"; on the contrary, he believed that without a disciplined life and constant reexamination of the soul, one's salvation would be suspect.<sup>128</sup> Having shown how Williams's ideas on the nature of the church led him to a radical break with Puritan ecclesiology, Gura speculates that Williams may even have been one of the early promoters of the Seekers, a small group of Puritans who believed that no true church existed because the church was infected by the spirit of the Antichrist. Williams, too, rejected all forms of the organized church as heretical and impure and relied on the work of the Holy Spirit to maintain personal purity and true worship in this life, and through his contribution to their cause he gave the Seekers a certain "American" flavor.<sup>129</sup> Gura believes that Seekerism also helped define Williams's views on toleration by forcing him to share the faith with all comers. Williams would debate, and even vilify, the beliefs of others, but he would never persecute those who held those beliefs.<sup>130</sup> For Gura, the main difference between Williams and the Puritans was that the Puritans were too entrenched in their own beliefs to understand or tolerate such freedom of conscience.

Yet Gura does not really address the crisis that Williams's advocacy of liberty of conscience brought to the seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay community. Was not Williams's vision of the church as much a threat to the New England Way as was Hutchinson's and Gorton's spiritism? As Williams's Puritan brothers saw it, liberty of conscience would surely have led to a crisis of authority. Even the first-century church had its authority base in the Apostles and Apostolic Fathers. If there were no established religious principles to govern the hearts of the magistracy, how could the community be

blessed by God? If the religious authority had no civil authority, how could sin be punished or discipline bestowed? What sort of church authority could there be if the church had no right to act on behalf of the state?

The implications of Williams's primitivism and the nature of ecclesiastical authority in Rhode Island are addressed by Sydney James in a 1984 article entitled "Ecclesiastical Authority in the Land of Roger Williams." In it, James explores Rhode Island's ecclesiastical development amidst its neighbors' belief that church and state were inseparable.<sup>131</sup> In Rhode Island, religious convictions came to be a matter for individual determination, and thus religious observance and piety were left without any clear communally accepted definition. With Williams and others who thought as he did leading the way, all sorts of zealots began questioning civil and religious authority and, often, following their own eccentric whims. James believes that the roots of this process lay in the first Puritans themselves, who in their search for the True Church distanced themselves from the Church of England. This distancing was fully realized in Williams and Rhode Island, and it eventually became the norm for America. Because of Williams, Hutchinson, Gorton, and others, the idea of ecclesiastical authority in Rhode Island eventually lost its force and faded away. Williams was the harbinger of the disestablishment of religious authority and of the voluntarism that followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>132</sup>

In "Roger Williams and George Fox: The Arrogance of Self-Righteousness" (1993), David Lovejoy shows that both Williams and the Quaker founder saw America as a "God-sent asylum" for the religiously oppressed, and that despite the deep animus between them, the two men had significant similarities in their commitment to religious freedom.<sup>133</sup> Both men were religious radicals who believed that America offered the best hope for hastening the Second Coming; both became Separatists and Seekers because they ultimately gave up on established denominations in their search for Christian purity of worship; and both denied the government's right to dictate religious beliefs.<sup>134</sup> Yet even with these similarities, Fox and Williams deeply distrusted each other. Despite their common commitment to religious freedom, each considered the other insincere and a threat to the truth of the Gospel. For Fox, Christ's immediate presence in the human heart provided all the inner light needed to assure one of the truth and to make the Scriptures understandable; for Williams, only revelation in Scripture guided the light of understanding. Williams waited for the fulfillment of the scriptural promise of Christ's return and the restoration of the church, whereas Fox waited for inner peace. To the Quakers, Williams represented the old order; to Williams, the Quakers were undisciplined heretics representing the worst form of religious enthusiasm.<sup>135</sup>



Biblical primitivism generally included a strong belief in the millennial return of Christ. Millenarianism was a persistent theme in Puritanism.<sup>136</sup> Examining the belief in his 1979 book *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*, University of Chicago Divinity School professor W. Clark Gilpin argues that the Puritans were convinced that they were living in the final days, and that God would soon deliver the church from worldly corruption into its final glory. According to Gilpin, this belief was the driving force in Williams's life.<sup>137</sup>

It was within the context of the millennial hope that Williams developed his passion for religious liberty and his ideas of church-state separation, says Gilpin. At the heart of Williams's concerns was his conviction that the millennial hope could be hastened only by a healthy, alert, and well-ordered church embodying the full expression of Christianity, a new church that would do away with the old one. Unlike the Puritans, however, Williams believed that the True Church could be established only by God; the

present times and worship were so corrupt that only God's apostles could reestablish the proper sacraments and orders of the church.<sup>138</sup>

One of the first historians to examine Williams's experiences in England, Gilpin points out that it was there that most of Williams's written work was produced, and that Williams was a significant influence in the English as well as in the American struggle for religious freedom. When he returned to England in 1643, he not only carried on a printed public debate with John Cotton over the various issues in his banishment; he also wrote tracts and letters for Parliament arguing for the Independents and the separation of church and state during the meeting of the Westminster Assembly. Here, too, Williams propagated his millennial beliefs, for he was convinced that only a pristine church could realize the hope that the Westminster Assembly aspired to achieve.<sup>139</sup>

Gilpin is also one of the first scholars to argue that Roger Williams's banishment was crucial to his religious development. Williams wrote while in banishment; he experimented with various forms of worship while in banishment; his personal quest for purity was realized only in banishment and seclusion; and it was in banishment that he arrived at a new conception of the true spiritual authority of the church.<sup>140</sup> Gilpin gives the reader a strong sense of how the experience of banishment molded Williams's thought, and how the theological idea of the millennium affected his view of the New England Way.

