SAINTS, SINNERS, AND SUBJECTS: RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE
PLANTATIONS IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE, 1636-1665

DISSERTATION

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By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explain how a small New England colony survived its first three crucial decades despite being surrounded on all sides by hostile neighbors. Having been founded by dissenters from the ecclesiastical scheme of Puritan Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations is known to students of American history as an oddity in a region dominated by "orthodox" men and women, and scholars have thus generally dismissed it. Understanding its early history, however, is vital, since Rhode Island's past underscores the importance of the English context to all North American colonies and suggests how the idea of religious liberty not only survived in the New World, but allowed its proponents to gain political advantage in London, thereby helping the tiny colony survive the onslaughts of Puritan rivals.

This dissertation has three main components. Part One shows that the founders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations represented a cross-section of religious beliefs in early seventeenth-century England, from nonseparating congregationalism to Separatism to General Anabaptism and Anglican mysticism. This Old World diversity was unwelcome
in the more homogenous, Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose leaders sought to construct and maintain ecclesiastical uniformity. Part Two outlines the development of the new "exile" colony on Narragansett Bay. In order to maintain independence from Puritan authorities and to keep order, magistrates in the communities of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations instituted several strategies, including their innovative decoupling of religious and governmental spheres, and their exploitation of the changing religious and political situation in civil war and interregnum England, an environment that in fact mirrored the milieu of the tiny colony. Part Three suggests that the use of these strategies extended well into the 1650s and 1660s, and guaranteed England's protection of the Narragansett colony from the territorial ambitions of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut.
Dedicated to my parents
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**BDBR**

**CRW**

**CSPC**

**CSPD**

**CWRW**

**DNB**

**ERPz.**

**JCB**
John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI

**Mass. Recs.**

**MHSC**
*Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*

**NEHGR**
*New England Historic Genealogical Register*
NEQ  New England Quarterly

PCSM  Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts

Ply. Recs.  Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds. 
Records of the Colony of New Plymouth.  12 vols. 
Boston, MA: W. White, 1855-61.

PR  Clarence S. Brigham, ed.  The Early Records of 
the Town of Portsmouth.  Providence, RI: E.L. 
Freeman, 1901.

PTP  Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence, RI

RICR  John Russell Bartlett, ed.  Records of the 
Colony of Rhode Island and Providence 
Plantations in New England.  7 vols.  Providence, 
RI: A. Crawford Greene, 1856-62.

RIHS  Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence, RI

RIHSC  Rhode Island Historical Society Collections

RIHSM  Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence, RI

WJ  James Kendall Hosmer, ed.  Winthrop's Journal, 
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908; 

WMQ  William and Mary Quarterly

WP  Allyn B. Forbes, et al., eds.  Winthrop Papers, 
1498-1649.  5 vols.  Boston, MA: Massachusetts 
Historical Society, 1929-47.

WR  Howard M. Chapin, ed.  The Early Records of the 
Town of Warwick.  Providence, RI: E.A. Johnson, 
1926.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1992, Richard Middleton expressed a view widely held among historians of colonial America. "Rhode Island during the seventeenth century," he argued, "never represented more than a refuge for a few outcasts, who practiced unconventional ideas on religion and politics." He concluded that "With only four settlements before 1660, Rhode Island remained on the periphery of events, and its contribution to colonial development was small."1 Embracing this rationale, scholars have ignored the tiny colony. Rhode Island rarely appears in American history textbooks and usually surfaces in introductory courses only as a foil for its larger neighbor Massachusetts. Indeed, the literature on early Rhode Island is remarkably slender compared to the mountain of work produced on the founding and development of Massachusetts Bay.

This neglect can be explained in several ways. Seventeenth-century Rhode Island was quite small, occupying an area less than one-fourth that of the Bay colony. In

1676 the Narragansett region was home to less than five percent of the total population of New England. Many of Rhode Island's residents were religious outcasts from surrounding colonies, and thus have been perceived as defeated or inferior; clearly, scholars have viewed the colony as an aberration in a relatively homogenous region, an oddity in an area dominated by "orthodox" Puritan men and women.

Puritanism, narrowly defined, has cast a long historiographical shadow over Rhode Island, one from which the small colony has been unable to escape. Most histories of seventeenth-century New England have focused primarily or significantly upon Puritanism, and most studies of Puritanism produced this century have begun with Perry Miller. Some have adopted Miller's famed "declension thesis," and others have revised it. Most have approached Miller's scholarship with a certain amount of reverence and awe, acknowledging their debts to the man who directed their attention to a subject which--in the thirty years since Miller's death--has been examined in thousands of monographs and articles.

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2 These estimates are based on Edward Randolph's report in CSPC, 1675-76, 464-65.

This extensive discussion of Puritanism has simultaneously advanced the theme of American exceptionalism. In 1953, Perry Miller argued in an enormously influential essay that the founders of the Bay colony believed themselves to be undertaking a divinely ordained mission to reform England—and in fact all of Christianity—as a prelude to the return of Christ. By accepting God's call to the wilderness of New England, John Winthrop and his fellow Puritan settlers had obligated themselves to establish a "city upon a hill," an example of piety that succeeding generations would struggle to maintain.4 Scholars have argued that in this way the Puritans of Massachusetts made their mark on the "national character," that since the seventeenth century Americans have viewed themselves as special and as agents for worldwide change. Thanks to the Puritan "errand," America became associated with the ideas of purpose, abundance, opportunity, and freedom.5 And, because Rhode Island has been popularly defined as an outcast, un-Puritan colony, it also has been ignored. Apparently "unexceptional," it is


assumed to have contributed nothing to the important trends in U.S. history.

While for three centuries the notion of a Puritan mission shaped the discussion about an "American character," many historians have recently challenged that notion. Some have argued that particular regions in colonial America deserve additional attention because they--rather than New England--prefigured American religion, politics, and society. This case has been made most forcefully for the middle colonies, New York and Pennsylvania, particularly in the work of Patricia Bonomi and Alan Tully.6 Other scholars have stressed the importance of various colonies for their close resemblance to early modern England and thus their "normality." Jack Greene and James Horn have argued that the Chesapeake colonies transferred to the New World English economic, religious, and legal ways and that this distinguished the region from "Puritan" New England.7 Such revisions treat Rhode Island as part of the larger,


"orthodox" area out of step with Anglo-American trends, when in fact the colony mirrored England in important ways.

Even scholars who examine the broader, transatlantic picture have mistakenly overlooked Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, preferring to dismiss it as an insignificant part of a monolithic colonial region. In reality Rhode Islanders, perhaps more than any other colony in seventeenth-century Anglo-America, drew upon the diverse theologies of England's religious communities and relied upon English legal codes and customs. Leaders of the Narragansett followed very closely the political trends of their native land and knew better than their counterparts in other New England colonies how to win favor from the various factions passing in and out of power in London. In short, over the course of three decades Rhode Island lawmakers conceptualized theirs as the most English of English colonies.

In contrast to other North American colonists, the inhabitants Rhode Island and Providence Plantations embraced their "Englishness" not merely formulaically or ceremonially, but as a necessary ingredient for their colony's survival. Narragansett residents represented all colors of the English spiritual spectrum, and thus were unwelcome in and around Boston, where authorities toiled to maintain strict uniformity. Their heterodoxy resulted in banishment and their communities, through the 1660s, were subject to
continuing threats from Massachusetts and other neighboring colonies. From the early 1640s Massachusetts authorities claimed jurisdiction over the area, used allies within the towns to forward an agenda of annexation, and refused aid to the outcasts in their battles against hostile Indian tribes. Bay colony ministers argued that the extreme "heretics" among the exiles should be brought to Boston and tried on capital blasphemy charges. The framers of the United Colonies of New England, a confederation established in 1643 for the common defense of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut, consciously excluded Rhode Island and Providence Plantations from membership, contending that no such colony existed; they argued that the towns within the Narragansett had been improperly organized, having lacked permission to settle in the region from the "true" owners of the territory, Plymouth and the Bay colony, and having established no legitimate churches. Moreover, the unabated spiritual diversification resulting from the freedom of the southern New England wilderness was, in the view of "orthodox" colonies, offensive to God and worthy of destruction.

Limited in their options for protection, the communities in the Narragansett region turned first to each other, and then to England, the recognized, common source of authority for all New England colonists. Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, as the collection of the four area
towns came to be known, earned help from London precisely because of its reputation as a colony of outcasts that, by 1641, had agreed to consider religious opinion irrelevant to civil, orderly government. When, in 1643, these exile communities united to petition for a patent from the king, the religious environment in England was beginning to resemble that of the Narragansett. Opposition to the Crown and the Church of England was mounting and, within a year, a civil war was in full swing and the ecclesiastical structure was rapidly breaking down. As a result, sects that had lurked underground since the sixteenth century began to surface, and the debate over toleration accelerated. Many in Parliament began to take up the cause of greater religious liberty, an issue that gave Narragansett envoy Roger Williams entree to the Committee for Foreign Plantations and helped him to secure the first patent for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

In time, others followed Williams's lead and exploited the issue of spiritual freedom in a rapidly radicalizing England. Eccentric theologian Samuel Gorton and his followers arrived in London in 1646 and played on the sympathies of parliamentary committee members who defended rigorously the notion that truth-finding required free expression of even the most offensive religious views. In 1652 Roger Williams returned to England, this time with Newport Baptist minister John Clarke, to reunite the
Narragansett colony, which had been split by resident William Coddington's successful bid a year earlier for a commission from Parliament that made him governor of Rhode Island for life. Williams and Clarke both contributed to the debate over religious liberty while in London and, eventually, repaired Rhode Island and Providence Plantations with the help of tolerationist Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell and his council. In each case the strategy for the Narragansett partisans was the same: emphasize before radical English leaders the workability of religious liberty and political order as proven in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

This argument was amplified over time as the residents of the Narragansett region solved the problem of instability which many opponents—including Massachusetts ministers and magistrates—saw as accompanying spiritual diversity. This process of decoupling the religious and civil spheres, while achieving and maintaining social order, was a lengthy and difficult one and one that depended a great deal upon the influence of English authority. For the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, the challenge, after declaring that "none shall be accounted delinquent for conscience," was to construct a legal code and civil institutions that did not depend explicitly upon adherence to a single faith. In this, Narragansett residents were rejecting the Massachusetts Bay system, whereby church
membership and political participation were linked and law was, to a large extent, dictated by Old Testament precepts. To counter the prevailing Anglo-American assumption that religion and government were, of necessity, inseparable in maintaining order, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations adopted whole sections of the English legal code and scrupulously avoided references to Mosaic law. In doing this, the colonists unified around a single secular standard while continuing to worship as they pleased. Moreover, by proving the workability of religious liberty and defining their colony in opposition to the intolerance of the Bay colony, residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations won tremendous political support in civil war and interregnum England.

Through the 1660s, Narragansett leaders continued to fend off challenges to their colony by referring to the devotion of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to religious liberty and English law. When power shifted with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, the themes that colonial agent John Clarke emphasized did not. When he petitioned the new monarch, Charles II, to recognize and reconfirm officially the status and boundaries of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Clarke stressed what he believed to be enduring ideas. He identified with the King as a fellow exile and underscored his colony's history of reliance upon English legal codes and customs. Moreover,
Clarke, noting that his Narragansett constituents continued to be besieged on all sides by intolerant neighbors, played to Charles's personal bias for toleration and his impatience with uncooperative "orthodox" colonies. Not surprisingly, then, when the Crown's representatives arrived in New England to solve conflicts between colonies and to guarantee compliance to royal wishes, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations again enjoyed favor well beyond--and at the expense of--its neighbors. As a result, threats to the Narragansett colony's existence faded to squabbles over boundaries; leaders of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut, by 1665, had been forced to concede the permanence of its heterodox nemesis.

The survival of the Narragansett communities through their first three decades depended, in short, upon the connections among religious and political cultures on both sides of the Atlantic. In the Puritan New England of the early 1630s, as in England, church and state stood together; one helped to define the other. The leaders of the Church of England, led by Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud and Charles I, believed that religious dissent resulted in political disorder and thus exercised their rights to persecute--to the point of expulsion--unhappy and unorthodox Puritans. By the same token, as these Puritans began to construct their vision of a "new Zion" in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, they excluded from their congregations and
governments all who expressed variant doctrines. In the former case, suppression of dissent helped to bring on civil war and to usher in an environment where multiple spiritual views were thought to be acceptable and inconsequential to governance. The American scenario was very similar, for persecution in New England resulted in the formation of communities in the Narragansett region that exhibited the same division of religious and political ground. The important differences between England and America, of course, were chronological and geographical; the process of separating the spiritual and civil realms began almost a decade sooner in New England and initiated long-term tensions between the "heterodox" and "orthodox" colonies. These conflicts were resolved, eventually, by English politicians whose sympathies for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had been shaped by similar religious and political contexts.

Unfortunately, the small body of literature on early Rhode Island and Providence Plantations has neglected the colony's important and close relationship with England. Work dealing with the four settlements of Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Warwick has consistently treated founders and colonists simply as outcasts from the Bay colony who were forced to establish self-sufficient communities modelled upon Boston and its surrounding towns.
Historians like Bruce C. Daniels and Dennis O'Toole saw in Rhode Island a unique set of conditions tending toward instability, but both indicated that a combination of compact government and civic structures learned in Massachusetts saved Narragansett exiles from extended reliance upon the power centers in Whitehall. As a result of this perception, the focus of such town studies throughout the 1970s and 1980s continued to celebrate the existence of a political continuum between Massachusetts and Rhode Island and to ignore a constant English influence upon the new colony.8

Probably the most heavily exploited theme in treatments of colonial Rhode Island—one that also de-emphasizes the role of the "mother country"—concerns the development of religious liberty as an end in itself. Local nineteenth-century antiquarians assumed that their ancestors had been refugees from Massachusetts for the sake of conscience and had simply established governments based upon that ideal. These writers framed what historian Dale Miller called the "Rhode Island Legend," a story of freedom won with sacrifice.

8 Dennis O'Toole, "Exiles, Refugees, and Rogues: The Quest for Civil Order in the Towns and Colony of Providence Plantations, 1636-1654," (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1973), vi, 7; O'Toole notes that "The towns of Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Warwick were, after their own fashions, as much influenced at their inception by the puritanism of their founders as were any of the towns of Massachusetts Bay or of the other colonies of New England." See also Bruce C. Daniels, Dissent and Nonconformity on Narragansett Bay (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).
that ran parallel to the tales told at the same time by Massachusetts patricians. This popular interpretation claimed that the settlers of the Narragansett region—Roger Williams and John Clarke chief among them—built a democratic colony despite external opposition (from Puritan oligarchs) and internal challenges (from traitor William Coddington and the anti-social theologian Samuel Gorton). The startling, new, and typically "American" ideas of Williams and Clarke—rough-hewn in the Rhode Island wilderness—then became the foundation for the development of freedom in the New World even through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.9

The legend has continued well into the twentieth century. Local Rhode Island historian and rabid Turnerian William Sheffield observed that the colony's "development from separate isolated communities in the wilderness" to a cohesive political entity resulted in "as large an individual freedom as could be consistent with organized society."10 Confident in the staying power of his argument, he proclaimed that "Rhode Island will always be chiefly remembered for its identification with the great principle of Soul Liberty," a claim echoed years later by

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the likes of Vernon Parrington, James Ernst, Mauro Calamandrei, Perry Miller, and Martin Marty.11 So distinctly American was the Rhode Island endeavor to establish "a limited democracy freed from theocratic control," that William Weeden had no compunctions in asserting that individual rights had not issued from the European context, but resulted solely from the work of Roger Williams, New Engander.12

The "Rhode Island Legend" has proved prohibitive to a wider approach since it focuses attention on the establishment of the United States. The nature of the colony's "experiment," according to Loren P. Beth, was the demonstration that connections between church and state were unnecessary for civil government.13 Many scholars, of course, interpreted the logical end of this contention to be


that Roger Williams and John Clarke were the progenitors of the establishment clause of the First Amendment. In 1950 Anson Phelps Stokes and Leo Pfeffer declared that the Framers had learned a great deal from the Rhode Island situation, and in the over forty-five years since, a number of scholars, including Edwin Gaustad and Martin Marty, have accepted the same conclusion.14

Though the legend has met some challenges in the twentieth century, it continues to shape the debate over seventeenth-century Rhode Island’s religious and political dissent and it guarantees that the discussion will be limited. Challengers include Herbert L. Osgood, who argued in 1904 that the colony of exiles found unity out of necessity rather than from Williams’s ideas or influence. A decade later Clarke biographer Thomas Bicknall revised the legend to give all the credit for Rhode Island’s development to his subject and none to Williams. A few have even downplayed the role of dissent in the development of Rhode Island, opting to emphasize instead political or religious structures inherited from Massachusetts, to challenge the uniqueness of Williams’s Rhode Island by comparing the extent of its religious freedom to that of Calvert’s

Maryland, or to deny the success of the "experiment" altogether. The result, however, has been the same: the strict geographical limitation of the discussion and continued emphasis upon liberty of conscience as an end rather than a means.\textsuperscript{15}

Yet another caveat in the debate has led to the same limitations: the argument over which came first, the idea of religious liberty or the necessity that such a policy be instituted in notoriously unstable Rhode Island. Entire articles have been written about this aspect of the Legend, and most monographs dealing with the colony have taken up the issue. Historiographically, the debate seems to be divided chronologically, with scholars of the late

\textsuperscript{15} Herbert L. Osgood, \textit{The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century} (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1904), I: 332-70; Thomas W. Bicknell, \textit{The Story of Dr. John Clarke, the Founder of the First Free Commonwealth of the World on the Basis of "Full Liberty in Religious Concernments"} (Providence, RI: T. Bicknell, 1915), 3; O'Toole, "Exiles, Refugees, and Rogues," vii. William McLoughlin observes that no one ever sought to emulate Roger Williams's experiment and Rhode Island was therefore a failure; instead, he argues, dissenters exiled themselves, leaving Puritanism intact, withdrawing to fight for freedom from outside Massachusetts, which was less effective; see New England Dissent: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), I: 8. Similarly, John Moffatt Mecklin has argued that Rhode Island was relatively poor, sparsely populated, and looked down upon by Massachusetts and thus could not take a militant position on behalf of dissenters; as a result, Rhode Island was forced to pursue peace by adopting "a policy of passive resistance"; The Story of American Dissent (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), 45. See also Lucian Johnson, Religious Liberty in Maryland and Rhode Island (Brooklyn, NY: International Catholic Truth Society, 1903); and R.E.E. Harkness, "Principles Established in Rhode Island," \textit{Church History} 5 (1936): 217.
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries arguing that the "experiment" was the product of big ideas and great men and women, and historians since the 1940s suggesting that liberty of conscience was dictated by the circumstances of settlements around Narragansett Bay. Both sides emphasize the sectarian impulse as the impetus for religious freedom, but the former group stresses a plan or intention on the part of Williams, Anne Hutchinson, Gorton, and other early settlers to create a place where reputed heretics could practice their faiths unmolested by civil authorities. They tend to view various legislative actions—the charters of 1644 and 1663 and orders passed in 1647 and 1656—as arising from long-held notions rather than from environment of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Recent additions to the body of scholarship have laid out the opposing view, claiming in some cases that the notion of "liberty of conscience" was in fact too vague to have been instituted in

16 Arthur Amasa Ross, *A Discourse, Embracing the Civil and Religious History of Rhode Island; delivered April 4, A.D. 1838, at the close of the second century from the first settlement of the island* [Providence, RI: H.H. Brown, 1838], 11-12) and Harkness ("Principles Established in Rhode Island," 218-19) tend to quote laws, while Caroline Hazard (*Anchors of Tradition* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1924], 1) and Beth (*American Theory*, 53) stress instability following legal liberty of conscience. David B. Ford notes the prevailing assumption in seventeenth-century New England, espoused by Increase Mather, that the ability of a society to support liberty of conscience is dependent upon its size, and observes that Rhode Island's idealists shattered that notion; *New England's Struggles for Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1896), 30.
any colony without guidance from experience. But for the
most part, those arguing that the "Rhode Island Legend" was
more pragmatic than principled have underscored the
existence of a deep spiritual unrest among Puritan radicals
that manifested itself in hefty political problems and
demanded a policy of religious liberty. By necessity, this
contention avoids any suggestion that settlers of Rhode
Island and Providence Plantations used their colony's
history of spiritual diversity to achieve political gain.
Moreover, such an approach denies the possibility of a
transatlantic exchange of ideas, substituting instead the
notion that the environment made the legend, that religious
freedom was completely indigenous to America.17

17 O'Toole finds that the idea of "religious liberty"
was very flexible, allowing opposites like Samuel Gorton and
William Bradford to subscribe to it; "Exiles, Refugees, and
Rogues," 3. For more on the view that the circumstances
created the principle, see Frederic Denison, Westerly (Rhode
Island) and Its Witnesses (Providence, RI: J.A. and R.A.
Reid, 1878), 88; and John T. Noonan, "Principled or
Pragmatic Foundations for the Freedom of Conscience,"
Haller argues that religious liberty in Rhode Island was
"sheer necessity" and notes that dissenters had as a common
enemy Massachusetts Congregationalists and "of necessity,
had to create a union purely civil to face this threat";
Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1955), 129. Mecklin takes a neo-
Turnerian stand, claiming that Roger Williams's banishment
allowed for a fresh wilderness start and thus "The
wilderness made Rhode Island and religious liberty
possible"; Story of American Dissent, 82. William
McLoughlin has a slightly different angle, suggesting that--
in New England as a whole--dissenter discontent sprang from
feelings of social inferiority and that religious liberty
sprang from a search for equality rather than a training in
principles; New England Dissent, xviii-xix. Stokes,
Pfeffer, and Beth make the same argument: that the very
Moving away from these old debates, I hope to enrich our understanding of early Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, and of the "other," transatlantic, unorthodox New England. By looking at the ways in which Narragansett leaders used their colony's history of spiritual diversity and their commitment to liberty of conscience, we can learn a great deal about the development of both early American and early modern English religious and political cultures, as well as the connections between the them. Moreover, growth in the number of dissenters in early America, precluded the establishment of a state church in places like Rhode Island; Stokes and Pfeffer, Church and State, 25, and Beth, American Theory, 7. Dennis O'Toole is perhaps most straightforward: "In the first years of settlement, men in the Narragansett plantations had accepted liberty of conscience, but more from necessity than from principle. There seemed no other way of governing men who were of so many different minds about God's things. What common sense did not teach early experiences in puritan New England did: to force orthodoxy upon a religiously heterogeneous population would produce stiff division, the bane of communities as new and exposed as theirs were"; "Exiles, Refugees, and Rogues," 538. Only Dale Miller and Loren Beth make a connection between the development of liberty of conscience in Rhode Island and England. Miller complains that historians have emphasized colonial differences with Britain, ignoring enormous commonalities, especially in the area of the relationship between religion and politics; "Protestantism and Politics," 8-10. Beth sets up the transatlantic debate, but only in summary, providing little specific or new evidence: "...colonial America contributed practically nothing to the theory of religious toleration, much less to that of religious freedom. That definite contributions to the practice of these concepts were made is a fact both striking and true. But the fact is clear that colonial theories of church-state relationships were not indigenous to the American soil; they did not spring full blown upon the American soil; they were brought here by Englishmen, and throughout the colonial period they had their counterparts in English thought"; The American Theory, 33. Beth describes back migration and the "Rhode Island Legend," without much detail.
looking past religious liberty as an end, and examining it as a means, places the true genius of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations leaders in perspective; they recognized that their unique characteristics, skillfully presented in the context of civil war, interregnum, and Restoration England, could guarantee their colony's continued independence, and with it insure the survival in America of the principle of free conscience.
PART ONE

THE SETTLEMENT OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
IN THE ENGLISH CONTEXT

Since the early 1970s scholarship on the origins and development of religious and political radicalism in early seventeenth-century England and New England has exploded. Thanks to the work of historians like Christopher Hill, Bernard S. Capp, Paul Lucas, J.F. Maclear, A.L. Morton, Keith Thomas, and Phillip F. Gura, a clearer picture has emerged of the groups once dismissed as insignificant sects or elements of the "lunatic fringe." Individuals espousing the same curious, "dangerous" doctrines have come to light on both sides of the Atlantic, indicating that American radicals either borrowed their ideas from English thinkers or developed them on their own, without extended contact with brethren across the sea.

Undeniably, the founders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had been influenced heavily by their English experiences and had, throughout the seventeenth century, ideological counterparts across the Atlantic. Their divergent views grew out of the
religious context of mid-sixteenth-century England, when the
Reformation resulted in splinter movements that challenged
the national church and competed with one another for
adherents. Puritans sought to purge the Church of England
of the remaining elements of Roman Catholicism in its
liturgy and in the vestments of its clergy, while others
adopted even more radical stances. Believing that the
Anglican church was corrupt beyond repair, the Separatists
established their own, independent congregations. Baptists
of various stripes organized around the principle of adult,
or believer's, baptism. Sundry other groups preached
mystical union with God, the denial of sin, or the gift of
prophecy. In short, by the early seventeenth century
England was home to a multitude of religious opinions, but
only one view, that held by the King and his bishops, was
upheld by the state. The others were suppressed.

These dissenters shaped the society and culture of New
England. The largest of the region's colonies,
Massachusetts, was established by Puritans for Puritans, a
theologically and ecclesiologically uniform settlement in
the New World. But other men and women who were neither
good Anglicans nor Puritans feld to New England as well;
upon arrival they had a difficult time adapting to the
church and state system of the Bay colony, which they viewed
as all too similar to Archbishop of Canterbury William
Laud's church in England. Separatists, Baptists, and
mystics who held spiritual opinions that were too extreme for the leadership of Massachusetts were forced to flee a second time, to the wilderness south and west of the Bay colony.

The area around Narragansett Bay afforded these dissenters an opportunity to preach their doctrines and establish communities in relative freedom. Having been unable to do so in London or in the towns of Massachusetts, Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, Samuel Gorton and their followers expressed their opinions openly and initiated the experiment in religious liberty that the Separatists, Baptists, and mystics remaining in England still struggled to implement. In the New World, as in the Old, well-worn sectarian ideas survived despite the best efforts of opponents to extinguish them; these ideas defined the future colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.
CHAPTER 1
THE SEPARATIST IMPULSE AND THE FOUNDOING OF PROVIDENCE

In 1636, the Massachusetts General Court voted to banish Roger Williams from the colony. The erstwhile Salem minister had criticized New England Puritan ecclesiology, attacked the legitimacy of the Bay colony charter, and supported natives' claims to property in the region. He had insisted upon strict autonomy for all congregations and sought to avoid "contamination" of his church by the impure tenets of the Church of England. Because Williams inspired extraordinary loyalty in the members of his flock, leaders in and around Boston feared that his unwelcome positions would become more popular and eventually endanger the American Puritan experiment.

Officially banished to England, Williams escaped instead to the southern New England wilderness and, with some of his Salem supporters, established a community called Providence. There Williams continued to publicize and develop his controversial ideas, stressing, in particular, the right of individuals to follow their consciences. His followers joined him in establishing a church similar to the
one they had abandoned in Salem and in constructing a civil polity to maintain order. As a group they opened a wide territory to settlement by other exiles from the Bay colony and worked to avoid the long arm of "orthodox" authorities.

The historiography of Roger Williams and early Providence is extraordinarily dense and detailed. Williams has been the subject of literally hundreds of articles and monographs, and scholars for over two centuries have either celebrated or challenged his role in the development of liberty of conscience in America. Biographers have concentrated upon various aspects of the founder of Providence, from his troubles in Massachusetts, through his foray into Anabaptism, to his relationship with natives. His later life in the Narragansett has been well-covered, especially his 1672 debates with the Quakers and his life on the frontier as a trader. Scholars have not overlooked his political and literary contributions, having commented at length about Williams's writing style and how his views anticipated the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.


The literature has little to say, however, in two crucial areas: the early development of Williams's religious views and their influence on his life in New England, including the founding of Providence; and the English or early American beliefs of other town settlers who helped to shape the character of the Narragansett. Though Williams's biographers invariably include a section on their subject's early life, none has systematically analyzed the implications for New England of his well-established pre-migration ideas. The backgrounds of those who followed Williams from Salem to Providence have been similarly overlooked, but have much to say about Williams's charisma, the appeal of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English Separatist and Anabaptist beliefs, and the extent to which the Great Migration included individuals who could scarcely be called conventional Puritans.

Clearly, Williams's controversial views came directly out of his early English environment, beginning with his childhood in the realm's capital. He was born in London around 1603, the son of James Williams, a tailor and staunch Anglican, and Alice Pemberton Williams, a child of the landed gentry. Roger, the second of three sons, grew up in Smithfield, probably among an ever-increasing extended family. His proximity to London profoundly affected his early life, introducing him to educational opportunities,
political news, and the importation of various religious
views from the continent. By all accounts a bright child,
he no doubt absorbed the flurry of activity around
Parliament, and likely witnessed the consequences of
nonconformity early on.3

More than anything else, Williams's education prepared
him to come to unpopular religious and political views later
in life, and to defend them with uncommon rigor. As a young
man he demonstrated superior talent for shorthand, which
captured the attention of well-known jurist Sir Edward Coke,
who in 1621, "seeling him soe hopefull a youth, tooke such
likeing to him that he put him in to suttons hospitall,"
also known as the Charterhouse School, a former Carthusian
monastery which had been converted to a preparatory school.
Williams did well enough there to move on to Cambridge,
matriculating at Pembroke Hall in June 1624. While there,
Williams learned the time-honored art of disputation, and,
in this bastion of Puritanism, prepared to become a minister
of the Church of England.4

Coke's intervention in Williams's education holds out
the possibility that the famous attorney and legal theorist

3 Cyclone Covey, The Gentle Radical: A Biography of
Roger Williams (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 2-3; Hugh
Spurgin, Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the
English Separatist Tradition (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen,
1989), 71; Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Master Roger Williams: A

4 Roger Williams to Mrs. Anne Sadleir, ca. April 1652,
CRW, 359n; Ola Winslow, Master Roger Williams, 124-25.
influenced the young Roger in more substantive ways as well. Through Coke, Williams witnessed trials before the Star Chamber, many of which involved religion, and thus "became acutely aware of the legal risks and sufferings of religious dissenters and perhaps learned something of their teachings as well." While a scribe for Coke, Williams came into contact with the future leaders of the Puritan movement in both England and Massachusetts, including eventual Bay Colony governor John Endicott, who acted as a witness for Coke on a legal document. During the same period, around the time that the Parliament of 1621 was sitting, Williams also met Winthrop's friend Sir William Martin, and probably other reformist members of Coke's circle, such as Sir John Eliot and radical parliamentarian John Pym. In short, the religious ideas Williams absorbed in Coke's law offices and in the courtrooms of England undoubtedly influenced him, and the contacts he made through the jurist would prove invaluable in his later attempts to get charters for Providence.5

But aside from potential acquaintances, the only certain clues left concerning the evolution of Williams's religious beliefs come from his educational records. In 1627 he signed an oath required for graduation from Pembroke by which he recognized the king's supremacy in spiritual

matters and accepted the Thirty-Nine Articles, the core of Anglican belief. After Williams completed two additional years of schooling in anticipation of a master's degree and a career in the ministry, however, he refused to submit to the episcopacy. His later recollection that he had been "persecuted even in and out of my father's house these 20 years," is intriguing, but suggests only a possible lifelong predisposition to Puritanism which really reached fruition after two years of graduate study.6

Williams's involvement in nonseparating congregationalism became more serious after he had completed his formal training, when he began actively participating in conventicles established in private Puritan households. In 1626, the English Puritans revived the concept of feoffees, a collection of professionals—including clergy, merchants, and lawyers—who purchased lay appropriations, private organizations within the Church of England, and hired Puritan preachers to staff them. When, in 1633 Laud ordered such outlets for Puritan preaching suppressed, the movement to a large extent shifted to wealthy households, which soon opened their doors to outsiders interested in sermons offered by well-known reform-minded ministers. Williams attended such sessions, and was eventually employed in the

6 Cambridge records indicate "that Roger Williams...hath forsaken the Universitye and is become a discontinuer of his studyes"; cited in Winslow, Master Roger Williams, 72. See also Covey, Gentle Radical, 7-8.
household of Puritan member of Parliament Sir William Masham as chaplain.7

As a minister in the Masham household Williams also came to know more of the men who shaped New England Puritanism. While at Masham's manor in Otes, Essex, Williams met Thomas Hooker, who lived and preached only twelve miles distant at Chelmsford, and had contact with John Cotton at Cambridge. In July 1629 Williams traveled with both Hooker and Cotton to the earl of Lincoln's estate, where a meeting called by Isaac Johnson was to plan migration to America. There Williams also became acquainted with Emanuel Downing, brother-in-law to John Winthrop, William Coddington, future governor of Rhode Island, Sir Richard Saltonstall, William Dudley, with whom Williams developed a life-long friendship, Richard Bellingham, and Simon Bradstreet. Williams likely had previously met John Winthrop, probably knowing him earlier when the future Massachusetts governor was a barrister for Masham. Evidence suggests that Williams also knew most of the leading ministers and magistrates in Plymouth and Salem, including Endecott, Francis Higginson, and the earl of Lincoln's former chaplain, Samuel Skelton.8


8 Covey, Gentle Radical, 12, 22-23.
Despite being well-connected in nonseparating reformist circles, however, Williams was a firm Separatist by the time he left England in December 1630. On the way to the conference in Lincolnshire, he told Cotton and Hooker that he could "not joyn with them in their use of Common prayer," indicating that he had completely moved away from Anglican practices which nonseparatists continued to maintain.\(^9\) In a letter to Lady Joan Barrington he noted that he intended to stay at Ctes and that he had turned down "many former offers and that late new-England call." Moreover, he had rejected two other "livings proffered me each of them 100 li per annum," not because of the money offered—which was average for the time—but because he could not in good conscience preach as a nonseparating congregationalist in old or New England.\(^{10}\) Williams turned away, then, from nonseparating congregationalism sometime between his subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles as a condition of graduation in 1627, and his rejection of the same two years later.\(^{11}\)

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\(^{10}\) Roger Williams to Lady Joan Barrington, c. April 1629, CRW, 2.

Williams likely reached a moment of religious crisis between 1627 and 1629, when Separatist influences from his early life compounded forceful arguments he had absorbed in post-graduate reading at Cambridge. Just how soon Williams came to identify with Separatist figures remains a mystery, but some historians have attempted—with little success—to connect him to Bartholomew Legate and Edward Wightman, who were burned at the stake for their separatism near the Williams home in Smithfield in 1611 and 1612 respectively.12 That an eight-year-old Williams would have witnessed and completely understood the event is unlikely. Rather Williams probably came to know the history of early English Separatism as a student at Cambridge and there began to examine the relative merits of that position compared to the nonseparatist one which was so pervasive at the university.

Unfortunately, as Hugh Spurgin has noted, historians have overlooked Williams’s extensive links to English Separatism, preferring instead to view him as simply a

12 Champlin Burrage, The English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641), 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1912), I: 67; Spurgin, Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism, 21. Leon McBeth noted that Williams grew up "in the heart of London, where within a few blocks of his home several English Christians had been martyred for their faith. Williams must have known about these cases and may even have witnessed some of these executions. Within his immediate community were known to be numerous meeting places of various kinds of dissenters. Williams must have known of these, and he may have attended some of their meetings"; Baptist Heritage, 126.
Puritan radical. Historiographically, the roots of Williams's thought have been overshadowed by emphasis upon his banishment from Massachusetts, the "emotional appeal of his arguments on behalf of 'soul liberty,'" and by his unorthodox views concerning Indian land rights. All of these issues, however, arise from Williams's criticism of non-separating Puritans, based upon notions he brought with him from England. In short, Williams "was influenced by the theology and practice of the original English separatists"; to "comprehend Williams's ideological roots, his separatist religious heritage must be understood." Spurgin rightly concludes that Williams's views--"so threatening to the leaders in Massachusetts--were a full application of principles of religious nonconformity developed several decades earlier by the first English separatists."13

As a student, and in his later writings, Williams acknowledged his pre-emigration debt to a number of English Separatists, whose careers he followed closely. At Cambridge he read the early tracts of Robert Browne and Henry Barrowe, which encouraged English Protestants "to examine our ways, and to ponder our estate," to become "Christ's little flock" separate from the corrupt Church of

13 Spurgin, Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism, x, xiii.
England.14 Through Barrowe's works, Williams became familiar with Amsterdam exiles Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth, admiring the latter as "That worthy instrument of Christ's praise,"15 and noting that he had "scarce his Peere amongst a thousand Academians for the Scripture Originalis."16 Williams was also on friendly terms with Ainsworth's Separatist associate Sabine Staresmore, who later authored an attack upon John Cotton in Williams's defense.17

Early on, Williams showed a particular fondness for the ideas of yet another member of the Ainsworth congregation, John Canne. After his exile from England in 1630 or 1631, Canne succeeded Ainsworth as minister of the strict


Separatist "Ancient Church" in Amsterdam, where he also printed dissentent tracts. In 1634 Canne published *A Necessitie of Separation from the Church of England, proved by the Nonconformist Principles*, which Williams read and later defended in print. Williams agreed with Canne that the Puritan rejection of national church ceremonies and offensive doctrines "must necessarily, if truly followed, lead on to and enforce a separation from such ways, worships, and worshippers, to seek out the true way of God's worship according to Christ Jesus."18 Williams's defense of Canne not only suggests his utter rejection of all things Anglican, but also points to his continued interest in Separatist literature after his immigration to New England.

Similarly, Williams had learned a great deal from nonconformist John Robinson, who, along with William Brewster, proved to be an ideological pillar of the New England Separatist colony of Plymouth. Williams criticized Robinson and Brewster for their "soft" separatism, for allowing their congregants to worship with Church of England members and to hear the preaching of Anglican ministers.19 Yet Williams adopted important ideas from Robinson, having read his *Treatise of the Lawfulness of Hearing of the Ministers in the Church of England* as early as 1637, a book

18 Williams, *Cotton's Letter Examined*, 381.

19 Williams followed Canne's argument against hearing the preaching of Anglican ministers. On Robinson, see Gura, *Glimpse of Sion's Glory*, 33-34.
which argued that those who derived their faiths from conscience were generally more peaceful people. Williams later referred to Robinson's *Observations Divine and Moral* (1625) which noted that "it is of human right and natural libertie, for everie man to worship what he thinketh God; and that it is no propertie of Religion to compell to Religion, which ought to be taken up freely." A person's faith was internal, and outward expressions were often misleading; civil action in the religious realm was thus useless. Ironically, Williams's *Bloody Tenent* had been conceived in July 1637 as a refutation of Robinson's ideas, but ended up adopting some of them.20

Continental Baptists exerted an equal influence upon the ecclesiological thought of Roger Williams prior to his removal to New England. Sometime between his entrance into Sutton's Hospital and the latter part of 1630, Williams came into contact with those who practiced believers' baptism.21 The most likely suspects were Anabaptists and Mennonites from Holland who migrated to Cambridge and Eastern England during Williams's tenure at Pembroke.


21 Jessie Fletcher, "Interactions Between English and American Baptists" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1955), 79.
Williams could read Dutch, and had read both the writings of English Baptist John Smyth and the work of the continental Anabaptists with whom Smyth later associated. Williams had absorbed the ideas of other English Baptists as well, all of whom had explicit connections to the Dutch sectarians.

Historians often overlook yet another source for Williams's early English Separatist and Baptist connections: his future father-in-law Richard Barnard. A protege of the daughters of Lord Chief Justice Sir Christopher Wray, Barnard earned two degrees from Christ's College, Cambridge in the late 1590s and became minister of the church at Worksop in Nottinghamshire, where he was caught up in the Separatist activities of Robinson, Brewster, Richard Clyfton, Ainsworth, and William Bradford, all of whom lived nearby. Barnard had attended university with Baptist John Smyth, and the two were close friends until Barnard, when confronted by the intolerant, High Church Archbishop of York Toby Matthew in 1607, changed his position to keep his living. To distance himself from his former colleagues, Barnard immediately initiated a literary battle with Smyth.

22 Ibid., 158-9. Spurgin noted many striking similarities between Williams and Smyth; see Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism, 73-77. Williams had heard much about Smyth prior to his departure for Massachusetts; see Williams, Mr. Cotton's Letter Examined and Answered, 59; and C.E. Barrows, The Development of Baptist Principles in Rhode Island, 1636-1875 (Providence, RI: J.A. and R.A. Reid Printers, 1875), 10.
and Robinson, arguing that Separatism and the Anabaptism to which it tended was unjustifiable. Around 1628, when Williams began courting Barnard's daughter Mary, he undoubtedly knew well these debates and scarcely could have tapped a better, more nuanced source of English Separatism and Anabaptism.23

Williams probably horrified his future father-in-law with his early adoption of many of John Smyth's ideas. Williams called Smyth "a man fearing God," and explained that, though "I knew him not, and have heard of many points in which my conscience tells me it pleased the Lord to leave him to himself," even nonseparatists like John Cotton "hath made some use of those principles and arguments on which Mr. Smith and others went concerning the constitution of the Christian church."24 John Robinson reported that Smyth had moved from Separatism to believer baptism around 1609, along with others, "having disclaimed their former Church state and ministry," coming together "to erect a new Church

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23 Burrage, English Dissenters, I: 197, 232, 241, 289; John Garrett, Roger Williams: Witness Beyond Christendom (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 63-65; English Sources of New England Families, ser. one (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company), III: 315-16. Williams was undoubtedly familiar with John Smyth's Parallels, Censures, and Observations, a response to Barnard's The Separatists Schisme, which denounced the Church of England as a combination of "false repentance, false Faith, false Church, false Ministry, false Worship, and false Government" and noted that "Wicked men joyned with Godly men in a Church, doe not produce a true Church, but a false Church." See Barnard's entry in the DNB.

24 Williams, Cottons Letter Examined, 343.
by baptism."25 Williams had probably read Smyth's
*Proposition and Conclusions* which defended both Smyth's
rebaptism and, for the first time, the notion that rulers
should "leave Christian religion free, to every man's
conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions,
injuries and wrongs." In both his later rebaptism and his
defense of religious liberty, then, Williams had much more
in common with Smyth than other paedobaptist Separatists.

Williams also had obvious connections with one of
Smyth's successors, Thomas Helwys. Like Smyth, Helwys had
published tracts arguing for complete separation of
religious interests and the state, probably authoring *A
Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity* (1612) in
Holland before his General Baptist group separated from
Smyth's congregation and returned to London.26 In it he
justified the existence of anabaptism in England, and in its
dedication to King James sought liberty of conscience,
arguing that "The King is a mortall man, and not God,
therefore hath no power over ye immortall soules of his
subjects, to make lawes in ordinances for them, and to set

John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers*, ed. Robert

26 For background on these Baptist congregations, see
B.R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*
(London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 20-29; Spurgin,
*Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism*, 83; Sydney E.
Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New
Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 172.
spiritual Lords over them." Concluding his syllogism, Helwys explained that "If the King have authority to make spirituall Lords and lawes, then he is an immortall God and not a mortall man." 27 The imagery was not lost on Williams, and in Blody Tenent Williams nearly duplicated the initial paragraphs of The Mistery. 28

Williams pulled other arguments for toleration from Helwys's successor John Murton. According to legend, while imprisoned at Newgate Murton wrote An Humble Supplication to the King's Majesty as it was Presented in 1620 in milk, wadded the papers in a milk bottle, and passed them to followers waiting outside his cell who would read them by firelight. These supporters then transcribed and bound them, "although the author himself could not correct nor view what himself had written." Williams, who lived near Newgate, later recounted the story, suggesting that—in the words of one of his many biographers—the prisons of London were part of Williams's "daily observation" and that he did indeed heed the wisdom of imprisoned dissenters. 29 In the case of Murton, Williams learned well. Having received a manuscript copy of A Humble Supplication from one of John

27 Helwys, A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity (London?, 1612?), preface.

28 Fletcher, "Interactions Between English and American Baptists," 159. See Williams, Blody Tenent, 29-30.

Eliot's parishioners, Williams read it carefully and drew from it many of the arguments he would use in Bloudy Tenent about twenty years later. So well known was Williams's liking for Murton that when John Cotton received a portion of A Humble Supplication from an unidentified source, Cotton assumed it had come from Williams. In 1637 the Boston divine penned a reply to Williams, noting that Scriptures demanded that the civil magistrate punish religious errors; Williams responded from London in 1643 with Bloudy Tenent, inaugurating a discussion that continued through the next decade.30

Williams also later acknowledged his debt to and friendship for English Baptist Samuel Howe. Howe had been a member of the London semi-Separatist church of John Lathrop, and later joined a conventicle that turned Baptist. He had served as a minister for the congregation for about seven years, having been "very famous for his vindication of the doctrines of separation." In 1639, Howe preached a sermon, later printed as The Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning (1640), in which he attacked the Anglican clergy's pretense and learned rhetoric in general,

30 Gilpin, Roger Williams, 98-9; Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 186; Fletcher, "Interaction Between English and American Baptists," 40, 82-3. A Humble Supplication (1620) is reprinted in Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution, 1614-1661, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: J. Haddon, 1846), 181. Williams recouunted the Murton legend in Bloudy Tenent, which was in fact a commentary on Murton's work. See CWRW III: 61.
and Puritan pastor John Goodwin in particular. He reminded his audience that Christ and the Apostles never had the benefit of a Cambridge education, preaching instead from the spirit. Howe went so far as to claim that uneducated men and women made better ministers than university-trained preachers since they expressed their faiths more clearly, without the impediments of ancient arguments and philosophies. Howe's suggestions horrified Puritans and mainstream Anglicans alike. Williams wrote a tribute to Howe's work in *A Hireling Ministry None of Christs* and, in fact, organized his treatise in a very similar way to Howe's major work. Williams apparently had listened to Howe prior to immigrating to New England, and certainly had read the English Baptist's book very carefully.31

In light of these continental Separatist and Anabaptist influences, and from his own later recollections, it is difficult to argue that Roger Williams came to America squarely within the Puritan movement. He sought not to reform the Church of England from the shores of the New World, but to convince others to abandon the national church as antichristian. In contrast to his reformist friends, who

argued for continuity from Christ through Roman Catholicism to the Church of England, Williams believed that the Christian Church had been corrupted early on, in the reign of Emperor Constantine, whereby the "ministry of Christ Jesus, [was] put to flight, and retired into the Wildernesse of Desolation."32 During the fourth century, by Williams's account, "Antichrist hath so farre prevailed against Christ, and his Kingdome, that he hathe no Church, nor Church Officers left upon the face of the earth."33 To Williams the seven-headed beast of Revelations symbolized the Church of England, which persecuted real witnesses for Christ, representing "A false conversion, and a false constitution, or framing of Nationall Churches in false Ministeries, and ministrations of Baptisme, Supper of the Lord, Admonitions, Excommunications."34 Such views virtually demanded that Williams attack the reformist movement as missing the mark; Puritan congregations could never be "true" churches, since they joined with "the Old English Parish Churches in so many Ordinances of Ward Preacher, Singing, [and] Contribution."35

By his own account, Roger Williams came to New England as a Separatist who sought a spiritual purity unattainable

32 Williams, The Hireling Ministry None of Christ, 158.
33 Cotton, John Cotton's Answer to Roger Williams, 89.
34 Roger Williams, Christenings Make Not Christians (London, 1645), in CWRW VII: 34.
35 Williams, Bloody Tenent, 67.

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in a nonseparating Puritan congregation. Like later immigrants to Massachusetts, Williams noted that "Bishop Laud pursued me out of this land," yet in distinction from the Puritan faithful, "my conscience was persuaded against the national church and ceremonies, and bishops."36 Williams also went far beyond Puritan leaders like Cotton and Winthrop in his zeal to create a personal relationship with the divine. He sought to escape the sinfulness of the Church of England and enjoy the "Liberties of Searching after God's most holy mind and pleasure," which required absolute separation of the godly from the ungodly, and stricter means of distinguishing one group from the other.37 This spiritual inner directedness and search for extreme purity came out most explicitly in Williams's debate with John Cotton. As one scholar has noted, Williams

36 Roger Williams to Mrs. Sadlier, ca. April 1652, CRW, 358. Sadlier was the daughter of Williams's mentor Sir Edward Coke. John Winthrop, Charles Fines, George Philips, Richard Saltonstall, Isaac Johnson, Thomas Dudley, and William Coddington, on the other hand, wrote to English Separatists as they were leaving England, 7 April 1630, that they were devoted to "our dear mother" the Church of England; cited in Isaac Backus, A History of New England (Boston: Draper for Freeman, 1777), I: 54-55.

37 Roger Williams, Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy, 30, 462. Williams, in a letter to Anne Sadleir, rejected royal direction of any church, since Charles I proved to be "vicious, a Swearer from his youth, and an oppressour and persecutor of Good Men (to say nothing of his owne Fathers [James I's] blood, and the blood of so many hundreth thousand English, Irish, Scotch, French lately charged upon him). Agst his and his blasphemous Fathers Cruelties...many Precious Men shall rise up shortly and cry for vengeance." See Williams to Sadleir, ca. Winter 1652/53, CRW, 374.
interpreted the idea of separation spiritually, while Cotton viewed it as physical removal, "coming out from Idolaters in the Fellowship of their Idolatry," "a locall departure from Old England in Europe, to New England in America."

Though these ideas were fully developed in the mind of Roger Williams before he departed England in 1630, he kept them to himself, an action that helps to explain historians' misplacement of the young Williams within mainstream New England Puritanism. In fact, when he arrived in Boston aboard the Lyon, the Puritan leaders there believed that Williams was "one of them." Winthrop, for one, noted the arrival of "mr Williams (a godly minister) with his wife." When the pastor of the Boston church John Wilson returned to England to convince his own wife to journey to Massachusetts, he sought to turn his pulpit over to Williams. At about the same time the congregation of the church unanimously voted to offer Williams the permanent position of Teacher. Only when Williams refused on the grounds that the Boston church had not divided itself from the corrupt Church of England did the magistrates and

38 See, "Concepts of the Church," 24; Gilpin, Roger Williams, 50-62; Williams, Mr. Cotton's Letter Examined, 74-81. Cotton and Williams were discussing Isaiah 52: 11; 2 Corinthians 6: 17; and Revelations 8: 4, which all deal with the notion of God's people distancing themselves from the "unclean."
ministers of the new colony have any clue about his
separatism. 39

Williams's declaration brought a predictable response
from the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay colony whose
interests were best served by maintaining ties to the Church
of England and possible rapprochement with the Crown. In a
somewhat exaggerated indictment of Separatism, elder Puritan
statesman John Winthrop questioned Williams's premise that
"Antichrist hathe nullified and quite destroyed the
Christian Churches," arguing that, if "that man of sinne"
had indeed taken over all organized churches, the Scripture
could not be fulfilled; indeed, the Christian church--by
Scriptural mandate--was to continue until the end of the
world. Winthrop blasted all Separatists, claiming none of
Williams's ilk to be true Christians and noting that those
under the Bay's care "will not sinne with them in the point
of separation." Orthodox Bostonians must have shared the
indignation that Winthrop expressed in refuting Williams:

39 Covey, Gentle Radical, 33. Thus William Hubbard's
claim that Williams had been "of good account in England for
a godly and zealous preacher, but after he came here he soon
discovered himself," is incorrect. See Hubbard, A General
History of New England (Boston, 1815). Williams later
explained that he had agonized over the decision, that he
had "much and long and conscientiously and mournfully
weighed and digd into the Differences of the Protestants
themselves about the Ministry" and that he had refused
"Gaines and praeferments...in Universitie, City Countrey and
Court in Old Eng, and Something in N.E. etc. to kepe my
Soule undefiled in this point, and not to act with a
doubting Conscience etc." See Williams to John Cotton, Jr.,
25 March 1671, CRW, 629-30.
...either pride, malice, or ignorance, in the most of these Censurers, will not give them leave, to distinguish between Corrupt Churches and false Churches, as they doe terme the Congregations...

Winthrop fiercely defended Massachusetts' tenuous connection with the Church of England, arguing that it was impossible to know whether any churches were rightly constituted; that their organization had been appointed by Christ was more important.40

Despite Winthrop's pleas, Williams continued to act upon his Separatist beliefs. In April 1631, after Williams had rejected the Boston church's position, the Salem church offered him the pastorate vacated by the death of Francis Higginson the August before. The Salem congregation knew Williams's record and essentially agreed with his stand on the validity of the Church of England. The town had been founded by a number of Separatists and was plagued by religious instability in its initial years. It had the distinction of being the original settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Company, the first permanent town in New England after Plymouth. Its first inhabitants were unorganized, lacked leadership from England, and came under

the influence of its Separatist neighbors. A large proportion of the town's early settlers had come from Plymouth, including its first governor, Roger Conant, and as early as July 1629 the Salem church had asked the Separatist colony to approve its organization. Others in the town expressed sympathy with Plymouth's religious views, even Salem's first minister, Samuel Skelton, who refused to administer the Lord's Supper to the arriving party of Governor Winthrop, Deputy Governor Dudley, and Assistants William Coddington and Isaac Johnson because, in his judgement, the dignitaries were not "of any particular reformed church, though of the Catholike." Skelton and other founders, William Hubbard noted, were "honest men, studious of reformation, that had only disliked some things in the discipline and ceremonies of the Church of England, but were not precisely fixed upon any particular order or form of government." The full force of the colony's leadership came down upon Skelton, Higginson, and others, who were warned against "rash innovacions," and scolded that "wee utterly disaliowe any such passages, and must and will

take order for the redress thereof, as shall become us."
Out of this early atmosphere came the offer to Williams.42

The invitation, however, did not sit well with ministers and magistrates closer to Boston. Upon hearing of the offer, Winthrop called a meeting of the Assistants and argued that such an action would undermine the structures of the government and church in the colony which most settlers cherished. The argument carried, and the Court of Assistants wrote to Salem's magistrate John Endecott and Salem church members that the magistrates "marvelled they should choose him without advising with the council; and withal desiring him, that they would forbear to proceed till they had conferred about it." The Salem congregation was admonished not to install Williams and, even though neither the government nor other churches had any authority over any particular church, either Williams or Salem--or perhaps both--backed down.43

Knowing very well that his return to England would bring even greater persecution at the hands of the Anglican hierarchy, Williams repaired from Salem to the center of Separatism in America, Plymouth. The pastor of the church there, Ralph Smith--who himself had been banished from Salem


43 WJ I: 62; Covey, Gentle Radical, 40-41.
for his Separatism by John Endicott—immediately embraced the new arrival. Smith, like Williams, had criticized the "soft separatism" of two of Plymouth's ideological leaders, John Robinson and William Brewster. Thus Smith and Williams proved to be even more avid Separatists than the Pilgrim leaders themselves, and were looked upon as dangerously radical in a system whose mild form of Separatism, with time, became barely distinguishable from the nonseparating congregationalism of their neighbors. Nonetheless, Williams's skills as a preacher were welcomed, even if his zeal for greater spiritual distance from England was thought perilous.44

The religious rift between Brewster and Williams, however, quickly widened. While Smith had bowed to the leading church elder's wishes, Williams's pre-immigration familiarity with General Baptist and radical Separatist literature continued to affect his disposition toward Brewster. Williams complained that his large congregation was becoming more interested in an economic boom brought on by the settlement of and trade with Massachusetts Bay, and less with finding its spiritual way in the world. Plymouth governor William Bradford agreed, suggesting that "no man now thought he could liue, except he had catle and a great deale of ground to keepst them," making the church a

44 Nathaniel Morton suggests Williams was "well accepted" and won many people over; New-Englands Memoriaall (Cambridge, 1669), 78. See also Covey, Gentle Radical, 44.
"widow," which "had made many rich, [and] became herself poore."

By many accounts Williams struggled with Brewster over the possibility of revival and greater congregational purity. At the same time Brewster grew more concerned that Williams had drifted toward the same rigid separatism and unacceptable anabaptism as John Smyth had in Amsterdam, recalling that a number of his other friends in Holland had groped their ways through various phases of separatism, ending in the "absurdity" known as Mennonite Anabaptism.

Again finding himself in an inhospitable environment, and hoping to initiate a radical Separatist crusade in America, Williams accepted a second call from the Salem church in 1633. At first Williams refused to be installed as its elder, but since no one else in the church was qualified to administer baptism or the Lord's Supper, he was persuaded to accept the teachership in July; most important to Williams was the fact that "the Church of Salem was known to profes separation."

In October, Williams and the

45 Bradford, quoted in Covey, Gentle Radical, 44.

46 Williams complained that at Plymouth "I spake on the Lord's days and weeke days, and wrought hard at the How for my Bread (and so afterward at Salem) untill I found them both professing to be a separated people in N.E. (not admittung the most Godly to Communion without a Covenant) and yet Communicating with the parishes in Old, by their members repairing on frequent occasions thither." See Williams to John Cotton, Jr., 25 March 1671, CRW, 630; and Covey, Gentle Radical, 50. Nathaniel Morton contended that Williams failed to get adequate support for his positions and was dismissed; see CRW, 102-3.

47 Williams, Cottons Letter Examined, 378.
aged and weak minister Samuel Skelton jointly opposed a plan for a fortnightly conference of Massachusetts ministers, "fearing it might grow in time to a presbytery or superintendency, to the prejudice of the churches' liberties." Both exhibited their separatist tendencies in their opposition, and were "all clear in that point, no church or person can have power over another church; neither did they in their meetings exercise any such jurisdiction."48

Williams immediately went to work applying the Separatist principles he had adopted in England to the Salem church. He insisted that women be veiled during services, and encouraged lay prophesying during regular worship.49 Perhaps recalling Barrowe's admonition not "to receive the wicked unto the Lordes table" because it was "contrary to the apostles doctrine," Williams set out to perfect the congregation.50 He sought to distance the church from civil authorities, heeding Browne's advice that though past state figures had been involved in reform "Yet may they doo

48 WJ, I: 112-13; Covey, Gentle Radical, 73-76. Williams's position did not change over time. In Bloudy Tenent (1644) he explained that "all must be left to the particular determination of the Churches." See CWRW III: 404.

49 CRW, 16; Richard P. Gildrie, Salem, Massachusetts, 1623-1683: A Covenant Community (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1975), 33.

50 Barrowe, Briefe Discoverie, in Writings of Henry Barrow, III: 325.
nothing concerning the Church, but onelie ciiuile." In short, he applied to the letter many of the doctrines he had earlier gleaned from English Separatists in his attempt to create in Salem a church worthy of the earliest Christian congregations.

At the same time, Williams—in yet another application of Separatist principles—launched an attack on the Bay colony's charter, branding the document illegitimate since it had been issued by an "antichristian" monarch. While at Plymouth, Williams had forged strong relationships with local Indian tribes, tribes whose lands the English claimed for the Crown. In sympathy with the natives' position Williams had penned a short tract which asserted that the colonists had usurped lands which properly belonged to the sachems and their people. In doing so, he denied the English right to the area by conquest and occupation, and frankly labelled King James a liar for claiming the territory as his. Winthrop caught wind of Williams's unpublished book, and asked for the manuscript, which Williams cheerfully forwarded, hoping that the colony's leaders, upon reading it, would invalidate the Massachusetts Bay charter and "returne the Patent back againe to the King."  

51 Browne, Reformation without Tarrying in Writings of Robert Browne I: 164.

52 Cotton, Reply to Mr. Williams, 46.
Williams's disrespect for the "antichristian" head of the Church of England resulted in a rapid showdown with Bay colony authorities who continued to worry that the King would make good on promises to retrieve the charter by force. Concerned about the way in which the book would be perceived in England, Winthrop and the rest of the Court of Assistants met in December 1633 to consider Williams's propositions. Winthrop argued that if Williams truly loved the congregations of the colony "he would not (for smale or no occasion) have provoked our Kinges against us, and putt a sworde into his hands to destroye us."53 Some Court members added that Williams had ignored well-known principles of international law as well as English custom. Because of these concerns, Winthrop wrote to John Endecott in Salem and asked him to use his powers to dissuade Williams from his controversial position. The governor gave additional arguments which he thought might be useful to Endecott:

...if God were not pleased with our inheriting these parts, why did he drive out the natuies before us? and why dothe he still make roome for us, by deminishinge them as we increase? why hath he planted his Churches heere?...If we had no right to this lande, yet our God hathe right to it, and if he be pleased to give it us

(taking it from a people who had so longe usurped 
upon him, and abused his Creatures) who shall controll 
him or his termes?54

The Bay colony's desire for unity and perhaps 
Williams's fear of the potential outcomes caused the 
controversy to be resolved rather easily. After 
consultation Williams expressed sorrow for creating doubt 
about the King's authority in New England. Whether Endecott 
had any affect upon Williams is unknown; Endecott responded 
with what Winthrop thought to be a "very modest and discreet 
answer." Meanwhile, Williams wrote to Winthrop and the 
Court of Assistants to express "his intent to have been only 
to have written for the private satisfaction of the 
governour, etc., of Plimouth, without any purpose to have 
stirred any further in it." At the Court's next session 
Williams appeared in person "and gave satisfaction of his 
intention and loyalty." As a result, the matter "was left, 
and nothing done in it."55 Both Wilson and Cotton came to 
Williams's aid, arguing that the passages in question were 
"written in very obscure and implicative phrases," and thus 
"might well admit of doubtful interpretation." Their 
testimony that these selections were not "so evil as at 
first they seemed," prompted Winthrop to express frustration 
that Williams's "figures and flourishes" had created such a

54 Winthrop, quoted in Covey, Gentle Radical, 94.
55 WJ, I: 117.
controversy. Thus, the Court voted that, if Williams agreed to retract the questionable sections of his treatise or take an oath of allegiance to the king, all would be forgiven.56

The Indian territory controversy was scarcely behind him when Williams's obsession with ritual purity which was derived from Old World Separatism, got him into trouble again. This time the issue was Williams's stand on veiling women during church services. In his demands to return to the primitive church, Williams had argued that his congregation was bound to comply with Paul's admonition to the Corinthians that "any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head."57 In a lecture before Endecott in March 1633/34, Cotton equivocated, explaining that the apostle had not necessarily commanded such a practice. Endecott, however, defended his own minister, contending that Paul was very explicit on the matter. The discussion grew so heated that Winthrop moved to end the meeting while some measure of order still existed. The issue was never resolved.58

Scarcely seven months after the discussion about the veiling of women, in his zeal to eradicate anything that smacked of the Roman church or its equally illegitimate

56 Covey, *Gentle Radical*, 95; WJ, I: 118-19.
57 1 Corinthians 11: 5.
58 CRW, 16; Covey, *Gentle Radical*, 97.
successor, the Church of England, Williams took on the issue of the "king's colors." In yet another show of his faith in his renegade minister, Endecott defaced the royal ensign, initiating one of the greatest controversies in the Bay colony up to that time. In early November 1634, the Court heard the complaint of a group of men headed by Richard Brown of Watertown, who claimed that during a militia training day Endecott had cut the red cross of St. George out of the corps' flag. Endecott had been motivated by the preaching of Williams, who had explained that the symbol—a relic of Antichrist—had been given to the king of England by the Pope after the Crusades. Finding cause to investigate the incident further, the Court ordered the ensign bearer, Richard Davenport, to answer the accusation at the next session. The whole episode suggests that Williams's movement for purity outside the bounds of the Church of England logically conflicted with the king, as the Church's head, something which made the magistracy quite nervous.59

Meanwhile, though Williams had promised the Court silence on the issues of the patent and the validity of the parish churches in England, he broached the former subject again "publicly, and vehemently," preaching that the King of England had falsely claimed to have been "the first

59 Mass. Recs., I: 137; Covey, Gentle Radical, 102-103.
Christian Prince who had discovered these parts" and unjustly granted his subjects "the Countr...which belonged to the Native Indians."60 As a result, the Assistants resolved to take harsher action against the renegade. Again, however, the ministers supported Williams. Loathe to act against a fellow cleric, even one who espoused radical Separatism, Bay colony pastors met and discussed the situation. Cotton again came to Williams's rescue, convincing his colleagues to advise the Court against civil action until the pastors could examine Williams. The ministers hoped to prove that Williams's positions came from a "misguided conscience" rather than a "seditious principle." Thomas Dudley, Winthrop's successor as governor, had less faith in Williams than did Cotton and the others, but still agreed to postpone resolution of the matter until the next session, at which Williams was commanded to appear.61

At the end of April 1635, Williams raised yet another issue borne of his Separatism which made the ministers and magistrates of the colony uneasy. Rather than discuss his stance on the validity of Massachusetts' patent, the Governor and Assistants summoned Williams to talk about his

60 Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 46.

61 Dudley told the ministers they "were deceived in him; if we thought he would condescend to learne of any of us"; Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 63. See also Covet, Gentle Radical, 104.
claim "that a magistrate ought not to tender an oath to an unregenerate man, for that we thereby have communion with a wicked man in the worship of God, and cause him to take the name of God in vain."62 Williams "vehemently withstood" taking the oath of fidelity to Massachusetts enacted a year earlier "because an Oath was part of God's worship, and many of the people being Carnall (as he conceived) it was not meet to put upon them an Oath, which was an act of God's worship."63 Williams was, Winthrop added, "heard before all the ministers, and very clearly confuted." Similarly, Endecott, who on this issue--like so many others--held opinions identical to Williams, heard out the assembled pastors and subsequently "gave place to the truth." But Williams's articulation of his position caused others to refuse the oath, "and upon their refusall the Magistrates could not discerne how the people stood affected to the publick safety."64

Williams also began preaching a dangerous corollary to this concept: "that the magistrate might not punish the breach of the Sabbath, nor any other offence, as it was a breach of the first table" (the first four Commandments)

62 WJ, I: 149.
63 Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 14.
64 Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 14; Covey, Gentle Radical, 111-12.
unless that particular act disturbed the peace. 65
Williams suggested that belief in God, idolatry, the usage
of God's name, and maintenance of the Sabbath were generally
matters to be regulated by the church, while the state could
govern relationships between children and parents, and
punish people for murder, stealing, adultery, and perjury,
those things necessary for maintaining peace in the
community. 66 For the Bay colony elite this view ran
counter to the much admired practices of Calvin in Geneva,
where "the first purpose of government was to buttress the
church, that the church should dominate society, and that
this would be impossible without the coercion of the
state." 67

Williams's opinions were, of course, thought to be
contemptuous of the magistracy. The church at Salem did not
think so, proceeding to elect Williams teacher while he was
being questioned by Bay colony authorities, a defiant act to
which the Court in Boston objected. "The sad opinions,"
Winthrop noted, "were adjudged by all, magistrates and
ministers ...to be erroneous, and very dangerous, and the
calling of him to office, at that time was judged a great

65  WJ, 1: 62.

66  Exodus 20: 1-17. For an explanation of the first
and second tables, and how they have been defined since
Augustine, see Henry Snyder Gehman, The New Westminster

67  Covey, Gentle Radical, 114.
contempt of authority."68 The Court graciously gave
Williams and the Salem church until its next session to
consider the range of arguments presented "and then either
to give satisfaction...or else to expect the sentence."69

Williams remained unpersuasive. This time, the
collected ministers of the colony offered Williams little
support. When asked to counsel the Court on the case, the
clergy expressed their desire that the civil arm maintain
some authority to prosecute violations of the First Table.
Williams's colleagues "expressly declared" that "he who
should obstinately maintain such opinions (whereby a church
might run into heresy, apostacy, or tyranny, and yet the
civil magistrate could not intermeddle) were to be removed,
and that the other churches ought to request magistrates so
to do."70 Even John Cotton, who shunted aside the patent
controversy and defended Williams's position on the ensign,
voted for Williams's banishment; more than that, he
convinced the others to follow his lead.71

Throughout his time in the Bay colony Williams never
lost faith in the church's ability to reform people, and

68 WJ, I: 154.
69 Covey, Gentle Radical, 115.
70 WJ, I: 154.
71 Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 77, 93; Covey,
Gentle Radical, 116. Cotton noted that Williams's views had
grown more radical "untill he rejected both our callings,
and our Churches."
reiterated the English Separatist position that such institutions be given the autonomy to function optimally. He argued that the concept of independent congregations—a principle espoused also by his nonseparating friends—was being eroded, to the detriment of the souls in his and their care. In a long and ponderous letter to the elders of the Boston church, written between court sessions, Williams laid out the arguments that vindicated himself and his congregation, noting that the selection of officers was each church's responsibility.72 Without local control over this basic task, Williams argued a month later in a note to the Salem church, congregations could not expect to make any other decisions without consulting the pastors and elders in all other churches. Williams demanded that the Salem church isolate itself from other congregations in the colony; barring that, he would have to leave.73

The Salem church was not prepared to let Williams go, but neither was it ready to sacrifice the town's position in the colony. The General Court of July 1634 gave both Williams and the congregation until its next meeting to consider of these things...and then either to give satisfaction to the Court, or else to expect the sentence; it being professedly declared by the

72 Church at Salem to the Elders of the Church at Boston, after 22 July 1635, CRW, 23-29.
73 Covey, Gentle Radical, 116.
ministers, (at the request of the court to give their advice,) that he who should obstinately maintain such opinions, (whereby a church might run into heresy, apostacy, or tyranny and yet the civil magistrate could not intermeddle,) were to be removed, and that the other churches ought to request the magistrates so to do. 74

As an additional incentive for Salem's cooperation, the General Court delayed action on the town's request for a grant of land on Marblehead neck "until they repented their former Contempt and amended their persistent independency." 75 The Salem church's apparently unshakeable loyalty to Williams led the colony's magistrates to reject the town's request. Incensed by the action, both Williams and the congregation began writing letters to churches that had as members magistrates who had voted against the petition. They called on their sister congregations "to admonish their magistrates of their breach of the rule of Justice, in not granting their petition." 76 The elders of the various churches withheld these letters from their congregations, which infuriated Williams and his supporters, who argued that elected officials of covenanted

74 WJ, I: 154.
75 Cited in O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees,"
71.
76 Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 14.
communities had no right to hide such information from the Saints who elected them.77

In the end, Williams's persistence legitimated the General Court's unflattering characterizations of him and outstripped the Salem church's nerve and endurance. While Williams defended the letters to area churches, his own congregation, cowed by the magistracy's threats to rejects the Marblehead petition, submitted in October 1635. The Salem church wrote to the Court that it accepted fault for tolerating Williams's errors and expressed regret for attempting to solicit help from other congregations.78 Clearly, the town's traditional radical, Separatist proclivities could not withstand the economic realities and land pressures over which the leadership in Boston had much control.79

For his decidedly Separatist views on the patent, the administration of oaths, the rejection of close congregational cooperation, and the "Antichristian" symbols of the Church of England, Williams was banished. In January 1635/36 the Governor and Assistants gathered in Boston and agreed to send Williams "into England by a ship then ready

77 Salem Church to Boston Church, c. August 1635, GWRW VI: 71-74.

78 WJ, I: 168. Cotton explained that the Salem church "began to hearken to us, and accordingly began to address themselves to the healing of his Spirit"; Cotton, A Reply to Mr. Williams, 51.

79 O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 80.
to depart." Massachusetts authorities felt more comfortable returning Williams to England than allowing Separatism to exist on the colony's frontier, since even on Narragansett Bay "the infection would easily spread into these churches." The Court knew Williams to be dangerously persuasive, able to marshal arguments effectively and to draw upon a vast array of literature from old English Separatists and Anabaptists. So serious were the magistrates that they sent a commission "to apprehend him, and carry him aboard the ship . . . but when they came at his house, they found he had been gone three days before." Winthrop worried that Williams "had drawn above twenty persons to his opinion...the people being, many of them much taken with the apprehension of his godliness."80

Winthrop's perception of the situation at Salem was correct. After Williams escaped the colony for the Narragansett region in January 1635/36, his allies in the church continued to hold meetings that upheld the Separatist principles Williams had preached. After the church's official recantation in October Williams had continued "to entertain company in his house, and to preach to them, even of such points as he had been censuzed for." In the spring of 1636 Winthrop lamented that the Salem church "was still infected with Mr. Williams his opinions," and called for

80 WJ, I: 168.
still further coercive action against the group. 81

By May 1636, Massachusetts authorities ordered Williams's Separatist followers to stop meeting apart from the Salem church. Writing to the town's constable, Governor Henry Vane and Assistants Winthrop and Dudley complained that they had been "credibly informed that divers persons (both men and women) within your town do disorderly assemble themselves both upon the Lord's day and other times," refusing to submit to the will of the congregation. Williams's ideas had "seduce[d] divers persons of weak capacity" causing "not only disturbance in the church, but also disorder and damage in the civil state, so as if they be suffered to go on, your town is like to be deserted of many of the chief and most useful members." The Bay Colony's top magistrates ordered the constable to notify the troublemakers "that their said course is very offensive to the government here, and may no longer be suffered" and to insure the eradication of "all such disordered assemblies and pretended church meetings." So concerned were Vane and the others about Separatism's negative impact on civil order that they warned the Williams contingent to "confine themselves to the laws and orders of this government, being established according to the rule of God's assistance," or the General Court would be forced to "take some such strict and speedy course for the reformation of these disorders" to

81 Ibid., I: 168, 221.
prevent "the evils which may otherwise ensue, as our duty to God and charge over this people do call for from us."\textsuperscript{82}

To counter the threat that persisted in Salem after the expulsion of Williams, authorities encouraged the appointment of the strong-willed orthodox cleric Hugh Peter. After receiving a call from the church in December 1636 Peter immediately began the arduous task of bringing Salem into the fold of nonseparating congregationalism. Preaching conciliation with the Church of England, Peter alienated some of Williams's staunchest supporters--Richard Waterman, Stukeley Westcott, Francis Weston, and Thomas Olney--causing them to remove themselves from communion with the rest of the congregation.\textsuperscript{83} Following Peter's lead, the majority of the church labored to bring the Separatist element back to the fold but met stiff resistance. By the end of 1637, the original group of four dissenters, joined by their wives and four others, were condemned in a church trial, and their Separatist ideas rejected as tending "but to schism, and so to heresy, which is damnable." Peter declared that they had "wholy refused to hear the church,"

\textsuperscript{82} Henry Vane, John Winthrop, and Thomas Dudley to the Constable of Salem, Boston, 30 May 1636, quoted in Ford, \textit{New England's Struggles}, 37-38.

\textsuperscript{83} O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 272.
and as a result he placed "the great centure" upon them.84

The censure of Williams's Separatist apostles did not stop them from continuing to make trouble for nonseparating congregationalists in Massachusetts. Perhaps the most vehement and vocal opponent of Puritanism after Williams, John Greene, created a stir in the summer of 1637 while arranging the sale of his home in Salem. Greene reportedly confided in a former neighbor that he would never return to the town because Reverend Peter and other congregation members had denied him "the freedom of his soul and conscience." Moreover, Greene could never again reside in a place where "the power of the Lord Jesus was in the hand of civil authority."85 Greene's remarks were reported to the General Court, which fined the upstart twenty pounds for speaking "against the magistrates contemptuously"; at the following Quarter Court he was "enioyned not to come into this iurisdiction vpon paine of fine or imprisonment."86 Greene, however, like his banished mentor, could not let the matter pass without first making his point. In a

84 Hugh Peter, "Letter in Regard to Baptists," 1 July 1639 (photostat), RIHSM X: 98. Peter included in the censure Williams and his wife, John Throckmorton and his wife, Thomas Olney and his wife, Stukeley Westcot and his wife, as well as Mary Holliman and "Widdow R[eeves]." See also Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 43.

85 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, 31 July 1637, CRW, 108.

vituperative letter to the Court, Greene reiterated his position that Bay Colony magistrates usurped "the powr of Christ over the churches & mens consciences" and had persecuted Williams without just cause. Despite Williams's defense of Greene as "peaceable, a peacemaker, and a lover of all English that visits us," the General Court voted not only to confirm Greene's banishment, but to exclude from Massachusetts in perpetuity all of Williams's followers who shared in Greene's Separatist views.

Hounded out of the church by Peter, and eventually admonished by the General Court to depart the colony, Salem's staunchest Separatists gradually joined Greene and Williams on the southern frontier. By late 1638, Williams and twenty-seven of his fellow exiles had come together in the establishment of Providence. Each agreed to pay a small sum in return for land and grazing rights, as well as


88 The Court noted that "because it appears to this Courte that some othr of the same place [Providence] are confident in the same corrupt judgment & practice, it is ordered, that if any other of the inhabitants of the said plantation of Prvidence shall come within this jurisdiction . . . they shalbee imprisoned & punished as the Court shall see cause." See Mass. Recs., I: 224.

89 The initial landowners in Providence were Richard Scott, William Reynolds, Chad Brown, John Warner, John Field, George Rickard, Edward Cope, Thomas Angell, Thomas Harris, Francis Weeks, Benedict Arnold, Joshua Winsor, William Wickenden, Alice Daniels, Mary Sweet, Stukeley Westcott, William Arnold, Thomas James, Robert Cole, John Greene, John Throckmorton, William Harris, William Carpenter, Thomas Olney, Francis Weston, Richard Waterman, and Ezekiel Holliman.
a direct stake in the government of the new plantation. These "householders" were to decide who was to be "admitted to the freedom of inhabitation" and who qualified to become voting heads of families. They dispensed land to new settlers, set the terms of acquisition, regulated possession and resale, and limited access to and use of common woods and lands.90 In short, they possessed complete economic and political power and were solely responsible for the future of the settlement.

These twenty-seven were for the most part Williams's ideological allies, at least initially. Of the twenty-two whose Massachusetts residences can be determined with certainty, nineteen had been with Williams at Salem. Williams described all of them as "destitute (especially for Conscience Sake)" and with them subscribed to a town compact that emphasized the old English Separatist notion that worldly governments ought not have power over an individual's conscience. For better or worse, they agreed to subject themselves "to all such orders or agreements as shall be made for public good of the body in an orderly way" in a "Towne fellowship" along with "others whom they shall admit unto them only in civil things."91

90 ERPr., I: 3-5; O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 280.

91 Providence Town Meeting, 20 August 1636, RICR, I: 19, 14. The emphasis is mine.
That the Providence "compact" harkened back to the writings of Browne and Barrowe is not surprising, given Williams's background and the prevailing Separatist makeup of the town. At least nineteen of the original twenty-seven settlers had probably been schooled by Williams in the congregation of Salem. At least three--Thomas Hopkins, Francis Weston, and Thomas James--had originally settled in the Separatist colony of Plymouth, found it to be in collusion with the "antichristian" practices of Massachusetts Bay and followed Williams to Salem and on to Providence. Others, though not explicitly implicated as Separatists, had family ties to those who were. Thomas Angell, for instance, was both a cousin and servant to Williams, 92 later settler William Man had come to Providence with the Arnold family and married Frances Hopkins. 93 John Sweet--though his views are unknown--may have absorbed Williams's Separatist teachings; his wife, at least, appeared to have done so, for after his death she married Ezekiell Holliman, the man who administered "believer's baptism" to Williams in 1638. 94

Some of Providence's initial settlers may have come to New England with Separatist or advanced Baptist leanings as

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93 *CRW*, 332n.

well. In July 1630 Adam Goodwin "of tw[ol] miles distant from Yarmouth" reportedly frequented a meeting of "Seperatistes or Brownistes as are resident within the Towne." The man who would later be instrumental in helping Williams bring others from Separatism to Anabaptism, Ezekiel Holliman, made his home in England within five miles of Baptists Chad Brown and William Weeden, and with them perhaps had been connected to the Separatist church at Amersham. Brown arrived in Boston in July 1638, came to Providence early the next year, having been "persecuted into the wilderness," and joined Williams's Baptist congregation immediately, suggesting that he had been predisposed to such ideas before emigrating. Brown likely had come from Buckinghamshire with the Weedens of Chesham, who later settled in Newport and became the mainstays of the Baptist church there. A later settler of Providence, Gregory

95 Burrage, English Dissenters, II: 309.


Dexter, came to New England from London as a Baptist preacher. 98

This infusion of Separatism and of the Baptist tendencies that came with it, however, all but guaranteed chaos in both religion and civil government. Founded as the antithesis of the English parish system in general, and the Puritan community organization in particular, Providence was doomed to be a centerless town. In Massachusetts, by law, each settlement was to be built around a properly-ordered church, inhabitants were to support ministers through rates, all were to attend services and submit to congregational discipline or be subject to fines, and no household was to be established more than a half-mile from the meeting house. 99 Williams's new community, based as it was upon voluntary religious gatherings unfettered by hierarchy or the doctrines of the Church of England and held together only by loose individual subscriptions to civil codes, had no such "center."

Living by the English Separatist and General Baptist creed of free conscience also meant that residents of Providence were obligated to accept into their community individuals expressing a staggering variety of religious beliefs. Historian Dennis O'Toole surmised that through the

98 Fletcher, "Interactions Between English and American Baptists," 94-95.


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first decade most townspeople "pursued the truth of Christ by themselves in the privacy of their rude homes, with just a Bible as their guide" while others "felt compelled to tell others of the truths they had glimpsed, and so preached to whomever would listen." 100 Available evidence indicates that this supposition is accurate; of the fifty-four landholders in Providence by 1644, twenty-six have left no trace of their spiritual beliefs. 101 Statements about remaining inhabitants, however, suggest abundant spiritual and ecclesiological diversity. Hugh Bewit, for instance, claimed that "what he spake God spake, what counsel he gave God gave," that "he was free from original sin and from actual also for half a year before, and that all true Christians after [blank] are enabled to live without committing sin." In Massachusetts he had been found guilty of heresy and banished upon pain of death for "his person &

100 O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 303. Glenn LaFantasie similarly noted that "other members of the community probably slipped away from organized religion, either because they satisfied their consciences through individualistic forms of worship or because they discarded credos of faith"; CRW, 210.

101 No direct evidence exists regarding the religious opinions of Daniel Abbott, Thomas Angell, Benedict Arnold, William Burrowes, Edward Cope, Alice Daniels, John Field, William Field, John Greene, Jr., Thomas Harris, Edward Hart, John Lippit, William Man, Edward Manton, Nicholas Power, William Reynolds, George Richards, "Widow" Sayer, Jane Sears, John Sweet, Joan Tyler, Christopher Unthank, Matthew Waller, Robert West, Matthew Weston, and Joshua Winsor. Angell, Arnold, Daniels, Greene, Harris, Sweet, and Waller, however, had been with Williams in Salem, and therefore perhaps held Separatist views initially.
errors" which were "dangerous for infection of others."102 Roger Williams's own brother, Robert, ran "strongly to Origens notion of universall Mercy at last, agst an aeternall Sentence," and argued that the search for salvation would eventually give the seeker power over sin and guarantee redemption.103 Similarly, Roger Williams called William Harris "a dolefull Generalist" whose "Atheistical denying of Heaven and Hell made honest souls to fly from him."104 Williams reported to the Massachusetts General Court that even Separatists and erstwhile Baptists William Arnold and William Carpenter were "very far also in religion from you, if you knew all."105 At least two Providence inhabitants were radical in a much different way, in their advocacy of a state church with a Presbyterian structure. Williams complained of "rigid and censorious spirits" John Smith and his wife, who labelled Bay colony authorities "Divills"; a miller, John Smith had been expelled from Dorchester in late 1635 for expressing "dangerous opinions" and later played an

102 Roger Williams, George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes (Boston, 1676), in CWRW V: 256; Mass. Recs., I: 312; WJ, II: 17.

103 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 8 September 1660, CRW, 501, 504n.

104 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 19 August 1669, CRW, 591; Roger Williams to Thomas Hinckley, 4 July 1679, CRW, 769.

105 Roger Williams to the General Court of Massachusetts, 15 November 1655, CRW, 444.
important role in the 1646 Child petition, which castigated the Bay colony for its intolerance of Presbyterians. Smith shared with his Separatist neighbors both disdain for the Anglican hierarchy and a desire to express religious views freely, but in doctrine could scarcely have been further from them.

Providence could not—and would not—have existed apart from the legacy of English Separatism. Roger Williams borrowed from this radical ideology ideas that influenced every action that he took in the New World. Initially he believed that the Massachusetts Bay colony represented the best chance that the faithful had to begin again, to create a new society dominated by truly independent congregations unfettered by the contamination of the Church of England. Put off by the nonseparating stance of the Boston congregation, and sorely disappointed by the "soft" Separatism of Plymouth, Williams built an ideological base at Salem. Williams's espousal of the pure, radical notions of English Separatists like John Canne and John Robinson, and of General Baptists like Thomas Helwys and John Murton, increasingly isolated him and his small cadre of devoted followers. Because he faithfully applied these ideas to each situation in which he found himself, Williams was

branded a severe and dangerous critic of the fledgling Massachusetts enterprise and banished.

Williams and his converts from Salem carried with them to the frontier a number of radical views originally propounded by English Baptists and Separatists; the most important of these to the subsequent development of Providence was, arguably, the movement toward decoupling the civil and religious spheres. Like Murton, Williams argued that conscience—internal and individual as it was—could not be coerced by government. Thus, the initial settlers of the town were predisposed to welcome all comers, from Separatists and Baptists to Presbyterians to nonseparating congregationalists. This commitment from Providence's founders was, and continued to be, the core of their disagreement with Massachusetts authorities, who sought to impose uniformity upon the region.

To some extent, then, the fears of Bay colony Puritans were justified: Williams's infectious ideas invited extraordinary and, some would say, unmanageable diversity. Almost immediately, Williams found himself dealing with numerous "unruly persons" who, by following his Separatist teachings and pleading conscience found their ways to Providence. Williams found that he could not stay in Plymouth due to his interpretation of English Separatist and Baptist authors. He differed from the framers of Plymouth—who sought a homogenous Separatist colony—in his insistance
that the doctrines of Robinson and others, taken to their logical conclusions, required a willingness to accept various religious views within the same community. After all, Williams argued, adherents to early Separatism had removed themselves from the English parish system and, in the New World, were bound to opt out of the church-centered communities of the New England Puritans, and were to make their faiths, practices, and preachers a matter of choice rather than geographical accident. As a result, in early Providence loyalties were individually, not corporately, determined. That Separatists favored small, voluntary groups over mandatory, larger organizations, and invited holders of other spiritual notions into the community, did not bode well for order within Providence Plantations. These radical English ideas created an extraordinary challenge for the town to overcome.107

CHAPTER 2

ANTINOMIANISM AND THE SETTLEMENT OF RHODE ISLAND

English religious ideas unacceptable to Massachusetts shaped the development of the Narragansett region via a second group of settlers known as "Antinomians." Like the Separatists in Providence, these radicals looked to a charismatic leader whose spiritual views were well-developed prior to migration. Like Williams, this teacher, an East Anglian native named Anne Hutchinson, boldly expressed her religious ideas before the scornful ministers and magistrates of the Bay colony. She, too, gained a devoted following and threatened the delicate political and ecclesiological balance of early New England. Her devotees, like Williams's inner circle in Salem, included individuals who, while in England, had been exposed to ideas that predisposed them to reject the emerging orthodoxy in New England. Unlike Williams's group, however, the Antinomians in Hutchinson's charge readily identified--initially, at least--with the goals of nonseparating congregationalism. They differed only in a specific matter of doctrine: the relative role of human action in achieving salvation.

The eventual contribution of the Antinomians to Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was also similar to that
of Williams's Separatists. Hutchinson and her allies added to the Narragansett region's religious diversity and to its early political instability. The group was divided: the more "conservative" element, led by former Massachusetts magistrate William Coddington, had defended Hutchinson's right to conduct private meetings in Massachusetts to discuss pastors' sermons, but had stopped short of claiming direct knowledge from the Holy Spirit, the specific charge for which Hutchinson was eventually banished. Coddington's allies were generally wealthy, well-connected church members with political experience who, while in England, had no history of straying beyond the limits of respectable Puritanism. In contrast, Hutchinson's group was, overall, composed of the poor and unchurched who frequently emphasized direct revelation from the Holy Spirit, even, in many instances, prior to their arrival in New England. These shades of thought developed in the Narragansett region over time, increasing diversity and complicating residents' efforts to construct a workable, peaceful civil system.

Known as "Antinomians" for their supposed rejection of biblical law, Hutchinson and her cadre have drawn a great deal of scholarly attention, but few of the historical treatments place the controversy in its transatlantic context. Rather, most of the hundreds of books and articles focus on New England and either psychoanalyze Anne Hutchinson, treat the political origins
and repercussions of the event, consider the social standing of the participants, or focus on the intellectual and theological issues involved. 1 Scholars have examined what


the episode suggests about the role of women in seventeenth-century New England, and the implications of the controversy for the civil structure in Massachusetts and for Puritanism generally. Most agree that the upheaval was a turning point of some kind, and that, after the banishment of the most dangerous radicals to Rhode Island, the Puritan New World experiment would never again be the same. In most previous treatments of the controversy, the departure from Massachusetts Bay of those holding "many unsound and loose opinions" has marked the end of the story.2 Traditionally,


scholars have considered Antinomianism important only insofar as it intersected with the history of Massachusetts; they have not related its origins and long-term consequences to the larger history of New England and America.