A less successful interpretation of the millennial theme in Williams's life is found in *Roger Williams' Dream for America* (1993), by history professor Donald Skaggs of Chapman University. Skaggs contends that Williams's millennial hopes focused on America: the New World would allow God's True Church, freed from all the polluted effects of "Christendom" and nurtured by freedom of conscience, to flourish and expand throughout the earth. For Williams, America was a land chosen by God to bring monumental changes to the world, "changes which would make possible the restoration of the New Testament Church and its flowering worldwide."<sup>141</sup>

Skaggs follows other recent literature on Williams in asserting that Williams's dream for America was a religious dream, and that the struggles and hardships Williams faced were the results of his unique vision of Zion for America. While he rejected all existing churches as hopelessly corrupt, Skaggs argues, Williams believed that Rhode Island would play a crucial role in God's plan for the church: the "lively experiment" would flourish because Rhode Island would provide the design for the foundation of the new Zion, a design based on liberty of conscience.<sup>142</sup> It was Williams's dream for America "that from its shores freedom would spread over the globe giving new apostles the opportunity to direct the way to Zion."<sup>143</sup>

Skaggs's work has its inconsistencies. Although agreeing with Gilpin that the key to understanding Williams lies in his millennial beliefs and his willingness to suffer the rejection of his peers, his friends, his livelihood, and even his family in order to be a true servant of Christ,<sup>144</sup> Skaggs overlooks the most recent scholarship on Puritanism.<sup>145</sup> Some aspects of his work are quite fanciful. For example, when Skaggs speculates on Williams's dream for America, he seems to transform Williams into a political planner, with a millennial dream that is strangely dependent on the expansion of the American frontier.<sup>146</sup> At times Skaggs loses sight of the Puritan context of his subject; he even intimates that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Rhode Island was generally admired for the liberty of conscience it allowed its citizens rather than condemned (as it generally was) as a good example of a bad system of government. Regarding Williams as a prophet of political liberty, Skaggs even muses that Williams would have approved of the Persian Gulf War as a war for freedom!<sup>147</sup> Finally, Skaggs betrays his religious bias by suggesting, without supporting argument, that Williams's eschatological hopes were close to—and perhaps even fulfilled in—Mormonism.<sup>148</sup>

Williams's views on religious liberty were closely linked to his views on history. Both the Puritans and Williams considered all of history as guided by divine providence, made manifest in everyday life by certain signs and blessings. Yet, as explained in "Religious Freedom and the History of the Christian World in Roger Williams's Thought," a 1977 article by University of Basel history professor Hans Guggisburg, Williams's views on how providence revealed itself were different from those of his Puritan brethren. Seeing history in epochs marked by the rise and fall of great powers, Williams believed that the New World was susceptible to the same corruptions and jealousies that affected God's judgment of the great powers in the Old World. The favorable material conditions that the Puritans considered God's blessings in the New World might not have been God's blessings at all; they were, in fact, much different from the kinds of blessings that the church had been promised. God did not necessarily punish idolatry immediately, Williams believed, but often delayed his wrath, as he did with Nineveh, Greece, and Rome. Williams saw the Last Judgement as imminent, and the precursor for any millennial blessings that the church would eventually enjoy.<sup>149</sup> God harshly judged nations that persecuted his saints, and what had happened to Rome and to Spain could happen to England and its colonies as well. If not kept in check, the worldly trinity—profit, preferment, and pleasure—would engulf New England, and materialism would become as much a god to the English settlers as it had been to the Spaniards.<sup>150</sup>



Recent scholarship has increasingly sought to synthesize monographic studies of Puritanism into more comprehensive narrative approaches to the subject.<sup>151</sup> As different aspects of Puritan life are brought into sharper focus, our understanding of the Puritan mission changes, and there is a need to incorporate the new information into our broader understanding of the Puritans in even the most general works. This process has also operated in the study of Williams. Perhaps the best biography to date, one that presents this complex man against the backdrop of the Puritan mission, is Edwin Gaustad's 1991 *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*. In addition to its well-balanced account of Williams's life and influence, this volume includes a brief description of the various popular and scholarly works on Williams published during the last three hundred years.

Gaustad begins his book with a cogent summary of the times in which Williams lived. England's Protestantism was profoundly affected in the sixteenth century by John Calvin, who systematized Reformed theology, and John Foxe, who zealously recounted the stories of the plight of martyrs under Mary Tudor. Much of Puritanism and the more radical undercurrents of Protestantism came from the outpouring of these Protestant ideas and passions, to which Williams was exposed during his youth.<sup>152</sup> Gaustad reminds us of how intensely religious an age it was, and how much it was marked by impassioned religious dissension. Particularly for the Puritans, all of life revolved around religious belief, and it was this impetus that led them to leave England to make a better world for themselves in America.<sup>153</sup>

Gaustad portrays Williams as a man who went his own way almost from the beginning. Like all Puritans, Williams left the national church and sought a purer, less corruptible worship. But Williams went further than his Puritan brethren: he insisted that all ties to the national church be renounced. Gaustad argues that the particulars of Williams's protests all flowed from his desire for complete separation from the Church of England and his repugnance toward compelling any form of worship. Yet Williams's concerns were not totally different from those of the Massachusetts Puritans; liberty of conscience was a volatile issue for them as well as for Williams, and freedom of worship was debated on both sides. Gaustad shows that only a matter of degree separated Williams's

views from those of his Massachusetts brethren. John Cotton, for one, concluded that freedom of worship was proper only for those who truly sought the Lord, and that public order could be maintained only by the strict enforcement of Christian morality. If the church did not hold sinners in check, he believed, the foundations of the community and the government would be destroyed. From the viewpoint of the Massachusetts leaders, soul liberty would have opened the door to all sorts of evil; and thus Williams, and others who thought as he did, were judged free to worship elsewhere.<sup>154</sup>