The story, however, has terminal points in England, where the controversial doctrines originated, and in Aquidneck (later Rhode Island), where most of the Antinomians settled. There, Anne Hutchinson and her supporters worshipped together, plying in the wilds of the New World a theology that had deep roots in English Puritanism. Since the mid-sixteenth century, reformists in England had discussed the tension between divine grace and human action in salvation, a condition that William K.B. Stoever has termed the dialectic of the created and "increated." Mainstream Old World Puritans sought to maintain a balance between these two poles, mediating between biblical law and moral standards infused in regenerate souls by the Holy Spirit. English Reformers on the "left wing" of the movement, however, emphasized the

3 Though its seventeenth-century use was pejorative, for the sake of simplicity I will employ the term "Antinomian" in reference to those implicated in the controversy in Massachusetts.

latter, the eternal and "increated," the dwelling of God's spirit in the elect.5

At the same time, the Hutchinsonians attempted to establish stable communities like those they had known in Massachusetts. Yet like the men and women in Providence twenty miles to the north, the Antinomians found reconstructing such political units to be difficult since their beliefs regarding the direct witness of the Holy Spirit emphasized individual revelation and tended to promote disagreement over proper polities and institutions. They found their doctrine difficult to control or limit; how could they deny an equal say in governance to anyone who claimed divine knowledge? No one among them was qualified to define heresy or maintain a sense of spiritual order, an eventuality that both English and early American Puritans had long feared. In attempting to apply the brakes to such "enthusiasm" in the Narragansett, Coddington and his lieutenants simply continued the struggle that had previously been played out in England and Massachusetts.

In England, the doctrine eventually known in Massachusetts as Antinomianism went by many names and had many proponents. As Janice Knight has recently noted, the more emotional, mystical side of Puritanism was not only well-represented but actually dominant in England. Taught

5 This "antinomian" concept was an old one. See Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947), esp. 1-61.
in the Cambridge colleges by the likes of Richard Sibbes and John Preston, this theological position emphasized divine benevolence over power and drastically minimized any human role in achieving salvation. These "Spiritual Brethren," as Knight terms them, viewed many issues differently than the "Intellectual Fathers," who stressed the need for individuals to prepare to receive knowledge of God's saving Grace. In England, according to Knight, these camps stayed close together, minimizing their differences in order to present a united front to a hostile king; in Massachusetts, the lack of a common, immediate enemy resulted in widening differences between the groups. This rift, I would argue, became ever wider in the Narragansett wilderness.6

Clearly, however, the situation in Rhode Island entailed much more than a scuffle between the heirs of the "Intellectual Fathers" and successors to the "Spiritual Brethren." Anne Hutchinson, for one, went well beyond the views of latter group to a position that only a few early seventeenth-century English clerics would recognize as "Puritan." She resided on the far left wing of the reform movement long before leaving England and, like Roger Williams, found little spiritual promise in her homeland.

In like manner, Hutchinson's radical views were derived from her English experiences, having been communicated to

her primarily by her father, Anglican minister Francis Marbury. Educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, Marbury was ordained deacon in a parish in the town of Northampton and given a license to preach. Almost immediately, he began espousing unorthodox ideas. An ecclesiastical court took him to task and, after finding Marbury overly disputacious, sent him to prison. After his release, Marbury ignored an injunction forbidding his return to Northampton and there spoke publicly about the failings of the hierarchy, the inadequacies of his fellow preachers in the state church, and his own mistreatment. As a result, he was again hauled before the authorities--this time the Consistory Court of the Bishopric of London--where he displayed an impudence remarkable in a twenty-two-year-old cleric. According to his own account of the trial, Marbury not only denied all charges, but accused the bishop of London of incompetence, chiding him for failing to train properly the ministers in his charge. Denouncing all Anglican bishops as "self-seeking soul murderers" earned Marbury another stint in prison and revocation of his preaching license. For the first three years of Anne's life (1591-94), her father--an accused Puritan--was silenced.7

Francis Marbury made a substantive mark on his daughter in the following ten years, especially in her religious schooling. After a successful petition to regain his preaching license in 1594, Marbury rejoined his wife and family in Alford and there ascended the pulpit periodically. In his thirteen years back in Lincolnshire, he aired his opinions in no fewer than four published tracts, all of which remained in the family library and served as basic works of theology in the training of the Marbury children. The bulk of his views are contained in three published sermons, all from 1602; Oyle of Scorpions, probably printed before the others, outlined Marbury's Puritan interest in reforming English society and aimed at the elimination of immodest female fashions. Marbury believed strongly in instruction for women and men, arguing that all people must "submit our selves to the instruments of our instruction, though they bee but meane" and that "every Christian is to bee a student, and he that can reade, must reade though it be painful." Of his eight children, Anne learned her lessons particularly well.8

8 For ten of these years, Marbury was master of the Alford Grammar School as well. See Williams, Divine Rebel, 12-13; Bolton, Woman Misunderstood, 8-9. For Marbury's views on education, see his Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance: Gathered on occasion of opening the fift[h] petition of the Lords Prayer. Delivered in the Church of Alford in Lincoln-shire, by way of Catechising (London, 1662), 71, 54.
In some ways Marbury was a typical state clergyman, preaching that his parishioners learn the lessons of the Bible and remain faithful to the sovereign head of the Church of England. During Easter week 1602 he sought to preach at Spittal because he "stood well affected to my countrimen, whom I desired to reforme." Later that spring he begged publicly that the "Gentiles of Europe" descended from Japheth, "specially of these verie Islands" reject their "stubborne and unflexible mindis" and "be allured to true religion." He claimed to be "free from affectation of noveltie," denied the epithet "Puritan," and agreed with the assumption supporting all state churches, that "matters of policie must be judged to be matters of religion, and matters of regiment of soules." Marbury's faith in Queen Elizabeth and her magistrates suggests that—after a turbulent early career—he settled down as a typical Anglican vicar.

But in other ways, Marbury seems to have strayed from the official doctrines of the Church of England by espousing

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9 Francis Marbury, *A Fruitful Sermon Necessary for the Time, preached at the Spittle upon the Tuesday in Easter weeke last...* (London, 1602), "Epistle to the Reader."

10 Francis Marbury, *A Sermon Preached At Pauls Crosse the 13. of June, 1602* (London, 1602), sec. B.

11 Marbury, *Notes of the Doctrine of Repentency, Dedictory Epistle.*

Calvinism more vigorously than most Anglican clerics. He noted that some of his audience were certainly "members of Christ" and would be "knit closely unto him," while others "can have no heavenly knowledge, nor receive the truth." Various divine secrets would remain forever hidden from the unregenerate, who would be forced to rely upon "speculation, to labour to knowe things unrevealed." A large portion of souls were doomed to "earthly and carnal things . . . For the natural man perceiveth not the things which are of God," and neither could they "receive the Spirit truth."

Certainly, God "will finish the good worke which hee hath begunne" in the Elect; on the other hand, "some have not the spirit, . . . and they are none of Christs." 13 Marbury defended the eminently Calvinist notion of "calling," 14 and adopted the Augustinian view that the Holy Ghost teaches some, but not others. 15

Marbury harbored definite and unconventional views about the ways in which individuals became convinced of their own spiritual estates. He urged his auditors to seek Christ constantly and to come to God humbly, with the

13 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentence, 41, 64, 66, 77-78.

14 That is, humans were born to serve God in a specific vocation. Marbury noted that "To containe our selves within the boundes of our calling is a speciall point of christianitie"; A Fruitful Sermon Necessary for the Time, unpaginated, sec. B3.

15 Marbury, A Sermon Preached At Pauls Crosse, unpaginated, sec. B3.
knowledge that all people were born in evil. Pride, Marbury warned, was the source of all contention; "subjects have seldom hearts humble enough, especially they that have any wit are rarely found to have the meeknesse of wisdom." 16 Similarly, and in contrast to mainline Anglican teachings, he explained that the greatest epistemological question of all time—"How do I know if I am saved?"—had an emotional, not a rational, answer. To be caught up in reason, Marbury argued, was to be led down the primrose path by the intellect, to have false assurance of a Heavenly destination. "Satan will teach us to be mad with reason," he explained, but only true humility would reveal divine favor. 17

While suggesting that English women and men humble themselves to determine their spiritual accounts, Marbury cautioned that people could never convince God to save them. Like many other English Protestants, Marbury reacted against Roman Catholic doctrine, 18 vehemently contending that mere mortals could never repent Original Sin. Papists offered


17 Marbury, A Fruitful Sermon Necessary for the Time, unpaginated, sec. B3. Sincerity in various human activities was required; for example, "fasting it selfe without the sincere humiliation of the heart is rejected." See Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentence, 9.

18 Marbury had been interned in Marshalsea prison—known mostly as a facility for Roman Catholic recusants—over a decade earlier.
penance in vain, he argued, abusing the term and turning it "into a sacrament. . . . To bring almost all the power of repentence to consist in the eternall affliction & penaltie of the bodie, which is hypocrisy."19 This errant position, he explained, was just one reason why Catholics were "so farre from yeelding themselves to the spirit of God," and proved that "to be settled in popery is to be in the flesh."20

Marbury was equally concerned that members of the Church of England were entangled in matters of the flesh and oblivious to their own powerlessness to alter their eternal conditions. He stressed that "There is no sufficiency in our selves, but the spirit of God must bee all in all,"21 and that even complete humiliation required the assistance of the Holy Spirit.22 God had led Japheth to know his salvation, and offered "true conversion" to all Saints who

19 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 8, 21.

20 Marbury, A Sermon Preached At Pauls Crosse, unpaginated, secs. B2 and B3. Elsewhere he argued: "No voluntarie religion, nor wil worships please the Lord . . . Which things have indeede a shew of wisdome in Voluntarie religion & humblenesse of mind and in not sparing the body: which are things of no value, sith [since] they pertaine to the filling of the flesh." See Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 8.

21 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 77.

22 "But this humiliation must not come by violent and carnall mortification, but by and from the Spirit of God, whereby we must mortifie the deeds of the flesh"; Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 7.
remained open to "the holy and omnipotent spirit of God." Marbury assured congregants that it was impossible "for us to convert our selves, or for any creature to convert us," and warned those who attempted in any way to earn salvation were "egregious inveterate hypocrites, dying eyther desperate or senselesse." He prayed "that we may not erre in the truth of religon in ascribing anything to ourselves, as if we were able to stirre up ourselves," and warned listeners to distinguish between their own spirits (which helped them to understand Scripture and moral lessons) and the spirit of God in them (which gave them assurance of salvation). 24

The Holy Spirit's movement within Saints had far-reaching practical implications for Marbury. When an individual "turned," she or he became a new person with redoubled powers to refuse temptation and to do good works. 25 Due to the mark of Adam, however, those unfortunate enough to be among the damned could never live truly sanctified lives. But people with the Spirit of God

23 Marbury, A Sermon Preached At Pauls Crosse, unpaginated, sec. B3.


25 "If ye Lord have wrought effectually in us, hee hath wrought it by the power of his might, & we have the sense of his omnipotencie in conquering those temptations, which none but the Spirit of God could have conquered"; Marbury, A Sermon Preached At Pauls Crosse, unpaginated, sec. C2. On "turning" see Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentence, 9.
moving in them could expect to glide easily "from vice to vertue," and to become "whole" men and women. 26 They would experience fully all powers of the soul—imagination, understanding, and affection—and know the joys of complete reformation. 27 Since the Spirit of God was "the fountain of all actions," the regenerate could expect "not only sanctification, but also outward vocation." 28 Like Saul, who rejected Samuel when "God have him another heart," and other biblical figures well-versed in the stunning power of the Holy Ghost, Saints would live different lives after God's spirit seized them. 29

But Marbury went further than other early-seventeenth-century Puritans in his discussion of Spirit and sanctification. The regenerate, he argued, were forever saved; God would never change that fact, no matter how grievous a Saint's sin. His position was a politically and theologically tenuous one: to argue for divine punishment against the Elect would impugn God's saving power; to

26 Marbury fondly quoted Titus 1: 15: "Unto the pure are all things pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure; but even their minds and consciences are defiled." See Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 20, 9-10, 60, 74.

27 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 18-19, 79.

28 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 38, 70.

maintain that the eternally saved need not uphold the law to enter Heaven held out the specter of catastrophic social instability. But to Marbury the latter argument was more tenable intellectually. "[A]ll whom the Lord hath justified," he explained, "hee hath also glorified, that is keepeth the[m] glorious by his glorious Spirit, even in this life, from inpenitent sinne, and maketh them stable and constant in godiinesse." Citing Hebrews 12: 15, Marbury stressed that this was a permanent condition, that "all Gods children are kept by the power of God, . . . even unto salvation it selfe: and hee keepeth the feete of his Saints from falling into sinne . . . that is, never to fall backe againe."30

That which made the Elect perfect and, in fact, above the law, according to Marbury, was the Holy Spirit. "Quickening" within Saints, Marbury deduced, "must be by no lesse then by the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus," and would be followed by "will or deed in us."31 As a result, mundane laws governing the Elect were unnecessary. "The law," held Marbury, "is not given to the righteous, but [to the] prophane."32 Incensed by irreligious officials judging ministers and congregations, Marbury contended that

30 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 35-36.
31 Marbury, A Sermon Preached At Pauls Crosse, unpaginated, sec. B3. Marbury was quoting Romans 8:11.
32 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 52.
"As many as have good consciences neede not to passe of it (as Saint Paul saith) to bee judged of the daie of man."33 This extreme position was justified because the Spirit which "converted" Saints was the same that inspired Old Testament injunctions and obedience to law. "Also the law is spiritual," Marbury declared, and by the Holy Spirit God "destroyed the power of darknesse within thee."34

This powerful Spirit, Marbury concluded, brought Saints remarkable powers of revelation. Gaining divine knowledge did not come easily, and completely bypassed the unregenerate and worldly. But for the Elect, God revealed all secrets, "openeth the eyes of the naturall mind," and "quickeneth the natural heart with the life of his Spirit, which maketh it spirituall."35 Marbury suggested that God's will was revealed corporately, in the selection of magistrates, and individually, to Saints; he reminded the nation that "wee ought to rejoice with them which rejoice, ... And for that the Gospell is revealed to simple men, as Christ himselfe doth."36 In short, to Marbury revelation

33 Marbury, A Fruitful Sermon Necessary for the Time, unpaginated, sec. E.


35 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 64, 66, 78, 82.

36 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 86; Marbury, A Fruitful Sermon Necessary for the Time, unpaginated, sec. D4. Marbury was citing Romans 13.
was real, could touch all regenerate souls, and could be communicated with zeal.

Not only unusual among Anglican vicars in his outspoken belief in revelation, Marbury clearly went beyond the pale in arguing in favor of prophecy. He found that the Holy Ghost chose some men to be leaders and "hath bestowed also divine gifts upon them agreeable to the title." "They are," he concluded "endowed . . . with an incredible measure of wisedome, to speake even [as] oracles at times."37 Marbury continually referred to Old Testament figures who, by the Spirit of God, were able to see the future. Noah, for one, "had received some informational (some way) of the matter concerning the behaviour of his sonnes, . . . landl as became the Prophet of the Lord, he was moved by the holy Ghost to publish unto them after this deede, especially in their posteritie."38 Likewise, Shem, Noah's son, tapped into "God's oracle" and found "that Christ should descend of him, in whose family also from that time forward true religion continued."39 Marbury pointed out that Noah's progeny, among others in the Pentateuch, were humble characters endowed with extraordinary spiritual gifts, gifts


that—millennia hence—appeared throughout seventeenth-century England.

Though unusual among mainstream Anglican clergy, Marbury's extreme views on the work of the Holy Spirit within individuals was common in more radical Puritan spheres. Marbury was among those whom Geoffrey Nuttall classified "liberal Puritans," those who saw the indwelling of the Spirit in the regenerate as typical. Like Marbury, such Puritans taught that the Holy Spirit endowed Saints with certain gifts and self-discipline, along with the unusual ability to interpret Scripture and a sense of the timing of the Second Coming.40

Marbury's own daughter, Anne, counted herself among these gifted, prophetic individuals. From her father Anne Marbury learned that "every one must speake & minister according to the gift of God admeasured forth unto him," and have the courage to "buy the truth with trouble, [rather] then sel[l] it with ease and quietnesse."41 Having spent the first eleven years of his daughter's life without a regular preaching appointment, Francis Marbury had the time to spend instructing his children in the particulars of doctrine and deportment. In the New England of his daughter, Francis Marbury's suggestions that "conversion"


41 Marbury, Notes of the Doctrine of Repentance, 69, 72.
need not have practical manifestations, that Saints were not subject to human laws, and that revelations and prophecies were apt to visit the humblest of the Elect would have placed him among the most dangerous Antinomian outlaws. When Anne Marbury Hutchinson propagated these views in Massachusetts, she would be similarly judged.

If her father planted and nurtured the seeds of her radicalism, Anne Marbury's removal to London as a young woman encouraged the growth of her theological positions by providing intellectual stimulation. In 1605 her father sought and received a ministerial position at the church of St. Martin in the Vintry on Thames Street near St. Paul's Cathedral. While in London, Anne probably met her mother's relatives, the Drydens, most of whom were staunch Puritans and opponents of James I. Most likely, she also came into contact with a number of religious groups, with views she would find amenable, most notably the infamous "Family of Love"--a continental sect that preached direct, individual spiritual contact with God--and the Separatists returning from exile in Holland.

After her father's death in 1611, Anne returned to Alford, Lincolnshire as the wife of a local merchant, William Hutchinson, and there seems to have continued to develop her religious views, particularly her rejection of human action in affecting salvation. Since the Alford pulpit was vacant, the Hutchinsons worshipped under the
tutelage of young clergy in nearby vicarates, favoring those who preached the Covenant of Grace. One of them, John Wheelwright, came to preach at Bilsby, about a mile east of Alford, and eventually married William Hutchinson's sister Mary. The other, a young Cambridge cleric named John Cotton, had assumed a living at St. Botolph's church in Boston one month before the Hutchinsons returned to Alford. Hutchinson rapidly identified with Cotton's teachings and counted herself among his devoted followers. She regularly made the twenty-one mile trek with her husband to hear Cotton preach. The cause of her devotion to Cotton—aside from his extraordinary charisma and erudition—was substantive and doctrinal. Anne Hutchinson could have traveled much shorter distances to hear good Puritan preaching, but she chose to travel a day and a half to hear Cotton because his theology—though eschewing explicit dependence upon revelation and prophecy—was remarkably similar to her own and her father's convictions concerning the Holy Spirit.

Cotton's theology, though less radical than Francis Marbury's, similarly emphasized themes of "free grace" and human inadequacy in determining spiritual estate. Cotton had developed these views late in his scholastic career and brought them to full boil during his ministry at St. Botolph's. Born in 1584, Cotton entered Trinity College, Cambridge, at a time when Puritans—fatigued by decades of struggle with Queen Elizabeth—were experimenting
theologically and seeking compromise with the Crown. A wide variety of doctrines were being taught at the university, from Arminianism to "free grace." William Perkins preached the latter view at Cambridge, arguing—as Francis Marbury had—the bleak position that mortals were inherently evil and powerless to change their preordained condition.

Perkins exerted great influence upon Cotton. Emphasizing grace as a free gift from God to the Elect, Perkins preached that humans could not truly know their spiritual conditions until they felt God's spirit moving in them, an intense, emotional experience that contradicted the mainline Puritan glorification of logic. The revelation that he had been saved would come to John Cotton only after an intense period of soul searching. Perkins's theology required the young Cotton to watch for any signs of the Holy Spirit, to be completely passive and humbled, and to be prepared for the unpleasant prospects of an eternity in Hell.43

42 Thus, Cotton biographer Larzer Ziff's suggestion that "The political lesson John Cotton learned, then, was how to disagree and yet conform; how to oppose and yet be with; how to practice what one believed and yet retain favor." See Ziff, The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 16.

43 Ziff put Cotton's situation well: "If [Cotton] were to follow Perkins he would have to set a watch upon himself to detect the faintest signs of the Holy Spirit moving in him, and he would dare not call the watch in for a moment's respite, because, unless these signs were noted, his eternal
Cotton first resisted the message in Perkins's sermons. This theology of helplessness ran counter to the young man's burgeoning sense of self-reliance. His initial reaction was to channel his energies to more worldly pursuits. As a fellow of Emmanuel College, Cotton quickly achieved a reputation as a preacher and master of high rhetoric. But Perkins's ideas caught up with Cotton in 1609, when Richard Sibbes, a fellow of St. John's College, grabbed the young clergyman's attention. Preaching in the "plain style," Sibbes, like Perkins and Marbury, taught that grief, sorrow, and humility were good, and argued that the Holy Spirit had a special role in alerting humans to their elections. In 1612, Cotton finally felt this Spirit "quickening his heart and illuminating his consciousness; he perceived a growing strength in himself, an ability to be moved feelingly by the contemplation of Christ's passion; and he knew that he had been called to salvation."44

Cotton's teachings were drastically altered by his conversion; they would be well-received in the far reaches of Lincolnshire. The congregation at St. Botolph's, enthralled by its minister's plain style and reliance upon future was one with damnation. All he had done, all he had lived in and for during his brief life, was for naught. He was completely passive in his relation to his God; he could but watch and yearn." Career of John Cotton, 22.

44 Ziff, Career of John Cotton, 31, 27-30. On the importance of Sibbes to Cotton's spiritual development, see also Knight, Orthodoxies in Massachusetts, 34-40.

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"absolute grace," demanded that he add a Thursday lecture to his regular Sunday sermon. Cambridge fellows, like John Preston, sent students to Cotton for training; likewise, Germans fleeing war on the Continent flocked to England for religious instruction, and often found themselves taking notes in the study of the renowned Boston theologian. Cotton's fame spread through Puritan circles in the upper echelons of English society as well, and the preacher regularly received admiring nobles: Edward Sackville, earl of Dorset, who pledged his future aid to Cotton; Dudley Carleton, Viscount Dorchester; Robert Bertie, Earl Lindsey; and members of the staunchly Puritan Clinton family, who held the earldom of Lincoln. Seeking to satisfy the spiritual needs of his devoted followers, Cotton, by 1620, was keeping a schedule unmatched by any other parish preacher in England, lecturing on Wednesday and Thursday mornings and Sunday afternoons, in addition to regular Thursday afternoon and Sunday morning services.45

While Cotton's popularity within the mainstream reformist movement rose, Hutchinson continued to explore the boundaries of Puritanism. Separated from her father, she sought out lay preachers who—like Francis Marbury—heralded the activities of the indwelling Spirit in individuals. In her church trial in Massachusetts she

45 For more on Cotton's early life, see Ziff, Career of John Cotton.
admitted knowing and admiring the "Woman of Elis" [Ely], a famous preacher in General Baptist and perhaps Familist circles in London and the surrounding shires.46 She allegedly had connections to Familist William Sprigg of Banbury, Oxfordshire, whose son, Joshua, a spiritualist preacher, credited—but went well beyond—John Cotton's sermons on the Canticles for thebulk of his ideas.47

While in England Hutchinson also heeded her father's admonition to minister in any way she could. During a stay in London in anticipation of their departure for Massachusetts, the Hutchinson family stayed with William and Mary Bartholomew, who also had planned to sail on the Griffin. Bartholomew, upon arriving in Boston, told the authorities that, while he and Mrs. Hutchinson strolled through St. Paul's churchyard, she explained to him her "constant" revelations from God, noting "that she had never had any great thing done about her but it was revealed to her beforehand." At the same time Hutchinson related to Mr. Bartholomew a sermon she had heard by Thomas Hooker, who


exclaimed that "It was revealed to me yesterday that England should be destroyed." Hutchinson "took notice of that passage and it was very acceptable with her." Bartholomew added that Hutchinson had taught her seventeen-year-old daughter Faith the gift of prophecy; on board the ship for New England the girl had "had a revelation that a young man on the ship should be saved, but he must walk in the ways of her mother." Moreover, he reported, as the Griffin approached Boston harbor, "I would remember one word of Mrs. Hutchinson among many others. She, knowing that I did know her opinions, being she was at my house at London, she was afraid, I conceive, or loath to impart herself unto me, but when she came within sight of Boston, and looking upon the meanness of the place, I conceive, she uttered these words, if she had not a sure word that England should be destroyed her heart would shake." 48

Reverend Zechariah Symmes similarly notified magistrates concerning Mrs. Hutchinson's English ministry and prophecies. Symmes noted that just before the voyage from Southampton, Hutchinson "did slight the ministers of the word of God," and urged the women on board the Griffin to join her as "she resumed her old Alford practice of holding women's meetings, with herself in the role of lecturer." Chillingly, Symmes recalled, Hutchinson

correctly predicted the length of the voyage: "What would you say," she taunted, "if we should be at New England within these three weeks?" 49

In Massachusetts, authorities would examine the ideas which Hutchinson had developed in old England and would find them wanting in both their theological merits and—particularly—their political salience. New England Puritans faced the problem of society-building unknown to them in England, and thus sought to strike a balance between authority and individual initiative in matters of religion. To them, the spiritual and temporal were inseparable: God's chosen were expected to create communities that were as pure as possible, thereby cementing the covenant between God and his people and lessening the risk of divine punishment. In this scheme the clergy played a pivotal role, preparing the Elect in their congregations for conversion, while exhorting the reprobate to keep God's law and maintain order. Authorities emphasized the corporate and cooperative nature of the New World undertaking, arguing that only in unity, "Truth," and peace would the Bay colony achieve divine favor and, thus, prosperity.

Anne Hutchinson challenged this ideal in a number of ways. Initially and primarily, she divided the clergy on the issue of evidence of salvation, criticizing most ministers in the colony for preaching the Covenant of Works.

49 Ibid., 322.
Hutchinson observed that only John Cotton and her brother-in-law John Wheelwright espoused the Covenant of Grace, the belief that the Holy Spirit's work within one's soul was sufficient evidence of an individual's election. Thus, a Saint could not rely upon sanctification as absolute evidence of her or his justification. In fact, using behavior as assurance of salvation signified certain damnation; it smacked of popery, of using works to gain God's favor.50

Hutchinson's admiration of Cotton made him the target of fellow clerics' queries on minute theological matters. Considering the importance of their American undertaking and the instability of the nascent civil and religious infrastructure, Bay colony ministers were understandably eager to maintain unity on all questions of faith. Central to the New England Puritans' conception of the "church" was the selection of members, or "visible saints" who, by their relations of "conversion experiences" before their congregations, appeared to be among God's elect. As a result of Hutchinson's extracurricular comments, Cotton's clerical colleagues quizzed him on the specifics of conversion, particularly the human role in the process. They sought to elicit from Cotton some admission of the

efficacy of "preparation," the way in which a congregant
came to know if she or he had been saved. Did their "loving
brother" believe—as they did—that prayer, Scripture
reading, and the study of sermons improved parishioners'
chances of receiving signs of God's affection?51

Cotton's answers tended to be equivocal, thereby
fueling the so-called "Antinomian Controversy" and leading
to further scrutiny—initially, at least—of his views.
Early in 1636, Cotton wrote to his clerical brethren that
the saving work of Christ in individual souls was primary,
that sometimes Saints need not have much "preparation"
before conversion; often, the assurance that one was saved
came suddenly, with the "fullness" of the Holy Spirit.52
Moreover, he differed slightly with other ministers in his
insistence that the connection between justification and
sanctification was a causal, rather than an evidential one,
and in his view that works could only serve as supporting
evidence of salvation after a person had felt God stir in
him or her. Vague language proved to be

51 For the idea of "visible sainthood," see Morgan,
Visible Saints. For preparation and the human role in
bringing "union with Christ," see Charles Lloyd Cohen, God's
Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 75-110. Also useful is
Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "Puritan Spirituality in
America," in Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and
Modern, ed. Louis Dupre and Don Saliers (New York:

52 Hall, Antinomian Controversy, xvi; Cotton,
"Rejoynder," 142; John Wheelwright, "Fast-Day Sermon," in
Antinomian Controversy, ed. Hall, 157-158.
the greatest obstacle between the colony's ministers and Cotton; a series of discussions among religious leaders through 1637 and early 1638 revealed that the theological differences between the parties were, indeed, small and surmountable.

Just as Cotton was reconciling with the Massachusetts pastorate, another minister whom Hutchinson had praised for his faithful adherence to the Covenant of Grace, John Wheelwright, raised the specter of Antinomian anarchy in the colony. In 1637, during a communal fast day designed for reconciliation, Wheelwright preached a fiery sermon in which he recognized that his followers would "cause a combustion in the Church and common wealth." He framed the dispute over assurance of salvation in terms of a biblical conflagration, wherein "there must be a Spiritual burning" to destroy the Antichrist. In doing so, Wheelwright clearly viewed the Bay colony church-state formulation as secondary to the goal of seeing God "with a direct eye of faith"; being charged with sedition by a worldly power operating under the Covenant of Works meant little to him as he

exhorted his followers to "prepare for battell and [to] coms out against the enemyes of the Lord."54

The ministers and magistrates of the colony did not appreciate Wheelwright's inflammation of an already tense situation, and moved to censure him. His supporters petitioned on his behalf, producing a document important not only for its substance, but for its signatories, a list of eighty-seven, of whom twenty-two were likely more spiritually attuned to Hutchinson than either Cotton or Wheelwright.55 The other sixty-five petitioners either moved with Wheelwright to the wilderness of Exeter (now Dover, New Hampshire) or remained in Massachusetts; forty-three either denied signing the petition or quickly acknowledged their errors.56 Wheelwright himself almost immediately sought to return to the good graces of the Bay Colony, distancing himself from Anne Hutchinson, whom he believed to be under a mystical spell. He recalled that Hutchinson had begun to preach during a pregnancy late in 1635, and was possessed by "strange fancies and erroneous tenets . . . especially during her confinement, where she might feel some effects too, from the quality of humours,

54 Wheelwright, "Fast Day Sermon," 157-8, 165.

55 These twenty-two removed with Hutchinson to Aquidneck. See Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 300-328.

56 Ibid. By December 1637, twenty who had remained in Massachusetts fully acknowledged fault in exchange for readmission to the church.
together with the advantage the devil took of her condition attended with melancholy."57 Wheelwright and his followers, like Cotton, resolved their differences with the pastorate, insisting that Hutchinson went far beyond the bounds of orthodoxy.

By December 1637, the vast majority of accused Antinomians in Massachusetts had recanted, leaving Anne Hutchinson with a score of hardcore supporters who believed in personal revelation from the Holy Spirit. The Antinomian group had been whittled away as a result of the General Court's examination of Hutchinson in November. There, magistrates and ministers alike accused her of having counseled and entertained the signers of the petition in favor of Wheelwright and took her to task for holding private religious meetings for both women and men. They determined that Mrs. Hutchinson had brought unorthodox views with her from England, where she had criticized ministers and veered toward Separatism.58

57 Wheelwright, His Writings, Including His Fast-day Sermon, 1637, and His Mercurius Americanus, 1645, ed. Charles H. Bell (Boston, MA: Prince Society, 1876), 197; Thomas Hutchinson, Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1769), 63; WJ, I: 240-41. After corresponding with Massachusetts magistrates in the hope of some favor, Wheelwright petitioned the General Court in 1662 and was allowed to return to the Bay Colony as minister of the Salisbury church. See Hall, Antinomian Controversy, 153.

58 Symmes explained that she had low regard for the preaching near her home in Lincolnshire: "I had occasion to be in her company once or twice before I came, where I did perceive that she did slight the ministers of the word of
Hutchinson alienated most of her supporters and horrified Bay Colony magistrates and ministers, however, with her unsolicited admission of direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. In their questioning of Hutchinson, members of the General Court showed great interest in her assertion that preachers, in order to express effectively the Covenant of Grace, had first to be "sealed" by the Holy Spirit—that is, have assurance of their own unities with Christ. Cotton, she insisted, preached Grace well because, like the apostles, her mentor "had received the witness of the spirit" and thus could articulate clearly the mysteries of salvation. Taking "the seal of the spirit" to be "the full assurance of God's favour by the holy ghost," Hutchinson claimed the ability to distinguish between "sealed" ministers—like Cotton—and the unsealed.59 She recalled that, while in England, she "had like to have turned separatist," and in despair "kept a day of solemn humiliation and pondering." As a result, Christ—through his "prophetic office"—"let me see which was the clear ministry and which the wrong." In a single moment

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God." Mrs. Hutchinson then admitted as much: "Being much troubled to see the falseness of the constitution of the church of England, I had like to have turned separatist." See "The Examination of Mrs. Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown," Antinomian Controversy, ed. Hall, 320, 322, 336-37. Moreover, Hugh Peter remembered that Hutchinson was stirring up trouble when he and Henry Vane arrived in Boston in October 1635.

59 Ibid., 333, 335-36.
Hutchinson had received from God the ability "to distinguish between the voice of my beloved and the voice of Moses, the voice of John Baptist and the voice of antichrist." The Holy Spirit had come to her "by an immediate revelation," "by the voice of his own spirit to my soul." "Ever since that time," Mrs. Hutchinson concluded, "I have been confident of what he hath revealed unto me." 60

Astonished, the ministers and magistrates present at the examination further probed the issue for clarification. Most disturbing to the assembly was Mrs. Hutchinson's seemingly unapologetic dismissal of the Scriptures and the laws contained therein. When Deputy Governor Dudley demanded a biblical warrant for her position Hutchinson, who throughout the proceedings had supplied specific verses for the Court's consideration, replied that she had "seen him which is invisible" and thus feared "not what man can do unto me." Governor Winthrop sarcastically asked Hutchinson if she expected to be "delivered by miracle" like Daniel had been; he probably did not expect the affirmative answer that he received. Stories of Hutchinson's past, "wild"

prophecies then poured from ministers and magistrates alike which, coupled with her own admissions, sealed the defendant's fate and left her with few supporters. 61

The assembly immediately set out to consider the consequences of Hutchinson's position for order in both religious and civil matters. Prior to the claim of revelation, the primary ministerial fear was that Hutchinson was teaching minor doctrinal errors in private conventicles and diverting her students' time away from more constructive worldly and spiritual pursuits. After her dramatic suggestion that she retained a special prophetic gift directly from the Holy Spirit, however, the Bay Colony pastorate concerned itself with the possibility that reasoned, objective "Truth" would become the casualty of an infinite number of individual revelations. Ministers worried about a loss in balance between the authority of the Bible and the spiritual life of each congregant so important in the Reformed tradition. But most of all, they feared a loss of control and purpose in the lives of their flocks. 62

The cadre of male clerics was particularly sensitive to the stinging criticisms of a woman and her feminine cohort, a group the ministers believed to have strange and dangerous

62 Ibid., 316, 338.
tendencies, as well as extraordinary methods of persuasion. Edward Johnson noted that wily women aptly used "many prety knacks to delude withall," especially others of "the Femall Sex." "[T]he Congregation of the people of God," Johnson wrote,

began to be forsaken, and the weaker Sex prevailed so farre, that they set up a Priest of their own Profession and Sex, who was much thronged after, abominably wrestling the Scriptures to their own destruction: This Masterpiece of Womens wit, drew many Disciples after her, and to that end boldly insinuated her selfe into the favour of none of the meanest.

Hutchinson was backed by other women who were attracted to and "had much converse with the Devill." in their religious meetings, Hutchinson's chief minions practiced the dark arts, and did such things as "give drinkes to other Women to cause them to conceive"; after an abnormally short gestation period "there were Monsters borne." Such lore began with the Puritan historians and continued well into the eighteenth century.63

At the same time, Massachusetts' ministers and politicians were quick to compare Hutchinson and her

followers to discredited and defeated groups of the past. Shepard and other Puritan theologians associated the Antinomians with English "Familists" who, they claimed, eschewed Scripture completely, relying instead upon individual conscience for the "Truth." The group's "rare Revelations of things" were "onely devised to weaken the Word of the Lord in the mouth of his Ministers" and replace them with "ignorant and unlettered Men and Women."64 John Winthrop argued that the Antinomians seemed prone to the same errors since they too rejected the only "safe and sure way of searching and finding Christ," the Bible.65 He and others also pointed to similarities between the Hutchinsonians and the sixteenth-century German Anabaptists, who bred new and dangerous doctrines via revelation, alleged personal visitations from the Holy Spirit which moreover "have stirred up their hearers to take up arms against their prince and to cut the throats one of another."66 This conception of "enthusiasts" as volatile and potentially violent carried the day in the November 1637

64 Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence, 95.


General Court, which ordered that seventy-six suspected sectaries be disarmed, and ten be disfranchised.67

The magistrates carefully considered the specter of such anarchy in Massachusetts arising from immediate revelation, and also suggested banishment as a remedy. Thomas Welde argued for expulsion, equating the divisions created by the Antinomians to the tragic separation of husbands and wives. Winthrop observed that Hutchinson's notions were delusional "and not by the ministry of the word," a condition which "hath been the ground of all these tumults and troubles." To the Bay Colony governor the Antinomian tendency to avoid checking "that the word and spirit should speak the same thing" brought with it--as it had in the case of the Continental Anabaptists--a dramatic loss of unity in the churches and government and the prospect of violent atomism, which was best remedied by excision of the offending party from the body politic. Winthrop drew a parallel between the Hutchinsonians and the biblical cases of Cain, Hagar, and Ishmael, all of whom had been separated from their families for the sake of justice and peace. "[S]uch disturbers should be put out from among us," Winthrop argued, "seeing it is one of their tenets, that it is not possible their opinions, and externall peace can stand together; and that the difference betweene them and us is (as they say) as wide as between Heaven and Hell."

Winthrop concluded that disturbing unity was not only seditious, but also impaired normal functions of society, such as trade, commerce, and farming—anything that required peaceful intercourse between neighbors. Other magistrates agreed. In its March 1637/38 session the General Court officially banished Hutchinson and gave licenses to depart to nineteen others implicated in the controversy. It endorsed an April day of humiliation "in the severall churches, to intreate the help of God in the weighty matters wch are in hand, & to divert any evill plots wch may bee intended." In May the Court confirmed a law "against intertaining any above 3 weeks without licence," an order aimed at preventing "opinionists" from increasing their numbers by immigration.

By expressing her belief in the "indwelling Holy Spirit," revelation, and prophecy, Mrs. Hutchinson crossed the New England Puritan line between orthodoxy and heresy, a

68 Thomas Welde's preface to Winthrop's Short Story in Antinomian Controversy, ed. Hall, 254, 296-99. In Wonder-Working Providence, Edward Johnson complained that the Hutchinsonians were threatening the orthodox "with the high displeasure of Christ for persecuting his people, which as they said these erronious persons with their new light, were the onely Men and Women that were pure Gospell Preachers. Thus the poore people of Christ, who kept close to his antient truths invernoned with many straitnes, having expended their Estates to voyage far through the perilous Seas, that their eyes might behold their Teachers, and that they might injoy the protection of a godly civill Government, began to deeme themselves in a more dolorous condition then when they were in the Commissiaries Court, and Prelates Prisons . . . ."
(101).


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division that was subtler in the England of her youth and of her father's maturity. Her candid expressions had cost her the support not only of the two score recanting members of the so-called "Wheelwright party," but also of John Cotton. During the General Court session of November 1637, Cotton protested that he had informed Hutchinson that "I was very sorry that she put comparisons between my ministry and their's [his fellow ministers], for she had said more than I could myself, and rather I had that she had put us in fellowship with them and not have made that discrepancy." He rejected outright Hutchinson's belief in revelations without support from Scripture, noting that he "look[ed] at it as a delusion."  

70  By the time the Boston church convened to consider Hutchinson's excommunication in March 1638, Cotton was in step with other Bay colony clerics, and most adamantly tried to dissuade his pupil from her heretical position on "union with Christ" and the prophetic abilities that it brought her. 71 His best efforts failed, as the church added excommunication to Hutchinson's sentence of civil banishment. On 28 March 1638, she departed Massachusetts and headed south to the island of Aquidneck in

70 "The Examination of Mrs. Hutchinson," in Antinomian Controversy, ed. Hall, 334, 342.

Narragansett Bay, where her husband and other supporters had already established a settlement called Pocasset.

Eighteen of the nineteen men who set up a government on the northern end of Aquidneck had close ties to Mrs. Hutchinson and had suffered for their theological views while in Massachusetts. Four—William Aspinwall, William Balston, John Coggeshall, and Edward Hutchinson, Sr.—had received the maximum civil penalty, having been disarmed, disfranchised, and banished. Henry Bull and Philip Sherman were both excommunicated from the Roxbury church and forced to surrender their weapons; additionally, Bull was disfranchised and Sherman ordered banished. Five others suffered multiple punishments, while four more were banished or disarmed.72

The government established by the "Pocasset compact" likely was framed by three or four of the most influential "Antinomians" who, incidently, had held positions of power in the Bay Colony and were less attached than other founders to the extreme notions of Mrs. Hutchinson. Though outnumbered by the Hutchinsonians, this group enjoyed power

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72 Pocasset Compact, 7 March 1637/38, RICR I: 52. The eighteen Hutchinsonians who established Pocasset were William Aspinwall, William Balston, Henry Bull, Richard Carder, John Clarke, William Coddington, John Coggeshall, William Dyer, William Freeborn, Edward Hutchinson, Sr., Edward Hutchinson, Jr., William Hutchinson, John Porter, John Sanford, Thomas Savage, Philip Sherman, John Walker, and Samuel Wilbore. Only Randall Holden appears not to have been involved in the Antinomian controversy. See also Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 300-328.
initially as a result of economic and social status. The probable author of the agreement, William Aspinwall, had come to Massachusetts with Winthrop, served as a deputy and Boston selectman, and during the Antinomian Controversy drafted the petition in favor of Wheelwright. He never expressed sympathy with Hutchinson; rather, within two years he had petitioned for return to the Bay Colony. John Coggeshall similarly refrained from too close an association with Mrs. Hutchinson, having only questioned the evidence during her examination before the General Court. He, like Aspinwall, had served as a deputy and Boston selectman and had collected signatures for Wheelwright. Neither he nor Aspinwall had been ardent defenders of Hutchinson, but had been disarmed, disfranchised, and banished nonetheless.73

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73 Mass. Recs., I: 205, 207, 223, 338. Aspinwall, who was secretary of the Pocasset colony, spent barely six months in Rhode Island. By early 1639 he had made his way back to Boston, where Cotton noted that Mr. Aspinwall had become "satisfied of the Righteous and just proceedings of the Church in castiging out some of our members and soe refuseth to have any Communion with them in the thinges of God." Early in 1642 Aspinwall had come full circle, making "a very free and full acknowledgment of his error and seducement, and that with much detestation of his sin." This recantation represented a brief pause for Aspinwall who, by 1651, supported the Fifth Monarchy movement in England, which advocated government by the letter of the Bible in expectation of the return and temporal rule of King Jesus. See Pocasset General Meetings, 13 May 1638, and 2 January 1638/39, RICR I: 53, 64, 66; "Proceedings of the Boston Church against the Exiles," in Antinomian Controversy, ed. Hall, 393; WJ, II: 56; Miller, "Protestantism and Politics," 29; and William Aspinwall, A Brief Description of the Fifth Monarchy or Kingdome, that shortly is to come into the World (London, 1653). On Coggeshall as a primary backer of Wheelwright, see Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 146.
The first compact signatory and chief magistrate in the new government, William Coddington, similarly clung to "the Word" over Hutchinson's emphasis of spiritual gifts. His defense of Hutchinson during her civil trial, though more vigorous than Coggeshall's, revealed that his sympathies clearly did not lie with revelation and prophecy. Coddington argued that private religious meetings were legitimate, invoked the rule against judges simultaneously acting as accusers, and paused to agree with Hutchinson's mild assertion that the apostles preached the Covenant of Grace after being filled with the Spirit. He never strayed from biblical texts; in maintaining that "there is no truth in scripture but God bears witness to it by his spirit," Coddington claimed ground identical to Cotton: that the veracity of all personal revelations were to be tested by their comparisons to the Bible. Coddington was one of three members of the General Court who did not vote for the banishment of Hutchinson, but he clearly did not concur with her most extreme religious claims.74

That Coddington, Aspinwall, and Coggeshall held only lukewarm affection for Hutchinson's teachings helps explain the Mosaic, legalistic form of the Pocasset government. The nineteen signers of the compact agreed "in the presence of Jehovah" to "incorporate ourselves into a Bodie Politick and

74 See "The Examination of Mrs. Hutchinson," in Antinomian Controversy, ed. Hall.
as he shall help, will submit our persons, lives and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and to all those perfect and most absolute laws of his given us in his holy word of truth, to be guided and judged thereby." In the margins the scribe of the group scrawled the citations to three Old Testament verses, all of which expounded the value of maintaining the Covenant with God, divine law, and unity. The settlers elected Coddington "Judge" over them "and so covenant to yield all due honour unto him according to the lawes of God, and so far as in us lyes to maintaine the honour and privileges of his place which shall hereafter be ratiftyed according unto God, the Lord helping us so to do." God's written law—not the fancies of a contemporary prophet or prophetess—was clearly important to the framers and signatories of the agreement; of the nineteen, seven had pledged to uphold a similar creed as officers in the Bay Colony, while another two had risen to positions of authority and responsibility in their towns.75

75 RICR I: 52-53. William Balston had served as ensign and Boston town selectman, Coddington had been colony treasurer, assistant and deputy, as well as a selectman, Edward Hutchinson, Sr. had been a sergeant and assessor for Boston, William Hutchinson held deputy and selectman positions, John Sanford had worked as a canoneer and selectman, Thomas Savage had been elected captain in the Bay Colony militia, and Samuel Wilbore had served on the jury of the court of trials and as Boston assessor. See Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 304-307.
This allegiance to the Massachusetts system was reflected in early efforts to establish a congregation in the new settlement. Coddington's group sought out Wheelwright for its pastor and, after laying out lands and establishing a militia, ordered "that the Meeting House shall be set on the neck of Land that goes over to the Maine of the Island." Authorities in Boston took special note of—and were quick to find fault in—Pocasset's efforts to replicate Bay Colony churches. Perhaps with some exaggeration, Winthrop observed that the group of exiles met regularly in an irregularly gathered church at the northern end of Aquidneck island. In February 1638/39, the Boston Church sent a committee of three to Pocasset to determine the religious state there. Even after entertaining the Boston group, Coggeshall, Aspinwall, and Coddington respectfully demanded to know "what power one church hath over an other church," indicating that Pocasset supported its own, independent congregational polity in the same tradition as other New England Puritans. Pastor of the

76 John Callender noted that the leaders of Pocasset had made overtures toward Wheelwright; see his Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode Island (Boston, 1739), 62; and Sydney V. James, "Creation of Institutions," typescript mss., RIHS, 55. The meeting house order was among the first that the original nineteen settlers made; see Pocasset General Meeting, 13 May 1638, RICR I: 54; Chapin, Documentary History II: 35-36; and "Island Records," 3, Archives of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Providence, RI.