Gaustad effectively captures the personal tenacity that characterized Williams's life. Even in hardship Williams never lost his faith or his convictions; indeed, his banishment from his Massachusetts brethren served only to strengthen him in his determination to carry out what he perceived as his mission.<sup>155</sup> As painful as that event was for him, Williams never lost his sense of God's immanence. Like a man caught up in a celestial drama, Williams remained conscious of God's purpose for him throughout his life. There was in him a gentleness that came from spiritual gratitude, says Gaustad.<sup>156</sup>

One of the most valuable parts of Gaustad's work is his discussion of the role Williams played in England's national struggle over its religious identity. Williams wrote and published *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* in London in 1644, at the height of that English debate. Providing a detailed analysis of this, Williams's most famous piece of writing, Gaustad finds *The Bloody Tenent* to be an extraordinarily persuasive work, with powerful images undimmed even by Williams's tangled style. "Williams slyly noted that treaties on behalf of peace and liberty were written in milk," Gaustad observes, "while books proposing conformity and persecution were written in blood. His own language was filled with blood, but he preferred a blood-splattered page to a blood-splattered land. 'Who can but run with zeal inflamed,' Williams asked, 'to prevent the deflowering of chaste souls, and spilling the blood of the innocent?'"<sup>157</sup> Gaustad cites Williams's remark, on the matter of forced conversion, that England's monarchs had changed the religion of the land like changing garments, "with wondrous ease and lightness, as a higher Power, a stronger Sword . . . prevailed," but had brought not one soul to genuine conversion.<sup>158</sup>

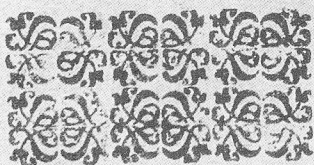
Yet Gaustad reveals in Williams the same paradox that can be found in many religious zealots in history. Despite his passion for soul liberty and his persistent hope for Christ's return, Williams thought that the future of the church was dark. Williams reluctantly concluded that the True Church could not be found on earth, that only by the church's rebirth through apostolic intervention could any true ministry of the church be undertaken in the world. Although there was hope for the future, Williams genuinely lamented the divine judgment that was to come.<sup>159</sup> A church that had become polluted, an apostolic succession that had been broken, and a millennial hope that held as much judgment as blessing combined to make Williams's outlook for the future dark indeed. The supposed blessings that many Puritans saw in America were nothing but worldly seductions.

Gaustad's biography shows the depth of Williams's character. True to his soul, Williams was a man who stood by his scruples regardless of what they cost him and kept his heart free of corruption and moral compromise. No matter how caught up he was in the ecclesiastical quagmire of his times, he never lost sight of his proper purpose in life: to serve God as a true disciple. But there was much more to Williams than was shown by his civic and religious stances. For example, Gaustad notes how much Williams cherished his "beloved privacie," which he enjoyed while running a trading post among the Indians at Cocomuscussoc, far from his irascible fellow colonists, and again toward the end of his life. In his friendship with the Indians, in his handling of negotiations between Indians and colonists during times of war, and even in his most difficult dealings with his fledgling colony, Williams was a careful and sensitive man. Contrary to his



T H E  
**BLOVDY TENENT**  
 of P E R S E C U T I O N , for cause of  
 C O N S C I E N C E , discussed, in  
*A Conference betweene*  
**TRVTH and PEACE.**

VV H O,  
 In all tender Affection, present to the High  
 Court of Parliament, (as the Result of  
 their *Discourse*) these, (amongst other  
*Passages*) of highest consideration.



Printed in the Year 1644.

*Williams's Bloudy Tenent of Persecution vehemently argued the case for religious liberty. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1411).*

reputation for insolence and incorrigibility, he is portrayed by Gaustad as the first guardian against "the farce of 'fallible and uninspired men' setting themselves up as inspired and infallible judges of the conscience of others."<sup>160</sup> Moreover, "Williams never feathered his own nest at the expense of the public he served. He never acquired great tracts of land even though, being first on the scene, a whole country lay before him. After coming to Rhode Island, he never received a salary, and after surrendering his trading post he never had a significant income. His wealth was in his family and friends, in his sense of integrity and 'sure calling' of God."<sup>161</sup>

A far different assessment of Williams comes from the religious right, whose vision of America has tended to be more like that of Winthrop and Cotton than like that of Williams or Jefferson. As if American evangelicalism had inherited the primitivism discussed in Allen and Hughes's *Illusions of Innocence*, two evangelicals have written a book that claims to identify a Christian heritage supposedly long lost in the secular liberalism of the day. In *The Light and the Glory: Did God Have a Plan for America?* (1977), Princeton Divinity School master Peter Marshall and David Manuel ask the question posed in the book's subtitle. America, they say, was founded upon a Christian heritage and upon a specific covenant with God, who promised to provide for his people so long as the covenant was kept. The authors trace their vision of America back to Columbus, the first "Christ bearer" to the New World.<sup>162</sup> But America has lost its way and now needs to "rediscover" the covenant that was first made by the Puritans and the Pilgrims.<sup>163</sup>

For these authors, godly reverence, holy service, and corporate commitment were most clearly represented by the Puritans. But Williams was someone whom the Lord "pruned from His vineyard," a "wild shoot" taken away so that the vine could bear fruit and flourish.<sup>164</sup> Although he had much promise, as even Winthrop acknowledged, he ended up the "most tragic" of Christians. Marshall and Manuel describe Williams as an obstinate, self-righteous man who could not bear to go any way but his own, a man obsessed with purity to such a degree that he brought anguish to the hearts of all who knew him. It was his arrogance that led him to insist upon liberty of conscience, which in fact was

nothing more than his declaration that nobody was going to tell him what he should do or believe.<sup>165</sup> The authors contend that Williams took great pride in his banishment, and that God dealt with him by giving him Rhode Island and “every crackpot, rebel, misfit and independent” to live there. This retribution caused him such anguish that he finally became withdrawn, ineffective, and spiritually shipwrecked.<sup>166</sup>

Needless to say, *The Light and the Glory* demonstrates that the Puritan assessment of Williams dies hard. In some circles the Puritans’ brand of biblical primitivism remains alive and well. In his defense of the First Amendment, William Miller examined the consequences of that ideology and found them dangerous. So did Thomas Jefferson, and so, too, did Roger Williams.



How can we best understand Roger Williams? A troublemaker to his contemporaries in New England, he spent much of his later life in relative obscurity. We cannot be certain when he was born, and we do not know for sure where he is buried. We do not even know what he looked like.<sup>167</sup> Unless a new tract or sermon or some other such document surfaces, there is little hope that we will ever discover anything new about the man.

Yet despite the meticulous scrutiny that his life and work have received, scholars have not grown tired of studying him. Some have portrayed him as too radical for his time and too stubborn for his own good, a man who had great potential but who squandered his opportunities because of his unbending will. Others have labeled him a true American hero who championed freedom of conscience, the most fundamental of liberties. He has been recruited into many causes, molded and remolded to fit within the various visions of America’s destiny. He has been the Baptist exemplar of Isaac Backus, the “irrepressible democrat” of Bancroft and Brockunier, and the hardened, crusty Calvinist of Perry Miller and William McLoughlin. And although the more embellished, inspirational interpretations of his life have been replaced with more realistic assessments, his importance to the American scene has not diminished. More than a hundred years before Jefferson helped write the separation of church and state into law, Williams stood alone for the same principle, with no majority of voluntarists and no Monticello to retreat to. Williams stood alone not in the cool rationalism of the Enlightenment but in the extreme ferment of religious revival. He had a great deal to lose; and with his banishment from the Bay Colony, he did, indeed, lose much.

Recent English and American scholarship on Puritanism has forced a reassessment of Williams and his times. Williams has emerged the better from this scholarship; he is now seen less as a crank and more as a principled objector to the status quo than was generally supposed, as well as a man with better political judgment than most of his contemporaries. For many previous scholars, Williams and seventeenth-century Rhode Island were prime examples of unruliness and strife, the colony a “Rogue’s Island” rather than a refuge for the oppressed. Yet the order that the Puritans sought and later writers praised—the order that Williams rejected—was one of enforced religious conformity and oppression, not unlike what the Puritans had fled England to escape. Williams would have none of it.

To understand Williams and his commitment, one must understand the Puritan conversion experience. For the Puritans, Christian conversion and God’s calling were synonymous, and these forces were vital to Williams’s life. Other factors no doubt also helped shape his stand for liberty of conscience, but first and foremost it was his Christian conversion and, subsequently, his deep sense of God’s providence in his life that moved him forward. These were what sustained him in his times of duress and

checked him in his times of triumph. His concern for church purity, for the true Christian evidences of a changed life, and for the freedom to worship according to the dictates of one's own conscience all came from his deep sense of God's calling and intimacy in his life. Williams was courageous and resolute because he was first of all a Christian.

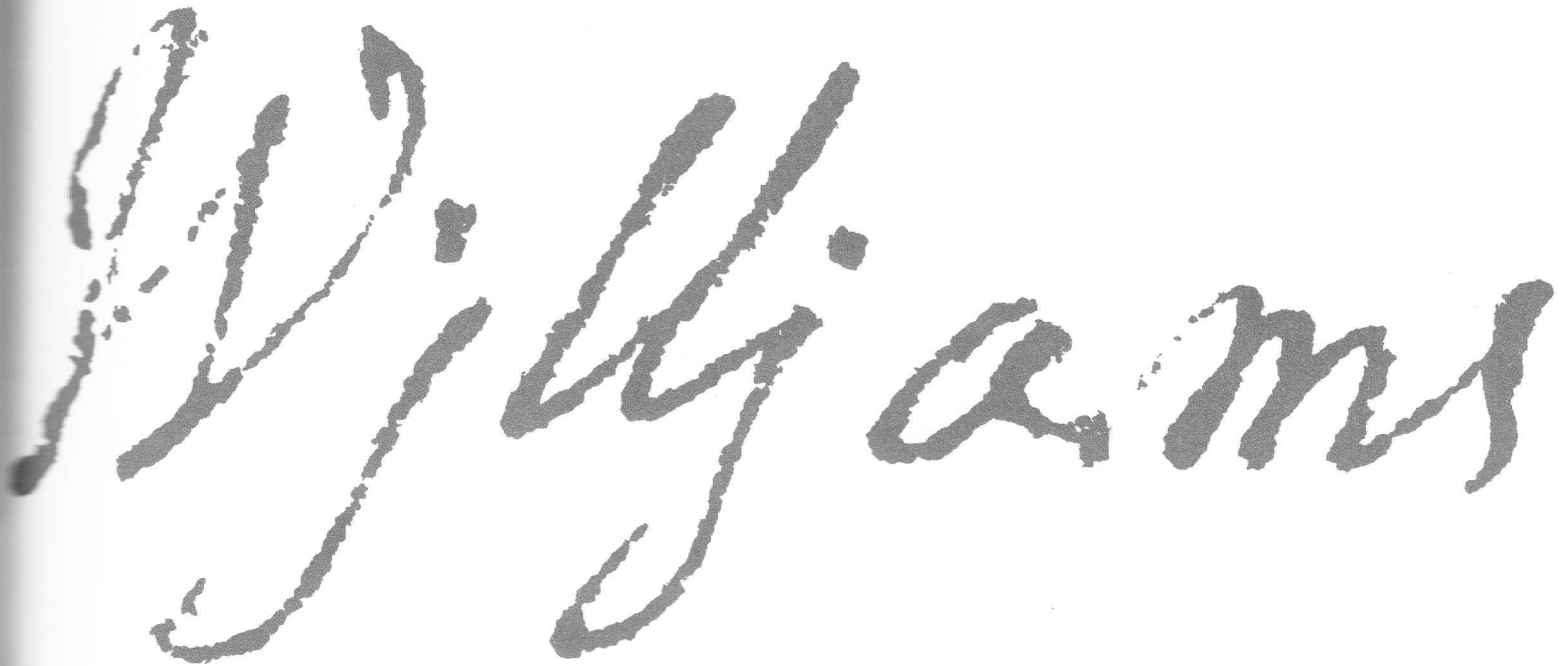
The biases and broad judgments that have pursued Williams almost from the time he set foot in America seem to be fading, and a deeper respect for him has emerged. First rescued from Puritan historians by eighteenth-century men like Stephen Hopkins and Isaac Backus, who saw him as an inspiration and example for liberty, Williams became in the works of twentieth-century Progressive historians Vernon Parrington and Samuel Brockunier a hero for the oppressed, one who exemplified the "irrepressible" democratic