77 WJ, II: 14; James, "Creation of Institutions," 55.
Boston church John Wilson would not deny that, under the leadership of prominent exiles, the settlers "ha[d] gathered them selves into church fellowship," but noted that they had done so without regard to "the Covenant that they have made with this church" and, unfortunately, continued to have "constant fellowship" with excommunicated people "in a church way." Cotton concurred, observing that Aquidneck church members "doe honor and esteeeme of us as Churches of Christ," but that the "legality" of the island congregation was questionable since most of its members had not sought proper release from the covenant of the Boston church. But while criticizing the particulars of ecclesiastical organization, Wilson and Cotton did not question the intent of the exiles to establish a church in line with the ones they had known in Massachusetts.78

The religious and political configuration of Pocasset began to change, however, as greater numbers of Hutchinson's more ardent supporters came to Aquidneck. By April 1639, at least thirty people who had been influenced by Antinomianism in Massachusetts had joined the original nineteen settlers. This latter group, however, differed from the town's founders in the relative poverty, lack of Bay Colony political influence, and more obvious heterodoxy of its members. Because they were far from wealthy, most rank-and-


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file Hutchinsonians had a difficult time settling their estates in Massachusetts and so were slower to come to the Narragansett region. As a result, when the group of thirty is divided further—into pre- and post-August 1638 arrivals—the pattern becomes clearer. A total of thirteen came prior to that date. Of these, five had backgrounds remarkably similar to the framers of the Pocasset government, having held colonial offices, possessing extraordinary financial resources, or both. 79 On the contrary, of the seventeen who came later, only Jeremy Clarke had held office in the Bay Colony, having been chosen town constable once, and none of the group had extensive material holdings. More importantly, the late-comers appear to have been predisposed to Hutchinson's radical inclinations. Robert Potter, who first appears in the Pocasset records in late April 1639, had been excommunicated from the Roxbury church for espousing "strange opinions." But most appear not to have been able to produce the conversion narrative necessary to join Bay Colony churches. Only seven of the first thirty-two settlers of Pocasset were

79 RICR I: 53-70; Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 300-328. William Brenton, Robert Harding, and John Spencer all held both local and colonial offices and had substantial estates, Richard Dummer held a number of colony-wide positions and great wealth, while Stephen Dummer is classified among Battis's "richer sort."
not churched, while fifteen of seventeen of those arriving after August 1638 were similarly disposed. 80

By late April 1639, then, the Hutchinsonians had sufficient numbers to mount a successful coup in Pocasset. Instrumental to the effort were those to whom Mrs. Hutchinson's emphasis on personal, experiential religion appealed: the unchurched (and hence unfranchised) and the relatively poor, who sought a "faire and easie way to heaven," one that bypassed the requirements of orthodox polities. Fourteen of the twenty-nine framers of a new Pocasset government had been implicated in the Antinomian controversy. Only three, Anne Hutchinson's husband William, Richard Maxson, and the excommunicate Robert Potter had earned church membership in Massachusetts, and of the entire group, only Hutchinson had political experience, first as a Bay Colony magistrate and then as one of the freemen in Coddington's government. 81 Within six months the more radical group added to its ranks seven new settlers, three of whom were staunch followers of Mrs. Hutchinson's

80 Other than Potter, the only church member among the later arrivals was Richard Maxson, who earned membership in the Boston church in 1634. See Records of the First Church in Boston, ed. Pierce; and Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 325.

81 Pocasset Meeting, 30 April 1639, RICR I: 70; ERP, 9. For specificity, page citations for the Portsmouth records are from the originals.
unorthodox religious views. 82 One of these, Richard Hawkins, came with his wife Jane, a "rank familist" and friend of Hutchinson who, while in England in 1629, had prophesied the downfall of the Anglican church and its bishops. A midwife whom Winthrop suspected of witchcraft, Hawkins had been ordered by the Bay Colony General Court in March 1637/38 "not to meddle in surgery, or phisick, drinks, plaisters, or oyles, nor to question matters of religion," and was later banished for disobeying the injunction. 83 The other two, Thomas Waite and John Albro, like the Hawkinses, were excluded from church membership in Massachusetts and believed in individual, divine revelation. 84

The appearance in Aquidneck of increasing numbers of Hutchinsonians initiated a struggle that would continue on the island for almost two decades. As more radical Antinomians pushed their individual spiritual views to extremes and demanded the right to do so, the Coddington faction responded by moving closer to the "orthodox"

82 The new settlers were John Vane, Richard Hawkins, Thomas Slaid, Thomas Waite, Edward Fisher, John Albro, and John Pane. See Portsmouth Town Meetings, July and December 1639, ERP, 12-13; RICR I: 72-74.


84 Albro came to Pocasset as a servant to William Freeborn and within two decades joined his master as a leading Quaker on Rhode Island. Thomas Wait likewise joined the local Friends meeting. See Austin, Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island, 234-35, 404-405.
position of Massachusetts. Still under admonition in Boston and unable to find common ground immediately with the new leaders of Pocasset, Coddington and his allies removed to the southern part of the island, established the settlement of Newport, and reconstructed a near theocracy. Though once defined as a single group in the Bay colony, in Rhode Island the "Antinomians" soon revealed that their movement had many branches and beliefs. Living as they did in close proximity to one another, the challenge for these individuals was to coexist, somehow, in peace.

The Antinomian devolution in Aquidneck was similar, in many ways, to that in the Providence settlement. Both increased the religious diversity of the Narragansett region—as Massachusetts authorities had predicted—but did so in different ways. Williams's group, though initially fairly uniform, was bound by English Separatist thought to accept into the Providence community individuals of all spiritual persuasions. Radical Antinomians in Rhode Island were prepared to accept the fruits of personal revelation from the beginning, bringing their ideas with them from England or learning that doctrine from Anne Hutchinson in Boston. Island residents who followed Coddington, as a group, also added diversity to the region and had long-standing ties to "orthodox" Puritan leadership. The two factions continued in Rhode Island a century-long argument over the relative merits of spirit and law, across a divide
well known in Puritan England. As in Providence, then, the problem that residents of Pocasset and Newport faced was how to forge an orderly society from diverse religious constituencies.
CHAPTER 3

THE ECLECTIC SAMUEL GORTON: ENGLISH INFLUENCES AND THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF SHAWOMET

The thought of English Separatists and General Baptists clearly had an effect upon Roger Williams, and Anne Hutchinson may be characterized as a radical Antinomian, but the third religious leader to arrive in the Narragansett region, Samuel Gorton, cannot be defined so simply. His works from the 1640s and 1650s suggest the confluence of many theological influences. Like Williams, Gorton certainly had become familiar with Separatism and various strains of Anabaptism prior to his removal from England. He knew well—and to some extent sympathized with—Puritan views. Gorton and his followers were unique among New England religious radicals, however, in their blending of various nonconformist traditions with mysticism. Gorton constantly referred to the "mystic body of Christ," rejected attempts to characterize Jesus historically, and ridiculed "worldly" governments—especially in the New World—as unfit. The "Gortonists" or "Gortonogues," as they were often called, borrowed bits of theology and ecclesiology from almost every conceivable English source. Thus, more
than any other group, Gorton and his followers perhaps belonged in the wilderness of southern New England; their eclectic beliefs made them misfits everywhere in the New World.

Gorton expressed clearly, however, his admiration for English law. In New England he challenged Plymouth authorities' right to try one of his servants, arguing that the colony's charter did not establish appropriate, traditional legal institutions. In Rhode Island Gorton accused William Coddington of treason, suggesting that the Newport judge attempted to rule as a tyrant by withholding English law books from residents. Gorton rejected legal proceedings against Francis Hutchinson in Massachusetts, noting that the defendant had been imprisoned on the basis of evidence given in a church—not a civil—trial. Moreover, in all of their tussles with the Bay colony, Gorton and his followers invoked the "antient statute laws" of England.

For Gorton and the other Narragansett residents, this devotion to English law and custom was closely connected to their heterodoxy. Many residents of Providence and the Rhode Island communities had adopted an important opinion of early seventeenth-century London Separatists and Baptists: that their unconventional spiritual ideas did not necessarily make them disloyal to the government. These sectarians sought to underscore their fidelity to the
English nation precisely because the King and local officials saw their conventicles as seditious. For exiles in the New England wilderness with neither a charter nor established legal institutions, the same was true. Narragansett settlers, unlike the founders of Massachusetts, had no specific religious, reforming mission, and thus were more inclined to accept English codes over biblical strictures. They held diverse spiritual notions, and the law of their native land was a common denominator around which to establish orderly communities.

Gorton's writings in particular reveal a worldly, political side common to the residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Because the Puritan response to him centered on his "heretical" doctrines, most treatments of Gorton since the seventeenth century have focused upon his theological extremism, his "radicalism," to the exclusion of his career as a tactician and political strategist. An expert in the use of history to achieve tangible goals, Gorton carefully recorded his interpretations of events and studied his English audience which, increasingly, encompassed individuals in government with the same sectarian backgrounds. Like many late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Protestant reformers, Gorton preferred to be guided in his exegesis by the Holy Spirit and refused to fix a specific meaning to religious texts; in contrast, he believed law and history could be determined with some
certainty. Gorton's world, then, was that of the radical London conventicles, where individuals expounded on Scripture as the Spirit moved them, but were aware of their political situations and rights under English law.

Gorton's ecclesiological indefinability and his cryptic, arcane writings have put off historians and potential biographers. Relatively little scholarly work has been done on Gorton and the followers he inspired, and much of what exists is outdated and slanted toward the views of Puritan critics. Recently, though, thanks to the work of Philip Gura and Barbara Ritter Dailey, Gorton's life and ideas have been brought to the surface of the often-murky waters of New England religious radicalism. As a result, Gorton's connections to General Baptist conventicles in England in the late 1640s and the impact of his later works on New World Puritanism are much better understood. What is lacking in the historiography is some explanation of the impact that possible early, English influences had upon Gorton's settlement and various resettlements in the New World. Placing Gorton in transatlantic context helps to explain his later political successes in civil war and Interregnum England.

Little is known about his early life, but judging by his own family and that of his wife, Samuel Gorton had a strong Anglican background. He was born and baptized in the parish of Gorton, England, just outside of present-day Manchester, around 1592. There, according to Gorton, "the fathers of my body had dwelt for generations."2 His family appears to have been relatively wealthy and prestigious. His father was a well-to-do merchant and member of a guild, indicating the family's good standing in the community and its ties to the national church.3 His father's socioeconomic status both enabled the younger Gorton to avoid "any servile employment until he settled in the colonies" and allowed him to live in his father's home until about age thirty, when he was able to establish himself as a clothier in London. There, he married Mary Maplet, daughter of John Maplet, a "gentleman" of St. Martin's LeGrand, and Maplet's educated and cultured wife, who had been "as tenderly brought up as any man's wife in the town."4

2 Gorton cited in Brown, Rhode Island's Tercentenary, 70.

3 Guilds, since the time of their medieval origins, were connected to the national religion; this trend continued through the Reformation, as guilds helped maintain and decorate the buildings of the Church of England.

Samuel Gorton's brother-in-law was staunchly Anglican John Maplet of Bath, who had earned his B.A., M.A., and M.D. degrees at Oxford, and was elected one of that university's preceptors.5 By both birth and marriage, then, Gorton maintained strong ties to the Church of England through about 1622.

Sometime after 1622, when he moved to London, however, Gorton shied away from the Anglicanism of his father and in-laws, establishing himself as a renegade who propounded doctrines unacceptable to the hierarchy of the national church. In a letter to Edmund Calverly of London authored late in 1642, Gorton recalled that he had been the victim of "unjust and unrighteous cases" in his homeland and hoped that his fellow English women and men would "bless themselves with hopes of freedom and reformation." He urged his London contacts to press for reformation of religion and society or face the consequences of "bondage and utter desolation, under which they [shall] sit as the shadow of death."6

46 (1892): 153, 51 (1897): 199; Deed to Samuel Gorton, PTP 013, RIHS.

5 Adelos Gorton, Life and Times of Samuel Gorton (Philadelphia, PA: George S. Ferguson Co., 1907), 12. In 1647 Maplet became principal of Gloucester Hall (now Worcester College), but within a year fled England as a nobleman's tutor, returning to Oxford at the Restoration; see also Maplet's entry in DNB 12: 998.

6 Samuel Gorton to Edmund Calverly, Warwick, 8 November 1642, Miscellaneous Manuscripts G-688, RIHS.
Like Williams, some of Gorton's unpopular doctrines were likely influenced by his geography. Arriving in London in the early 1620s, Gorton made his home in the northwestern part of the old city, near Smithfield and within the ancient wall, a portion of town known for Newgate gaol, which housed Separatist and Baptist prisoners during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the 1590s and early 1600s, this less-than-one-half-square-mile area contained the greatest concentration of Barrowist congregants in England. In 1592, Francis Johnson established the first Separatist church in London, at the home of "Mr. Fox" in St. Nicholas Lane, and saw the congregation through several rounds of depositions taken by members of the Anglican hierarchy. Fully half of the

7 Gorton married into the Maplet family of St. Martin LeGrand and almost certainly stayed there, since in his letter of 8 November 1642 to Edmund Calverly "at his house by the east end of Christ Church in Newgate market. London" he discusses his neighborhood near "the Mitre in Wood Street," less than 1500 feet from both Newgate and St. Martin LeGrand.

8 For the purposes of this discussion, roughly the northwest quadrant of old London, bounded on the north by Smithfield and the Cripplegate portion of London Wall, on the east by Coleman Street, on the south by Cheapside-Paternoster corridor, and the west by the old wall running from Ludgate to Newgate.

9 These included Christopher Bowman and John Nicholas, both of Smithfield, John Barnes of "Ducklane," Richard Rogers and Jeremy Manwood, both of Whitecross street, along with Edward Gyles, George Knifton of Newgate market, George Johnson, a schoolmaster in St. Nicholas Lane, and Christopher Simkins and Thomas Farret, both of Aldersgate street. See the deposition list of Francis Johnson's congregation in Burrage, Early English Dissenters 1, 146-48.
deponents whose London addresses can be discerned resided in Smithfield and the northwest quadrant, and Johnson's church usually met in the region.10 When Church of England authorities ferreted out the meetings in April 1593, congregation members, including Johnson himself, were jailed in local prisons, including the "Counter in Woodstreete," and Newgate.11

From Johnson's congregations in Gorton's neighborhood came a number of lay preachers in the 1620s and 1630s who emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Richard Rogers, who headed a congregation in "Blew-Anchor-Alley," a quarter mile from Gorton's London home, purported to speak "nothing but that which the spirit gives him utterance for." Jeremy Manwood of nearby Goat Alley and Edward Gyles of Checker Alley similarly preached once or twice a month against the evils of the world, while a

Members of a later, major conventicle near St. Giles Cripplegate, Philippa Cowlake, Frances Greene, and Martha Elliott, were also interrogated. See Burrage, Early English Dissenters, II: 323-24.

10 Seventeen of thirty-four congregation members who lived in London lived in the northwest; see Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 146-48. Johnson's church was known to have fifteen meeting places, nine of which were in the same region. See Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 145.

11 Huge numbers of Separatists were interned in Newgate; see Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 71, 123, 133, 153 (for a list of Barrowist prisoners), II: 45-47. Johnson "was first committed to the Counter in Woodstrete by the Sherif of London . . . beinge taken in an assembly in St Nicholas Lane," and was imprisoned there with parishioners George Bryty and Thomas Hewet. See Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 154, II: 56.
button-maker in the area named Marler preached more regularly, arguing that anyone may assume the pulpit so long as she or he had a calling from the Spirit. Welshman Charles Thomas held a conventicle every two weeks in Warwick Lane, just around the corner from Gorton's haunts in Newgate market and insisted that prophesiers be "devout men" who were "familiar with the Spirit."12 The neighborhood was similarly inundated by members of the Family of Love, who felt an affinity for liturgical changes occurring within the Church of England that stressed the mysterious workings of God within individuals.13

Indeed, London's established churches spearheaded a movement toward a mystical view of Christ. Spurred on by the high church proclivities of Charles I, Anglican theologians like Lancelot Andrewes gained popularity in the 1620s by preaching "adoration, self-surrender, and blessing" and the union of human souls with Christ through ordinances. A shift toward Anglo-Catholic ceremony swept through

12 These gatherings are enumerated in a pamphlet called The Brownists Synagogue, printed in 1641 and cited in Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 205-206.

13 Interestingly, during Laud's ascendency members of the Family of Love in London were not heavily persecuted, perhaps because, theologically, "the Laudian preference for human free will over strict predestination was in harmony with the Family's own stance. The fellowship's members, moreover, would have been willing to conform to Laud's new ceremonial requirements," and the increasing slant to mysticism. See Marsh, Family of Love in English Society, 241-45. For the membership and views of the Family of Love in London, see Stephen Denison, The white wolf ... (London, 1627), 38-43.
London's parishes, as the Crown encouraged the installation of vicars trained in the "mysteries of Christ." The clerical composition of the parishes in northwest London during the 1620s and early 1630s suggests that Gorton was surrounded by separatists and by Anglicans who preached spiritual unity with Jesus and the presence of God's spirit in all individuals.14

Gorton could not avoid General Baptist congregations in the area either. Like Roger Williams, Gorton came to spiritual maturity among the notorious characters of Newgate prison, including early General Baptist leaders Thomas Helwys and John Murton, who were housed there in the 1610s. Between Newgate market and Coleman street a half mile to the east, Murton's followers concentrated themselves, transcribing his Humble Supplication near the prison in 1620 and establishing congregations in the area thereafter. Considering the views he espoused immediately upon his arrival in Massachusetts and then Plymouth, chances are good that Gorton had already explored General Baptist beliefs.

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while in London, something he could readily do given their presence in his neighborhood.15

On a number of important doctrinal issues, Gorton's early ideas and those of Helwys and Murton are identical. All three rejected Calvin's notion that a few were destined to go to Heaven, agreeing that Christ's sacrifice applied to all people who were willing to accept it. They stressed that infant baptism was illegitimate, that only "believer's baptism" marked those bound for Heaven. Gorton and the early English General Baptists agreed that any gathering of these believers—whether it selected a minister and officers or not—constituted a congregation with the power to pray and prophesy, and that men and women were equal in their abilities to convey the messages of the Holy Spirit. Helwys, Murton, and Gorton advocated freedom of worship, unfettered by officials of any established church and criticized Puritan ministers for seeking out lucrative preaching positions.16

15 Murton was called "a Teacher of a Church of the Anabaptists in Newgate"; John Graunt, Truths Victory against Heresie (London, 1645), 19. See Tolmie, Triumph of the Saints, 69-77; Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 251-76.

16 Helwys's clearest expressions of doctrine are found in An Advertisement or admonition, unto the Congregation ([Amsterdam?], 1611), and A Short Declaration of the mistery of iniquity (London, 1612). See Murton's A Most Humble Supplication (London, 1620), Objections Answered by way of Dialogue (London, 1615), and A Discription of What God Hath Predestined (London, 1620). Gorton's views are described in greater depth below.
Moreover, while Gorton held to the separation of religious and civil spheres, he also adopted Murton and Helwys's view that English law and custom was binding on all the king's subjects regardless of their doctrinal beliefs. Because they rejected the state church and argued for complete religious freedom, the General Baptists were constantly fending off accusations of treason, and thus labored to make their loyalty to the Crown very clear in their writings. In a petition to Parliament in 1614 Helwys pleaded for his congregation's opportunity to take the Oath of Allegiance, which he claimed the bishops had withheld from them.17 While some of Helwys's flock conscientiously refused to become magistrates, they all recognized the necessity of a peaceful realm based on subjects' fidelity to the nation's leaders and laws. Other General Baptist authors consistently preaced their claims of persecution with declarations of loyalty.18 Throughout his career in New England, Gorton would make similar protests, which were unwelcome in American colonies that—as a result of their geographical distance—heded toward ideological separation from old England.

17 Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 255. See also Murton's Objections Answered by way of Dialogue (London, 1615).

18 See, for instance, Leonard Busher, Religions Peace: Or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience (London, 1646); and Burrage, Early English Dissenters, I: 275-80.
Feeling that his role as a "Professor of the Mysteries of Christ" was being infringed in England, Gorton wrote that, in 1636, "I left my native country to enjoy liberty of conscience in respect to faith toward God and for no other reason." Arriving in Boston in March 1636/37, his expectations of spiritual freedom were disappointed immediately. He found that Puritan doctrine in Massachusetts "was bent to maintain that outward form of worship which they had erected to themselves, tending only to the outward carriage of one man to another." Bay colony authorities, in Gorton's estimation, never encouraged the reformation of individuals from within; rather, each church sought "to bind men's consciences unto [them] as they had established amongst them." Right away Gorton rejected Puritan exclusivity in church membership and the colony's restraint of religious freedom, a principle that Murton and Helwys had so actively upheld in London.

Within three months of his arrival at Boston, Gorton removed to Plymouth hoping to find individuals who propounded doctrines similar to his own. Not surprisingly—considering the connections of many colony inhabitants to

19 Cited in RHSC II (1830): 42. See also Brown, Rhode Island's Tercentenary, 70-71. Gorton was apparently quite wealthy, and thus had no pressing economic motive for migration. His last legal entanglements in England were eliminated when John Dunkinfield of Chester released him from all actions and claims. See Gorton, Samuel Gorton, 12.

London's Separatist communities—Gorton found a number of ideological allies. Minister Ralph Smith's wife and other family members frequented Gorton's house in "morning and evening in the time of family exercises." Mrs. Smith noted that "her spirit was refreshed" by Gorton's preaching "in the ordinances of god as in former dayes"; in comparison, she viewed the Plymouth ministry of John Rayner as "much decayed and allmost wore out." 21 Gorton rode the tide of revival then sweeping New England, stressed the power of the Holy Spirit in individuals' lives, and reassured auditors that Christ had died for them all, regardless of their positions in worldly society. In doing so, he earned for himself both a huge following and staunch opposition. Congregation elders observed that Gorton had immediately begun "to sow such seed . . . whereby some were seduced." 22 They accused him of heresy, of espousing "blasphemous and Familistical Opinions," and of holding private meetings to spread them throughout the colony.

Plymouth authorities understandably looked upon Gorton's gathering of a congregation as a threat to the established order, but found some of his overt political notions even more unsettling. As Massachusetts leaders had learned from the Hutchinson episode, charismatic, unordained

21 Gorton to Nathaniel Morton, 30 June 1669, in Tracts and Other Papers, ed. Force, IV, no. 7, 12.

22 Ibid., 3-17; Edward Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked (London, 1646), 57.
women and men who encouraged experiential religion in large, voluntary groups, could be as dangerous as any external, armed force. But Gorton, as an avid student of English law and a persuasive advocate, challenged Plymouth in its courts as well. In November 1638 a rumor circulated that one of Gorton's servants, a widow named Ellen Aldridge, had smiled in church. Governor Thomas Prence called the woman before the court, which eventually declared her to be a vagabond and sentenced her to banishment. Gorton had appeared to defend her, arguing that the complaint was not recognized in English law, and thus was not prosecutable in Plymouth. For his pains, magistrates chided Gorton for deluding his servant and ordered him to answer contempt charges in following court sessions.23

By late 1638 Gorton was swimming against both the spiritual and temporal tides in Plymouth. In November he pledged "good behavior towards o[u]r said souaigne lord the King, & all his leige people" and promised to appear the following month at the General Court. When he came before the magistrates, however, Gorton reportedly referred to the governor as "Satan" and "in a seditious manner turned himselfe to the people and said, with his armes spread abroad; Yee see good people how yee are abused! Stand for

23 Aldridge had been ordered to appear "to answere to all such matters as on his maties behalf shalbe objected against her, and shee did willfully absent herself, & was conveyed away by the meanes and help of Mr Samuell Gorton & his wyfe, . . ." Ply. Recs., I: 100.
your liberty; And let them not bee parties and judges."24 Gorton, "for his misdemeanors in the open Court towards the elders, the Bench, & stirring up the people to mutynie in the face of the Court" was fined twenty pounds, and required to post sureties for his good behavior "during the tyme he shall remayne at Plymouth, which is limitted by the Court to xili dayes."25

Before his banishment, Gorton was able to convince one Plymouth resident with a long mystical and Separatist past to join him. In 1635, John Wickes had departed his home in Staines, Middlesex, just west of London, arriving in New England in November aboard the Hopewell. Traveling with him were his wife Mary, daughter Anne, and four in-laws, the Withie family. Likely Wickes' father-in-law was Henry Wyther, a shipwright from Depford Strand, London, who had

24 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 62.

25 Ply. Recs. I: 105-106; Morton, New Englands Memoriall, 108. In the Aldridge case, Gorton--like his English General Baptist predecessors--insisted that the civil and religious realms remain separate and admitted that only English law strictly interpreted could maintain order in colonies thousands of miles away. But Plymouth's leaders, though indicating in their compact that the colony would remain loyal to the King and his codes, had moved toward an ecclesiastical and political system more like that of Massachusetts. Whereas pre-1638 Plymouth had required a freeman's oath to the King, and had mandated that its governor be chosen directly by the votes of the freemen, after 1638 the colony's laws were revised to decrease the number of freemen and place the reins of government more firmly in the hands of the magistrates. At the same time, Plymouth's legal codes were modified to reflect New World conditions and the colony's accepted religious doctrines. See Ply. Recs. I: 61; John Gorham Palfrey, History Of New England, 5 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1858-75), I: 546.
been "perswaded . . . by the teachinge of Johnson and Greenwood" in the Barrowist meetings at St. Nicholas Lane, Islington, Smithfield, and in "the wood by Detford."26 Wickes himself came from a similarly disposed family. His father Thomas Wickes was a member of Enoch Clapham's Barrowist congregation-in-exile known for its mystic inclinations.27 Thus, the first loyal "Gortonist" was not uninitiated in the ways of Samuel Gorton's thought.

Leaving Plymouth, Gorton, Wickes, and an additional disciple, Randall Holden, found a home on Aquidneck, an island divided between the mystical and more conservative Antinomian exiles from Massachusetts. When Gorton's group arrived, Anne Hutchinson's cadre was struggling with the newly-formed government of Pocasset under the "judgeship" of William Coddington. They opposed Coddington's campaign to establish a biblical commonwealth on Aquidneck run by the strictures of Old Testament—not English—law and to fuse civil and religious spheres. Gorton and his followers immediately sympathized with the more radical Antinomians, arguing for their right to worship as their consciences persuaded them. Like the English General Baptists, Gorton opposed the unnecessary linkage of public and private duties, explaining that the former were directed to the

26 Wyther's deposition, 4 April 1593, reprinted in Burrage, Early English Dissenters, II: 53.

27 Enoch Clapham, The Syn Against the Holy Ghoste . . . (Amsterdam, 1598).
sovereign and the latter to God. On that the Hutchinsonians and Gortonists agreed.28

Gorton's vehemence on the issue of conscience and religious expression led directly to a series of confrontations with Coddington's group over the locus of temporal authority. Coddington, acting on his background as a Massachusetts magistrate and devoted English reformer, was bound to conflict with Gorton, who had been influenced heavily by General Baptist protestations of loyalty to the English Crown. Thus, when Coddington and his deputy William Brenton held court in Portsmouth in an attempt to prove the legitimacy of their government, Gorton resisted. In one court session, Brenton himself made a complaint against one of Gorton's servants for trespassing and assault, and brought her before the court. Gorton, among others, rejected the authority of Brenton's magistracy, arguing that the town of Portsmouth was outside its jurisdiction.29

In the argument that followed, Coddington and Gorton—each relying upon very different traditions and experiences—appealed to English authority. While the former Bay colony official approached the situation as a nonseparating congregationalist defending the head of the Church of

28 Brown, Rhode Island's Tercentenary, 72. For Gorton's relationship to Anne Hutchinson, see Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 324.

29 The episode is outlined in Thomas Lechford, Plain Dealing (London, 1642), 94-95.
England, Gorton viewed the case as English General Baptists would, protesting temporal loyalty despite rejection of Anglicanism. After a heated verbal exchange, a scuffle broke out, with Randall Holden, John Wickes, and others of Gorton's followers facing off against Coddington's guardsmen. Coddington reportedly shouted "You that are for the King, lay hold on Gorton," while Gorton retorted, "All you that are for the King, lay hold on Coddington."30 The bailiff finally controlled the renegade Gorton, jailed him, and placed his disciple Wickes in stocks. Coddington, "because of some fore-going jealousies" between himself and the Gortonists, continued "to command a guard of armed men to preserve themselves and the peace of the place."31 After the grand jury presented him on fourteen counts of contempt and resistance to the law, Gorton argued self-defense, explaining that magistrates "broke into our houses in a violent way of hostility, abusing our wives and our little ones." Coddington's forces had taken such extralegal action, Gorton claimed, not to seize arms but "to take from us the volumes wherein [the laws of our native country] are preserved; thinking thereby to keep us ignorant of the courses they are resolved to run."32 Thus, in Gorton's view, Aquidneck's codes were not consistent with the laws

30 Lechford, Plain Dealing, 95.
31 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 53.
32 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 80-81.
of England; as a subject of King Charles, then, he was not bound by them. Gorton complained that Rhode Islanders "have denied in their public courts that the laws of our native country should be named amongst them." He observed that the magistrates were merely "a company of gross and dissembling hypocrites," who jailed residents for expressing "those ancient statute laws . . . thinking thereby to keep us ignorant of the courses they are resolved to run, that so vitiosity [viciousness] of their own wills might be a law unto them." 33 The court, claiming its actions were in accord with English law and custom, tried and convicted Gorton, and sentenced him to a whipping and banishment. 34

In years that followed, Gorton continued to complain about the antilegalism of the early Aquidneck government. He wrote to Nathaniel Morton that he was not afraid of how history would judge his trial since "I perceive what manner of honor you put upon me in Rhode Island, which the actors may be ashamed of, and you to be the herald." He assured his correspondent that "I have been silent of these things done at Plymouth and Rhode Island and elsewhere, and am still in many respects, but have not forgotten them." While suspecting that some of his adversaries in Plymouth were

33 Ibid.

34 Dennis O'Toole argues that the Aquidneck judicial system in fact mirrored the quarter courts of England, and-- in the Gorton case, for the most part--proceeded like any English court would have; "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 213. See also Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 51-55.
instigators of events in Aquidneck, Gorton recognized that Plymouth "had commission wherein authority was derived, which authority I reverenced; but Rhode Island at that time had none; therefore, no authority legally derived to deal with me; neither had they the choice of the people, but set up themselves." Gorton maintained this logic throughout his life: colonial sovereignty was to be derived from the consent of the English government; absent that, settlers—as subjects of King Charles—were still bound by the laws and judicial procedures of England. Coddington, Gorton argued, had neither a commission from England nor the consent of a majority of freemen.

What Gorton perceived to be illegal actions on Coddington's part further factionalized the island religiously. The scene at the court did not help matters. After Gorton had been whipped, some of his followers observed that "now Christ Jesus had suffered." Gorton himself "ran a good way after the Governour, drawing a chaine after one of his legs, the upper part of his body being still naked, and told him [Coddington], He had but

35 During and after the trial, Gorton "charged the Court with acting the second part of Plymouth Magistrates"; Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 55. Moreover, Gorton contended, "some of Plimouth then in place" met secretly at Taunton with a party from Aquidneck and "were instigators of the Island" in its proceedings against him, suggesting that perhaps the case against Gorton's maid was simply a pretext to get rid of Gorton and his faction. See Gorton to Morton, June 1669, in Tracts and Other Papers, ed. Force, IV, no. 7, 8.

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lent this, and hee should surely have it again."36 The punishment divided settlers and gave Gorton a forum both as a political renegade and as a "professor of the mysteries of Christ." Some island residents uttered "some reproachful Speches" against Coddington and believed that Gorton was being punished for his unorthodox spiritual views under the guise of civil stability.37 The trial episode and ensuing rifts within Aquidneck proved to be a boon for Gorton, who tripled his following as a result. Prior to Coddington's censure, Gorton had two loyal adherents, Randall Holden and John Wickes. By the time he had left the island he had gathered four more: Samson Shotten, Robert Potter, and Richard Carder--all of whom had supported Hutchinson in Massachusetts--as well as John More.38

From Aquidneck Gorton and his followers moved to the mainland and immediately challenged the spiritual leadership of Williams and of the Providence Baptists. There, though Gorton claimed a number of "converts" to his brand of mystic Anabaptism, the same unique theology that caused him to be cast out from Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Aquidneck, also made him a misfit in Providence. Williams, according to


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Edward Winslow, opposed Gorton's settlement in Providence because the firebrand and his band of outlaws from Aquidneck infected people with errors. But John Cotton reported that Gorton represented a significant threat to Williams's standing in the community since "friends of Mr. Williams were soone taken with that greater Light, which they conceived was held forth by Mr. Gorton."39 Williams himself noted Gorton's censureship of "all the Ministers of this Country and also [his] denying all visible and external ordinances in depth of Familisme, against which I have a little disputed and written, and shall (the most High assisting) to death."40 By spring 1641, Gorton had convinced "almost halfe of them" at Providence of the validity of his views and was preaching "thrice a weake" in town, drawing by far the largest audiences of any preacher in the area.41

Gorton's growing popularity as a preacher and his reputation for opposition to temporal authority worried even some of the most factious residents of Providence. Within a year, Gorton had convinced fourteen inhabitants—or roughly one-third of the adult male population of the town—to

39 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 54; Cotton, Reply to Mr. Williams, 15.

40 Williams to John Winthrop, 8 March 1641, CRW, 215.

follow his teachings. William Arnold surmised that many others were sympathizers and argued that if the Gortonists were accepted into the town fellowship there would follow "next a ruine of all such as are not of his side."42 His concerns were heightened when Providence proprietors Francis Weston and John Greene, along with Richard Waterman and Robert Cole, provided Gorton with land in town. Almost immediately, Gorton's opponents reported that "six or seven" inhabitants had signified their intentions to stay in Providence, but to withdrawal from the town's government. Arnold and other townsmen worried that these inhabitants would join the Gortonists in order "to have no manner of honest order, or government either over them or amongst them."43 These opponents feared Gorton initially for his success in the religious realm, but came to hate him for the political power he had come to wield as a result.

The way in which Gorton's religious ideas disrupted civil governance was demonstrated most clearly in the case of one of his most devout followers, Francis Weston. A former member of Williams's Salem Separatist group, Weston had been found liable in a November 1641 suit for the sum of fifteen pounds. Believing the judgment unjust, and perhaps

42 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 60; O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 313, 338.

43 Joshua Winsor et al to the Governor and Assistants of Massachusetts, 17 November 1641, in Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 56-7.
also doubting the legitimacy of the government itself, Weston refused to pay, prompting a contingent of townsmen to present him with a warrant authorizing the attachment of his cattle. "Samuel Gorton and his company," the Providence men reported, after receiving notice of the action "came and Quarrel'd with us in the streete and made a tumultuous Hubbub." After "some few drops of Blood wer[e] shedd on either-side," Weston summoned other Gortonists, who "came running & made a great outcry, and Halloeing, and crying Thieves, Thieves; Stealing Cattle, stealing Cattle, and so the whole number off their desperat Company Came Riotously running."44 In opposing the judgment of the Providence officials, Weston and the other Gortonists were acting upon their charismatic leader's teaching that they were the only New Englanders upholding English law and--more importantly--that they were being persecuted in worldly matters for Christ's sake. This latter theme had been commonly expressed in the radical, mystical conventicles of Gorton's London.

After the Weston episode, opponents complained more vigorously about Gorton's mystical teachings and his followers' ambivalences about temporal authority. The Providence men led by Joshua Winsor observed that

44 Providence to the Governor and Assistants of Massachusetts, Providence, 17 November 1641, Mss. from the Connecticut Archives, RIHS, I: 4-5.
if men should continue to resist all manner of order, and orderly answering one of another in different cases, they will suddenly practise, not only cunningly to deteine things one from another, but, openly in publike, justly or unjustly, according to their own wills disorderly take what they can come by. Because Gorton taught spiritual union with God and the inconsequence of material goods, his followers were "like savage brute beasts" who "will put no manner of difference between houses, goods, lands, wives, lives, blood, nor any thing will be precious in their eyes."45 They were subject to the spirit of God first and the English crown second, but would never feel allegiance to government in the wilds of America that they perceived to be "antichristian."

Some residents of Providence were so concerned about the situation that they sought advice from Massachusetts' political leaders and in fact obtained a warrant from them against Gorton. The Gortonists answered the resulting Bay colony document in an often ignored missive known as the "Pawtuxet letter."46 Relatively easy to overlook (but

45 Winsor et al. to Massachusetts, in Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 58.

46 The letter's cryptic nature has discouraged analysis of its theological content. Dennis O'Toole has examined what the letter meant for power relationships in the region, noting that "Their rather elliptically written missive was both a defense of their rights in and actions at Pawtuxet as well as a rambling discourse on the antichristian proceedings of the Arnolds and their more exalted sponsors and on the truth of the Gortonists' own
nonetheless significant), the letter is a confusing mixture of mystic theology and political taunts designed to deter Massachusetts from intervening in the region. The twelve signatories argued that the area's defectors to the Bay colony were self-interested and antichristian, that they abused the natives and broke land contracts.47 They defended their own rights as Englishmen; as a result their letter has often been viewed as simply a manifesto on community building and the Gortonists' peculiar notions of justice.

More than a political instrument, however, the Pawtuxet letter is the first known surviving expression of Gorton's theological and ecclesiological views. It provides ample evidence that his beliefs—and those of his followers—were taken in large part from the General Baptist and mystical, Separatist conventicles that dominated Gorton's London neighborhood. Most obviously, the Gortonists condemned their would-be Bay colony masters for their baptism of infants, noting that Puritan ministers ridiculed genuflecting and making the sign of the cross on the child's forehead, while themselves baptizing newborns, who "neither

peculiar religious opinions"; See "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 319. Joseph Felt referred to the Gortonist response as "irrelevant, unintelligible, and often offensive"; Ecclesiastical History I: 506. Even leading Gorton expert Philip F. Gura explains the letter in wholly political terms, devoting a single paragraph to it; Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 281.

47 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 66.
know God or Baptism." Gorton had been castigated for his "Anabaptistical tenents" as early as May 1641, but expressed them for the first time in writing in the Pawtuxet letter.

The Gortonists also explicitly rejected limited atonement. They ridiculed the Bay colony practice of presenting a conversion narrative for admission to the church and membership in the body of "visible saints." They explained that such an exercise merely encouraged hypocrisy, and "cast a reproach upon all the world in that you profess yourselves a choice people picked out of it." Massachusetts' ministers, they contended, rejected the eternal nature of Christ, and thus denied Jesus's ability to save souls prior to his appearance on earth. The Gortonists encouraged women and men to come to God on their own volition and held out the possibility that all could be saved.

Moreover, Gorton followed English General Baptist writers in his emphasis on millennialism and "deliverance"

48 Pawtuxet Letter, 20 November 1642, in Harrision S. Taft, "Tercentenary of Warwick, Rhode Island," Vol. 2, typescript mss., RIHS, 51. The following citations of the letter are from this manuscript.

49 Edward Winslow to John Winthrop, 24 May 1641, in Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 459.

50 Pawtuxet Letter, RIHS, 46.

51 Ibid., 38.
from the ills of the world. Constantly pointing out Massachusetts' fascination with the "law," the Gortonists proudly declared--via Old and New Testament parallels--that they would be spared the worldly judgments of the Bay colony in favor of greater glory. They were pleased "to have our condition conformed to Moses, the man of God who was dead in Pharoah's account, before he was brought forth," and likewise believed that their situation was comparable to the deliverance of Jesus. "And so it was with Christ our Lord," the Gortonists explained, "in the days of Herod also, who is our life, at which you strike and make all things, yea death itself, lively and advantageous unto us."52 They compared their "joy and gladness" at the imminent return of Christ with the "darkness and gloominess" that Massachusetts authorities could expect, noting that "the time of your fear is the time of our courage and conquest[,] For when ye fear error, schism, rents and confusions in Church and State, then do we know the messenger of the Covenant."53

At the same time, the Gortonists--like their Baptist and mystic counterparts in England--rejected educated ministers in favor of lay prophecy. The group's staunchest opponents discredited them as "unlearned men," and scoffed that "the ablest of them could not write true English," yet, in folly, "would take upon them[elves] to interpret the

52 Ibid., 41.
53 Ibid., 40.
most difficult places of Scripture."54 The Gortonists, however, wore their ignorance as a badge of honor, dealing with such criticisms in the same way that the English General Baptists had. They attacked the ministers of the Bay colony, arguing that Puritan pastors attempted to satisfy their congregations by their "submission unto the word of God, in your fasting and feasting, in contributing and treasuring, in retiredness for study, and bowing of the backs of the poor, going forth in labor to maintain it, and in the spirit of that hirling, raising up your whole structure and edifice: in all which you bring forth nothing but fruits unto death."55 The Massachusetts pastorate, by the Gortonists' estimation, had lost the "Light" of God's spirit by emphasizing worldly law. "Neither can you with all your libraries, give the interpretation there of," they charged, "but have lost it in the wilderness, and accordingly have made the whole way and will of our Lord, the oldness of the letter, both to yourselves and all that have an ear to listen unto you."56

The Gortonists favored instead lay prophecy filled with the "Light." They blasted the Massachusetts system for being centered upon mere human beings, "and not the Lord, crying out in the way of elevation, and lauding his

54 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 71.
55 Pawtuxet Letter, RIHS, 37.
56 Ibid., 40.

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ministers." Such educated pastors, Gorton and his disciples argued, made Jesus an ordinary, changing historical figure, effectively painting "the Son of God to have been that which now he is not, to make a nullity of him, not to be at all!,) For he is the Lord that changeth not." Lay preachers, Gorton contended, had no university training, and thus were more likely to look upon Jesus as an unchanging spiritual presence in the lives of Christians. Whereas "the Ministry of the Word [was] so monopolized" by educated men who interpreted Scripture "by the art, wisdome, and will of man, prostrating themselves thereunto," through lay preachers the Spirit of God "uttereth it selfe freely without respect of persons in all the Congregations and Assemblies of Saints."57 Indeed, to the Gortonists, an "Oracle of God" could be anyone "by whom hee is pleased" to preach the truth "for ye may all prophecy one by one for the edification of the Church."58

This anti-authoritarianism in religious matters transferred to "illegitimate" powers in the temporal realm, as the Gortonists rejected the government of Massachusetts as earthbound and spiritually bereft, and thus not worthy of respect. Characterizing the "life and power of the Son of God" as infinite, Gorton and his followers observed that the


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leaders of the Bay colony had "dared to grasp and environ that power in the heavens and therefore have resolved and concluded that he only rules upon the earth in these days, by his deputies, lieutenants and viceregents, whereby you limit and so destroy the Holy One of Israel." 59 As a result, since they depended largely upon supposed "contract[s] and covenants of God," Massachusetts' southward territorial claims were illegitimate. The Puritan colony's inhabitants, in the Gortonists' eyes, had been deceived by Satan, "communicat[ing] only in the light of that beast who puts the witnesses [for Christ] to death." 60 They admonished the General Court to "measure your kingdom whether it be eternal, and your jurisdiction, whether it be unlimited," and advised against unabashed--and undeserved--arrogance. 61

In particular, Gorton and his followers saw humans as spiritual equals, and contended that the Bay colony hierarchy was antichristian. "[W]e know," they declared, "that the greatest of the princes of this world hath the very same spirit wherewith the basest peasant hath laid himself open in the view of all the world[,] And the basest peasant hath the same spirit with the greatest of the

59 Pawtuxet Letter, RIHS, 45.
60 Ibid., 39, 44.
61 Ibid., 47.
princes of this world." The Gortonists argued, artificial distinctions between people, especially the notion that governments "can remove, create or make void offic[es] and officers at their pleasure, is of that evil one, not of Jesus the salvation of his people." This certainly was not a new idea, but characteristic of English General Baptists.