*Williams's signature from a letter to the town of Providence, 8 December 1680. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 1444).*

A large, stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Roger Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, calligraphic style with thick, dark strokes. The word "Roger" is written in a larger, more prominent script, while "Williams" is written in a smaller, more compact script. The signature is positioned in the lower half of the page, below the main text.

spirit of the common man. More modern, less exhortatory scholarship has sometimes judged Williams too much as most of his contemporaries did; Perry Miller saw him as little more than a nuisance, and William McLoughlin labeled his "lively experiment" a dismal failure. Yet, his reputation bolstered by such historians as Edmund Morgan, William Miller, and Edwin Gaustad, Williams has over time come to be seen as the nation's foremost historical figure in the quest for religious freedom.

Noting in 1860 that there was not even a marker on Williams's grave, Brown University president Francis Wayland observed that Williams had not been given the attention he deserved. Yet, said Wayland, there are some men for whom such recognition is unnecessary: their monuments are everywhere.<sup>168</sup> Surely Roger Williams was such a man.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Roger Williams". The ink is dark and the strokes are bold and fluid, characteristic of a personal signature.

## Notes

1. James Dobson, *Focus on the Family Newsletter*, May 1995, 3.
2. See Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1983), 15.
3. See *A Modell of Christian Charity in The Winthrop Papers* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1947), 2:282-95.
4. See, for instance, William McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630-1838* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991), 3.
5. For a brief but excellent summary of Williams's life and times, see Ronald P. Dufour, *Colonial America* (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1994), 120-27. See also Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 54-61.
6. He would bow his head *after* his meals.
7. See Francis T. Bremer, ed., *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 4-5, 12; S. E. Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 61.
8. Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 109, 141; David Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 9.
9. Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 175. See also Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 126-40.
10. Cragg, *Church and the Age of Reason*, 176; Morison, *History of the American People*, 63; Edwin Gaustad, "Roger Williams: Beyond Puritanism," *Baptist History and Heritage* 24 (1989): 15.
11. I am indebted to Donald Skaggs's unpublished dissertation "Roger Williams in History: His Image in the American Mind" (University of Southern California, 1972) for much of the information in the following pages. On Winthrop and Winslow, see pp. 11-13.
12. William Bradford, *History of Plimoth Plantation* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co., 1898), 370.
13. See *The Correspondence of Roger Williams, 1629-1682*, ed. Glenn W. LaFantasie (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), 1: 57-64; Nancy E. Peace, "Roger Williams: A Historiographical Essay," *Rhode Island History* 35 (1976): 103-4; and *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England, 1630-1649*, ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908) 1:168.
14. *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, ed. John Russell Bartlett (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963) 1:315.
15. *Ibid.*, 7-9.
16. See Edwin Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 39-41.
17. Irwin H. Polishook, *Roger Williams, John Cotton, and Religious Freedom: A Controversy in New and Old England* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), 45-48. See also Theodore P. Greene, ed., *Roger Williams and the Massachusetts Magistrates* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1964), 4-16.
18. Interestingly, the first American edition of the *Magnalia* did not appear until 1820.
19. See Greene, *Roger Williams and the Massachusetts Magistrates*, 17-18.
20. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience*, 201; John Callender, *An Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode Island* (Boston: S. Kneeland & T. Green, 1739), 56-58.
21. Stephen Hopkins, "An Historical Account of the Planting and Growth of Providence," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser., 9 (1832): 184-89.
22. See Daniel G. Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 195.
23. *Ibid.* The college is now Brown University.
24. Skaggs, "Roger Williams in History," 50-51. Edwards believed that Williams deserved a statue in his honor.
25. Isaac Backus, *A History of New England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 1:75-76. It is interesting that Backus used Williams's writings and arguments surprisingly little when he himself argued for religious liberty.
26. John Gorham Palfrey, *A Compendious History of New England* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1890), 1:414-15.
27. James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Roger Williams, the Founder of the State of Rhode Island* (Boston: Lincoln, Edmunds & Co., 1834), 387-89, 388. See also Peace, "Roger Williams," 105.

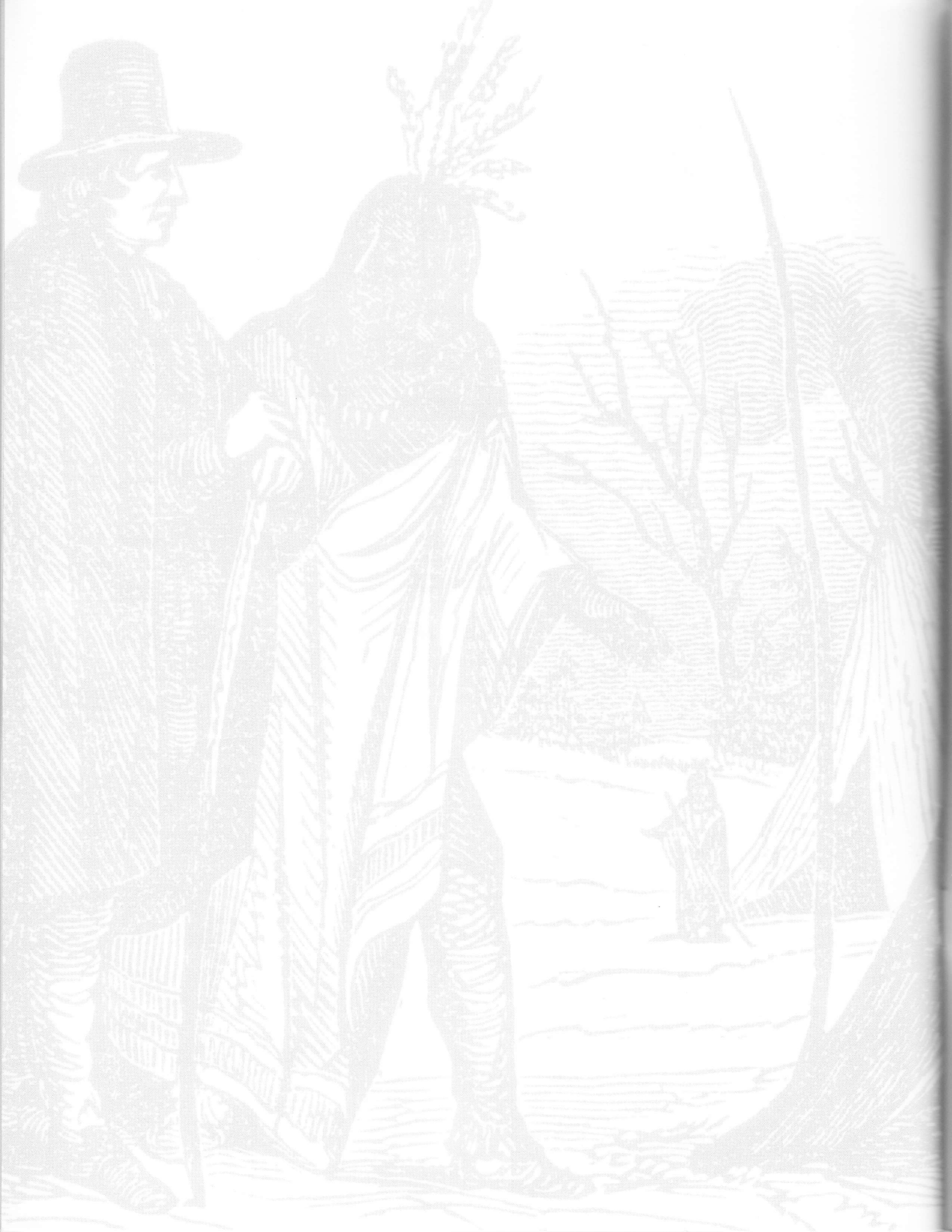
28. See Noll, *History of Christianity*, 148-53. For an excellent discussion on the effects of this populism on American historiography, see Gerald N. Grob and George Nathan Billias, *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives*, 6th ed., 2 vols. (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 1:4-8.
29. See Grob and Billias, *Interpretations of American History*, 1: 6.
30. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience*, 210-11.
31. George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America, from the Discovery of the Continent*, 6 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1886), 1:501-3. See also Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience*, 212.
32. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Charles Frank Adams (Freeport, Maine: Books for Free Libraries Press, 1969), 11:376-77. See also John Quincy Adams, "The New England Confederacy of 1643," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd ser., 9 (1846): 209.
33. Other major nineteenth-century works that dealt with Williams include Thomas Durfee's *A Biographical Dictionary, Containing a Brief Account of the First Settlers, and Other Eminent Characters among the Magistrates, Ministers, Literary and Worthy Men, in New England* (1809), James Grahame's *The History of the United States of North America, from the Plantation of the British Colonies till Their Assumption of Independence* (1850), and Henry Dexter's *As to Roger Williams, and his 'Banishment' from the Massachusetts Plantation* (1876). Grahame and Dexter sought to vindicate the Massachusetts Bay leaders by focusing on the incorrigible and irascible character of Williams and by emphasizing the danger he posed to the colony.
34. Oscar S. Straus, *Roger Williams: Pioneer of Religious Liberty* (New York: Century Co., 1894), 95-97, 108.
35. See Skaggs, "Roger Williams in History," 126, 129-30.
36. Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1930), 1:62-74. See also Peace, "Roger Williams," 106-7, and Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience*, 216.
37. Samuel H. Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams* (New York: Ronald Press, 1940), 43-44, 50.
38. *Ibid.*, 206-8. See also Skaggs, "Roger Williams in History," 166-68.
39. See Mauro Calamandrei, "Neglected Aspects of Roger Williams's Thought," *Church History* 21 (1952): 245-56.
40. *Ibid.* 255-56.
41. Peace, "Roger Williams," 107.
42. Typological interpretation of the Old Testament began in Alexandrian Judaism in the first century B.C. During the Jewish captivity, Jewish mystics who were strongly influenced by Platonic and other Hellenistic literature searched the Jewish scriptures for their symbolic meaning. Christian typology had its roots in the Christian accommodation of the Old Testament, with Christian apologists and other writers seeking Old Testament types and examples of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Many of these types were alluded to in the New Testament, and they were expounded upon and expanded by the Apostolic Fathers; for example, Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the great fish represented Christ's death and resurrection. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews said that the entire Old Testament priesthood was a shadow of the true heavenly one. Accommodating the Old Covenant to the New proved at times challenging. Eventually it was believed that the only way to truly understand the Old Testament was through the New Testament. Within the first two hundred years of the Christian church, typology led to an allegorical method of interpretation that at times became so fanciful that it was condemned as heresy. An excellent discussion of typology and the Alexandrian school can be found in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1:56-64.
43. Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York: Bobbs, Merrill, 1953), 32-38.
44. *Ibid.*, 26-27, 254.
45. Alan Simpson, "Salvation through Separation," in Greene, *Roger Williams and the Massachusetts Magistrates*, 112.
46. Ola E. Winslow, *Master Roger Williams: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1957), 154, 291-92.
47. *Ibid.*, 200-201.
48. Miller apparently thought that Williams's interpretation of the Bible and his ideas on religious liberty were either extravagant notions or tormenting convictions akin to larvae! See Perry Miller, "Roger Williams: An Essay of Interpretation," in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 7:9, 22.
49. Winthrop S. Hudson, "John Locke: Preparing the Way for the Revolution," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 42 (March 1964): 20, 28.
50. Hudson said that these men recognized Locke's ideas in other of the Puritan controversialists as well. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
51. *Ibid.*, 28.
52. Sacvan Bercovitch, "Typology in Puritan New England: The Williams-Cotton Controversy Reassessed," *American Quarterly* 19 (1967): 166-71.
53. Edmund Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), v, 141-42.
54. *Ibid.*, 87.
55. *Ibid.*, 93, 96-99.
56. *Ibid.*, 138-40.
57. See Robert E. Brown, review of Morgan's *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* in *Yale Review* 58 (December 1968): 293.
58. John Garrett, *Roger Williams: Witness beyond Christendom* (London: Macmillan Co., 1970), 10, 42, 174-75.
59. *Ibid.*, 134-36.
60. Peace, "Roger Williams," 107-8.
61. *Ibid.*, 111.
62. Sydney V. James, "The Worlds of Roger Williams," *Rhode Island History* 37 (1978): 99, 100.
63. *Ibid.*, 102-4. James was surprised by Williams's "sweeping characterizations" of the Indians as the "treacherous and barbarous scum of mankind." For a discussion of Williams's earlier and far more complimentary depiction of the Indians in his *Key into the Language of America*, see Jennifer Reid, "Roger Williams's Key: Ethnography or Mythology?" *Rhode Island History* 56 (1998): 77-86.
64. James, "Worlds of Roger Williams," 107-8.
65. Glenn W. LaFantasie, "A Day in the Life of Roger Williams," *Rhode Island History* 46 (1987): 97. This "capturing" of a day in the life of Williams shows a strong influence of the Annales school of history of the late nineteenth century, when historians first sought to recapture in their discipline all of human life and its variety. See John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman Group, 1991), 107.
66. LaFantasie, "Day in the Life," 99. Cocuscusoc is believed to have been just north of modern-day Wickford, though its exact location has remained a mystery.