The Gortonists also made clear to Boston their belief in the separation of civil and religious matters. Much like the English Baptists, they argued that the former emphasized mortality and humanness, while the latter concerned the very non-human issues of the spirit and eternity. They held up the Bay colony *modus operandus* as the antithesis of the perfect system, observing "that the spirituality of your Churches is the civility of your Commonwealth, and the civility of your Commonwealth is the spirituality of your Churches; the wisdom of man being the whole accomplishment of them both." Pointing to the case of Francis Hutchinson, who had been imprisoned on the basis of evidence given in a church trial without the benefit of civil proceedings, the Gortonists argued that the magistrates and ministers had become indistinguishable. They noted that

62 Ibid., 45.

63 Ibid., 48.

64 Ibid., 36.

65 Ibid., 42.
Massachusetts' leaders delighted in this state of affairs, "finding it fair and beautiful, to gain conformity with your Maker, in these your dissembling subjects, grossly profane amongst us." 66

Part of this "profanity" involved Bay colony authorities tendering oaths. Like Roger Williams, Samuel Gorton rejected "swearing," but disagreed with the founder of Providence on the exact nature of the practice. Williams, having come to his Separatist position via limited-atonement Puritanism, had argued that ministering an oath to an unregenerate person was blasphemous because it necessitated asking that person to use God's name in vain. Gorton, however, approached the subject more as a mystic who believed that God existed in everyone, contending that all people told the truth only because the Holy Spirit willed it, not because of the repetition of a few words. "[O]ur Lord plainly evinceth," Gorton concluded, "unto all mens' consciences not only the guilt, but the folly and madness of the oath of man, to shew how far it is from investing into place or demonstrating causes." Gorton assured followers and adversaries alike that God alone would be the judge of those who bore false witness, and thus oaths were ineffective. In short, Williams's views on the matter were Calvinistic: a person's eternal estate was for the most part preordained, and oaths tendered to the unregenerate were

66 Ibid., 36.
blasphemous. In contrast, Gortonists believed that, because God had endowed humans with the power to distinguish and to choose between good and evil, their choices had severe consequences in the afterlife which the mere administration of an oath could never alter.67

Gorton and his group concluded their missive with a combination of ad hominem attacks and assertions of their loyalty to English custom. The Gortonists reported that William Arnold, an "ill-bred, apostatized . . . felonious hog-killer," had gone over to the Bay colony, whose "pretended and devised laws" were responsible for "the robbing and spoiling of our goods" and impairing "the livelihood of our wives and children." The General Court in Boston was "a company of gross and dissembling hypocrites that under the pretence of law and religion have done nothing else" but "maintain their own vicious lusts." The Gortonists, on the other hand, clung tightly to "those antient statute laws" of England, even though they had been abused "for speaking according to the language of them."68 The letter's authors concluded that Massachusetts' sympathizers in the Narragansett region were "nothing but

67 Ibid., 46, 48. Gorton warned Massachusetts authorities "that it is the oath of God which confirms and makes good his covenant and promise to a thousand generations. And it is the oath of man that is the bond and obligation of that League and agreement made with hell and death forever."

68 Ibid., 49.
the shame of religion, disquiet, and disturbance of the places where they are" and that "their associates and confederates" had no authority "to enlarge the bounds [of Massachusetts], by King Charles limited unto you."69

Not surprisingly, the Pawtuxet letter was not well-received in Boston, and the Gortonists felt increasing pressure to remove from Pawtuxet. In December 1642, Gorton and ten others settled at Shawomet, several miles southwest of Providence, and within two months negotiated with Indian sachems Cannonicus and Miantinomi for a deed to the land. They purchased a large tract of land "lyinge uppon the west syde of that part of the sea called Sowhomes Bay, from Copassanatuxet . . . [to] the outmost point of that neck of land called Shawhomett" and westward twenty miles.70 More important than the dimensions of the place, the Gortonists' believed that the relative isolation of their new settlement would afford an opportunity to establish a community based upon their religious tenets, unmolested by the Bay colony.71

69 Ibid., 36.


71 The purchasers were Randall Holden, John Greene, John Wickes, Francis Weston, Samuel Gorton, Richard Waterman, John Warner, Richard Carder, Sampson Shotten, Robert Potter, and William Woodall. Nicholas Power was the only signatory of the Pawtuxet letter who was not among the purchasers. Of these, Greene, Weston, Waterman, and Warner had been followers of Williams, while Carder, Shotten, Potter, and Woodall had been supporters of Hutchinson during
Religion, however, would continue to be an issue of contention between Massachusetts and the Gortonists for years to come and would constantly threaten to be the undoing of the community at Shawomet. Within a year of Gorton's settlement there, Massachusetts captured him and his disciples, hauled them back to Boston, tried them for heresy, convicted and imprisoned them, and then set them at liberty with an admonition to change their doctrines. The Bay colony's frontier settlers constantly complained to Boston about Gortonists' behavior and their unorthodox teachings. In short, Samuel Gorton's spiritual views, all of them traceable to his formative environment in London during the 1620s and early 1630s, continued to irritate New World Puritans whose primary goal was the establishment and maintenance of a "godly" society.72

Particularly frustrating for the Bay colony was the Gortonist insistence that "heresy" be treated as a subjective concept. This point of conflict, too, was born in England. Prior to his emigration to America, Samuel Gorton had assimilated mystical and anabaptist sentiments, and had concluded that the English General Baptists Murton


72 These issues will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.
and Helwys were correct to argue that religious and civil
cconcerns should be completely separate. Gorton was
convinced that, when divorced from Anglican doctrine, the
laws and procedures of England were superior to makeshift
colonial codes and governmental systems, and that the
authority of the Crown was absolutely indispensable to the
orderly governance of English subjects. Ultimately, Gorton
had the opportunity to test this notion, something that the
English General Baptists did not have the power to do.

In the long run, Gorton continued to rely upon his
English experiences and the advice of his English
compatriots. Writing to friends in London two weeks before
signing the Pawtuxet letter, Gorton acknowledged enduring
relationships with individuals in his native land. "I was
looked at as a man among the dead by friends who had just
cause to expect to hear from me long before this," he
lamented, "the like phrase being written by others also into
these parts, are as arrows and sharp swords in my soul."
Gorton wrote his "best respects" were "as rich as ever I
professed both to yourself & the rest of my loving friends
and companions with you in the time of my sojournning and
abode amongst you." He insisted that he continued to send
replies to letters he had received from England, but that
his notes must have fallen into the wrong hands.73 Gorton

73 Gorton to Edmund Calverly, 8 November 1642, Misc.
Mss. G-688, RIHS. Gorton reported that "I received a letter
from you by Mr. Conigrave, but it was so black and congealed

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regretted "any hurt or damage" inflicted upon his English friends as a result of his scrapes with authorities in America, and explained that he never intended "my thoughts to be troublesome or any way disadvantageous to any friend when I set my face toward England." He hinted at the existence of ideological allies in London, "friends so bounteously and undeservedly raised up unto me," who, during his five years in New England helped him to bear "the weight of the burden of the cruelty and oppression of my enemies."74 Gorton had not only developed in England the ideas that made him a renegade in Puritan America, but continued his relationship with the Old World in order to garner spiritual and--through the 1670s--political support.

By the beginning of 1643 the Narragansett region's four settlements had arrived at similar spiritual and political positions, though in dissimilar ways. The inhabitants of Providence came primarily from Salem, a town known for its Separatist background, and bore the intellectual marks of Roger Williams, who himself had been strongly influenced by both English congregationalists, Separatists, and General

74 Ibid.

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Baptists. The Antinomians who settled the island of Aquidneck were split into two camps. The first adhered to the relatively radical notions of Anne Hutchinson, whose grounding in revelation and prophecy came from the far left wing of English Puritanism, of which her own father had been a member. The second, led by William Coddington, was made up of steadfast New England congregationalists who favored the old reformist notion of private conventicles, were sympathetic to the teachings of John Cotton and remained united in their belief that the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court had been too strict with Hutchinson. The discipleship of Samuel Gorton represented a cross between the Antinomians of Aquidneck, the Separatists of Providence, and the General Baptists and mystical congregants of early seventeenth-century London. All three Narragansett ecclesiastical leaders rejected state involvement in religious affairs, insisting that only outward behavior—being unconnected to conscience—was subject to civil regulation.

Partisans of Williams, Hutchinson, and Gorton were, however, accustomed to communities in which devotion to orthodoxy was a determining factor in governmental participation, social status, and the maintenance of order. In the various crises that precipitated the three waves of migration to the Narragansett region, defending the integrity of the one-faith-one-colony system was explicitly
(as in the cases of Williams and Hutchinson) or implicitly (in Gorton's banishments) at issue. Their exile from the Bay colony had cost the settlers of Providence and Aquidneck the intellectual security of ideological consensus. It forced them to consider the relationships of their new towns to old powers and to search out assistance from friends and even long-time foes. In religious matters inhabitants along the shores of Narragansett Bay--like their adversaries in Massachusetts--drew from their English roots and found comfort in old world spiritual allies. Unlike Boston and the surrounding, stable communities, though, Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Shawomet struggled for political survival. In this, they would depend heavily upon signals sent from London.
PART TWO

THE PLACE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS IN
THE ANGLO-AMERICAN WORLD, 1636-1660

Through 1660 the Narragansett communities had much in common with England. With the onset of civil war, the elimination of the monarchy, and the lapse of press regulation, English men and women gained unprecedented political, social, and religious freedom. Individuals were exposed, to a larger extent than ever before, to a variety of radical ideas. They experimented with theology, drawing upon the teachings of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century dissenters from the Church of England, including Puritans, Separatists, Baptists, and mystics. During the civil war and its aftermath, England became a more religiously diverse nation, and its inhabitants sought, in increasing numbers, to experience their faiths apart from civil obligations or restrictions. At the same time, they recognized the indispensability of their legal and
governmental traditions to maintaining order in a spiritually fluid environment.1

After 1642 the English milieu was similar to that in the Narragansett. As war took its toll on English society, settlers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations labored to construct orderly communities in an atmosphere of religious disorder. Like some residents of England, the exiled inhabitants of the New England wilderness had proved themselves open to the ideas of diverse nonconforming, radical theologians. In contrast to surrounding colonies, the Narragansett region reflected the spiritual variety of the English nation at mid-century. The area was filled with Puritans, Separatists, Baptists, "Seekers," and "antinomians," as well as individuals who denied the existence of sin, rejected all ordinances, and used allegory to interpret the Bible. Most important, the Narragansett was home to men and women willing to defend their ideas in print in England, to undertake "truth-seeking" missions in Massachusetts and Plymouth, and to write the stories of neighboring colonies' intolerance. They gained confidence by establishing a workable, orderly polity, heavily dependent upon English legal codes and institutions, in which the religious and civil spheres remained separate. In

these respects Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was virtually identical to Interregnum England.

These parallels between the Narragansett region and England became vital to the tiny colony's survival. English sectarians held the values of most settlers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, including greater political and religious liberty. Through the New Model Army and greater representation in Parliament, these English radicals won power and a voice in policy, and asserted their desire to worship without government interference. Admirers of the Narragansett polity, they became important allies for the Independents, the theological counterparts of the Bay colony Puritans, in their battle against the Presbyterians, who favored a comprehensive, state church. Transatlantically, tolerance became an important political issue; leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, through their publications and the example provided by their colony, not only contributed significantly to the debate, but won for their government validation and protection from London.
CHAPTER 4

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS, 1636-1660

In 1644, John Winthrop observed that the loose confederation of settlements known as Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was plagued by spiritual and political anarchy, a condition that arose, he contended, from inhabitants' rejection of "orthodox" civil and religious stricures. Residents in the region were "loose and degenerate in their practices" and "frequent and hideous" liars who had gone out of our jurisdiction and precinct into an Island, called Read-Iland, (surnamed by some the Island of errors) and there they live to this day, most of them, but in great strife and contention in the Civill estate and other wise, hatching and multiplying new Opinions, and cannot agree, but are miserably divided into sundry sects and factions.

Led by Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, and others, these groups, according to Winthrop "broached new heresies every
year" and "denied all magistracy," notions that guaranteed unrest.1

This image of chronic, persistent unrest in the communities along Narragansett Bay in southern New England became encoded in popular conceptions of the history. In the seventeenth century, Edward Johnson, William Hubbard, and others followed Winthrop's accounts closely, staunchly defending first- and second-generation Massachusetts Puritans as the upholders of "truth" and godliness. In the following century Cotton Mather ridiculed Rhode Island's diversity with his famous quip that the colony included in its ranks every religious persuasion except "Roman Catholics and real Christians." This view dominated the regional and national histories of the nineteenth century as well, as native Bostonians Josiah Quincy and John Gorham Palfrey presented the Bay colony as well-settled and stable and Rhode Island as its antithesis.2

More recent studies, too, have identified ideological and political diversity and instability as the hallmarks of early Rhode Island. Historians of the colony, Sydney James, Bruce Daniels, and William McLaughlin have all argued that the communities of the Narragansett only slowly made the


2 Lovejoy, Religious Enthusiasm in the New World, 88; Weeden, Early Rhode Island, 22-23, 80, 204-205; Irwin, "Cast Out from the 'City upon a Hill'," 7.
transition to civil stability over the course of five decades. 3 Dissertations by Dennis O'Toole and Dale Miller, Jr. have examined the relationship between religion and politics in early Rhode Island, finding that colonial leaders struggled constantly with faction and found little upon which to agree through the late 1650s. 4 Philip Gura has similarly argued that religious diversity in the Narragansett was extraordinary and had an adverse effect on civil order. 5 Scholars have found early Rhode Islanders more interesting for their supposed instability and for the wide-ranging theological opinions they expressed than for the notions they held in common.

Undeniably, Rhode Island's early settlers had vastly divergent religious and political ideas, and faction was a regular part of life in the Narragansett communities. Separatist Roger Williams and his followers established Providence, formed a Baptist congregation, and soon found themselves joined by Presbyterians, Anglicans, and others. Women and men expelled from Massachusetts during the Antinomian controversy occupied the island of Aquidneck, and immediately divided themselves into conservative and more

3 Sydney V. James, Colonial Rhode Island: A History (New York: Norton, 1975); Daniels, Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay.

4 Miller, "Protestantism and Politics"; O'Toole, "Exiles, Refugees, and Rogues."

5 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory.
radical elements; the former, led by William Coddington, generally favored the ecclesiastical and civil system of the Bay colony, while the latter, followers of Anne Hutchinson, held tenets considerably further from "orthodox" Puritanism. At Pawtuxet, near Providence, William Arnold led a group of settlers who insisted upon annexation to and protection from Massachusetts. Nearby, eccentric theologian, mystic, and three-time outcast Samuel Gorton established a community based on his own peculiar religious beliefs, much to the consternation of Bay colony leaders and their allies in the Narragansett region. This mixture of theologies, personalities, and ambitions was certainly unprecedented and represented a significant challenge to the inhabitants of early Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Too much has been made of the gulfs separating residents of the Narragansett and not enough consideration given to the ideas and practices that tightly and quickly bound incongruent constituencies together. The infighting among settlers in the communities of Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Warwick can be framed in terms of pro- and anti-Bay colony factions. Many of the region's inhabitants sought intervention from Boston and either attempted to establish religious and political institutions similar to those in Massachusetts, or aimed to have large areas of the Narragansett annexed to the Bay colony. Their opponents feared returning to a system of forced religious uniformity,
arguing that separation of spiritual and civil estates was necessary, beneficial, and intellectually tenable. This ideological division appeared within the towns of Aquidneck (later Rhode Island) almost immediately and was played out in the mainland communities in the early 1640s. Sympathy with or opposition to the Bay colony church-state scheme became the organizing principle of early Narragansett politics and remained the dominant polarizing force among settlers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations well into the 1650s.

In the end, opponents of the Massachusetts system were able to preserve Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as a single colony and protect diversity within its bounds, a difficult accomplishment and one that has been overlooked by historians. The instability in the Narragansett region that orthodox Puritan commentators traced to heterodoxy and "heresy" actually originated from settlers' continuing debates on the merits of the Massachusetts society they had left. The anti-Bay colony contingent won the argument, ultimately, on the strength of its logic and tactics. Over time its members were able to convince Boston's allies in the region that their spiritual differences were irreversible, that decoupling the religious and political spheres was thus necessary, and that, in fact, this goal could be accomplished—without sacrificing order—by explicit reliance upon the laws and protection of England.
The victors in this argument went on to fashion a tenuous, but innovative, political entity, unique in an age when the church was believed to be a necessary support of the state. This polity became the linchpin of later efforts to sway opinion in England and to criticize Massachusetts.

At the beginning of 1643, each of the Narragansett settlements consisted of pro- and anti-Massachusetts factions and were wracked by instability as a result. These tensions shaped the history of Pocasset, the first community established on the island of Aquidneck. In 1638 refugees from the Bay colony under the leadership of former Massachusetts magistrate William Coddington settled the town on the northern tip of the island. This initial unity quickly disintegrated when part of the group, inclined to the more radical teachings of Anne Hutchinson—including personal revelation from God, unrestricted prophesying, and separation of civil and religious spheres—found that Coddington and his friends maintained close ideological and personal ties to the Bay colony. The Coddington group insisted on government by Old Testament Scripture, a theocratic legal system, and requirements for freemanship similar to those of Massachusetts. In contrast, the Hutchinsonians sought the right to worship as they pleased, English-style courts, and more liberal land policies. With the arrival in 1639 of theologian Samuel Gorton, and the
continued migration to Pocasset from Massachusetts of Hutchinson sympathizers, the more radical Antinomian exiles were able to force Coddington from his office as "judge" and to encourage him and his allies to remove to the southern tip of the island, where they established the community of Newport. The struggle was based on two competing visions of Pocasset's future: one structured by religious and legal institutions similar to the Bay colony, and the other significantly divergent from "orthodox" Puritanism.

Coddington and his supporters did not go quietly, though. Instead, the conservative faction indicated its sympathy with the Massachusetts magistracy by adopting the latter's strategies for dealing with and limiting dissent. From its inception Coddington's government had attempted to limit admission to freemanship by imposing restrictions similar to those in Massachusetts.6 The very first act of the initial nineteen Pocasset freemen was "that none shall be received as inhabitants or Freemen, to build or plant upon the Island but such as shall be received in by the consent of the Bodeye, and do submitt to the Government that is or shall be established, according to the word of God."7 Thus, those who came after Coddington's group were to

6 Of the original nineteen compact signers, only John Clarke and Randall Holden—both of whom arrived in New England at the tail end of the Antinomian controversy—were not members of a church and freemen.

7 Pocasset General Meeting, 7 March 1637/38, RICR I: 53.
subscribe to the religious principles of the settlement's
government—based upon the Bible—before they had any civil
or economic standing in the community. As Hutchinsonians
started arriving in Pocasset, they expressed their
frustrations with this familiar standard, causing Coddington
and his disciples in late August 1638 to erect a pair of
stocks. They also augmented their numbers by admitting four
more wealthy, politically experienced, and previously
churched exiles as freemen.8

Three days later, this expanded group of freemen
enlarged the executive power in order to deal more
aggressively with "enthusiasts." They ordered that "a Howse
for a prison . . . shall forthwith be built," and cracked
down on Hutchinsonians George Parker and John Vaughn "By
virtue of a Warrant" for "a Riott of Drunkennesse."9
Coddington's government created the office of "Elder" "to
assist the Judge in the Execution of Justice and Judgment
for the regulating and ordering of all offences and

8 Pocasset General Meeting, 20 August 1638, RICR I:
58. The new freemen were Richard Dummer, a wealthy Newbury
church member and former Bay Colony Assistant, Nicholas
Easton, a tanner from the same community and church, who
served on various colony committees in Massachusetts, Boston
merchant, church member, and selectman William Brenton, who
served the colony as a deputy, and Brenton's fellow
congregant and selectman in Boston, Robert Harding. See
Mass. Recs. I: 120, 125, 145, 156, 159, 164, 175, 178, 185,
191, 223, 301, 339, 345; and Battis, Saints and Sectaries,
303-305.

9 Pocasset General Meeting, 23 August 1638, RICR I:
59-60.
offenders." The freemen reasserted their rejection of unrestrained revelation, empowering the judge and three elders to draw up "all such Rules and Laws as shall be according to God" and to "Rule and Govern according to the Generall Rule of the word of God."10 When the Bible offered no specific solution to a problem, the body of freemen was to offer "direction unto them in the case." Every quarter year the assembly was to review the triumverate's "actions and Rules" and were charged to weigh each law and case "by the word of Christ."11

As Hutchinsonian "opinionists" flooded the island, the Coddington government grew concerned. In February 1638/39, after Nicholas Easton, John Coggeshall, and William Brenton were installed as elders, the freemen passed on to them and to Coddington responsibility "concerning Invasions forreine and domestick," along with "the determination of Military discipline, and the disposing of the lands" and house lots on the island.12 The judge, elders, and freemen "agreed (as necessary) for the Commonwealth, that a Constable and Sargeant should be chosen by the Body to execute the Lawes and penalties thereof." Tellingly, the constable was to keep the peace by rooting out Hutchinson's signature

10 Pocasset General Meeting, 16 November 1638, RICR I: 63.

11 Pocasset General Meeting, 2 January 1638/39, RICR I: 63-64.

12 Ibid., 64.

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"unlawfull Meetings," and was commanded "to inform in Generall of all manifest Breaches of the Law of God, that tend to civill disturbance." Similarly, the sergeant was to enforce court sentences against those who broke "the Lawes of God" and disrupted the community's peace. Two of the Pocasset compact signers, Henry Bull and Samuel Wilbore, were selected to fill the positions.13

Ultimately Coddington's efforts to head off the tide of incoming Hutchinsonians and to entrench Bay colony ecclesiastical structures were unsuccessful. In fact, in the aftermath of the conservative government's fall in Pocasset, town residents appear to have gone their own ways religiously. Evidence on development of religious structures in Pocasset and Newport is scanty, but reports from both friendly and hostile sources indicate that the community harbored a variety of spiritual views. From Winthrop's perspective the Hutchinsonians were "loose and degenerate in their practises (for these Opinions will certainly produce a filthy life by degrees)," they ignored the Sabbath and prayer—"unlesse the Spirit stirre [them] up

13 Pocasset General Meeting, 24 January 1638/39, RICR I: 64-65. Moreover, at an early April 1639 meeting, the freemen ordered "that in regard of the many Incursions that the Island is subject unto, and that an Alarum for the securing the place is necessary therefor; it is thought meet for the present that an Alarum be appointed to give notice to all who inhabit the place, that they may forthwith repair and gather together to the House of the Judge for the defending of the Island or quelling any Insolences that shall be tumultuously rayse[d] within the Plantation." See Pocasset General Meeting, 6 April 1639, RICR I: 68.
thereunto"--and were prone to "frequent and hideous lying." They mistakenly rejected a learned ministry on the grounds that the indwelling Spirit provided more knowledge than a university-educated pastor could ever supply and ignored congregational discipline, separating themselves from their churches in Massachusetts with ease. As a result, Winthrop predicted, the more radically inclined Antinomians would themselves be constantly plagued with schism. The religious lives of these exiles would remain unsettled as long as each could follow his or her own spirit from meeting to meeting, preacher to preacher.14 Boston cleric John Cotton, having been the religious mentor for many Pocasset residents, continued to be more sympathetic--and even felt partially responsible for the situation of these exiles--but he too believed that the Rhode Island followers of his former pupil Anne Hutchinson had gone too far. They were, he declared, "bent on backsliding into error and delusion."15

Edward Johnson concurred with this view, observing that the Antinomians at Pocasset had "Elbow roome enough, [but] none of the Ministers of Christ, nor any other to interrupt their false and deceivable doctrines." Many of these


"sectarians" were to be pitied, since they were "very ignorant and easily perverted," and, though their numbers were relatively small, they were "very diverse in their opinions." Some argued that every day was the Sabbath "and therefore kept not any Sabbath-day at all; others were some for one thing, some for another." Several groups met, a number being led by women who were vainly interested in their own fame, "especially the grand Mistresse of them all [Hutchinson], who ordinarily prated every Sabbath day," until other preachers "who thirsted after honour" chipped away at her audience. This, Johnson asserted, finally caused Hutchinson to leave the island permanently.16

Other observers also noted that, after the removal of the Coddington faction, Pocasset lacked ecclesiastical structures familiar to most New Englanders. As late as July 1640 Francis Hutchinson stated before the Boston church that he "knew of no church at [Pocasset]."17 Thomas Lechford, writing in England in January 1641/2, reported the same thing, observing that between March and August 1640 there was a "towne called [Pocasset], but no Church; there is a

16 Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence, 100, 132. Johnson added that "Their Church-meetings are full of Disputes in points of difference, and their love-Feasts are not free from spots, in their Courts of civill Justice some men utter their Speeches in matters of Religion very ambiguously, and among all sorts of persons a great talke of new light, but verily it proved but old darknesse, such as sometime over-shadowed the City of Munster."

17 Chapin, Documentary History II: 85.
meeting of some men, who there teach one another and call it Prophesie." 18 These reports suggest that the congregational system initially set up in Pocasset under the guidance of William Coddington had been replaced by the spiritual callings of individuals who sought only to avoid any connection to "orthodox" Puritan institutions.

Pocasset's new leaders immediately changed town government to reflect the Hutchinsonian dissatisfaction with Coddington's Massachusetts-style regime. In contrast to the former reliance upon God's "holy word of truth," they acknowledged themselves to be "the legall subjects of his Majestie King Charles, and in his name" bound themselves "into a civill body politicke, unto his lawes according to matters of justice." They limited the term of the settlement's executive, William Hutchinson, to one year, and disposed of the three-elder system in favor of six or seven assistants, who were also to be elected annually. In overt recognition of their English roots the inhabitants provided for quarterly courts, jury trials, and arbitration; moreover, they dropped the Native American name of their town in favor of the familiar "Portsmouth." 19

Given this alternative government and spiritual atmosphere, some of Coddington's followers defected to the

18 Ibid., 85-86.

19 Portsmouth Town Meeting, 30 April 1639, ERP, 9; RICR 1: 70-72.
Hutchinsonian party at Portsmouth. William Balston, William Freeborn, John Porter, John Walker, and Philip Sherman had all been freemen in the town of Pocasset and initially refused to take part officially in the coup against Coddington. Almost immediately, however, all five—who had been among the most radically inclined of Coddington's corps—were elected to assist William Hutchinson in the new government.20 John Sanford likewise distanced himself from Coddington early in 1639, and similarly looked upon the indwelling Holy Spirit as a central matter of his faith, as did future Gortonist Richard Carder and Anne Hutchinson's nephew, Edward.21

In Newport Coddington continued his bid to shape society in the image of the Bay colony. He and his followers retained the judge-elder system and operated with a limited number of freemen, all of whom had held key positions in Massachusetts churches and government.22

20 Ibid. Of the five, William Freeborn, John Porter, and Philip Sherman (who had been excommunicated from the Roxbury church for his support of Hutchinson's ideas) became Quakers within the next decade and a half. Sherman's friend in the Roxbury congregation, John Walker, was likely predisposed to the spiritual side of Hutchinson's teachings as well.

21 Irwin, "Cast Out from the 'City Upon a Hill,'" 13-15.

22 Coddington continued as judge, while Nicholas Easton, John Coggeshall, and William Brenton stayed on as elders. The freemen were John Clarke, Jeremy Clarke, Thomas Hazard, Henry Bull, William Dyer, Robert Jeffreys, and William Foster. See the Newport Records in RICR I: 87-90.
Coddington reported to Winthrop in 1640 that the inhabitants had formed a congregation in the new settlement which existed under the same terms and regulations as any church in the Bay colony, that they "doe intend to chuse officers shortly, & doe desire better healpe in that kind, when the Lord is pleased to send them." Evidence suggests that the congregation even subscribed to a covenant similar to those in Bay colony churches, extended membership only to those who could prove that they were among God's elect, and kept only Sunday as the Sabbath.

More than replicating "orthodox" church organization and practice, Coddington also presented opponents with clear and convincing evidence that the erstwhile Aquidneck "Judge" sought to surrender the island's religious life to Boston. Coddington had, from the time of his removal to Newport, openly flirted with the ideas of either renewing his allegiance to the church at Boston, or creating a sister institution on the island. The Boston church, for its part, continued to hold out hope for his return to the fold, keeping him under admonition indefinitely. In 1639 Boston


24 This is Comer's belief in the Backus Papers, Mss. #21, RIHS, based upon Samuel Hubbard's journal. See also Sydney James, "Creation of Institutions," 9. Records for Aquidneck reveal that "Whereas the Generall Courte doth fall on the 2d of feb. wch being the Lord's day upon serious Consideration it is assigned to be kept four days sooner." See "Island Records," 18.
minister John Wilson had explained to his congregation that Coddington "was sensible of an Evell" in hearing the preaching of excommunicated persons but was content to practice his own version of Congregationalism in Aquidneck. Moreover, unlike other, more radically-inclined exiles, Coddington had never rejected the Boston church or its ordinances; later he even expressed regret for his role in the Antinomian controversy.

Coddington's continued, public ties to the church in Boston and his hardline insistence on specific membership requirements in the Newport church helped to swell the ranks of the opposition, even within his own congregation. Thomas Lechford reported the existence of three religious factions, noting that their leaders were John Clarke, Robert Lenthall, and Francis Doughty. He found that a congregation had been established briefly "where one master Clark was Elder; the place where the Church was is called Newport, but that Church, I heare, is now dissolved; as also divers Churches in the Country have been broken up and dissolved through dissention." Lenthall arrived in Newport from Weymouth in August 1640 and immediately began spreading his views that the church should be opened to anyone previously


26 WJ, I: 297; Miller, "Protestantism and Politics," 44.

baptized, thereby abrogating the covenant of the Clarke church, of which Coddington was a member. 28 This opened the way for greater dissension, as Nicholas Easton disagreed with Lenthal over forms of worship and led a small group whose primary concern was direct revelation. 29 Informal worship among the members of Clarke's group was probably maintained, but even this group, by 1641, was disbanded by disagreements, when Thomas Lechford reported on the state of religion in Rhode Island. 30 Coddington's imposition of "orthodox" ecclesiastical structures on more radical refugees generated outward opposition on religious issues, opposition that translated into politics.

Similar concerns about the viability of Massachusetts-style institutions in the Narragansett dominated the political discourse of mainland communities Providence and Shawomet. Whereas the island conflict was driven by a former Bay colony magistrate with strong ties to the Boston Church and "orthodox" organization and practice, the discussion in settlements to the north revolved around two avowed Baptists near Providence, William Arnold and William Carpenter. Three-time outcast preacher Samuel Gorton served as the lightning rod for the pro-Massachusetts segment on


30 Barrows, *Development of Baptist Principles*, 47; James, "Creation of Institutions," 57; Chapin, *Documentary History* II: 84.
the mainland; opposition to his unique theology and strong personality arose both in Gorton's own community of Shawomet and in nearby Providence. In both Aquidneck and the mainland towns, debate centered on advantages and disadvantages of association with Massachusetts, and involved, to some minds, the choice between freedom and order. Like Coddington, those in Shawomet and Providence who sought out Bay colony guidance saw all opposition to their position as chaotic in and of itself and sought to emphasize in their correspondence to authorities in Boston the extreme, radical religious views of their opponents.

The key proponent of Bay colony control on the mainland, William Arnold, seems to have been motivated to take that position solely by material concerns, in contrast to Coddington, who had extensive commercial, personal, political, and religious ties to Massachusetts. Arnold had come with Williams from Salem and reputedly joined the Baptist Church in Providence, but went his own way in temporal matters. In town meetings he "more then once professeth to hope for and long for a better Government then the Countrey hath yet, and lets not to particularize, by a generall Governour, etc."31 Months later, Arnold and Providence resident Joshua Verin, another former Salemite, plotted against the town "even as Gardiner" had against

31 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, ca. early May 1638, CRW, 154.
Massachusetts. Roger Williams complained of "many odious accusations in writing" from the pair which aimed at "render[ing] me odious" to both England and the Bay Colony. Williams begged the elder Winthrop to "judge of the notorious wickedness and malicious falsehoods...concerning the maintaining of our liberties in this land, or any difference with yourselves." 32 From the beginning Arnold and his allies openly criticized town government for its inability to maintain the stability they saw as crucial to secure landownership and the conduct of business.

The main goal for Arnold during that time was possession of land in the Pawtuxet meadows, just north and west of Providence, and the establishment of some government--any government--strong enough to protect his estate. Disagreements over land in 1638 had resulted in a loose system of deed recording in Providence, but the lush meadows at Pawtuxet continued to be a sore point. 33 New settlers in the town during the late 1630s and early 1640 clamored for a portion of the Pawtuxet lands in which Arnold and his allies had an extensive interest. Arriving late in 1640, Samuel Gorton and his followers represented an additional threat to Arnold's territory. By spring 1641,

32 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, after 21 September 1638, CRW, 185.

33 Town Evidence, 24 March 1637/38, ERPr. V: 296; Williams's Memorandum, 10 June [1638], ERPr. I: 4-5; Initial Deed, [October 1638], ERPr. XV, 86.
Gorton—a highly effective preacher—had convinced "almost halfe of them" at Providence of the validity of his views and was preaching "thrice a weake" in town, drawing by far the largest audiences of any preacher in the area.34 Within the year, Gorton had convinced fourteen inhabitants—or roughly one-third of the adult male population of the town—to follow his teachings. William Arnold believed that others were sympathizers and feared that if the Gortonists became householders, Gorton's opponents would be forced from the town.35 His concerns were heightened when Providence proprietors Francis Weston and John Greene, along with Richard Waterman and Robert Cole, provided Gorton with land in town. Almost immediately, Gorton's opponents reported that "six or seven" inhabitants had signified their intentions to stay in Providence. Arnold and other townsmen worried that these inhabitants would join the Gortonists "to have no manner of honest order, or government either over them or amongst them."36 Arnold and his allies came to hate Gorton for the political power he wielded, as well as for the extraordinary amounts of land that he and his followers demanded.

34 Edward Winslow to John Winthrop, 24 May 1641, in Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I: 459.

35 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 60; O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 313, 330.

36 Joshua Winsor et al to the Governor and Assistants of Massachusetts, 17 November 1641, in Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 56-7.
Some of these fears about Gorton's role in the civil sphere quickly came to fruition. Williams and Arnold agreed that Gorton's "railing and turbulent" manner "hath brought the Towne into a hurry, almost the one halfe against the other in which estate no Towne or City can well stand or subsist." 37 Gorton had denied that the town meeting represented legitimate authority. He degraded officials, calling one townsman "Boy," while "most wrathfully and shamelessly reviling him." One follower openly ridiculed a town official whom he had met in the street, convincing William Arnold that neither Gorton nor his cadre were "fit persons to bee received in, and made members of such a body, in so weake a state as our Town is in at present." 38 Plymouth magistrates agreed with Arnold's assessment, concluding that Providence was "being overpressed by vyolent and turbulent psions" and thus "should submitt or subject the place to another govment," presumably their own. 39

Arnold concurred with the Plymouth assessment which signified how desparate he was to protect his material

37 Arnold to the Town Disposers of Providence, 25 May 1641, in Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 59-60.

38 Ibid. When Gorton and his followers applied for admission to the town, they were refused "because of what a majority of the townsmen considered riotous and subversive behavior on their part"; Joshua Winsor et al to the Governor and Assistants of Massachusetts, 17 November 1641, Mss. from the Connecticut Archives, I: 1-6, RIHS.

interests. Gorton's following represented a large minority, one that was more cohesive and aggressive than the population at large. Moreover—and more dangerously—the faction was growing ever larger as a result of its leader's preaching.40 In an effort to solicit both advice and perhaps armed assistance, Arnold convinced thirteen Providence men to write to the General Court of Massachusetts in November 1641. Explaining that it was "meete and Necessary to give you true Intelligience of the insolent and Riotous Cariges of Samuel Gorton and his Company," the group observed that "[i]t would be tedious to relate the Numberless Number of their upbrayding Taunts, assaults and threats & violent Kinde of Cariadg dayly practised" against the town's inhabitants. Rather, a large part of Providence sought, "either with care or Counsell . . . to withstand or prevent their Lewd licentious Courses," and begged the Bay colony "for the preservatione of Humanity and mankind to Consider our Condition and Lend us a neighbour like helping hand and send us such assistance." The Gortonists' actions were so outrageous that Arnold and many others in Providence now looked to their former adversaries as the settlement's best hope of salvation.41

40 O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 311.

41 William Field, William Harris, William Carpenter, William Wickenden, William Reinolds, Thomas Harris, Thomas Hopkins, Hugh Bewitt, Joshua Winsor, Benedict Arnold,
The Bay colony's response only divided Providence inhabitants more, separating those who emphasized freedom from those who, like Arnold, stressed stability and order. Massachusetts' magistrates explained that assistance would be forthcoming only if Providence residents "did submit themselves to some jurisdiction, either Plymouth or ours, [since] we had no calling or warrant to interpose in their Contentions, but if they were once subject to any, then [the General Court] had a calling to protect them."42 In January 1641/42, Gorton's followers began deeding to their spiritual mentor portions of their lands in Pawtuxet, a move that Arnold had long dreaded. This land transfer split the tract's proprietors and convinced Arnold that he had to act in order to protect his meadowlands.43 By October 1642,

William Man, William Hukinges [Hawkins], and Robert Weste to the Governor and Assistants of Massachusetts, Providence, 17 November 1641, Mss. from the Connecticut Archives, I: 1-6, RIHS. This letter is also reprinted in various forms in Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I: 462, and Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 58.

42 WJ, II: 53-4.

43 Robert Cole was the first to sell land to Gorton in the area, 10 January 1641/42, followed by John Greene; see ERPr. III: 26. Arnold saw himself as first among those who had "laid the first foundation of the place, and bought it even almost with the losse of their lives, and their whole estates" and thus believed himself to be the arbiter of tract transfers; Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 60. Of the Pawtuxet proprietors, Weston, Greene, Cole, and Richard Waterman supported Gorton, Arnold, William Harris, William Carpenter, and William Field opposed him, and Williams, Stukeley Westcott, Thomas Olney, John Throckmorton, and Ezekiel Holliman did not involve themselves in the situation. See O'Tcole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 337-339.
Arnold's group had submitted to the authority of Massachusetts, claiming that after Gorton had purchased the "patuxet lands againe over the heades of those men that had dwelt there 3 or 4 year before," he had warned Arnold and his men "that they should begone or else they must be there [their] tennants."44 Arnold's handful of allied Pawtuxet proprietors were mortified by that possibility; in essence, they argued that Gorton had taken too far both liberty of conscience and freedom from Bay colony political constraints.

On the other side of the issue, Gorton and his disciples were understandably concerned about the prospect of the Bay colony's intervention in the region. In the summer of 1642, William Collins, a Bay colony minister and son-in-law of Anne Hutchinson, visited Gorton at Pawtuxet, and informed him that "the Massachusetts intended to take in all the Narragansett Bay under their government and jurisdiction." Collins advised the Gortonists to take refuge in Dutch or Swedish settlements since "upon his knowledge, the Massachusetts intended, in short time, to take away his life, if he abode in any English plantations."45 Gorton had reason to heed Collins's warnings since Collins himself had been a prisoner in

45 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 59.
Massachusetts during the fall and winter of 1641. 46 Collins's information, along with Arnold's collaboration with the Bay colony convinced Gorton that he and his followers should move "further from the Massachusetts, and where none of the English nor other nations had anything to do, but only Indians, the true natives."

Arnold was more expeditious in soliciting help from Massachusetts than the Gortonists were in moving into the frontier. In October 1642, Arnold successfully lobbied the Bay colony General Court for a warrant against Gorton. The document noted that John Greene, "one of his [Gorton's] chiefe prossalightes" gave Gorton half of his divided land at Pawtuxet and "so by vertue of those gifts, gorton & many of his Company went & built houses at papaqueinepaug in pautuxet purchis." 48 It declared that Pawtuxet fell under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts and ordered all residents of the area to take their disputes to Bay colony courts. The warrant concluded that "if you shall proceed to any violence you must not blame us, if we shall take a like course to right them." 49 The General Court knew Gorton's


47 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 59. John Warner had visited Massachusetts, and gave Gorton the same advice.


record well, and Arnold stood by to fill in any lapses in the magistrates' memories.

By gaining an official commitment for intervention in the Narragansett from authorities in Boston, Arnold elevated previously localized pro- and anti-Massachusetts cleavages to the status of region-wide concern. Early in 1643 many of Aquidneck's residents feared that their island would be subject to the same fate as the Gortonists who, as a result of Arnold's pleas to the Massachusetts General Court, had been carted off to Boston, convicted of blasphemy, and sentenced to indefinite terms at hard labor. In response, anti-Massachusetts elements across the Narragansett region organized rapidly to send Roger Williams to England for a charter that would bind the four communities together officially to fend off the territorial ambitions of surrounding "orthodox" colonies.50 This first collaborative effort among the towns thus resulted from long-running fears and factionalization within the communities rather than from unilateral action by a neighboring colonial government.

While Williams worked in London to secure a charter, transregional anti-Massachusetts elements continued to reach out to one another to combat local Bay colony allies. In January 1643/44 the "Inhabitants of the towne of Newport"

wrote to the residents of Providence, indicating that they had,

after serious consultations at length unanimously concluded that for sundry considerations concurring it wo[u]ld be safe and moer [sic] then expedient that a Generall Assembly sho[u]ld be forth with cold [called], both to rectify those things that are amisse among us, to supply what is defective, and to take order for a collony court of tryall, fearing that erlong by reason of that late sad accident fal[le]n out among us ther[e] may be more than ordinary occasion to make use thereof.51

Significantly, the letter was penned not by the pro-
Coddington freemen of Newport, but by those who feared their governor's pro-Massachusetts designs. Seeking to circumvent the established, Coddingtonian channels of government to get their way, these residents of Newport were ready to create new institutions in order to avoid what they perceived to be ecclesiastical and political tyranny.

In September 1644 Williams returned from England with a patent that for the first time unified the four Narragansett communities in a colonial government and, more importantly, changed the terms of the pro- and anti-Bay colony debate in the region. The latter group gained legitimacy and

51 Inhabitants of Newport to the Town of Providence, January 1643/44, RIHSM, I: 5.
extraordinary momentum from the document, which defined the boundaries of the new political entity and effectively implicated Arnold and Coddington as traitors to the colony and thus the government of England. Moreover, the patent further strengthened the transcolonial bonds of the anti-Massachusetts party. The document was celebrated with bonfires in Providence and was "joyfully embraced" on Aquidneck.52 According to Samuel Gorton, who perhaps had the most to lose by a pro-Bay colony government in the Narragansett, as a result of the charter, "with all expedition, an orderly and joint course was held, for the investing of the people into the power and liberties thereof unanimously, for the exercise of the authority, in the execution of Lawes for the good and quiet of the people."53

The debate over Bay colony ideas, institutions, and intervention continued, however, because Massachusetts allies in the Narragansett feared that the new charter would not result in peace and order. Coddington, for one, convinced that the Gortonists held too much power under the patent arrangement, not only maintained his own government apart from the charter, but offered Massachusetts authorities his assistance in destroying those "heretics."

52 George Fox and John Burnyeat, New England Firebrand Quenched (London, 1679), II: 248.


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In the spring of 1644, after their brief internments in the Bay colony, rather than going "to the Dutch," Gorton and his followers irritated their old nemesis Coddington by opting to resettle temporarily in Portsmouth, renting "houses and grounds to plant upon," before removing to an area known as Shawomet. Almost immediately Massachusetts Governor Endecott apparently wrote to Coddington in a letter Gorton characterized in a later account. Endecott wrote:

to some in the island whom he thought they
[Massachusetts] had interest in, being he [Coddington] continued a member of their Church, however removed from them, telling him, that if he and the others (who were in like relation unto them) could work the people of the island to deliver us up into their hands again, (at least some of us) it would not only be acceptable unto the Court, then sitting, but unto most of the people in general.54

Bay colony overtures had only limited effect, Gorton noted, since opposition to Coddington on the island was increasing and more unified than ever. Endecott's letter does illustrate clearly, however, the links between the Puritan church-state regime and Coddington's faction.

54 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 165. The reference here is certainly to Coddington and perhaps William Baulston and William Brenton, known religious and political sympathizers with Massachusetts.
Gorton's off-handed remarks that opposition to Coddington's pro-Massachusetts policies was increasing appear in 1644 to have had some validity. If court records for the early 1640s are any indication, Coddington was having a difficult time controlling his constituents. In 1643 alone, nine Newport residents sued or were sued by the town for recovery of money, suggesting both that the town was insolvent and--more importantly--that Coddington's power was slipping away. During the same time, the Aquidneck Quarter Court, swamped with cases, frequently turned to arbitration for quick solutions, but even this method had only limited success. Coddington claimed to have control of the entire island of Aquidneck, but between 1644 and 1648, changes in the composition of the Portsmouth corps of freemen were favorable to the anti-Coddington Hutchinsonians; of the nine new freemen admitted during that time period, six held to the extreme position of revelation via the Holy Spirit. The influx of freemen opposed to

55 Chapin, Documentary History II: 141-42, 146-47; O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 215-16. Moreover, Portsmouth authorities constantly found it necessary to remind citizens to carry arms to all meetings. The records for this period are, unfortunately, very skimpy.

56 PR, 37-38. Admitted on or before 10 July 1648 were the two sons of Hutchinsonian Richard Burden, Antinomian exile John Parker, Gortonist John Cook, and future Quaker Ichabod Sheffield and Matthew Grenell. See Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 318, 323, 331, 340; and Austin, Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island, 23-24, 54, 175-76, 308-309. The
Coddington's pro-Massachusetts government made ruling the island much more difficult. Coddington put a positive face on the situation for the benefit of his backers in Boston, holding on to his title as chief magistrate and convening Quarter Courts of Trial at Portsmouth and Newport in 1645 and 1646; he notified Winthrop in November 1646 that "wemantayne the govermtt as before." 57

An accompanying symptom of Coddington's loss of political control was the shift in the religious milieu of Newport. The Newport congregation, once under the considerable influence of the conservative Coddington, strayed, over time, further away from the principles of orthodox Puritanism. Since 1639 John Clarke had ministered to the group of Antinomian exiles that included Coddington, but between 1643 and 1647 the character of the body changed greatly. Apparently Clarke transformed the church into a fellowship that rejected the very notion of a pastor presiding over a congregation, adopting instead a system whereby others "qualified by the Holy Spirit"—not learning—could preach and administer baptism. Unlike his colleagues in Bay colony pulpits, Clarke welcomed dialogue and savorcd theological discussions during meetings. While retaining an

others admitted as freemen were John Wood, Samuel Jenny, and Cornelius Jones.

abiding belief in predestination, the congregation--by about 1644--leaned heavily toward "believer's baptism," the idea that infant baptism was illegitimate and without biblical warrant. 58

Assisting Clarke, English Baptist Mark Lucar played a vital role in the transformation of the Newport church from congregationalism to Particular (or Calvinist) Anabaptism around 1644. In April of that year, John Hazel of Yarmouth wrote to Baptist Samuel Hubbard of Connecticut that

I desire grace mercy and peace may be multiplied upon yo[u] and my sister yr wife with a sanctified use of yr present condition knowing yt all this [persecution] worketh tog[ether]r for the best to those yt love God. Rom. 8. Not only losses and wants but persecutions & death itself for Ch[rist]ts sake will be great advantage. Desir[in]g yr prayers for me unto the throne of grace, w[i]th my Christn remembrances and salutation in the Lord unto all the brethrin & sisters; & bro. Clarke & bro. Luker in particular . . . .59

This letter not only suggests that transcolonial Baptist networks existed and that family ties within the sect were important, but also hints that Clarke and Lucar were

58 Sydney V. James, "Dr. John Clarke's Legacy," ch. 2, pp. 7-8.

involved in these circles and perhaps were already working together to advance the Anabaptist cause in Newport. Though Lucar may have been itenerant in April 1644, land records indicate that he chose to settle permanently in Rhode Island little more than two years later, and he was fully engaged in the struggle against Coddington. 60

Loss of political and religious control was strange for Coddington, who throughout the 1640s and early 1650s appeared to remain at heart a Bay colony magistrate. After the charter and subsequent coalescence of the opposition, regaining control clearly required direct intervention from powerful "orthodox" colonies. In 1644 and again in 1648 Coddington petitioned both Plymouth and Massachusetts for the annexation of Rhode Island. Along with new Aquidneck resident Alexander Partridge, 61 William Baulston "and some others of this island," Coddington found himself "in


61 Partridge had arrived with his wife and family in Boston from England late in October 1645. Winthrop writes that he "had served the parliament" as an army captain and that on the trip to New England he espoused "divers points of antinomianism and familism." When Partridge refused to answer the colony's magistrates about his beliefs he "was forced to depart, and so went to Rhode Island" in the middle of winter. In May 1646 he purchased eight acres in Newport and added "a house & barne" in July of the same year. See WJ, II: 260; O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 480.
disgrace with the people of Providence, Warwick and Gortons adherents" in Portsmouth and Newport because the conservative faction had decided not to "enterpose or needle at all in their quarrels with the Massachusetts and the rest of the Colonyes."62 Fearing that "Gorton will be a thorn in their and our sides, if the Lord prevent not," Coddington and Partridge appealed to the United Colonies of New England, a confederation of "orthodox" entities. Claiming to act with "the consent of the major part of our Island," they asked that wee the Islanders of Rodde Island may be Rescavied into Combinacion with all the united colonyes of New England in a firme & perpetuall League of Friendship & amity: of offence and Defence Mutuall advice and succour upon all Just occasions for our Mutually Safety & welfaire, & for preserveing of Peace amongst ourselves, & preventing as much as may be, all occasions of warr, or difference . . . .63

Coddington's appeal to the United Colonies served only to heighten tensions between his followers and other inhabitants of the region, who were attempting to establish a government under the new charter. Coddington's supporters


63 Extracts from minutes of the meeting of Commissioners for the United Colonies of New England, held at New Plymouth, 7 September 1648, Mss. from the Massachusetts Archives, I: 47-48, RIHS; Ply. Recs., IX: 110.

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had managed to get him elected as one of the officers for
Newport in 1647, but Coddington rejected the charter regime
as illegitimate. As a result, by May 1648, when Coddington
was reporting to Winthrop all the differences between Island
and mainland factions, the colony's General Court was
considering whether it should suspend from office Coddington
and several of his closest political and religious allies.
Roger Williams indicated that the Coddingtonians were
opposed on Rhode Island by a group led by Jeremy Clarke and
Nicholas Easton, and that both factions had invited him to
mediate. But Williams refused, deciding "not to engage,
unless with great hopes of peacemaking"; instead, he
suggested that the situation be resolved by six "peace-
makers," three chosen from each side.64 Neither faction
adopted the suggestion, indicating that the chances for a
happy resolution of the continuing conflict were slim
indeed.

After Coddington's opponents voted to suspend him from
colonial office, the pro- and anti-Massachusetts debate grew
nastier still. Coddington's allies in both Portsmouth and
Newport countered the Court's actions by again looking to
orthodox Puritan powers. In July some in Newport asked
Portsmouth's town meeting "to voate the opinion of the

64 Roger Williams to the Town of Providence, 31 August
1648, CRW, 238-39; Roger Williams to John Winthrop, 23
September 1648, CRW, 248-49; Roger Williams to John
Winthrop, Jr., before 29 January 1648/49, CRW, 268-69.
legalitie of the Corte & orders therof held at Providence,"65 and sought out support for a separate island government with authority to submit to one of its neighboring colonies. Williams reported that "the Colonie now lookes with the torne face of 2 parties and that the greater number of Portsmouth with other lo[ving]. friends adhering to them appeare as one grieved partie [and] The other 3 Townes or greater part of them appeare to be another."66 This factionalization encouraged both Coddington's supporters and his opponents to seek leverage from outside groups; while Coddington had an appeal before the Commissioners of the United Colonies, the General Court sent representatives both to Plymouth and Massachusetts in an attempt to get recognition and acceptance for the Narragansett patent and for documents confirming the Gortonists' control of the area known as Shawomet.

Ironically, where the status of the Coddingtonian appeal to the "orthodox" colonies was concerned, faction and the stridency of the discussion proved to be the group's undoing. By the early autumn, having "considered what you have propounded" the United Colonies Commissioners informed Coddington that the "present state and condition" in Rhode Island was "full of confusion & danger, haveing much

65 Town of Newport to the Town of Portsmouth, July 1648, PR, 37.

66 Roger Williams to the Town of Providence, 31 August 1648, CRW, 238-39.
disturbance amongst yourselves." They agreed "to afford both advice & helpe: but upon prusall of the Antient Pattent granted to Newe Plymouth" found that Aquidneck fell "within their Lyne & bounds." Noting that an English commission had recognized the sovereignty of Rhode Island's neighbors, the United Colonies' representatives agreed to "afford you the same advice, protection, and helpe wch other plantations within the United Colonyes enjoy," only if Coddington could convince the "most Considerable parts" of Aquidneck to acknowledge themselves to be within Plymouth's jurisdiction.67

In the late 1630s Coddington had polarized Aquidneck residents into pro- and anti-Massachusetts factions, an accomplishment that in the waning years of the 1640s appeared to eliminate the chances for Plymouth's annexation of the island. In Portsmouth residents aimed at reducing the power of elements on Rhode Island sympathetic to Coddington and "orthodox" neighbors by adopting a more liberal nomenclature, beginning its 1648-49 records with meetings "of the Inhabitants." Documents show less deference to freemen per se and indicate that each officer in the town had to subscribe to a new engagement, adopted in June 1649, requiring him to acknowledge his being "called

67 Extracts from the minutes of the meeting of the Commissioners for the United Colonies of New England, New Plymouth, 7 September 1648, Mss. from the Massachusetts Archives, I: 47, RIHS; Ply. Recs. IX: 110.

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and chosen by the fre[e] voate of the inhabitants of Portsmouth.\textsuperscript{68} At the same time the town loosened its land policy, granting in the autumn of 1648 and in 1649 small and medium-sized lots to newcomers, actions aimed at undermining the conservative religion and politics of the Coddington faction. During a September 1648 meeting four grants of thirty acres each and one of twelve were made; at a late January 1648/49 meeting five more grants were recorded, averaging about thirty acres a piece.\textsuperscript{69} Of the ten grants made during this time, only two were to freemen. Only one of these, Thomas Gorton, had been elevated to freemanship prior to 1648 and another, Giles Slocum, had arrived in Portsmouth within the year preceeding these land grants, while the other nine grantees first appear in town records in 1644 or earlier.\textsuperscript{70} Throughout the 1640s, then, Portsmouth residents continued to admit residents unsympathetic to Coddington.

\textsuperscript{68} Moreover, a rate of thirty pounds was enacted in June 1651 "of the inhabitants of this towne" by "a townes meetinge of the Inhabitants," further blurring the line between freemen and others. See Portsmouth Town Meetings, 10 July 1648 and 3 June 1651, \textit{PR}, 42, 52.

\textsuperscript{69} Portsmouth Town Meetings, 4 September 1648 and 25 January 1648/49, \textit{PR}, 38-40.

\textsuperscript{70} There is no record of four of the ten having received any lots before 1648 or 1649; only Thomas Gorton is known to have been granted lots exceeding ten acres previously. See \textit{PR}, 38-40, and O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 407.
Coddington, obviously loathe to turn "his" island over to the government of his personal, political, and religious enemies in the patent government, and certain that he could not get the necessary support for annexation to Plymouth, decided in September 1648 to go to England to petition Parliament for advantages he had hoped to receive from the United Colonies. The way in which he made his departure suggests that he was as close as ever to ministers and magistrates of the Bay colony. He first revealed his travel plans to John Winthrop, Jr. and then proceeded to spend a significant amount of time in Boston before his journey to London. Because he had been neither officially banished nor removed from the rolls of the Boston church, Coddington could stay in the Bay colony, something that most Rhode Islanders would not, or could not, have done. While in Boston the aged Governor Winthrop gave Coddington a letter for Winthrop's son Stephen, who had returned to England three years earlier to fight in the Parliamentary army. Obviously, Winthrop believed that Coddington would be traveling in the same circles as Stephen, and trusted him to deliver correspondence. The missive likely reached its destination since, Coddington later noted, he had frequented the same London book shops as Stephen Winthrop and spoke to him on occasion.71 His close relationship to the Winthrop

71 William Coddington to John Winthrop, Jr., 19 February 1651/52, MHSC, 4th ser., VII (1865): 280-81. Coddington writes that when he was in London he had met
family probably made Rhode Island residents even warier of Coddington's motives in seeking assistance from Parliament. Once he had been appointed "governor for life" in 1651 by a committee of Parliament, Coddington had reason to believe that his power on Rhode Island was impervious to challenges, a notion that proved overly optimistic on his part. After Coddington secured his commission, he became embroiled in judicial wrangles that undermined his authority and encouraged a rapprochement between his opponents on both the mainland and the Island. An ongoing dispute between Newport resident William Dyre and Coddington over rights to a herd of cattle had been tried before a judge and jury during the winter of 1651/52. After the jury expressed "some doubt . . . whether [Dyre] were a Principale and Accessary" in the matter, Coddington cited English lawbooks and declared that when a jury cannot reach a verdict from the facts in the matter, the case "rests with the Judge to determine." The judge, who in this instance happened also to be Coddington's attorney, ruled Dyre liable for one hundred pounds in damages. In a letter to John Winthrop,__________________________.

Stephen Winthrop in a book shop, but "did not know him, for he was in scarlett till he heard him called by name." Stephen Winthrop went to England in 1645 and joined Colonel Thomas Harrison's regiment of horse; Cromwell's son Henry and Winthrop were captains in the regiment. See "Thomas Rainborow," in the DNB, and Sir Charles Harding Firth, Life of Thomas Harrison, Major-General in the Army of the Commonwealth of England, and one of the Judges of King Charles I (Worcester, MA: Charles Hamilton, 1893), 8, as well as Michael J. Canavan, "Mr. Blackstone's 'Excellent Spring,'" PCSM: Transactions XI (1910): 316.
Jr., Coddington complained that Dyre had thwarted attempts to collect the judgment by hiding the cattle; according to Coddington, Dyre and others considered themselves justified in obstructing "justice," charging "that I made my Attorney, my Judge, & that hath an ill savour with it of Partiality." Coddington defended the matter's legality, pleading that circumstances demanded that his attorney also act as judge since "none of my Councell would sitt in my cause, but did wholly refuse mee in it." Dyre and other Coddington opponents did not accept the explanation. They believed the role played by his attorney revealed Coddington's blatant disregard for fairness and justified his removal from power. To that end, within the month Dyre and Jeremy Gould embarked for England to plead for Coddington's ejection from office.

During the same winter, the so-called "Dutch Prize" case further bolstered the Dyre-Gould position against Coddington. This legal action stemmed from the capture of a Spanish cargo ship in the West Indies by a crew of Dutch privateers who, in April 1649, sold the contents to a group in Newport led by Jeremy Clarke. New Netherlands governor Peter Stuyvesant, in a letter to Providence, expressed concern that the seizure violated international law. Stuyvesant got little sympathy from the mainland.

Narragansett settlements, and consequently turned to the United Colonies, whose commissioners were equally reluctant to get involved. Assuming him to be the legitimate governor of Rhode Island, Stuyvesant then—in desperation—appealed to Coddington. Two Dutch agents visited Newport early in January 1651/52 to demand restitution for the ship and cargo in the amount of five hundred pounds sterling. They cited "Captaine Jeremy Clarke, as the principall actor, author, & deteyner," but demanded action against all town residents who had participated in the purchase. In response Coddington held court, heard the testimony of the Dutch agents, and issued summonses to the local entrepreneurs who had bought and sold portions of the ship's contents. At the same time his opponents met at Jeremy Clarke's house and agreed to go to court *en masse* to disrupt Coddington's proceedings.

The following events illustrate well both the reliance of all factions upon English institutions and the definition of these political groups in religious terms. By Coddington's account "Capt. [Richard] Morice" headed the group that "came in to the Courte, & did forbid that any Courts should be held in a tumultuous way." Thus, in Coddington's mind, Morice was responsible for "countermounding the authoritie of the State of England." He led "an interuption, not to saye a rebellion" against the one legitimate government for the Island sanctioned from
London--Coddington's. The actions of his rabble prompted Coddington to send over "my agent for England to the Counsell of Staite, who I doubt not but will take order herein." Coddington made a point to observe not only that his opponents were traitors to their native land, but that they were highly immoral and unorthodox as well. Indeed, Jeremy Gould, Jeremy Clarke, and William Dyer were all tied to the more radical Antinomian element on Rhode Island and, after the fireworks in court, Coddington snarled, the notorious preacher "Mr. Easton delivered a profecye aginst my selfe, Capt. Parteridge, & the Duch Governours agents." Thus, even worse than rejecting the authority of the Council of State, these radicals were--in Coddington's estimation, at least--falsely using the Holy Spirit to condemn legitimate leaders.74

Coddington realized the extent and depth of this "heretical," traitorous opposition in yet another court case following closely on the heels of the "Dutch Prize" fiasco. This time a tribunal ruled in favor of Coddington's close associate Alexander Partridge who alleged that Newport


resident Nathanial Dickens had refused to surrender a house that Partridge had previously purchased. But when Partridge attempted to seize the property, "the people, to above 20, came, some with guns, & some with swords, & stafs, to dispossesse Captaine Partridge." In a frenzied response, Partridge fixed on the crowd, killing one and wounding another of "the tumultuous crue," which replied with a volley of its own. After hearing that the mob had "planted a great gun to batter downe the howse," Coddington went to the scene and convinced Partridge and four or five of his assistants to vacate the house. The response of the crowd was far from conciliatory. When Partridge appeared, Coddington recalled, "they came all about mee, & would have the murtherers, was their cry: bayle they would not suffer me to take, so that I was necessitated to deliver them up into their hands." So violent was the opposition to Coddington and his government that the crowd "sent for the Councell, & say if they will not try them, they will try them & hang them too, & nothing but their deaths . . . will content them." 75 Such violence would have been unimaginable fifteen years earlier, but the concern of the crowd that liberties be maintained, justice be fair, and religion be separate from civil demands, led its members to rise up against a once-revered leader whose loyalties they

now knew clearly belonged to Massachusetts and its church-state system.

Though Coddington could claim authority from England, the violent episode at the Partridge/Dickens house had effectively solidified the opposition, causing Coddington again to look to neighboring colonies for assistance. In April 1652 he asked Winthrop "to come over unto mee, & . . . bring some friend of yours with you," while at the same time writing to "Mr Browne" of Plymouth requesting his "counsell & presence" in the government of Rhode Island. Moreover, Stuyvesant apparently also got a request for help from Coddington, having reported in early spring 1652 that he had "offered Governor Coddington Some soldiers to be employed against the Inhabitants of Rhode Island." In all three cases Coddington's plans were apparently thwarted. No responses from Winthrop and Browne are extant, and Stuyvesant's letter of support was intercepted in April 1652 by "the Court or Assembly of the people of Rhode Island," which accused the Dutch of "conspiracy and treason against the State of New England" and demanded that the bearers of the communique "give bail in the sum of 100 lb. sterling until their innocence should be proved."76 In his religious and political struggle with neighbors in Rhode

Island and with opponents in the colonial government, Coddington had used all the options available to him, including armed intervention.

On the mainland, Coddington's commission complicated matters for Bay colony allies even more than Williams's charter had. The establishment by patent of an officially anti-Massachusetts colony presented challenges for William Arnold and his followers at Pawtuxet, but Coddington's return in 1652 with his grant of lifetime governorship raised the stakes by further involving the imperial government in London. In response to the Coddington commission, inhabitants of the Narragansett region moved quickly to preserve the 1644 patent by petitioning Parliament. Roger Williams reported to the younger Winthrop that "It hath pleased God to bring your ancient acquaintance and mine, Mr. Coddington, in Mr. Carwithy his ship of five hundred; he is made Governor of this colony for his life,"77 phrasing which indicates that Williams assumed that Coddington's commission applied to the mainland settlements as well. Thus, in September 1651 William Arnold notified his Bay colony sponsors that "the Gortonists that live at Shawomut, and that company of Providence are gathering of 200 [pounds] to send Mr. Roger Williams unto

77 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., ca. early August 1651, CRW, 333.
the Parliament to get them a charter of these partes." Certainly sympathetic to Coddington's pro-Massachusetts activities, the Pawtuxet men argued that "there may come some mischiefe and trouble upon the whole country if their project be not prevented in time." Though Arnold was mistaken—the colony simply sought to confirm the old patent, thereby "Renewing of their [the towns'] Liberties upon the occasion of Mr Coddingtons late grant"—Arnold's disapproval still applied to the new mission and was based upon fears that it would weaken the Bay colony position in the region.

In light of the proposed mission, Arnold desperately solicited aid from Bay colony magistrates by reminding them of the rampant heresy that plagued the region. Notifying Massachusetts authorities that Gorton and his followers were "beast like," Arnold also reported "that now they have Racked together all ye odious things yt they can Imagen against [their opponents] & set it out in writting upon trees." They had gotten "most of their Rascally people to defame these men [John Warner and Walter Todd, Bay colony allies within Warwick]" and were "making choice of one amongst them to come to Massachusetts to defame ye men," one "whose wife is greatly affected to Gorton himself [in]

78 William Arnold to the Massachusetts General Court, 1 September 1651, RICR I: 234.

79 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 6 October 1651, CRW, 351.
doctrine [to] say no more." In his defense of Warner and Todd, Arnold recognized that "your worship nor ye much honoured Court is not Ignorant of Gorton's behayour in this kinde and what multitude of filthy stufe he onc[e] & againe Racked up and sent it to your Court to defame men even the whole state of Massachusitt and after he went to England & set it out in print to ye view of all men." Arnold was more than happy to use the radical, "heretical" past of the Gortonists to support Warner and to convince Bay colony magistrates to strengthen their presence on the Narragansett mainland.80

In response to such attacks, the Gortonists in Warwick worked to forge consensus among the Narragansett communities in support of Williams's mission to England to confirm the 1644 patent. In the early summer of 1652, Providence received a letter from Williams in England indicating that he was having a difficult time convincing the Council of State to issue a favorable order. In response, the townsmen of Providence requested from Warwick in July a letter of encouragement to Williams.81 Warwick replied by

80 William Arnold to Deputy Governor Dudley of Massachusetts, 26 April 1652, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 106, RIHS.

81 Providence town clerk John Throckmorton had been ordered "to sig[nify] unto yow wt intelligence we have from o[u]r agent [in] Ingland as also this townes minde at prsent to consi[der] of wt may Concerne o[u]r generall good wch we referr [for] yor further determinations (if yow so please) wth us--" He explained that "The last [let]t[elr] Mr Will[iams] writt we have Sent yow & desire yow to send it us
suggesting that both Providence and Warwick "treat either by word or writing with the [Is]land . . . to see if there may bee a unanimous agreement for the 4 Towns to send over together as desiring the former charter to bee renewed."82 The Gortonists' first suggestion of the kind, this effort to create a united front was a natural extension of their careful anti-Bay colony strategy.

Leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, however, did much more than simply consult with Parliament in their efforts to limit or erase dangerous pro-Massachusetts sentiment in the region. Additionally, they crafted a strategy that aimed to take away the motives for

back againe being dated to Mr Robt Williams wch hath reference to Providence & Warwick as the contents will signifie—Lastly in the behalfe of this towne whereas we have divers Lo:ters [letters] from o[u]r Agent mr Roger Williams in England wherein his careful pceedings are manifested unto us concerning o[u]r publick affaires & as yet soe answering tis of encouragemet hath been sent unto him from this Collony." Therfor," Throckmorton concluded, "this towne doth take it into Consideration & orders me in ye behalfe of this towne to write unto yow, o[u]r Lo: [loving] neighbors of Warwick intimating o[u]r desires in writing, to o[u]r aforesayd agent whif by yow assented, that then yor Towne give order in the behalfe of the Colloney unto the Generall Assistant for Warwick (supplyinge the Presidents place) forthwith to call A Comittee of the two townes consisting of Equall numbers alsoe time & place as the sayd Generall Assistant in Wisedome shall direct for composing of the sayd tre[atise]—[.]

82 Providence to Warwick is in RIHSM X: 133; Warwick's reponse is recorded in ERPr. XV: 56. Certainly, because the request involved receiving direction from England, the Gortonists were happy to suggest a unified front to that end.
Bay colony support in the Narragansett communities. Recognizing that men like Coddington and Arnold feared the instability that was so destructive to commerce and peaceful possession of property, and noting that Massachusetts partisans in the area associated religious diversity with chaos, colony magistrates put forward a two-pronged strategy. First, they outwardly defended liberty of conscience as practicable and necessary in a region where virtually all residents were exiles from "orthodoxy." Secondly, they sought to achieve order by careful reliance on English legal codes, thereby proving to pro-Massachusetts residents, English supporters, and Bay colony leaders themselves that order and spiritual diversity were not mutually exclusive concepts.

The initial part of the strategy amounted to simple confirmation of the colony's most obvious and unique characteristic. Leaders of the Narragansett communities insisted that spiritual diversity need not interfere with the proper functioning of civil society. Both Roger Williams and Gortonist Randall Holden had suggested that a number of more "orthodox" men in the region would, if they had an opportunity, force their beliefs on all members of a society, making hypocrites of most people and sparking civil disorder by driving individuals to defend themselves against what they perceived to be untruths. Moreover, Williams and Holden argued, such a system was necessarily exclusionary,
thereby depriving governments of good servants. The better strategy was to recognize at the outset of the government's formation "our different consciences" and give "as good and hopeful assurance as we are able, touching each man's peaceable and quiett enjoyment of his lawfull right and Libertie." 83

To that end, the colonial government made no laws against blasphemy and no churches were established. The Narragansett settlers knew very well that at the heart of their conflicts were heated arguments about spirituality. As a result, between the granting of the charter in 1643/44 and the subsequent legal code of 1647, great strides were made toward de jure separation of state and conscience. By court order in 1641, Aquidneck had already declared religious freedom worthy of legal protection. 84 The Parliamentary Commissioners had granted the patent, in part, because of Williams's position on "soul liberty," which helped to increase the credibility of the Narragansett settlements in England, and to set the stage for Gorton's


84 Pee, "Concepts of the Church," 32.

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mission two years later. 85 The patent document itself says nothing about religion; Williams and the Commission clearly agreed upon the limited scope of colonial government, assuming that the Narragansett's leaders would not intervene in matters of conscience. 86 The colony's magistrates followed up on this notion immediately. Williams "professed Liberty of Conscience, and was so zealous for it at the first Coming home of the Charter, that nothing in government must be Acted, till that was granted." 87 Williams apparently got his way: in the colony's initial assembly after the patent's arrival, representatives insisted "that none be accounted a delinquent for doctrine, provided it be not repugnant to the government, or the laws established." 88

85 O'Toole contends that "The significance of liberty of conscience as preached by Roger Williams and practiced in the Narragansett towns in Williams' success, though certainly a factor, is difficult to gauge with precision" since the members of the Warwick Commission "could scarcely have been ignorant of either Williams' radical views or the nature of the church order in the Narragansett plantations. There was the published exchange between Williams and John Cotton to consult, the whispers and letters of Thomas Weld and other New Englanders, and John Winthrop's strident A Short Story of the Rise, reign and ruine of the Antinomians..." See "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 359, 410. For the same reasons, I see Williams's position on conscience as central to the discussion of a charter during the winter of 1643/44.


87 Richard Scott, quoted in Fox and Burnyeat, New England Firebrand II: 248.

88 Ross, Discourse Embracing, 11.
This idea was confirmed in the 1647 legal code, which noted that each individual was guaranteed "peaceable and quiet enjoyment of his lawfull right and Libertie" notwithstanding any "different consciences, touching the truth as it is in Jesus." In fact, the conclusion of the code highlights the true views of the inhabitants of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations:

These are the Lawes that concerne all men, and these are the penalties for the transgressions thereof, which by common consent are Ratified and Established throwout this whole Colonie; and otherwise then thus, what is herein forbidden, all men may walk as their consciences persuwde them, every one in the name of his God. And let the Saints of the Most High walk in this Colonie without Molestation in the name of Jehovah, their God for Ever and Ever.90

Even though the leaders of the Narragansett region invoked religion, they did so in a very careful and broad way, so as to avoid alienating any of the colony's inhabitants.

The second part of the strategy—maintaining order despite religious diversity—proved more difficult. To achieve this result, leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations emphasized their reliance upon English law and custom. After all, the laws of their native land were

89 Pee, "Concepts of the Church," 121; RICR I: 156.
90 Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 190.
instantly recognized as authoritative to all inhabitants of the Narragansett region, including those who favored intervention from Massachusetts. In an effort to avoid even greater theological controversy and an extended battle over Scriptural interpretations, the framers of the legal code scrupulously avoided biblical citations as the bases of regulations, choosing to rely instead upon well-established and more clearly defined case law.91 They were separating themselves explicitly from the Old Testament scheme of governance laid out by John Cotton and adopted by William Coddington. The colony's representatives were attempting to prove that peace did not require a "godly commonwealth," but could be achieved through religious tolerance coupled with English common law. In this vein John Coggeshall proudly reported to the younger Winthrop just days after the code was ratified that "The Lawes of England are established with

91 The Code of 1647 occupies more than thirty-four pages of modern print, but the Bible is only cited twice in it: Judges 5:19 is used as a reference for "misadventure" (the accidental killing of a man while doing a lawful thing), while 1 Romans is used to support the law on sodomy. In each case, the biblical citation is supported by reference to one or two English statute books. See the Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 165, 173. As O'Toole observed, "The other New England colonies drew upon English common law too, of course, but Providence Plantations differed from all of them in deriving its law solely from English common law and refusing to draw any of its commands and punishments from the Bible, and in its unwillingness to permit its magistrates to follow the dictates of their consciences and God's commandments in cases not covered by explicit laws." See O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 401.
very little variation," and that things were running unusually smoothly as a result.92

The goal, of course, in emphasizing this bond between the colonial and imperial governments was to achieve sustained peace in spite of ideological divisions. The framers of the legal code admitted that their intent was not only "to prevent murder, Theft and Perjury, . . . Poverties, . . . and whoredom," but also to head off problems over litigation and sale of property. They sought to prevent "needless suitts of Law," and to that end ordered that all "bargaines, covenants, agreements, and compacts" be put into writing in a way that was "as easie to be understood as may be." After all, deeds and conveyances of "Lands, Tenements, and Hereditaments" were thought to result in "many evils" and were declared to be invalid unless "made by writing, indented, sealed and enrolled in a Meeting of the Towne" where the property lay.93


93 Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 159-70, 176-77, 186-87. Residents of Aquidneck had expressed concern about this issue years before, reporting in March 1643/44 that "itt now appearing to this present Court that much Lands have been granted unto divers persons who have made sales thereof, and have neglected to record their Lands so granted, or past on so and so to persons purchasing the same Lands, and have since gone away, or departed from the Jurisdiction, so that original Records cannot be in a dew forme made." Providence Plantations General Court of Election, 13 March 1643/44, RICR I: 127-28.
While Coddington continued to claim authority over Rhode Island, Providence and Warwick—by 1647—were using the Parliamentary patent to full advantage against Bay colony allies in Newport and Pawtuxet. For their part the inhabitants of Providence, early in that year, had voted that all court summonses be issued in the name of King and Parliament and had declared their intentions "to receive and be governed by the laws of England, together with the way of administration of them."94 Referring to the earlier overtures from Newport aimed at establishing a central government, they agreed "to hold corresponsendency with the whole colony in that model that hath been lately shown unto us by our worthy friends of the Island."95 In short, the leaders of Providence were more than willing to surrender some autonomy to a regional government under the explicit control of England.

In establishing a central legal code and government in May 1647, the Narragansett communities that pledged allegiance to the 1643 charter protected themselves from Bay colony hegemony in the only way they knew how, through the rigorous application of English law and custom. No record

94 Roger Williams to Thomas Hopkins, Sergeant of Providence, 21 February 1646/47, PTP 08, RIHS; Instructions from the Town of Providence to its Committee, 18 May 1647, RICR I: 43. In England, Parliament was still claiming to act on behalf of the King.

95 Providence Plantations General Court of Election, 19—21 May 1647, RICR I: 147—48. The date of Providence's letter to the General Court was 19 May 1647.
exists of governmental meetings between the arrival of the patent (1644) and the penning of the legal code (1647). In its initial post-patent meeting, however, representatives of Aquidneck and Providence Plantations chose Samuel Gorton "into the place of judicature," an election that--considering the Gortonists' previous criticisms of various colony governments--suggests how serious the Narragansett communities were about establishing and refining an English-style judicial system.96 The new colony's legal code promised "that those Lawes, Constitutions, and Penalties soe made shall be conformable to the Lawes of England." Its representatives vowed to reject "Anarchie" and "common Tyranny," "to preserve every man safe in his person, name and estate," and to maintain the "limitts prescribed us in our Charter, by which we have Authoritie in this respect to act." From each of the code's legal headings, its authors proudly declared, "may be reduced the common Law of the Realme of England"; restating the laws of their native land served "to bring such Laws to light for the direction or correction of such lawless persons" who sought to eliminate the liberties that the Narragansett settlers enjoyed. At the same time, the framers of the code recognized that, since their authority flowed directly from Parliament, local constables had the power to enter an inhabitant's house "in

96 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 121; Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 83.
all cases wherein the King and State are a partie or have interest in the business," such as treason and felony.97
Residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations consciously used English codes to rebuff the overtures of "orthodox" enemies within--and outside of--the new colony.

Meanwhile, Coddington's efforts to solicit assistance from Massachusetts and Plymouth drew a stern response from the pro-patent leadership of the Narragansett communities. In fact, the reaction against the conservative faction was sharp and uncompromising. During the General Court of Election at Providence in May 1648, Coddington, Baulston, and the newcomer Alexander Partridge were all suspended from their colonial offices.98 The Court declared that Coddington would be unable to serve if found guilty of "divers bills of complaint exhibited" against him and if he took the engagement to uphold the colony's laws while at the same time undermining its sovereignty. At the same session Jeremy Clarke, Nicholas Easton, John Clarke and William Dyre gave further "accusations and articles" against Coddington. One of these involved an on-going case between Dyre and Coddington initiated several months prior to the convening of the Court of Elections, while the others apparently

98 Coddington had been chosen colony president, Baulston was Assistant for Portsmouth, and Partridge was then General Sergeant-elect. All three were suspended; Providence Plantations General Court of Election, 16 May 1648, RICR I: 210.
"charged him with disloyalty to the colony for his refusal to support its chartered authority to govern and defend all men who fell within its territorial limits, especially those residing at Warwick." 99

At the same time, leaders of the infant charter government—including representatives from the settlements of Providence and Warwick, as well as from factions in both Portsmouth and Newport—framed their opposition to the appeal of Coddington and Partridge to the United Colonies in terms of its twin themes of the colony's sovereignty and the protection of liberty of conscience. Warwick's agents, Randall Holden and John Warner, presented to the United Colonies's representatives the other side of the issue. In effect acting as attorneys for the charter government, the two explained "why they [Providence and Warwick, as well as portions of both Portsmouth and Newport] dare not depart from the charter." They charged that Coddington and Partridge's division of a political entity that had been created by Parliament demonstrated disloyalty to the English government and would risk revocation of liberties that the region's inhabitants enjoyed. Moreover, they warned, if Plymouth or any other government assisted in this ill-fated enterprise, London's retaliatory wrath would be swift, sure

99 Ibid., 210, 212-13; O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 425-26. At an Island Quarter Court, William Dyre had entered an action of trespass against Coddington, claiming damages in the amount of 40 pounds.
and devastating. The United Colonies Commissioners agreed to take the Warwick position under consideration and make a decision at its next quarterly meeting.

The vast majority of residents in the Narragansett region found unity in both religious liberty and English common law, and used these two grand concepts to fend off serious internal and external challenges. While some inhabitants—namely the ideological allies of Roger Williams and Samuel Gorton—looked upon spiritual freedom as an old-time English General Baptist principle to be defended even at high personal cost, others saw the notion as a way to accomplish political goals that would be impossible in an atmosphere filled with bickering about the specifics of a religious establishment. Reliance upon English law and custom similarly removed area residents from sources of conflict by emphasizing common, widely accepted strictures over multifarious spiritual preferences and by reinforcing evolving Parliamentary legislation in favor of religious freedom. Whereas Bay colony orthodoxy thrived on its contrast to English "corruption" and required constant policing by ministers and magistrates sensitive to dissent, Narragansett inhabitants celebrated their diversity as both the result of their English spiritual heritage and the cause of their reliance upon the government of their native land.

100 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, 23 September 1648, CRW, 248-49.
In the following decades these ties would only become stronger.

Strengthening the relationship between the patent government and England took the particularly potent form of missions to London by Roger Williams and John Clarke, efforts that most residents of the Narragansett enthusiastically supported. Providence took a cue from the Gortonists to praise Williams "for your care and dilligence to watch all oportunityes to promote our peace, for we perceive your prudent and comprehensive mind stirreth every stone to present it unto the builders, to make firme the fabrick unto us." The townspeople explicitly recognized, for the first time, the connection between English authority and peace in the Narragansett region. They expressed gratitude to Williams for his steady presence, despite "so sad events, as the subjection of some amongst us, bothe English and Indians to other jurisdictions." They noted the value of an agent in England "to prevent such neere approach of our neighbours upon our borders on the Nanhigansett side, which might much anoy us, with your endeavours to furnish us with such amunition as to looke a forreigne enemie in the face." They sought out Williams's assistance to help the people of the region "to unite in one again, such as of late have had seeminge separation in some respects," and "to incouradge and strengthen our weake and enfeebled boddy to performe its worke in these forreigne partes, to the honour
of such as take care, have been, and are so tender of our good, though we be unworthy."

At the same time, the town promised to insure that Williams's "weighty affaires may not seeme tediouse, nor bee any discouradgement unto you," and pledged to pay him well for his work in England. The group hoped that "our protectours . . . renew our Charter for the reestabishinge of our government," and prayed for the "subjectinge of persons who have been refractory, to yield themselves over, as unto a settled government." Providence even thought that "it might be the pleasure of that honourable State to invest, apoint, and impower," Williams to return "as Governour of this Collony" with the desire that "the government . . . bee honourably put upon this place, which might seem to add much weight forever hereafter," in the successful ordering of the region. The Plantations concluded by showering praise on Williams, and gave credit to God

who hath pleased to selecte you to such a purpose, as we doubt not will conduce to the peace and safety of us all, as to make you once more an instrument to impart and disclose our cause unto those noble and grave Senators our honourable protectors, in whose eies God hath given you favour (as we understand) beyond our

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hopes, and moved the hearts of the wise to stir on your behalf.101

As a result of the colony's tenuous position in the council chambers of London, inhabitants sought to put their best foot forward. The most telling action of the leaders of Providence Plantations in pursuit of peace and order—as well as respectability in the eyes of English authorities—was passing laws against slander and "pretended" power. Noting that "this present Assembly is informed that some ill-effectuated and rude persons within this Collonie are apt to carry themselves uncivilly in giving out speeches tendinge to the disparagement of others, by callinge them out of their names, or other ways to villifie them," and that these renegades had degraded "not only of the government heere established," but also, by implication "the State and Commonweale of England, our honorable protectors," the magistrates decided that "whosoever utereth such words as are the disparidgement of another, savoringe of malice or an imbittered spirit," would be subject to trial for slander in each town in the colony.102 The law appears to have been aimed not only at the elimination of factions in general, but in particular against emerging pro-Massachusetts elements in Warwick, which many magistrates

101 Town of Providence to Roger Williams, 28 October 1652, RICR I: 248-49.

102 Providence Plantations General Assembly, 28 October 1652, RICR I: 246.
believed to be forming "no lawful committees" that pretended to pass regulations for the entire colony. Such persons acted "against our present State," were "prejudistiail to oure poore estate," intended "to stir up strife and contention amongst ourselves," and were "dishonourable to the State or Commonweale of England." These factions, the assembly feared, undermined legitimate authority in both Providence and London and pretended that "this present Court" was not "a legall Court." Thus, for the legitimacy of Providence Plantations government and the honor of England, the assembly ordered "that the clamours of people might bee stopped touchinge any legality aforesayed," so "that unity and peace may still bee preserved in our poore Collony."103

More than mere mimickry of English institutions, the charter and consequent legal code--on paper at least--gave the leaders of the Narragansett region the authority to control their wily constituents. The colonial government asserted power over the towns and attempted to gain consensus. The General Court granted to Providence, Warwick, Portsmouth, and Newport all the priviledges of a town, making all four equal in stature and authority. In particular, it sought to protect the inhabitants of Warwick

103 Ibid., 247. Gortonists were losing hold of the government of Warwick and their opponents--in the view of Warner and Todd--were increasingly seeking out the advice of magistrates in the Bay colony.
from their enemies, both locally and in the Bay colony, warning those seeking to do harm "to be have yor selves towards o[u]r friends & allyes of Warwick plantacon."104 At the same time, the assembly ordered the establishment of local courts in each of the four towns, laying out specific regulations for their operation, including strict adherence to the traditional jury system.105 The colony's General Court reminded the towns of their duties to the whole, to control land distribution and maintain order. To this end, it ordered that each community administer to its Assistants an engagement whereby each promised "faithfully and truly to the utmost of your power to execute the commission committed unto you" and "to do neither more nor less in that respect than that which the Colonie [authorized] you to do according to the best of your understanding." Reciprocally, the inhabitants entrusted their officials with "the due administration of Justice and the execution thereof throughout the whole Colonie, [and] do hereby engage ourselves to the utmost of our power to support and uphold you in your faithful performance thereof." These engagements, in addition to the procedural rule against the passage of laws without the consent of the General Court and


105 Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 199, 206, 211.
confirmation of the towns, were meant to inhibit future factionalization.106

In other ways as well, the legal code overtly sought to minimize the risks of internal power struggles. In a clause seemingly aimed at Coddington and his pro-Massachusetts faction, the new statutes outlawed any usurpation of authority, ordering that "no person shall (but at his great peril) presume to beare or execute any office, that is not lawfully called to it; nor though he be lawfully called and confirmed, presume to doe more or less than those that had powre to call him, or did authorize him to doe."107

Limiting the claims of would-be usurpers, Narragansett leaders believed, depended in part upon the official government's control of both legislative and administrative records. To that end, the code ordered that holders of "Books, Papers or Parchments, in which are conteyned Orders, Records, Purchases, or Charters that belong unto Colonie, Island or Townes, or have any other things appertaining thereto" were to deliver them to colonial authorities within one month of the end of their terms.108 Similarly, it forbad the existence of any rival law-making bodies within the same jurisdiction, noting that "no Assembly shall have

106 Providence Plantations General Court of Election, 19-21 May 1647, RICR I: 149-51, 153-55; Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 196, 198-200,
107 Ibid., 157.
108 Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 205.
powre to constitute any Lawes for the binding of others, or
to ordaine Officers for the execution thereof, but such as
are founded upon the Charter and rightlie derived from the
General Assemblie, lawfully met and orderly managed."109
The colony's leaders sought to prevent the upshot of such
legislative and administrative competition, that is "Riot
[and] Rout." They noted that an "unlawfull Assemblie" was
certain to be "most destructive to civill peace and order,"
ironically pointing to civil war England as the very model
of stability.110 To reduce the potential for disloyalty
and disorder the Court ordered that all inhabitants pledge
allegiance to the charter.

Part of bringing disparate towns and ideologies
together involved limiting the impact of religious
predispositions on public service and policy. One problem
confronting the framers of the legal code centered on the
relatively old issue of oaths. Williams had, of course,
inaugurated a discussion on the validity of requiring
government officers and court witnesses to swear before God
to serve faithfully or give truthful testimony. As
religious opinions in the Narragansett region multiplied,
this concern remained; it is reflected in the legal code of

109 Ibid., 157.

110 The framers of the code noted that leaders in
England carefully operated under a single government, and
that "Riott" and "Rout" produced from competing legislatures
were "with such vigilance withstood and prevented in our
1647. "Forasmuch as the consciences of sundry men, truly conscienable, may scruple the giving or taking of an oath," the framers explained,

it would be noways suitable to the nature and constitution of our place (who professeth ourselves to be men of different consciences, and not one willing to force another) to Debar such as cannot do so, eyther from bearing office amongst us, or from giving testimony in a case depending.111

Due to a shortage of qualified men to fill positions of government, the code's compilers agreed "that a solemn profession or Testimony in a Court of Record, or before the Judge of Record, shall be accounted, throwout the whole Colonie of as full force as an oath; and because many, in giving engagement or testimony, are usually more over awed with the Penaltie which is known, than with the most High, who is little known in the Kingdoms of men."112 In short, the framers acknowledged and sought to work around spiritual diversity in an attempt to involve more of the most qualified men in government.

During the same session the Court sought explicitly to tame pro-Massachusetts elements both in Pawtuxet and in the communities of Aquidneck. Residents of Rhode Island officially were given power to decide the course of their

111 Civil Code of 1647, RICR I: 181.
112 Ibid., 181-82.
own governments; the General Court of Providence Plantations ordered Island inhabitants present at the May 1647 meeting to "choose their officers of the Island" and commanded the new "Councils of Newport and Portsmouth" to establish their "monthly and quarterly Courts" within a month. The Court asserted tighter jurisdiction over the territories claimed by the Bay colony's allies at Pawtuxet under the leadership of William Arnold. Suggesting that the settlement was one of the "remote places inhabited and possessed within our Charter," the magistrates "found necessary that a vigilant eye be had over them," and left to the Arnolds and others "their choice, whether they will have Providence, Portsmouth, or Newport over them." The residents of Pawtuxet, however, were not forthcoming in expressing their desires to submit to one of the three main towns of the colony. As a result, the members of the Court sought to "write to the Bay about Patuxet Inhabitants" to encourage their submission to "the government of the Province."\textsuperscript{113} Massachusetts magistrates apparently did not apply any pressure, choosing instead to support Arnold's group against the fledgling colony.