## Notes continued

67. *Ibid.*, 99.
68. *Ibid.*, 103, 104-5.
69. *Ibid.*, 104.
70. *Ibid.*, 107-8.
71. *Ibid.*, 109.
72. Glenn W. LaFantasie, "Roger Williams and John Winthrop: The Rise and Fall of an Extraordinary Friendship," *Rhode Island History* 47 (1989): 85.
73. *Ibid.*, 87-88.
74. *Ibid.*, 89, 92, 95.
75. LaFantasie, *Correspondence of Roger Williams*, xxvi, xxviii.
76. *Ibid.*, xxix-xxx.
77. *Ibid.*, xxxix.
78. *Ibid.*, 59-60.
79. L. Raymond Camp, *Roger Williams: God's Apostle for Advocacy* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), iv-v.
80. *Ibid.*, 16-18, 20-21.
81. *Ibid.*, 29, 30-31.
82. *Ibid.*, 158.
83. *Ibid.*, 213-16.
84. Bradford F. Swan, "Roger Williams's Most Persistent Metaphor," *Rhode Island History* 35 (1976): 127-239.
85. Anne G. Myles, "Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood: Roger Williams, Persecution, and the Discourse of the Witness," *Modern Philology* 91 (November 1993): 133, 134, 144.
86. *Ibid.*, 149, 160.
87. See Edwin Gaustad, "When in the Course," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd ser., 52 (1995): 482.
88. R. D. Linder, "Roger Williams," in Daniel G. Reid et al., *Christianity in America*, 1258.
89. Noll, *History of Christianity*, 58-59, 60.
90. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 126-27.
91. *Ibid.*, 130.
92. *Ibid.*, 135-36.
93. Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 76.
94. *Ibid.*, 78. The observation that Williams's resolve was strengthened by the hostility of his contemporaries—a possibility not mentioned in other works on Williams—is an insightful one. It is unfortunate that Marty did not develop this idea further in his brief sketch of Williams.
95. William McLoughlin, *New England Dissent: 1630-1833* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 405, 1229.
96. *Ibid.*, 92-93.
97. *Ibid.*, 24-25.
98. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, ix.
99. *Ibid.*, 3.
100. *Ibid.*, 19.
101. See William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 151.
102. Gerald U. Bradley, *Church-State Relationships in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), xi.
103. Richard E. Morgan, *The Supreme Court and Religion* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), 16, 17. See also pp. 184, 185.
104. Leonard W. Levy, *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986), ix-xi.
105. *Ibid.*, 168-69.
106. *Ibid.*, 188.
107. William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty*, 153-54.
108. *Ibid.*
109. *Ibid.*, 163.
110. *Ibid.*, 172-74.
111. *Ibid.*, 156-57, 181, 183.
112. Neal Riemer, "Religious Liberty and Creative Breakthroughs in American Politics: Roger Williams and James Madison," *Journal of Political Science* 16 (1988): 43.
113. *Ibid.*, 46-47.
114. Robert D. Brunkow, "Love and Order in Roger Williams's Writings," *Rhode Island History* 35 (1976): 115-16.
115. *Ibid.*, 116.
116. *Ibid.*, 117.
117. *Ibid.*, 122.
118. See C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), iii-viii.
119. *Ibid.*, x. The authors call this thinking an "illusion of innocence" and part of a dangerous proclivity to try to solve the problems of the present by imitating the past.
120. *Ibid.*, 4-6.
121. *Ibid.*, 25-29.
122. *Ibid.*, 60-61, 77. Allen and Hughes believe that Williams was first and foremost a primitivist, and that primitivism must be taken into full account if Williams and the Puritan movement are to be properly understood. Williams saw little hope for the church except by divine intervention, the authors say; until that happened, only complete state toleration would allow any possibility of unblemished worship. See also C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, eds., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 33-34.
123. Hugh Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), vii-viii, x.
124. *Ibid.*, xiv, 11-12.
125. *Ibid.*, 124.
126. Philip Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 4-6.
127. See *ibid.*, 6-8.
128. *Ibid.*, 43.
129. *Ibid.*, 74. Like Williams, the Seekers waited for the restoration of the True Church by new apostles and prophets. Bartholomew Legate, one of their leaders, was condemned for heresy and burnt at the stake in Smithfield, England, Roger Williams's home town. See F. L. Cross, ed., *Oxford History of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1256.
130. Gura, *Glimpse of Zion's Glory*, 188.
131. Sydney V. James, "Ecclesiastical Authority in the Land of Roger Williams," *New England Quarterly* 57 (1984): 324.
132. *Ibid.*, 345.
133. David S. Lovejoy, "Roger Williams and George Fox: The Arrogance of Self-Righteousness," *New England Quarterly* 66 (1993): 199.
134. *Ibid.*, 200, 208.
135. *Ibid.*, 209, 224-25.
136. Millenarianism is the belief that the full restoration of the church will be accomplished with the thousand-year reign of Christ over the entire earth. The particulars of this belief have created different opinions about when the thousand-year reign of Christ will be: premillennialists believe that the millennium will begin with the Second Coming, while postmillennialists believe that it will precede the

- Second Coming, for which the faithfulness of the church will prepare the way through the spread of righteousness throughout the earth. The first mention of a millennial reign of Christ can be found in Revelation 20. The Puritans were mostly premillennial in their hopes. See Cross, *History of the Christian Church*, 916. See also Sinclair B. Ferguson et al., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 429; Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm*, 16-18; Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 193-96; and Daniel G. Reid et al., *Christianity in America*, 919.
137. W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 8-9.
138. *Ibid.*, 13, 49, 53. See also pp. 110-12, 58-61.
139. *Ibid.*, 69-95.
140. *Ibid.*, 62.
141. Donald Skaggs, *Roger Williams' Dream for America* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 2.
142. *Ibid.*, 29, 35, 44.
143. *Ibid.*, 45.
144. *Ibid.*, 178.
145. See Ronald Dufour, review of *Roger Williams' Dream for America* in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd. ser., 53 (1996): 650.
146. See Carla Pestana, review of *Roger Williams' Dream for America* in *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 1283.
147. Skaggs, *Roger Williams' Dream*, 189. Of course, as Skaggs should know, Williams hated war.
148. *Ibid.*, 184-85.
149. Hans R. Guggisburg, "Religious Freedom and the History of the Christian World in Roger Williams's Thought," *Early American Literature* 12 (1977): 36, 46.
150. *Ibid.*, 37-38.
151. One of the earliest attempts to synthesize separate ideas of historical interpretation for a greater understanding of Puritanism was Alan Heimert's "Puritanism, the Wilderness, and the Frontier" in *New England Quarterly* 26 (1953): 361-82. Since then, many works have reexamined Puritanism in light of the New History, including, most recently, Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, rev. ed. (Hanover, N.H.: University of New England Press, 1995); Bremer, *Puritanism*; and Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). Each of these provides a blend of the cultural and intellectual contexts for the proper understanding of American Puritanism.
152. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience*, 4.
153. *Ibid.*, 6-8, 12-15.
154. *Ibid.*, 25, 43-44.
155. Gaustad in fact uses the word "exile" in every chapter heading but one.
156. *Ibid.*, 50.
157. *Ibid.*, 75.
158. *Ibid.*, 79.
159. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
160. *Ibid.*, 105-6.
161. *Ibid.*, 189.
162. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory: Did God Have a Plan for America?* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1977), 29-32.
163. *Ibid.*, 18-19.
164. *Ibid.*, 191-92. The authors' metaphors are so plentiful that the work often reads like an overdrawn jeremiad.
165. *Ibid.*, 193.
166. *Ibid.*, 198.
167. Most sketches and portraits of Williams are renditions of what he might have looked like based on the physical characteristics of his descendants.
168. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience*, 213.





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*Cover*  
Detail from *The Landing of Roger Williams*,  
Engraving from a painting by Alonzo  
Chappell; published by Johnson and Fry  
Company, New York, 1866. RIHS Collection  
(RHH X3 844).

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