The colony moved to confirm the legitimacy of local institutions in an effort to shield towns from the threat posed by pro-Massachusetts factions. Town charters had been

\textsuperscript{113} Providence Plantations General Court of Election, 19-21 May 1647, \textit{RICR I}: 152-53. Note the self-referential choice of words.
agreed upon in the May 1647 General Court, but were only
finally dispatched in a special meeting of the General Court
in March 1648/49. These documents allowed towns that were
"far remote from each other . . . helpe in designinge of
differences and tryinge of causes." Each community was to
elect officers and enact "such particular orders and
penalties, and so many of the Comon lawes agreed in the
Generall, as are not annexed already to the General Court of
Tryalls" or not "conformable to the lawes of England."114
Providence's charter stressed that "lawes, constitutions and
punishments, for the civill government of the said
plantation" follow those of their native land and
surrendered to the "Generall Assemble power and authoritie
so to dispose the generall governmente of that plantation as
it stands in reference to the rest of the
plantations."115 Evidence indicates that Providence,
along with Portsmouth and Warwick, set up town courts in the
summer of 1649 to try cases not within the colony Court of
Trial's jurisdiction.116

114 WR, 253-54.

115 Providence Town Charter, 14 March 1648/49, RICR I:
215-16.

116 PR, 43; ERPr. II: 40; WR, 43-44; Civil Code of
1647, RICR I: 202. The General Court certainly wanted to
increase the respect of authority for the colonial
government and thus authorized the magistrates of the town
where the General Court of Trials convened to "sit in court
with the General Officers, and have equal authority to
voate and act with the Generall Officers." The effect was
increased power for local judges and--indirectly-- for the
Besides opening the political process to the previously disfranchised and designating legitimate governing institutions, communities sought to limit challenges to their governments by demanding organization and centralization of records. In 1656 Warwick pressed its former clerk, John Greene, to deliver "the Records of the Towne" or "forfeit and pay unto the Towne Treasury the full sume of twenty shillings 6 per penny for retarding the Towne this day."117 The inhabitants of Portsmouth similarly took up the issue of "Deliveringe the Records papers or wrtings which belonge to the town and Towne Clarks office" as well as the "Difference concerninge the laying out of land."118 In the end, "for the prevention of such disorders," the town council proposed a plan for the proper evidencing of property, ordered its clerk to copy all General Court regulations relating to lands and designated a special book for the keeping of records.119

towns themselves; moreover, it decreased the chances that an inaccurate verdict would be reached. See Providence Plantations General Court of Election, 22 May 1649, RICR I: 218; and O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 434.

117 Warwick Town Meeting, 2 June 1656, Warwick Town Records, First Book, 1647-1667, Vault K-Wa6, 143, RIHS.

118 Portsmouth Town Meeting, 31 July 1657, PR, 83.

119 Portsmouth actually spent much time on town records and land evidences. At a town meeting of 9 July 1660 the town agreed to abide by the order of the General Court of Election of 16 March 1641, ruled that the book containing the evidences should be safely kept at the house of William Baulston, and appointed a committee of four to view all deeds and copies to make sure they were legal as
On the colonial level, too, recordkeeping gained greater urgency. In March 1657/58 the General Court, in a clear attempt to limit challenges to its authority from within and without, stressed the safety of "the Grand Charter of the Collony," ordering Roger Williams to deliver it "to the President by a safe hand with all possible speede and conveyance." At the same time, other important documents were to be collected and shipped to the colony's officers: "the Councill of States letter in Mr. Nicholas Easton's hands," "the Councill of State's letter brought from England by Mr. William Dyre," and "the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, &c., his late letter and order to the collony." The Assembly was eager to obtain custody of these four items since they in fact formed the constitution of the colony and clearly spelled out authority from England for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations' existence as an independent entity. The Court did not leave room for any individual to doubt its resolve; it commanded those in possession of these vital documents to surrender them immediately or forfeit one hundred pounds sterling.120

At the same time, the General Court offered unprecedented legislation designed to promote greater peace entered. See PR, 100-101.

120 Rhode Island General Court, 10 March 1657/58, RICR 1: 380-83.
and safety. It ordered "that no house of entertainment shall suffer any person to tipple after nine of ye clock at night," that individuals under the age of twenty-one remain under the control of parents, masters, or guardians, and that no one "tolerate or countenance sonnes or servants in licentious courses at unseasonable times or places." Colony representatives empowered towns to "schatter" and "remove" any young persons "if they shall live disorderly," and ordered neglect of such regulations punishable by five pound fines. During the same session commissioners voted that all marriages "be published either at a Towne meetinge, or on a traininge day, at ye head of ye Companie, or by a writinge under ye Magistrates hands fixed upon some noted place in ye Towne." By regulation marriages were never to be incestuous; "ye parties offendinge" were to "suffer ye punishment of adulertie." Legislators outlawed magistrates' removing themselves from cases, arguing "that thereby he prejudgeth ye case, and forestalls ye mindes of some more or less of ye number in ye jruie, and thereby doth hazard ye best and most just cause." They instituted penalties for bringing false charges, and made provisions for prisons in each of the colony's four towns.121 In short, the March 1655/56 Court of Commissioners established itself as the

121 Court of Commissioners, 17 March 1655/56, RICR I: 327-35. The legislation from this Court is comparable to the Assembly of 1647, which established the legal code under the Charter of 1643.
most productive in almost a decade, and the most concerned with reforming unseemly political behavior in the short history of the colony.

Long after the 1655/56 Court of Commissioners, colony leaders concerned themselves with the habits of their constituents. They dealt with individuals known for "abusive cariage & expressions" and general contempt for authority,122 as well as with Indians who had promoted riots near Warwick.123 They realized that colony officers were not above reproach and made provisions for the arrest of town treasurers who mishandled rates.124 Lawmakers stepped up efforts "to have a prisson or prissons in the collony, for the safe keepinge of offenders, or such as may be on severall cases arrested, and cannot or otherwise will not give security, for appearance to tryall"; the Court instituted this order by recognizing that--despite the existence of jails in each of the towns in the colony, "noe prisson is yet in such capassity within the collonies

122 This is a partial description of Portsmouth resident Edward Lay, who had fled from Seabrooke and was a wanted man in Connecticut for failure to appear before magistrates at Hartford. See J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 15 vols. (Hartford, CT: Brown and Parsons, 1850-90), 1: 302-303.

123 Providence Plantations General Council, 9 March 1658/59, RICR 1: 405-406.

124 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court of Commissioners, 23 August 1659, RICR 1: 424.
as to answer the sayd occasion."

By May 1658, then, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were dealing with overflowing prisons, the fruits of increased legislation and enhanced law enforcement.

During the same period towns also took unilateral action to smooth out differences with neighboring communities, most of which centered on territorial boundaries. In April 1657, Warwick offered "to put it unto arbitration concerning any Claime or difference in respect of the line and Comon"; the town ordered arbitrators to meet with representatives from Pawtuxet "to give them ane Answer as they see cause conduceing to the good of the Towne in generall." About the same time Portsmouth sent a committee to meet with men from Newport to confirm the boundary between the two towns; during the next three years inhabitants of both communities worked to resolve land and other issues. To prevent future disputes between

\[\text{\[125\] Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court of Commissioners, 18 May 1658, \textit{RICR I}: 391.}\]

\[\text{\[126\] Warwick Town Meeting, 8 April 1657, Warwick Town Records, First Book, 1647-1667, Vault K-Wa6, 153, RIHS.}\]

\[\text{\[127\] Warwick Town Meeting, 1 June 1657, Warwick Town Records, First Book, 1647-1667, Vault K-Wa6, 156, RIHS.}\]

\[\text{\[128\] Portsmouth Town Meeting, 31 August 1657, \textit{PR}, 83. On 2 March 1657/58, Portsmouth chose Baulston to meet with representatives from Newport to resolve all differences with Newport. See \textit{PR}, 87. In its 7 March 1659/60 meeting Portsmouth appointed William Almy, William Hall, and Thomas Cornell to view the records to see what evidence they could send to William Brenton concerning the land between the two towns.}\]

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residents of different towns over land, the General Court ordered that "noe person, strainger or other, shall make any further purchases of lands or Islands from the Indians within the precincts of this Collony" without permission from the Assembly.129

In stressing the compatibility of religious diversity with law and order, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were able to remove the most potent threat to the colony's stability, the faction determined to win external, "orthodox" intervention in the region. By the mid-1650s, both William Coddington and William Arnold repudiated their oppositions to the Narragansett colonial government and surrendered--outwardly, at least--their loyalties to the Bay colony. For Coddington, increased pressure from a more effective colonial government and the improved image of and magnified support for the Rhode Island colony in England, made capitulation a reasonable option. Similarly, the colony's redoubled devotion to the preservation of order, coupled with the realization that the Bay colony would never tolerate Pawtuxet residents' spiritual leanings, resulted in Arnold's return to the good graces of the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

129 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court of Commissioners, 2 November 1658, RICR I: 403-404.
In the case of Pawtuxet, reconciliation with the colony at large was extraordinarily gradual. Roger Williams took the lead, observing that the Arnold faction had extreme differences with the Bay colony on the issue of religion. In a letter to the General Court in Boston Williams noted that four families in the settlement had expressed misgivings about the town's relationship with Massachusetts; at least two had done so for religious reasons. Stephen Arnold, according to Williams, desired "to be uniforme with us," while Zachary Rhodes "being in the way of dipping is (potentially) banished by you." Moreover, William Arnold and William Carpenter, being "very far allso, in religion from you, if you knew all," similarly expressed doubts about maintaining allegiance to the Bay colony.

At the same time Williams stressed that the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, as the result of its leaders' campaign to maintain order, had gained the respect of the authorities in England. He noted that Massachusetts' grip on Pawtuxet had been the source of "constant obstructing of all order and authoritie amongst us," and that these dyed-in-the-wool dissenters from orthodoxy expressed "a willingnes to arbitrate" with Massachusetts in order "to obey his highnes[s]'s] authoritie in this charter." Apparently, Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell had recently taken a strong position on the boundaries and legitimacy of the colony of Rhode Island and
Providence Plantations which had forced the Arnold faction's leaders to reconsider their official statuses as residents of Suffolk County, Massachusetts. With a stroke of his pen, the Lord Protector had forced the most important Pawtuxet men to turn their backs on Boston. 130

Achieving this peace and unity on the mainland involved incorporating the Pawtuxet men into the government of a single Narragansett colony. To achieve that goal, the General Court agreed to offer the Pawtuxet men good terms for their submission. Explaining that the colony was "very ready and willinge to gratifie the desire of that Honour'd government" in England, the magistrates promised to settle differences with the Arnold faction by arbitration. It requested that the Pawtuxet men take up the issue within a month, but guaranteed that "the said inhabitants shall enjoy the benefitt of all equal and impartial justice, together with ourselles," including the benefit of freemanship and full participation in the colony's government. It agreed to open communications with Massachusetts "for the endinge of all such controversies amongst us" that had acted to impede unity and peace. It pledged that, by way of the "arbitration of some indifferent and judicious men, mutually chosen," the inhabitants of Pawtuxet would "enjoy the

130 Roger Williams to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 15 November 1655, CRW, 443-45.
benefits and privileges of this jurisdiction." Most importantly, the Court concluded, taking such a course promised to "greatly promote the honor and pleasure of his Highness, yea, of the Most High also." Providence, too, pushed for the submission of the Arnold faction, refusing to allow the group to participate in town governance or record Pawtuxet land plots until each resident of the community "hath set his hand to a ingadgement to be obedient to ye lawes of ye Towne." Residents of Providence were in frequent communication with both Arnold and Massachusetts in an effort to

131 Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 23 May 1656, RICR I: 339.

132 Providence to the General Court of Massachusetts, 12 May 1656, RICR I: 341-45. Providence sought to get powder and ammunition from Boston authorities and observed that local tribes had "not been sparing of your name as the patron of all their wickedness against our English men, women, and children." How then, since "the Most High and Only Wise" had chosen to impose upon the "barbarians" the English "bond of authority over them" could the magistrates in Massachusetts deny assistance to fellow subjects of the Protector?

133 Providence Town Meeting, 14 November 1655, ERPr. II: 90.


135 The Providence Town Meeting of 27 April 1656 ordered that "upon receit of a Letter from ye Governr of ye Baye that a man be sent thither to treate about ye busines of Pautuxet" and tapped Thomas Olney, Sr. to deliver it. See ERPr. II: 93.
mediate a transfer of authority to the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. The situation was, for Narragansett magistrates, vital to the elimination of the orthodox Puritan beachhead in the region and the preservation of the colony's unique liberties.

Providence's intensity gradually paid off. Within three weeks of an April 1656 overture to Massachusetts, Roger Williams announced that only "2 or 3 English families at Pawtuxet" continued to be aligned with Boston. He begged the Bay colony General Court for "your prudent removall of this great and long obstruction to all due order and regular proceedings among us, viz. the refusall of these families (pretending your name) to conforme with us unto his Highnes authoritie amongst us." He noted that "This obstruction is so great and constant, that (without your prudent removall of it) it is impossible that either his Highnes or yourselves can expect such satisfaction and observance from us as we desire to render."136

In the end, the General Court in Boston remained inflexible, but Narragansett leaders' negotiations with the Pawtuxet settlers—including promises of stable government and greater religious freedom—worked. In May 1658, William Arnold and others were still asking Massachusetts magistrates for advice in legal matters. Within a week,

136 Roger Williams to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 12 May 1656, CRW, 452.
however, Arnold and William Carpenter--on behalf of all inhabitants of Pawtuxet--asked authorities in Boston "to give us a full discharge from submission to this Jurisdiction." 137 They explained that their decision was based upon their consideration of the "trouble betwenee your Collonie and the government of Providence Plantations with reference to ourselves" and admitted that they were accepting proposals from Roger Williams which, though not extant, appear to have emphasized differences between Providence and the Bay colony on the matter of conscience, an issue that became increasingly important to the Arnold faction. 138 In short, the Pawtuxet men, by the late 1650s, felt that they no longer were forced to choose between religious freedom and order.

137 The Arnold group asked Bay colony magistrates how to proceed with Gortonist John Greene, who had reeized cattle that the Pawtuxet men had taken from him in execution of an order from the Bay colony. General Court clerk Increase Nowell replied that Arnold and his men were empowered to retake the cattle and to bring Greene and his accomplices to Boston for trial. See Petition of William Arnold to Massachusetts General Court, 20 May 1658, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 99-105, RIHS. The request for release from the Bay colony jurisdiction came 26 May 1658.

138 Inhabitants of Pautuxit to the General Court in Boston, 1 June 1658, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 107-108, RIHS. The signatories were William Carpenter, Steven Arnold, Zachary Rhodes, Benjamin Smith, Richard Townsend, Christopher Hawksworth, Roger Williams and witness John Shelden. The conclusion that Williams convinced the Pawtuxet men to submit to Providence because of religious freedom is based on Williams's letter to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 15 November 1655, CRW, 443-47.
Coddington, too, eventually submitted to the charter
government of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations,
having received the one condition he had demanded for the
relinquishing of his commission—-an order from England. By
mid-1655, the colony's leaders, via agents in London, had
convinced Cromwell to address Coddington directly. The Lord
Protector, himself a believer in the compatibility of
religious freedom and order, issued an order to Coddington
to lay down his commission. As a result, Coddington agreed
to "freely submit to ye authoritie of his Highness in this
Colonie as it is now united, and that with all my heart."
This public admission before the Court of Commissioners
strengthened Rhode Island's claim to the status of a
unified, stable, provincial English government.

Between 1643 and 1658, the vast majority of residents
in the Narragansett region defined themselves by their
opposition to imposed orthodoxy, and came together—-despite
theological differences—-to combat those factions
spiritually and politically committed to Massachusetts.
Throughout the 1640s and 1650s, the mainland followers of
William Arnold at Pawtuxet and the disciples of William
Coddington on Aquidneck declared themselves to be faithful
adherents to the Bay colony and worked tirelessly in support
of Massachusetts' territorial claims in the region. The
spectre of magistrates in Boston controlling both civil and—
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by the implications of the emerging "New England way"--
religious policy in the area prompted most residents in the
four Narragansett communities to identify liberty of
conscience and English authority as sources of both unity
and justification for opposition to the Bay colony. In
doing so, they brought even the most stubborn holdouts into
a single government, overcame what initially appeared to be
insurmountable diversity, and created a system unprecedented
in the Anglo-American world, one under which even the most
radical among them could live.

The successful establishment of the Rhode Island polity
had enormous implications for both Old and New England. It
gave proponents of liberty of conscience the confidence to
make their case forcefully in England and throughout
neighboring colonies. It served as a powerful example for
partisans who asserted the efficacy of separating religion
and government. Perhaps most important, it destroyed the
notion of a unified, homogenous New England, helped
legitimize diversity, and shaped the course of the future
discussion on both sides of the Atlantic.
CHAPTER 5

OPPOSING ORTHODOXY: NARRAGANSETT COMMUNITIES BATTLE NEIGHBORING PURITAN COLONIES

At the beginning of 1643, each of the Narragansett settlements struggled to achieve the stability that Bay colony communities knew, but without the traditional linkage of civil and religious spheres that Puritan authorities deemed necessary for a "godly commonwealth." Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Shawomet were established by women and men who found fault with Massachusetts orthodoxy, and who took their spiritual cues from the Separatists and General Baptists of London, Essex, and Kent, from the left-leaning Puritans of Lincolnshire and Suffolk or from self-described mystics infused with the notion that God dwelled in all people. The settlers of Aquidneck, Providence and Shawomet clung to a variety of beliefs, finding unity only in their rejection of the brand of Puritanism espoused by the magistrates and ministers of Massachusetts. While the founders of Narragansett communities gradually learned to avoid internal rifts--through the separation of the religious and civil spheres--they still faced powerful,
hostile neighbors. These external enemies had the benefit not only of a common ecclesiastical and political worldview, but also held a concept of covenant that demanded the elimination of "heresy" in the region.

"Orthodox" colonies, led by Massachusetts authorities, were especially eager to minimize the threats to uniformity posed by Baptists and the followers of Samuel Gorton. Both groups were constant reminders to Bay colony authorities and ministers that "heresy" existed in many forms throughout the Narragansett region, that "illiterate mechanicks" sought to tear down "Truth," and that any toleration of such notions risked the invocation of God's wrath. Within Massachusetts authorities stepped up their opposition to all dissent, particularly Anabaptism. Horrified by the rapid production during the early 1640s of English treatises defending "believers' baptism," Massachusetts ministers like Thomas Shepard and Connecticut's Thomas Hooker fired back, contesting the biblical basis for adult baptism while criticizing dissent generally. In line with such views magistrates took up their pens against "heretics" and

1 Two of the most important defenses of believers' baptism were John Spilsbury, A Treatise concerning the lawfull subject of baptism (London, 1643) and John Lathrop, To Sion's Virgins (London, 1644). In answer, Thomas Shepard wrote New England's Lamentations for Old England's present errors and divisions (London, 1644), while Hooker preached a series of sermons designed to defuse the impact of Spilsbury's work throughout 1644.
legislated against Anabaptism throughout the summer and autumn of 1644.2

The Bay colony efforts against Baptists in this period were part of a more general trend to erect walls against all sectarianism. From the mid-1640s, John Cotton and Thomas Shepard had wanted to create godly institutions and to correct consciences, arguing that "To cut off the hand of the magistrate from touching men for their consciences will certainly in time . . . be the utter overthrow" of proper and moral government. Peter Bulkeley agreed and hoped that English Puritans would follow New England's example by creating and sustaining a biblical commonwealth of their own. At the same time he worried about New England's waning resolve; after the Antinomian controversy, he feared that the Bay colony was sliding into the abyss of sectarianism; he challenged the inhabitants of Boston and the surrounding towns to maintain the "city upon a hill" or else to become "a Beacon upon the top of a mountaine, desolate and forsaken."3 Disturbed by the Hutchinsonian episode and

2 Massachusetts passed a law against Baptists in November 1644. See Mass. Recs., II: 85. During the same year, Winthrop's chronicle of the Antinomian controversy, Short Story, came off London presses.

Robert Child's petition for more open church membership, Massachusetts ministers convened in Cambridge in 1646 and agreed to accept the authority of synods in doctrine and discipline, effectively decreasing the power of church members. In doing so, pastors eliminated risk of future congregational uprisings, and rejected any movement toward toleration. Nathaniel Ward was certain that the devil had been responsible for "polyplity" and argued that anyone "willing to tolerate any unsound Opinion, that his own may be tolerated" simply suspends the Bible "at the Devil's Girdle." Indian apostle John Eliot was less disparaging about diversity, but made very clear his opposition to it. He explained that "westward from Martins Vinyard Some leauges layeth Road Island where they have 2. Townes but noe Church nor Minister, nor doe they desire any that I heare of." Near the mouth of another river, Eliot explained, "lyeth Providence, which Towne Mr Williams first began, but

4 Robert Emmet Wall, Jr., Massachusetts Bay: The Crucial Decade, 1640-1650 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), ch. 5 and 6; Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 165; Ziff, John Cotton, 207-208, 227. Dennis O'Toole explained that Massachusetts Bay had two choices: to "move with the swiftly flowing currents of their time and practice a greater tolerance toward men of differing consciences within and without the bounds of their colony" or "place the capstone upon the ecclesiastical walls they had been raising and defend them to the last soul against any men." Obviously, Massachusetts' leaders chose the latter. See O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 379-380.

5 Ward, Simple Cobbler of Agawam, 7-8.
there also they affect to have no minister, but is also A Receptacle of many varietyes of opinions."6

Such criticism of heterodoxy, as well as the official persecution that accompanied it, helped the residents of the Narragansett region define their colony in three ways. First, by focusing upon the persistent territorial and ideological threats posed by neighboring colonies throughout the period between 1643 and 1660, leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were able to lend genuine urgency to their pleas for assistance in London. They noted that Massachusetts, the colony from which many residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had been exiled for religious dissent, continued to encourage Indians near Warwick to harrass Gortonists there; moreover, Bay colony representatives claimed jurisdiction over large sections of territory near Providence, despite the protests of town residents. Connecticut's settlers of the mainland area southwest of Shawomet complained about unruly and heretical mobs from Rhode Island and asked to be placed under the "godly" protection of Boston. Plymouth sought out defectors from Newport, Portsmouth and Providence to support its claims to islands in Narragansett Bay and land south of Warwick. All around them the residents of Rhode Island and

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Providence Plantations faced governments that aimed to annex their colony, a fact that envoys used to gain immediate entry to policy-making committees in England.

Second, the spectre of magistrates in Boston or in other colonies controlling both civil and--by the implications of the emerging "New England way"--religious policy in the area prompted most residents in the four Narragansett communities to cling ever closer to their spiritual beliefs, to defend the principle of free conscience against their "orthodox" neighbors, and to define themselves in opposition to New World Puritanism. In doing so, they developed a useful history for presentation in England, one which cast aspersions upon neighboring colonies as intolerant.

In a third and related way, the settlers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, while aggressively and confidently defending the principle of free religious expression against their "orthodox" neighbors, also established for their colony its image as a refuge for oppressed outcasts. Like most English sectarian, they held stubbornly the notion that "truth" could be found only through free theological debate and by preaching against ecclesiastical establishments. Like early Christians many of them relished the prospect of suffering for their beliefs. In defining themselves as principled victims, Rhode Islanders were well positioned to win favor in
England, where leaders were beginning to appreciate religious freedom. In particular, the colony's Baptists and Gortonists told stories in London about their devotion to free conscience, the price they paid for this devotion at the hands of Bay colony authorities, and the continuing threats such vengeful neighbors posed to the territorial security of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

In late 1643 the arrival of a patent for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations officially inaugurated the battle over the Narragansett territory. Important because it gave England's recognition and nominal protection to the outcast entity, the document began by introducing the members and outlining the authority of the earl of Warwick's Committee. It set vague boundaries for the colony, lines which included not only the mainland communities of Providence and Shawomet, but the island of Aquidneck as well. The Commission claimed, "for the better Government and Defence" of the area, authority "to nominate, appoint, and constitute all such subordinate Governors, Counsellors, Commanders, Officers, and Agents, as they shall judge to be best affected and most fit and serviceable for the said Islands and Plantations." Such power remained in England to protect the Narragansett region from "open violences and private Disturbances and Distractions" for which its inhabitants
were well known. Such an observation from Warwick and his peers was important because it reflected a more general perception of Aquidneck and Providence Plantations among English leaders. Authorities in London finally recognized the existence of a troubled cluster of communities on the Bay colony frontier, groups of individuals engaged in constant bickering in civil and religious matters and threatened on all sides by hostile English and native neighbors.

Though the patent promised to help the fledgling Narragansett government fight off territorial claims from neighbors, challenges came quickly, first from Plymouth. In September 1644 Plymouth petitioned the Warwick Commission about the region and then sent magistrate John Brown to Aquidneck to inform those operating under the new patent that "a great part of their supposed Government is within the line of the government of New Plimouth." Brown proceeded to forbid the colony's representatives from "exercis[ing] any authority or power of Government within the limits of our Letters Patents." He disseminated warnings "publiquely in the place of their Assembly" and "in a private way from house to house" at Newport and Portsmouth "discouraging the people from yielding any obedience unto


8 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 83.
the authority of the Charter."9 After listening to Brown, the assembly debated imprisoning or otherwise punishing the Plymouth magistrate, even suggesting that he be "sent to the Dutch and so far [for] England." To Samuel Gorton, who was in attendance, Brown committed high treason by contradicting an order of a committee of Parliament.10 Nonetheless, this challenge was simply the first in a series stretching over the next several decades.

Not surprisingly, Massachusetts authorities, too, rejected the Narragansett patent and sought to thwart its implementation. Making no secret of its displeasure with the document, the Bay colony magistrates ordered the garrisoning of Shawomet Neck just outside of Providence. Soon after Williams had arrived with the patent in September 1644, the General Court in Boston, according to the later recollections of Samuel Gorton, gave the "order to set up writs upon our houses, where formerly we lived, prohibiting all men for entermeddling with those Houses, Lands, Peoples, either English or Indians (which they call their own people) without their consent and approbation in these parts."11 In short, authorities in Boston ignored the Parliamentary


10 Brown's son later reported that Gorton had told him "that his father had done that which he deserved to die for, and were hee in any other place it would cost him his life." See Winslow, *Hypocrisie Unmasked*, 83-84.


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document and continued their efforts to eliminate Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.12

One major indication of impending trouble was Massachusetts magistrates' claims that their colony's own revised patent had given them authority over the entire Narragansett region, courtesy of Parliament itself. Writing to the "chief officer" of Providence Plantations, Roger Williams, the General Court in Boston insisted that "wee receaved lately out of England a charter from the Authority of the high courte of Parliament bearing [the] date 10th December 1643 whereby the Narragansett Bay & a certaine tract of land wherein Providence & the Iland of Quindny are Included" were granted to the Bay colony. It commanded the Providence men to "forbeare to exercise any Jurisdivcon therein otherwise to appeare at our next Generall Courte . . . to shew by what right yow claime any such jurisdiccon."13 Though they had had many earlier opportunities, Massachusetts authorities chose to use a document of dubious validity, indicating continued,

12 As O'Toole noted, the Bay colony leaders were alarmed at "the spread of heretical and tolerationist notions among the faithful in their own province and in England, and their awareness that the existence and growing strength of the heretic plantations situated upon New England's southern flank, besides affronting a jealous God, diminished their own accomplishments and gave encouragement to those who would pull down the Lord's house from within." See "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 367.

13 Chapin, Documentary History I: 229.
extraordinary desperation to neutralize the troublesome Narragansett colony.

Concerns about sectarianism and "heresy" continued to motivate "orthodox" neighbors in their disputes with "Rogues Island." Magistrates in Massachusetts were horrified about the reputed brazen immorality of inhabitants of the Narragansett region; they intervened in a handful of celebrated cases with the aim of imposing righteous order on their misguided neighbors in order to prevent God's wrath. In jousts against the Gortonists, Bay colony leaders articulated this goal fully, seeking to sustain a uniform standard of behavior and system of religious belief in disputed territory near Shawomet. In doing so, magistrates in Boston exacerbated differences with their counterparts in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations--particularly with regard to the Narragansett colony's embrace of liberty of conscience--and mobilized to homogenize southern New England.

Massachusetts tried several strategies to take Gortonist territory, including a claim that local Indians were officially subjects of the Boston government. Throughout 1643 the Shawomet settlers and the Bay colony General Court hurled accusations back and forth on a number of issues. Having encouraged Pawtuxet settlers led by William Arnold to submit to their authority, Massachusetts magistrates moved to swallow up the territories of local
native sachems. Acting with Arnold's assistance, authorities in Boston claimed as subjects Shawomet sachems Pomhom and Socononoco. In September 1643 the Bay colony Court sent a warrant to Gorton and his company, noting that these Indian allies had complained of mistreatment at the hands of the English settlers of Shawomet. Observing that failure to resolve the case favorably for Pomhom's tribe would cause all natives "to fly from us, & to fall to our enemies, & set themselves against us," the magistrates demanded that Gorton and his counselors appear before them in Boston to answer the charges.14

Early in the debate, Gorton and his cadre set the tone by answering Massachusetts authorities in religious terms, underscoring their mystical heritage, and claiming the unabashed right to express their spiritual views. Addressing their response "To the great and Honored Idoll Genell: Now set up in the Massachusetts," the Gortonists ridiculed the magistrates for their "pretended equity in distribution of Justis, unto the Soules and bodies." The government in Boston represented "a meere devise of man, accordinge to the anchant custom & sleights of Satann, transforminge himselfe into an Aniell of Lieght." These magistrates, the Gortonists argued, deluded themselves in claiming power over others since man, "even in his best


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perfection ... can lay claim to no titel, or terme of honnor but what the dust, rottennes, and putrefaction can afforde." The members of the Court, then, in pretending to administer justice and calling to account people beyond their jurisdiction were usurping authority that "belongeth solie to the Lord, Christ."15

In the response the Gortonists went even further, however, claiming special spiritual insights that the orthodox faithful in the Bay colony could never know. "[W]ee looke not one the things yt are seene," they proclaimed proudly, "but one the thinges yt are not seene, knoinge the one are temporary, the other Eternall, Nor doe wee thinke the better of anny mann."16 The Gortonists argued that this spiritual gap was the cause of all troubles between themselves and the government in Boston:

... the Lord hath taught us a language you never speake, Neither can you heere it, and yt is the cause of yr alienation from us, for as you have mouthes and speake not, so have ye eeres and heere not, so wee

15 "Gorton Libell," 15 September 1643, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 8, RIHS. The text is also reprinted in Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 263-71. Gortonists believed that Christ dwelled in all people who received him and thus thought it wrong to set up officers over a community. See "An Apologetical Reply," 30 May 1665, in Simplicities Defence, 239; and Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 43-44.

16 "Gorton Libell," Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 17, RIHS.
leave you to the Judgment and Arainement of god All mighty.17

The Gortonists also claimed to be victims of the Bay colony's rejection of the ties between English subjects. Randall Holden wrote that "wee are your owne contrimen, whatever you report of us," and complained that Massachusetts favored Indians over those who were, by birth, English subjects. Turning the judicial tables on the General Court, the Gortonists expected "some of you to come up to us, to answer and give satisfaction, for some of those fowle, anhewmaine [inhuman] wronges, you have done, not to the Indeans, but to us your Contrimen." They resented the Bay colony's wealth and the ease with which its leaders gathered information from England, reminding magistrates "that every people and poare plantation, formerly fleeced by you, Cannot reach into the hyre of one of your Levites, nor fetch in one such Dove as you send abroad into our Native Country, to Carre and bringe you Newes."18 Had the leaders of Massachusetts been loyal subjects, the Gortonists concluded, all information gathered in Boston from England would have been freely shared, rather than used against the settlers of Shawomet.

Gorton, Holden, and the others compounded the charge of treason with an accusation of fatal religious intolerance in

17 Ibid., 22.
18 Ibid., 17-20, postscript.

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the case of Anne Hutchinson. Noting that they had just learned of the "effusion of blood and Horrible Massacre [by Indians]" in which Hutchinson and her family perished, the Gortonists asked "whoe was the cause of Mrs. Hutchinson her departure from amongst you[?]" They recounted Hutchinson's civil trial, in which "shee Changed her phreses, according to the dictates of yor tutours, and Confessed her mistakes that so shee might give you Content to abyde amongst you, yet did you expell her, & cast her away." Holden charged that the Bay colony's rumored designs upon Aquidneck in 1642 had caused Hutchinson to fear for her life and had made her family face the choice of acting "against the plaine verdict of theire Consciences," or removing to the wilderness of Long Island; the Hutchinisons chose the latter and paid with their lives. Moreover, the Puritan magistracy had denied her penitent children the right "to confer with you, in your one way of Brotherhood," preferring that--instead of reasonable discussion--Hutchinson's sons and son-in-law William Collins "bee Clapt upp & detained by so longe imprisonment." While acknowledging that Aquidneck continued to be "at such devissions within itself" on religious matters, the Gortonists also wanted Bay colony leaders to know that the Hutchinsonians professed "their dissent, and devision from you" in their unwillingness "to exersise the like tirany."19 In this tragic case, Gorton, Holden, and

19 Ibid., postscript.

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the other settlers at Shawomet maintained that Massachusetts's intolerance of spiritual diversity was unjust and, in the end, deadly.

The Gortonists' extraordinary accusations against Massachusetts magistrates indicate that the Shawomet residents were very serious about defending their territory and beliefs. Despite the Gortonists' trademark asceticism, they were more than eager to do battle with Puritan magistrates. "If you Exercise your pen," they concluded, accordingly doe wee become a redy writer; If your Sword bee drawne; our Uirs is Girt uppon our Uir thigh, If you present a gunne [and] make hastle to give the first fier; for wee are come to put fier upon the earth & it is our desier to have it speedily kindelled.20

Drawing the fire motif to the end of their letter, the Gortonists warned authorities in Boston that, just as Hutchinson had fallen in an Indian massacre, the time of the Bay colony's destruction was at hand. They advised the magistrates not to "beguile yourselves in cryinge out against the errours of those So miserably falne," since "Now the axe is layd to the roote of the trees, whereof you are a part & every tree that brings not forth good fruit, ... shall be Cutt downe and Cast into the fire."21

20 Ibid., 14.
21 Ibid., postscript.
The General Court sitting at Boston reacted to these "contemptuous & disdainfull answers" by sending an armed commission against Shawomet not only "to requir[e] & see satisfaction made wth security," but to silence heresy on Massachusetts' borders.22 Upon meeting the Bay colony commissioners the Gortonists offered to put their differences to "arbitration by indifferent men," men mutually chosen from among the settlers of the Narragansett region.23 The proposal was rejected out of hand, according to Winthrop, because Gorton and his men insisted upon "horrible and detestable blasphemies," which the leaders of Massachusetts were loath to negotiate over, especially since the "neutral parties"--coming from Rhode Island and the surrounding countryside--were bound to be untrustworthy "heretics" themselves.24 As a result of this rejection, the Gortonists mounted a verbal offensive against the Bay colony military force, warning them that the Shawomet men were "under commission of the great God not to

22 Mass. Recs., II: 41; WJ, II: 140. The Court was so concerned about the rebuff and developing situation that it made provisions for an emergency government during the tenure of the expedition. The majority of deputies from Boston, Charlestown, Cambridge, Roxbury, and Dorchester were empowered "to take order . . . in all exigents & occasions whc before the next session of this Colu[rt] may fall out, . . . conc[el]ning the expedition now on foote agt Sam: Gorton, & the rest of that compa[ny]." See Mass. Recs., II: 46.

23 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 104.

24 Ibid., 109-111.
be children in understanding, neither in courage, but to acquit ourselves as Men."25

The religious implications of the standoff were clear to members of the Providence Baptist Church, who intervened in the dispute in defense of the principle of spiritual liberty. Writing to Bay colony authorities early in October 1643, church members, led by Chad Brown, suggested arbitration by "indifferent" parties from Providence or Aquidneck—men who had spiritual ties neither to the Gortonists nor to Boston—a clear sign that the group sought to separate the religious issues from the territorial dispute. Moreover, the church wanted to rescue the Gortonists from almost certain death, not only out of devotion to free conscience, but because among those holed up at Shawomet were occasional Providence congregants John Greene, Richard Waterman, Francis Weston, Ezekiel Holliman, and Stukeley Westcott.26 This intervention clearly indicates both a continuing religious association between

25 Inhabitants of Shawomet to Massachusetts commissioners, Shawomet, 28 September 1643, Stevens Transcripts, No. 111E, JCB.

26 Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 510-11; Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 103-104. Antiquarian Noah J. Arnold claimed that fully half of the members of the General Baptist church that Williams had founded in Providence settled in Shawomet with Gorton in 1642 and that these Gortonists continued their connections with the congregation, worshipping with Chad Brown's Providence group as often as possible. See "Further Reminiscences of the Valley of the Pawtuxet River and its Branches," The Narragansett Historical Register 7 (1889): 267.
some in the Providence congregation and the Gortonists, and an insistent belief that religious diversity need not provoke stridency or disorder.

Winthrop, however, rejected Brown's offer out of hand, insisting that religious differences between Massachusetts and the Shawomet men precluded any settlement short of the Gortonists' surrender. Noting that the Bay colony had already asked Gorton and his followers "to make answer for their blasphemies, and that we lately sent them safe conducts for their coming and returning," Winthrop found that, in reply, magistrates had "received from them nothing but storms, contempt, and revilings." On behalf of his colleagues in Boston Winthrop pledged "the vindication of God's honor" and blamed the unorthodox views of the Gortonists for "put[ting] us upon this course with them." At the same time, he promised that, if the Shawomet men acquiesced immediately, "under the conduct of our commissioners, no violence shall be offered by our soldiers there, and our justice here." However, if the heretics were to "refuse and offer violence, let the hurt they receive be upon their own heads."27

Ultimately, the Gortonists lacked the power to hold off the determined Bay colony. Charging the commissioners not to set foot "upon our land in any hostile way, but upon your

27 John Winthrop to Chad Brown et al, 3 October 1643, in Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 511.
perills," the Gortonists again referred to "our Commission sealed allready to resist you unto death; for this is the Law of our God, by whom wee stand, written in all mens hearts."28 Taking that threat as a promise, the Bay colony's forty soldiers commenced firing into Gorton's fortified house. The Gortonists responden in accordance with their pro-English stance instead of the threatening taunts hurled in moments of crisis. "(B)eing loth to spill the blood of our countrymen," the Shawomet men put down their arms and agreed to proceed to Massachusetts "as free men and neighbors."29 Anticipating an opportunity to convince fellow English subjects of the benign nature of theological diversity, Gorton and his men traveled to Boston under guard.

Predictably, when Gorton and his company got to Boston, the primary charges levelled against them by the General Court involved the Gortonists' breach of orthodoxy. Suspecting that the Shawomet men might—when in the proper

28 Inhabitants of Shawomett to Massachusetts commissioners, Shaw-omett, 28 September 1643, Stevens Transcripts, No. 111E, JCB.

environment—recant their "blasphemies," the magistrates
brought them to hear Cotton preach on the subject of
idolatry's threat to early Christianity. 30 The sermon,
however, only gave Gorton more material to use against his
captors; publicly taking issue with the Boston cleric,
Gorton argued that the passage Cotton had expounded merely
illustrated how useless the Bay colony's ordinances,
ministers, and sacraments were to the true, spiritual
Christ. This declaration prompted the authorities to
examine him further. Ministers submitted to Gorton four
questions to answer in writing, two dealing with the nature
of redemption and two seeking a detailed description of
God. 31 Though Gorton apparently answered all four queries
satisfactorily, he was taken to task anyway, presumably for
other theological statements which had not been part of the
initial interrogation. The Court examined "yo[u]r writings,
with yo[u]r answers about them," and concluded that Gorton

30 The text for the sermon was Acts 19: 24-41, the
story of Demetrius, a silversmith at Ephesus, who crafted
models of the temple of Diana, and who incited a riot
against Paul, who was preaching against adoration of Greek
gods and goddesses. See Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 512.

31 Gorton was asked, in the first place, "Whether the
fathers who died before the advent of Christ depend for
justification and salvation on his sufferings and death?
(and) Whether the sufferings, obediences, and death of
Christ on the cross are not the only price of our
redemption?" In the second set, ministers asked what God
Gorton served, and what he meant in the Pawtuxet Letter when
he indicated that he and his followers worshipped the star
of their god Remphan, Chion, and Moloch. See Felt,
Ecclesiastical History I: 512.
was "a blasphemous enemy of the true religion of o[u]r Lord Jesus Christ & his holy ordinances." It also found his views to be inimical to "all civill authority among the people of God, & perticulerly in this iurisdiction."32

Gorton's theology was the sole issue in the trial that followed. Magistrates were concerned about the eccentric theologian's powers of persuasion and his charisma, qualities that had already convinced dozens of Massachusetts residents to take up his cause. Apparently the Shawomet men--though admonished to keep silent during their terms of incarceration--had begun preaching and gaining converts. As the trial began, the Court summoned one of the most outspoken of Gorton's new disciples, Lucy Pease, and accepted her renunciation of "Gortons opinions." Not only had she defaced an unidentified book to show her support of Gorton, but she acknowledged guilt for "shew[in]g the same [to others] before shee had deliv[e]red it [to the authorities]."33 Pease's case suggests that quite a few in the Bay colony were interested in the doctrines that the Shawomet men had been espousing, that the General Court's crackdown on these teachings increased their appeal, and that recantations were rare and perhaps of dubious sincerity.

The trial and punishment of the Gortonists demonstrates the Massachusetts officials' determination to eliminate blasphemy in New England. Three days after pleading innocent to charges of blasphemy, the Shawomet men were joined in confinement—courtesy of Boston's allies in Pawtuxet, led by William Arnold—by four of their colleagues who had managed to escape weeks earlier. The trial itself lasted less than a day and essentially consisted of the magistrates' deliberations over the Gortonists' previous writings and the testimony of the commissioners who had been sent to escort the defendants to Boston. The guilty verdict was, of course, a foregone conclusion; at issue was the severity of the sentences. Under colony law, blasphemy carried a maximum penalty of death, but was also punishable by any combination of imprisonment and fines. Almost all the elders and Assistants "were of opinion that Gorton ought to die, but the greatest number of the deputies dissenting, that vote did not pass." Undoubtedly aware that many in England were questioning the Bay colony's intolerance, the Court abandoned the death penalty. Instead, on 3 November 1643, it voted to send the seven chief Gortonists to "seven several towns, and there kept to work for their living, and wear irons upon one leg, and not to depart the limits of the town, nor by word or writing maintain any of their
blasphemous or wicked errors upon pain of death." 34 Other people tied more loosely to Gorton were fined or placed in servitude for a short time. 35

The Shawomet men did not take these threats lightly and did not long remain silent on spiritual matters, indicating that they were prepared to take extraordinary risks to express their radical views. After about a month of confinement, Gorton, who had apparently been preaching privately since the trial, asked the Court if he could be heard publicly. Ignored, Gorton continued to propound a

34 WJ, II: 149. Gorton was sent to Charlestown, John Wickes to Ipswich, Randall Holden to Salem, Robert Potter to Rowley, Richard Carder to Roxbury, Francis Weston to Dorchester, William Woodell to Watertown, and John Warner to Boston; Pelt, Ecclesiastical History I: 513. Gorton was warned that if he attempted escape or "in the mean time either by speach or writing, publish, declare, or maintaine any of the blasphemo[u]s or abominable heresies wherewith hee hath beene charged by the Gen[e]rall Co[u]rt, conteined in either of the two Books sent unto us [the Pawtuxet Letter and "Gorton Libell"] by him or by Randle Holdon, or shall repach [reproach] or repr[o]v[e] the churches of o[u]r Lord Jesus Christ in these United Colonies, or the civill governmt, or the publ]ig ordinances of God therein, . . . that imediately upon accusation of any such writing or speach, hee shall . . . be tryed by a Jury, whether he hath so spoken or written, and upon his conviction thereof be condemned to death and executed"; Mass. Recs., II: 52. During later debates with the Bay colony the Gortonists used this order to charge Puritan magistrates with intolerance. See Massachusetts order of imprisonment of Samuel Gorton, 3 November 1643, Stevens Transcripts, No. 111F, JCB.

35 Christopher Helmes and John More were each fined five pounds, and Richard Marphot [Harcutt] was ordered "put to Mr Batter for one yeare, to have meate, drinke, & such wages as the Co[u]rt at Salem shall thinke meete; & hee is not to go out of Salem without the leave of his m[aстер]", while Nicholas Power, who denied subscribing to the Pawtuxet Letter, was admonished and dismissed. See Mass. Recs., II: 52-53; and Pelt, Ecclesiastical History, I: 514.
mystical, personal image of Christ that verged on denial of the historical Jesus. His chief lieutenant, Randall Holden, did the same during his internment at Salem. In February 1643/44, Emanuel Downing wrote to Winthrop that he feared God was offended "for sparing the lives of Gorton and his companions, for if they all be as busy as this [Holden] at Salem, there will be much evil seed sown in the country." He hoped that "some of them will be brought to trial next court for breach of their order" and worried that "if yet you shall spare them, I shall fear a curse upon the land." 36 Downing had relinquished any hope that England could ever again be united religiously, and thus opted to encourage his brethren in the New World to hold the line against heterodoxy.

Ironically, Bay colony authorities, concerned that the Gortonists' continued preaching would "seduce" more naive Massachusetts residents, decided upon early releases for the offenders. The General Court, meeting in March 1643/44 ordered

that Samu: Gorton, & the rest of that company who now stand confined, shalbee set at liberty, p[ro]vided, that if they, or any of them, shall, after fourteene dayes after such inlargment, come wthin any part of our jurisdiction . . . , then such person or p[er]sons

36 Emanuel Downing to John Winthrop, 6 February 1643/44, WP, IV: 439; Peirce, Ecclesiastical History I: 555.

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shalbee apprehended wheresoeuer they may bee taken, & shall suffer death by course of lawe . . . 37

Not only were the Gortonists to remove themselves from Massachusetts proper, but were expected to stay clear of all areas to which the General Court had laid claim, including "the lands of Pumhom or Sochonocho", Providence, and even "our own plantations at Shawomet, with other parts thereto adjoining."38 Massachusetts lawmakers thus acknowledged that "heresy" might continue to exist in New England, but were determined that it be far from Bay colony borders.

To that end, Boston authorities used force and influence to push Gortonists still further from Massachusetts and to minimize their power. Magistrates sent ten men to Shawomet to build and garrison "a strong house . . . [or] pallizado" for the protection of Massachusetts' Indian allies39 and, at the same time privately wrote "to some in the island [Aquidneck]" whom the General Court believed would turn on Gorton and his men. The Court probably relied upon Coddington to stir up Rhode Island's

37 Mass. Recs., II: 57. This order, like the one mandating the Gortonists' imprisonment, became an issue in the later disputes between the Shawomet men and Massachusetts officials before the English government. See General Court of Massachusetts, Boston, 7 March 1643/44, Stevens Transcripts, No. 14, JCB.

38 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 147; Mass. Recs., II: 57; Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I: 555; Brown, Rhode Island's Tercentenary, 75.

residents against the Gortonists and hoped that religious and personal differences with the eccentric theologian would seal a new covenant with Massachusetts.40

Bay colony authorities were not about to find sympathizers among the large proportion of Narragansett residents who called themselves Baptists. In fact, Massachusetts leaders associated Anabaptism with the "abominations" of Gorton, and with good reason. In Providence, for instance, the Baptist church led by William Wickenden and Chad Brown,41 had intervened on behalf of the Gortonists in their struggles with Massachusetts over Shawomet in the early 1640s, and seems regularly to have welcomed many of Gorton's followers at its worship services. Often caught in the middle between Boston and Warwick, the congregation appears to have identified with the Gortonists and frequently played the thankless role of peacemaker.42 Moreover, the Providence group's ecclesiological views were remarkably similar to Gorton's. Much of the congregation's

40 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 165.


42 For example, a large percentage of those signing a 1647 document for peace and unity in Providence Plantations were affiliated with the Baptist church there. See Backus, History, I: 202.
ideological slant was, of course, directly traceable to Williams's adoption of several General Baptist tenents, like laying on of hands. Like Gorton, Williams rejected university training for ministers, describing "seminaries for the Ministry, the Universities of Europe, and the Universities of this Nation [England]" as "refined Monasteries." Williams opposed state licensing of ministers, condemning titles like "Bachellor of Divinity" and "Doctor of Divinity" as "Popish and vaunting Titles" and attacking academic trappings as "far from the purity and simplicity of the Son of God." He denied any biblical precedent for formal ministerial education, noting that he knew "no schooles of Prophets in the New Testament, but the particular Congregation of Christ Jesus." More importantly, Williams openly acknowledged the validity of the "six principles" found in the sixth chapter of Hebrews that formed the core of Arminian Baptist beliefs, calling them the "principall Pillars or Foundations" of the true church. Presumably the bulk of the original Baptist

43 Williams expressed dismay that people "seem to magnifie the Scales of Baptisme and the Lords Supper . . . above other Ordinances," and concluded that "concerning Baptisme & Laying on of Hands, Gods people will be found to be ignorant for many hundred years." See Bloudy Tenent, 65.

44 Williams, Hireling Ministry, 169-170; Williams, Bloudy Tenent, 307.

45 Williams, Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloody, 21. The principles were (1) repentence, (2) faith, (3) "believer's" baptism, (4) laying on of hands, (5) resurrection, and (6) the eternal judgement. Incidentally, Williams saw the first

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congregation members at Providence followed these teachings; Wickenden likely learned his religion from Williams while at Salem, while Brown probably accepted Anabaptism in England. In all these opinions the Providence Church was quite close to Gorton.

Thus, the relationship between Narragansett Baptists and the leadership of Massachusetts paralleled that of the Gortonists. Persecution and banishment became key themes for both groups and for all sectarians in Rhode Island; they increased the numbers of Baptists there and served as the basis of organization and motivation in Clarke's religious community. As with the Gortonists in the early 1640s, by the early 1650s, so far as Newport Baptists were concerned, intolerance was something that faithful individuals had to combat at its source in order to expose spiritual "truth."

And, like the earlier episode involving the Shawomet men, the 1651 mission to Boston by John Clarke and Obadiah Holmes indicates that Narragansett residents were adamant about the value of expressing spiritual opinions freely and protecting
two as the most important, arguing that they preceded all else for Christians. He virtually ignored the Lord's Supper as an ordinance, emphasizing instead baptism and laying on of hands. See Williams, A Key Into the Language of America (London, 1643), in CWRW, I: 161.

46 No record of Chad Brown exists until his arrival in Providence, when he immediately joined Williams's Baptist church. Fletcher, with neither concrete evidence nor analysis surmises that both Brown and Wickenden "had probably been General or Arminian Baptists in England." See "Interaction Between English and American Baptists," 92.
conscience from the hands of government. Moreover, both the blasphemy trial of Samuel Gorton and his lieutenants, and the incarceration and punishment of the Newport Baptist contingent would later prove invaluable to the cause of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in England. Both stories eventually found their ways into print in the relatively tolerant atmosphere of mid-seventeenth-century London, where they served to illustrate effectively the contrast between the freedom of the Narragansett and the persecution of Massachusetts.

Like the Gortonists' tale, the Baptist story was so compelling because it involved a cast of dedicated evangelicals willing to argue for "truth" in the hostile environs of neighboring colonies. Led by John Clarke and newcomer Mark Lucar, initial efforts focused upon nearby Seekonk, where the two established a Baptist meeting.

According to Williams, by November 1649

At Secunck a great many have lately Concured with Mr. Jo. Clarke and our Providence men about the point of a New Baptisme, and the manner by Dipping: and Mr Jo. Clarke hath bene there lately (and Mr Lucar) and hath dipped them.47

Williams observed "the Bay hath lately decreed to prosecute such, and hath writt to Plymmouth to prosecute at Secunk

47 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 10 November 1649, CRW, 302.
with overtures that if Plymmouth doe not etc." Indeed, the
Massachusetts magistrates had written to their counterparts
in Plymouth requesting them to take action against the
Baptist meeting so that these "erring men" could not spread
"such diseases" to others in the region. The Plymouth Court
reluctantly took this advice and began a crackdown on
Anabaptism at Seekonk that continued through the following
year.48

The actions of the magistracy at Plymouth were
successful only in adding to the numbers of the Baptist
congregation at Newport and increasing the appeal of the
teachings of John Clarke and Mark Lucar throughout the
Narragansett region. Most of the fourteen people that the
two had rebaptized at Seekonk removed to Newport, including
three future leaders of the Rhode Island church and
community, Obadiah Holmes, Joseph Torrey, and Edward Smith.
Moreover, the Baptists fleeing from the Seekonk area, Roger
Williams reported, did not deplete their ranks in Plymouth;
on the contrary, he noted that "now the way of New baptism
spreads at Secunck as well as at Providence and the Iland,"
indicating that the new anti-Baptist laws enacted by
Plymouth, under pressure from the Massachusetts General

48 See Massachusetts General Court to the Plymouth
General Court, 18 October 1649, Mass. Recs., III: 173-74;
and Ply. Recs., II: 162.
Court had simply scattered scores of sectarian evangelists through the region.49

One of the most important and passionate of these missionaries was Obadiah Holmes, whose own transition to Anabaptism reveals something of the opposition that Narragansett settlers felt toward the Bay colony. Initially Holmes accepted and rigorously defended the congregational system and theology of Massachusetts. In March 1639/40, he and his wife Catherine joined the church at Salem under the pastorate of Hugh Peter and had three of their children baptized there. So ardent was Holmes in support of Peters' teachings that he took one Richard Fowler to court "for reproachful speeches against the ordinance of God," pressing his case until the defendant had been convicted and fined forty shillings. All available evidence indicates that prior to 1645, Holmes had upheld the Puritan polity and teachings with great rigor.50

49 Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 24 February 1649/50, CRW, 310. See also C.E. Barrows, History of the First Baptist Church in Newport (Newport, RI: J.P. Sanborn and Co., 1876), 15-16; Burrage, History, 26-27; and Fletcher, "Interaction Between English and American Baptists," 91.

Within a short time, though, Holmes became critical of the standing ecclesiastical order. At Salem he gradually adopted the stringent Separatism for which many of the town's residents had been known and as a result was excommunicated from the church there. Holmes sharply criticized the church's minister, Samuel Newman, and in October 1649 Holmes brought "an action of slander to the dampoline of an hundred pound" against his pastor, charging that Newman had taken a false oath against him. In the end Newman admitted that he had gotten incriminating information against Holmes from six other members of his church, acknowledged that it was hearsay, and agreed to pay court costs. After being chastened in the civil realm, however, Newman attempted to take action against Holmes within the confines of the church. Noting that Newman had the support of only seven of the twenty-three members of the congregation, Holmes rejected "the evill which he [Newman], and the other six had done," and led seven or eight of the faithful out of church, establishing a separate congregation which "met once a week, and every first day, and so continued for a long space of time."51

When Holmes received baptism at Rehoboth from Clarke and Lucar in September or October 1649, he of course went much further in his criticism of orthodoxy. He bragged to


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Endecott that "the day was known when we intended to be
Baptized, and there were many witnesses observing our Faith,
and Order, and yet not one of Man or Woman of Mr. Newman's
Company that ever came to deal with me for evill, neither in
Judgment nor Practice." Having completely escaped Newman's
discipline, Holmes explained that he could freely immerse
"believers" to symbolize the death, burial, and resurrection
of Christ. He claimed that, in defiance of the threats of
Bay and Plymouth colony magistrates, he would continue to
baptize any who would "yeeld up themselves to hold forth a
lively similitude or likeness unto" Jesus, and vowed "to go
forth but by [Christ's] commission, and carefully observe
the same according as Christ gave it forth, without adding
or diminishing."52

Holmes's enthusiasm for "believers' baptism" earned for
him excommunication and banishment from Plymouth, and
encouraged him to remove to the Narragansett region. His
apparent rejection of church discipline, his unauthorized
departure from the congregation, and his zeal for adult
baptism gave Newman adequate reason to revoke Holmes's
church membership officially. More than that, in June 1650
Holmes's "Meeting uppon the Lords day from house to house"
evoked from the Plymouth court an order of immediate
desistance. But Holmes and the members of his tiny

52 Mass. Recs., III: 174; Clarke, Ill Newes, 30-55;
Gaustad, Baptist Piety, 90-91.
conventicle, determined "to obey God, rather than man . . .
come what will come," ignored the ruling. Consequently,
Holmes and his eight followers were summoned to the October
session of the Plymouth court to explain their disobedience
to the prior order and to answer four petitions against them
which begged the magistrates to "take some speedy course to
suppress" the colony's Baptists. No record of a response
exists, since late in 1650 Holmes--along with his chief
lieutenants Joseph Torrey and Edward Smith--abandoned the
cause in favor of permanent exile in Rhode Island.53
Holmes's experiences in Plymouth and Massachusetts shaped
his political opposition to any movement in the Narragansett
region aimed at increasing the influence of the orthodox
colonies or establishing a Puritan church-state system.

By banishing men like Holmes to Rhode Island,
Massachusetts and Plymouth not only increased Baptist
numbers in the Narragansett, but encouraged their
organization. The Particular Baptists under the charge of
John Clarke focused upon developing a missionary program and
intercolonial network of sectarians. The arrival of a
number of Baptists from Rehoboth prior to 1648--including
Obadiah Holmes, Joseph Torrey, and Edward Smith--both
increased the evangelical ethic of the Newport congregation
and tipped the political balance against Bay colony allies

53  *Ply. Recs.*, II: 162-63; Clarke, *Ill Newes*, 57-60;
Barrows, *History of the First Baptist Church in Newport*, 15-
16.
in the region like William Coddington. Lucar and Clarke had
taught their lessons well; they had convinced about a dozen
residents within Plymouth to renounce their baptisms, to
accept rebaptism, and to speak openly about the truth of
believers' baptism, all within very inhosiptable environs.
This training prepared the newcomers to resist "orthodox"
ideology both within and without Newport.

Thus, when Bay colony Baptist William Witter requested
help from his Newport brethren in the summer of 1651, Clarke
and his company--given their backgrounds as the victims of
persecution and their commitment to evangelization--could
scarcely refuse. Believing that God had called them to a
dangerous mission, Clarke, Lucar, and John Crandall set out
for Witter's home in Lynn and arrived within one day. There
the three initially planned to disrupt the sermon of the
town's orthodox minister Thomas Cobbett, but instead, and in
defiance of Bay colony law which forbade private religious
services, they worshipped with Witter and several of his
friends. In doing so they attracted the attention of local
magistrate Robert Bridges, who immediately sent for two
constables to arrest the convehticlers and then ordered the
offenders to attend Cobbett's services. Loathe to sit
quietly through Cobbett's sermon, both Clarke and Holmes
instead signalled their disrespect by refusing to remove
their hats and by speaking out publicly against infant
baptism. After a week's detention the insolent and

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antagonistic Newport group was charged with administering
the "sacrament of the supper to one excommunicated person,
to another under admonition, and to another that was an
Inhabitant of Lin, and not in fellowship with any church,"
while he was "in the custody of the law." 54

Because the perimeters of the Bay colony's
ecclesiastical regime were changing through the 1650s,
Clarke's and Holmes's demands for Narragansett-style
religious expression proved particularly antagonistic in and
around Boston. After his imprisonment, Clarke declared that
"after you had Past your sentence upon me . . . I could not
maintaine the same against your ministers & thereupon
publikly proffered me a dispute with them." After making
the challenge, Clarke asked the orthodox ministers to
"appoint the time when, & the person with whom in that
publick place wher I was condemned I might with fredome and
without molestation of the will powre dispute that point
publiquely." He relied upon "the strength of Christ" to
defend believers' baptism, while his associate Obadiah
Holmes enthusiastically continued to baptize people after
having been whipped in the Boston marketplace. Holmes
denied the existence of true churches in Massachusetts and
Clarke continued to press for greater liberty of conscience
in the Bay colony, insisting that "every brother may, in the
church, ask questions for his own edification, or speak for

the edification of others." But "No man," he concluded, "has the right to hurt the person or estate of another for matters of conscience who behaves inoffensively with respect to civil laws."55 In this he not only summarized the position of Baptist congregants, but also the mission of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

The Rhode Island Baptist counterattack against Bay colony policy was far from the last shot fired in the war of "orthodoxy" and "anti-orthodoxy." Through the 1650s conflicts still centered, as they had a decade earlier, on disagreements over religion and territory. The leaders of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Plymouth, aggrieved as they were by the continued existence of a neighboring colony that condoned and flaunted "heresy," followed a policy to settle and annex the western portion of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. In response, Narragansett lawmakers undertook extraordinary efforts to defend the region from "orthodox" ideology and to protect and celebrate the unique "liberties" that colonists there enjoyed.

The orthodox Puritan quest to eliminate perceived heresy via territorial annexation continued to be directed most explicitly—as it had in the previous decade—toward

the Gortonists at Shawomet. Though Massachusetts
magistrates denied that they had consistently persecuted
Gorton's followers, clashes continued through the late 1640s
and early 1650s.56 Problems again erupted when Warwick
residents and local Indian sachem Pomham became involved in
"a great Fray" which led to Gortonists' complaints and a
General Court order of 1650 demanding that Indian leaders
appear before the Narragansett colony magistrates. On the
advice of Massachusetts leaders, however, Pomham and his
associates never appeared.57 Thereafter surrounding
orthodox colonies stepped up their attempts to absorb
Warwick, presumably with the intent to "reform" the town.
Connecticut, for instance, expressed concern that the colony
was "Interesteing of fugitives and such as are guilty of
Capitall crimes and other misdemeanors, from the severall
United Colonyes," and noted that they could not "but Judge
the same to bee extremally prejudiciall to the peace of the
said Colonyes." In an effort to remedy the situation, the
Court of Election in Hartford ordered a letter written to
Plymouth "that they would prepare themselves against the
next meeting of the Commissioners to make appears under wch

56  Mass. Recs., II: 275, III: 162. In its May 1649
session, the Massachusetts House of Deputies noted that "In
ansr to the letter of John Smith gennl Assis of ye [collony
& Towne of Warwick ther being no accusacon agt ye
Inhabitnats of Warwicke hence nothing to Charge upon them
at prsent & wn any [ ] shall Refer to the Commiss."

57  Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., 10 November
1649, CRW, 303; O'Toole,"Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 436.
Colonyes the plantations of Warwick and other[s] doe stande."58

During the summer of 1650 the Pawtuxet faction effectively rekindled the fears of Warwick inhabitants that the Bay colony was out to swallow up their settlement and impose Puritan orthodoxy upon them. In July one of William Arnold's adherents, Richard Chasmore, served a summons to John Greene, Jr. to appear before the next General Court in Boston to answer renewed Indian complaints against the Gortonists. The Warwick townsmen, fatigued by the constant challenges to the Providence Plantations charter and to their own community's sovereignty, commanded Greene to ignore the summons, opting instead to order four Gortonists --including Samuel Gorton himself--to pen an answer to the Bay colony's magistrates. Three of them were empowered "to meet at Portsmouth the Committees of each Towne about the summuns."59 The following day the town demanded that "the letter that Mr. Gorton hath drawn up" be sent directly "to the Court at Boston to bee delivered in case the Comittee chosen now for the Collonie doe not send any letter." The missive suggested that the summons was

Contrary to the Orders given out & confirmed by the Parliament of England which hath pleased to graunt unto

58 General Court of Election in Hartford, 15 May 1651, Mss. from Connecticut Archives, 1: 5, RIHS.

59 WR, 53-54.
us the liberty to determine & Issue all matters amongst our selves . . . and betrusted us with the preservation of our privildges conferred, which these practises seeme to obstruct, neglect, & Invalid[ate] which your selves know is not our safety to suffer & lay downe under . . . 60

Signed by seventeen Warwick men, the letter is a perfect example of the near unanimous opposition to Massachusetts' attempts at political and ideological dominance in the region.

Warwick was not alone in its concerns about what the summons meant for the future of the colony and its relative freedom. Copies of the Gortonists' letter had been sent to Providence and probably to sympathetic groups in Portsmouth and Newport as well. The settlers of Warwick encouraged the other towns to concur with the "Propositions" in the missive, suggesting that "this letter or the like for Substance" be sent to Massachusetts by the General Court of Providence Plantations. In August, the Court sitting in Providence did just that: in a letter to Boston it declared that Warwick was part of the colony outlined by Parliament and that the government of Providence Plantations was ready to defend its charter rights.61 If the Bay colony did not

60 Town of Warwick to Massachusetts General Court, July 1650, RIHSM X: 156.

61 Ibid.
respond favorably—even to such a united front—Warwick's residents resolved "then with all expedition" to appoint "Some men or man . . . to sollicit the cause in England," and suggested that in such a case "sufficient meanes [be] raised in the collony to defray the charge of their negotiation."62 Both by asking for support from the colony and other communities, and by reemphasizing the notion of an English mission financed by all Rhode Island and Providence Plantations residents, Warwick's Gortonists were underscoring the importance of unity in denying Massachusetts' religious and political hegemony.

In response, and in an effort to reform their "unruly" neighbors, the United Colonies ruled that Plymouth should assert its rights to the territory under its patent. The Commissioners noted that "all faire meanes bee with the first Conveniency used to reduce Warwick, etc. to a due Submission to the government of Plym: that justice may have a free course and all greivances betwixt them and their neighbors may bee satisfied and Removed." Furthermore, they declared, if Warwick were to refuse the order, a committee of neutral persons would decide the matter; if such mediation failed, then either Plymouth or Massachusetts would be allowed to "enforce" justice in Warwick.63

62 Ibid.


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The relatively new Narragansett colonial government had its hands full with settlers fiercely loyal to Boston filtering into the lands just south and west of Warwick, individuals who represented a potent threat to religious liberty in the area. Though these migrants were in plain violation of the Committee of Foreign Plantation's 1646 order, the General Court for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations advised Bay colony settlers in the "Pequot" region not "to engage in either part of the Indian quarrels, one with another" and sought "if possible, the peace of the country and therein your owne safety with ours may be preserved."64 The purchasers from Massachusetts, however, were unwilling to cooperate with Rhode Island leaders against hostile natives, and were determined to recreate familiar institutions of church and state. To that end, George Denison and others asked the General Court in Boston to govern them, and to grant them the privileges of a Bay colony township "so as that we under your happy Government may live quietly, righteously, & orderly, both in Civill & Ecclesiasticall respects." Their requests were quickly granted.65

64 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to Denison and Stanton, 4 July 1657, R1CR I: 363.

65 George Denison's per Curiam motion to the Massachusetts General Court on behalf of the inhabitants of Mistick and Pockatuck, 22 October 1658, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 93-94, RIHS. The motion was granted 25 October 1658.
The submission of western Narragansett territory to Massachusetts prompted a stern response from the Rhode Island General Court and inaugurated an extended struggle over the area. The Court meeting at Warwick, in order "To prevent innovation in the government and liberties of this Collonie from forraign power," forbade all residents from placing "landes or any partes thereof that are within this collonies bowndes under the government of any other jurisdiction." Narragansett magistrates clearly worried about their colony's chief "liberty," freedom from religious homogeneity, and believed that efforts "to bringe in any forraigne power to govern in any parte or partes of this collonies precincks," placed it in jeopardy.66 Rhode Island's ensuing efforts to root out Bay colony allies in the Pequot region were so vigorous that Denison, in pleading for greater assistance from Boston, compared the struggle to the traditional rift between "the borderers of England and Scotland."67 Denison's comparison was appropriate; in May 1659 the Rhode Island General Court unilaterally appointed four men to lay out the western boundary of the colony.68

66 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 2 November 1658, RICR I: 401.

67 George Denison, Southertown, to Governor John Endicott, 15 March 1658/59, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 123-28, RIHS.

68 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 18 May 1659, RICR I: 417. The assembly voted "to signify to Mr. John Winthrop our intentions to run our westward lyne," and chose Arthur Fenner of Providence,
By the end of 1659, the General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations—obsessed with the protection of its citizens' "liberties"—had declared its western flank off-limits to Massachusetts. In August 1659 it secretly debated "the matter concerninge severall purchases of lands made in the Collony contrary to law, by severall of the Massachusetts, or others." As a result of the discussion the body ordered that a committee of eight—two from each town—draw up three letters to demand satisfaction from the Commissioners of the United Colonies, the General Court of Massachusetts, and chief Bay colony antagonist Major Humphrey Atherton and his fellow land purchasers in the Narragansett.69 Eight months later the Court decided on a less diplomatic and certainly more aggressive course. In a communique to Warwick, the Assembly's representatives explained that they had been commissioned to obtain land for the future use of the colony, and had initiated an acquisition program at Acquednessitt "& pts adjacent in this Colloney."70 In other words, Rhode Island had embarked

Thomas Cooke of Portsmouth, John Crandall of Newport, and Robert Westcott of Warwick to run the line. That all four towns were represented suggests how united the Court was in the matter.

69 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 23 August 1659, RICR I: 420-21.

upon a course of direct competition with Massachusetts for the territory between Warwick and Connecticut proper.

At the same time, the Rhode Island General Court initiated ideological, verbal battles with settlers in the region who had subjected themselves to Massachusetts. It appointed a committee "to ripen the matter concerninge the purchase made by the gentlemen of the Bay, in Narragansett,"71 and endowed it with authority "to treate and fully agree with them in the present differences about their coming into our collony." The group, made up of representatives from each town, were ordered to request a meeting with Major Atherton and his associates in order to discuss all problems arising from "their coming into, or possessing lands from the Indians within this collonie's bownds." The committee's negotiations were to be final provided that "there be nothing done to the prejudice of the priviledges of the Collony." If the Atherton contingent acted to threaten the liberties of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, or refused this offer of arbitration, the General Court would be "authorized to forbid those gentlemen further progress on the lands premised" and would be empowered "to use all lawfull means

71 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 22 May 1660, RICR I: 429-30. The committee was made up of William Brenton, Benedict Arnold, John Porter, John Sanford, Nicholas Easton, William Harris, John Greene, and Randall Holden.
to hinder them from such proceeds, and to prosecute against
them."72

The extreme fears expressed by Rhode Island residents
that the Bay colony would gradually impose its
ecclesiastical and legal system upon the region were
partially realized in the case of Richard Chasmore.73 The
episode sprang from rumors that Chasmore, a resident of the
much-disputed Pawtuxet area, had committed buggery with one
of his heifers. The Massachusetts General Court, upon
hearing of the charge, asserted that it had jurisdiction in
the matter and sent a marshall, Richard Waite, to apprehend
the suspect and return him to Boston for trial.74
Immediately, nearby Narragansett communities challenged the
action. A faction in Pawtuxet beholden to Rhode Island and
Providence Plantations helped Chasmore to escape capture
briefly, and after Waite took his suspect into custody
Warwick wrote to the colony president "to give notice to
Richard Chasmore that they have taken his case into
consideration."75

72 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence
Plantations, 18 October 1660, RICR I: 435-36.

73 For a summary of this incident, see Bardford F.
Swan, The Case of Richard Chasmore, alias Long Dick
(Providence, RI: Society of Colonial Wars, 1944).

74 For a summary of the case, see CRW, 464-70.

75 Warwick Town Meeting, 5 February 1656/57, Warwick
Town Records, First Book, 1647-1667, Vault K-Wa6, 148, RIHS.
Providence was even more tenacious in asserting jurisdiction in the case. Its representatives wrote to Waite directly, demanding to know by what authority Chasmore had been seized.76 The town then contacted Warwick "to signifie to you o[u]l: friende[s]" that Bay colony authorities were preparing to try Chasmore, and to recount events of the previous three weeks. Providence leaders explained that they had challenged Waite "to shew us his authority" but he refused, at which time "we sent & required him & ye prisoner to us." "[A]fter some debate about it & ye right of his Commission," the inhabitants of the town "judged it contrarie to all reason yt ye prisoner should be so disorderly carried away." Providence's representatives made the town's case point-by-point, arguing that Massachusetts authorities were wrong for a number of reasons. Not only had Chasmore been "bound to answer in this Colonie by ye President," he was "no subiect to ye Bay" and "had petitioned for a tryall at o[u]l: Gen: Court." Moreover, the Bay colony had been out of order procedurally. The allledged crime "is sayd to be done within ye bounds of o[u]l: Charter" and thus Waite "had no just authoritie to keepe a prisoner in Providence." In sum, Providence inhabitants resolved "againe as need requires [to] returne a

76 Providence Town Meeting, 25 February 1656/57, ERPr. II: 100.
reasonable answer to what may be objected, 77 while continuing to rally the residents of the other three towns to their aid. 78 In the end the united front worked; the colony wrested away from Massachusetts the authority to try Chasmore and declared him not guilty for lack of evidence. 79

The colony's lawmakers had their hands full with fending off challenges from Massachusetts, yet managed to resist the territorial advances of Plymouth as well. The General Court, meeting at Warwick in May 1658, reported that "there hath of late falne out a seeming, and an unexpected difference betwenee our loveinge and peaceable neighbours of New Plymouth" over a small island in Narragansett Bay. It agreed to refer the issue of "Hog Island" to arbitration by four men on each side. Within a year, though, other territorial disputes arose. As a result, the General Court penned a letter to the Governor and Court of Plymouth to arrange a series of meetings over the exact boundaries between the two, especially with respect to the mainland. Noting that some of their commissioners "cannot goe freely


78 Providence Town Meeting, 6 March 1656/57, ERPd, II: 102. The clerk was ordered to keep leaders of Newport, Portsmouth, and Warwick apprised of developments in the case.

79 CRW, 468-69.
and safely into the Massachusetts jurisdiction," the Rhode Island and Providence Plantations magistrates suggested that the colonies' representatives meet in New Plymouth, Taunton, Rehoboth, Providence or Portsmouth.\textsuperscript{80} While negotiating in good faith to resolve territorial issues, the Court proved itself willing to prosecute anyone who "indeavored by profession, and likewise by progression to action, to submitt parte of the jurisdiction to another Collony, namely, to Plymouth."\textsuperscript{81}

Being surrounded by rivals for land made the residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations acutely aware of all options that might help to preserve the colony. Specifically, representatives continued to watch their neighbors carefully, restricted the actions of potential "traitors" within the colony, and maintained lines of communication to England via their agent, John Clarke. In August 1659 a committee was chosen to "open any letters which shall be sent to the Collony about the United Collony, Massachusets or Plymouth controversies with us" and, if necessary to send in the name of the General Court "a commission with instructions to Mr. John Clarke, in England, to prosectute our cause or causes before the high

\textsuperscript{80} General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 18 May 1659, \textit{RICR} I: 411.

\textsuperscript{81} This refers to the case of Robert Westcott who, during the General Court of 23 August 1659, was accused of surrendering property to Plymouth. He was suspended at the Court and replaced by John Weekes. See \textit{RICR} I: 420.
Court of Parliament, and the Right Honourable Counsel of State on our behalfe."82 In order to prevent traitors from getting their hands on this valuable inside information, the Court sought to keep all correspondence with other colonies strictly confidential, ordering "that there be noe coppies given forth to any private person or persons, of any of the letters ordered to be sent to the United Collony, or to Massachusetts, Plymouth, or to Major Atherton as before sayd."83 During the same session the General Court voted to restrain one of these traitors, Richard Smith, who had seized buildings on Hog Island and promised to harrass any resident of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations whom he met "in any other jurisdiction of this country."84

Throughout the 1640s and 1650s, the relationship of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to its neighbors

82 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 23 August 1659, RICR I: 421.

83 Ibid., 426. Only towns were allowed to order and pay for copies.

84 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 23 August 1659, RICR I: 422-23. The Court worried that Smith "may proceed in against the Collony priviledges, &c.; he having professed that if he meete any of the free inhabitants of this Collony in any other jurisdiction of this country, after his beinge so obstructed, he will there arrest and prosecute against any such freemen; The Court, therefore, doe declare that if Richard Smyth, the aforesayd, or any other, shall doe arrest or molest any member of this Collony, in aitry jurisdiction for lawfully obstructinge him as abovesayd, or for doing any such lawfull act in this Collony; this Collony will stand by such as shall be soe molested by him, or any others."
continued to be guided by ideological differences, primarily the view espoused by sectarians in the Narragansett: that free exchange between individuals of varying religious beliefs was good, that it could be accomplished without destroying social order, and that it could aid in truth-seeking. The leaders of neighboring, closed communities found themselves, in time, dealing with dissent more frequently. They remained fearful of the example of heterodoxy that the Narragansett communities provided and became more vocal in their concerns that the survival of "heresy" in New England would result in the region's annihilation at the hands of an angry God. This fear explains the Bay colony's treatment of the Gortonists and the Newport Baptists and underscores the efforts of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut to settle territory along Narragansett Bay and construct "godly" institutions. By the same token, though, the actions of the Gortonists, the Newport Baptists and the colonial government suggest that religious liberty was the key to Rhode Island and Providence Plantation's image, its definition, and its residents' desires to continue the fight with their adversaries in the "orthodox" colonies.

Rhode Islanders' exploited in England the twin themes of the colony: aggressive expression of religious opinions in the search for spiritual "truth" and their suffering at the hands of intolerant "orthodox" neighbors. In London,
Gorton was eager to discuss his imprisonment and trial in Massachusetts and his view that his captors were not good Englishmen. Similarly Clarke, in his *Ill Newes from New-England* carefully chronicled Rhode Island Baptists' sufferings in the Bay colony and made his case for liberty of conscience. In a series of works published during his second mission to England, Roger Williams recalled his banishment from Massachusetts, noted the compatibility of religious freedom with civil order, and lamented the cruelty of Boston authorities. All of these books were meant for wide distribution in England and sought to persuade lawmakers to protect Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. In all these cases Narragansett leaders sought to fashion for their colony the image of an "enlightened" polity fighting intolerance. If they succeeded, their experiment would continue with blessings from London.
CHAPTER 6

FORGING POLITICAL LINKS WITH CIVIL WAR AND INTERREGNUM

ENGLAND, 1643-1660

As they were besieged by orthodox Puritans close to home, the men and women of the Narragansett could draw encouragement from the ecclesiastical situation in England. Between 1640 and 1649, divisions between Parliament and the Crown widened; these often centered upon religious policy. In the Commons in 1640, partisans argued about reconstructing the Church of England in various ways, some advocating the establishment of presbyteries and others demanding the elimination of a hierarchical system altogether in favor of autonomous congregations. The latter group had given birth to the New World Puritan movement and in the early 1640s its members were fighting against both the Laudian Anglo-Catholics and the English Presbyterians for the soul of the Church and the allegiances of the King's spiritually uncommitted subjects. Though consensus in religious matters had begun to unravel during the Henrican Reformation of the 1530s, only in the 1640s did debate over ecclesiastical policy occur in Parliament with a realistic
opportunity for significant changes. These debates inadvertently legitimized theological difference, the continuation of the infinite regression of sectarianism, and the thoughtful consideration of the relationship between free conscience and political order.

These matters, of course, were being fought out in the Narragansett at the same time. The debate in the New World took place in a much smaller arena and affected far fewer people, but the partisans in the New England wilderness had learned both their faiths and their tactics from the sectarians who were becoming more important in determining the outcome of the English struggle. The Narragansett settlers were eventually able to use the notion of diversity to argue for the preservation of their communities before parliamentary committees in London.

Between 1643 and 1660, the Narragansett communities regularly posted representatives in London, a reliance upon the governments of England unmatched by other New England colonies. Three of the missions undertaken within that time frame sought not only to secure political legitimacy for the towns within Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, but also imperial protection from the territorial and ideological encroachments of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut. Each time, the Narragansett's envoys expertly navigated the maze of political and administrative units endemic to Civil War and Interregnum England and emphasized
what they perceived to be their colony's strengths. In each case, continuing through the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, the representatives of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations evaluated the shifting governmental and religious tides in England and effectively overmatched their Bay colony opponents each time. The secret to the successes in London of men like Roger Williams, Samuel Gorton, and John Clarke was not a simple matter of having friends in high places or correctly diagnosing the political atmosphere in England. Each of these envoys also exploited both the intolerance of their colony's "orthodox" neighbors and the radical principle of religious diversity and freedom with political order, a notion that set Rhode Island and Providence Plantations apart in the Anglo-American world.

The first movements toward England-centered solutions to the problems of the Narragansett region came from Rhode Island, but substantively involved the two mainland settlements and their founders, Roger Williams and Samuel Gorton. For most of 1642 and 1643 all four communities busily fended off the land claims of Massachusetts and Plymouth and dealt with hostile native populations. No evidence exists of intertown collaboration prior to 1643, and documentation for the early 1640s is scant.1 In September 1642, however, the General Court for Rhode Island, 

1 CRW, 217-19.
meeting in Newport, appointed a committee "to consult about the procuration of a patent for this Island and Islands, and the lands adjacent," charging it "to draw up [a] Petition or Petitions." In light of extraordinary challenges from the Bay colony, its members were given full power to send an emissary to England immediately "for the speedy affecting of said business."2

In the end, the committee did not choose one of its own members for the journey to England, or even an inhabitant of the island, but instead sent to Providence for Roger Williams. The choice was a logical one. Of all settlers in the region, Williams had perhaps the most contacts in Parliament. He was friends with Henry Vane, the former governor of Massachusetts who had been ousted from office during the Antinomian controversy, and knew many others in the upper levels of government from his days in the William Masham household. Moreover, Williams—though occasionally undiplomatic—carried with him to London relatively little ideological baggage: among the outcasts of the Narragansett region, Williams was probably the least religiously partisan, counting among his friends Puritans, Presbyterians, Separatists, and Antinomians. Thus, he was less likely than some others on the committee to get caught

2 General Court at Newport, 19 September 1642, RICR I: 125.
up in the ecclesiological distinctions known to be dividing
the government at Westminster.3

The Islanders also likely selected Williams for the
English mission because he had long understood the
importance of London in preserving the Narragansett
settlements. As Providence became filled with young
dissenters from the Bay colony, Williams feared that these
newcomers would feel no allegiance to the town's makeshift
government. He acknowledged that "We have no pattent: nor
do the face of Magistracie suit with our present
Condicion"; consequently the inhabitant's oath stressed
that all town orders were to be obeyed "untill we heare
further of the Kings royall pleasure concerning our
selves."4 At the same time, Williams sought to avoid the
imposition of a tyrannical governor-general upon Providence,
one that aimed to extend the power of the monarchy and
guarantee Arminian religious uniformity, resulting in "the
Raping of the Fundamentall Liberties of the Countrey, wch
ought to be dearer to us then our Right Eyes."5 In short,

3 Williams had been responsible for finding exiled
Antinomians a suitable spot for settlement, cultivated
friendships with members of the Winthrop family,
corresponded with English Presbyterian Robert Baillie, and
acknowledged Separatist sources of his own thought. See
chapter one, above, and Glenn W. LaFantasie, "Roger Williams
and John Winthrop: The Rise and Fall of an Extraordinary

4 Williams to John Winthrop, before 25 August 1636,
CRW, 53.

5 Williams to John Winthrop, early May 1638, CRW, 154.
Williams wanted to secure England as a source of authority for Providence while maintaining a measure of spiritual and political freedom to which the residents had become accustomed. Not surprisingly—considering their similar predicaments—most Islanders desired the same things.6

Williams's religious ambiguity and his intimate knowledge of the spiritual squabbles that affected the public sphere in Providence, Portsmouth, and Newport, made him well-prepared to face the English situation. When Williams arrived in London in the early autumn, debate was raging among dissenters from the Laudian Church of England over the best religious course for the kingdom. Under reformist leadership, Parliament in 1641 had passed the Root and Branch Bill, a document that initiated widespread attacks on the Anglican hierarchy, especially in outlying counties traditionally dominated by Puritans.7 The bill

6 O'Toole observes that "so long as Providence's ruling body exercised governmental powers without the official sanction of the sovereign of England, there would always be the possibility that one or a group of the town's settlers would refuse obedience to its commands on the grounds that it had no legal basis for its pretended authority." Gorton's tussle with the Coddington government indicates how real such a concern was for Rhode Island as well. See "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 285.

7 The counties that petitioned Parliament in favor of the Root and Branch bill were Lancashire, Cheshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Warwick, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Devonshire, Somerset, Surrey, Kent, and Sussex. See Anthony Fletcher, The Outbreak of the English Civil War (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1981), 93.
outlined, in twenty-eight articles, ideas for further
liturgical reformation within the Church of England and
attacked the Arminians for holding a theological monopoly,
silencing reformist preaching, supposed encouragement of
superstition and ritual, use of excommunication for
trivialities, and support of the episcopacy. Though most
religious reformists in Parliament favored the Root and
Branch Bill, after it passed, ecclesio-political
distinctions became finer, and consequently the Commons
became more factionalized.8

This important legislation signalled the beginning of
the sectarian explosion in England, a proliferation of
religious and social groups that had only been held in check
by the enforcement of High Church Anglican perogatives under
Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud. In the summer of
1641, a majority of the House of Commons voted to abolish
the hierarchy that had been charged by the King to tighten
its control over the parishes and enforce uniformity and
reliance upon the Book of Common Prayer. Those same
legislators, true to their own varied spiritual

8 When London Alderman Isaac Pennington presented the
petition to Parliament on behalf of 15,000 militant
Puritans, the cause it represented was immediately embraced
by Presbyterians as well. It excited Scottish Presbyterian
Robert Baillie, who believed that the wave of
anticlericalism might lead to substantive reforms. But
after opposition was overcome, the movement lost focus and
broke apart, as reformist members of Parliament sought to
distinguish themselves religiously and politically. See
Fletcher, Outbreak of the English Civil War, 91-92, 98-101.
inclinations, could not agree upon the ecclesiastical government that would replace the bishops, thus leaving the door open for free discussion on the merits of various theologies. At the same time, Anglican churches throughout the kingdom, uncertain of the parliamentary outcome and lacking guidance from a distracted hierarchy, slid into chaos; one newsletter at the end of 1640 observed that "All the pulpits do now ring of the disorders of the clergy both in doctrine and discipline."9

So far as its religious landscape, Williams probably did not recognize, in 1643, the England he had left over a decade earlier. Most of the Separatists and General Baptists from whom he had taken so many ideas were no longer living, but the congregations they had founded still existed, were benefitting from a new and energetic generation of leadership and were--largely as a result of the confusion produced by Parliament's attacks upon the

established church—steadily gaining membership. 10 Contemporary accounts noted this sectarian expansion in the early 1640s with either delight or concern and described the relative spiritual freedom available to English women and men in the wake of Laudianism's decline. 11

While slightly strange to him, the situation Williams encountered in London was probably also somewhat familiar, thanks to his experiences in the Narragansett region. England's ecclesiastical restraints were loosening, intraparliamentary political alliances were being determined more and more by religion, and the debate over accommodation or toleration of various sects was heating up. The differences between this situation and that in Williams's colony, of course, were manifest. Providence and the Rhode Island settlers were cast into wilderness territory by a government whose established church, though not free from continued internal challenges to its authority, remained


11 Thomas Crosby's The History of the English Baptists from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of George I, vol. I: Containing Their History to the Restoration of King Charles II (London, 1738) quotes extensively seventeenth-century anti-Baptist chroniclers who "bewailed" the "great increase of the Baptists" between 1640 and 1643; see esp. 160-75. Thomas Edwards, of course, was one of these detractors. He gives the historical context of the broad increase in sectarianism; see the first part of Gangraena (London, 1646).
fairly strong and stable. Narragansett legal systems were to be built from the ground up, and the religious communities of the region freely advertised their spiritual wares. But the ecclesiastical and political climates of England and the Narragansett were more similar than dissimilar, making Williams's experience in Providence all the more valuable in his quest for a colonial charter.

Williams, however, was not without opposition while in England, having been met there immediately by New England "orthodox" foes who recognized the explosion of religious variety in England in the early years of the Long Parliament and attempted to use the situation to support their goal of sustainable uniformity. One of Williams's allies in London, the former governor of Massachusetts Bay Henry Vane, applauded the dismantling of the Church of England, and used the occasion to preach his own left-leaning theology. Leading a group of ecclesiological misfits dubbed "Vanists" by detractors, Vane sampled a number of religious views, coming out in favor of liberty of conscience and against the

abuses of Anglican clergy and bishops. On the other hand, Williams's staunch opponent, Thomas Weld, looked upon the proliferation of "opinionists" in his native land as a tragedy for both old and New England. Vane himself was illustrative, Weld argued, of the contamination of the Bay colony's pure spiritual waters by English sectaries:

... some going thither from hence full fraught with many unsound and loose opinions, after a time, began to open their packs, and freely vent their wares to any that would be their customers; Multitudes of men and women, Church-members and others, having tasted of their Commodities, were eager after them, and were straights infected before they were aware, and some being tainted conveyed the infection to others ...

Both Weld and Vane had seen religious order coming apart at the seams in England before Parliament acted in 1641; the Root and Branch Bill, though, guaranteed the "venting" of more opinions throughout England. For Weld and his brethren in the Bay colony, this was an ominous sign.

Weld made these observations in late 1643 as part of a carefully-crafted effort to please his ideological allies,

13 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 187. Vane also associated with Infamous English Antinomians like Joshua Sprigg.

the Independents, who were in positions of power in Parliament. Massachusetts Bay had dispatched Weld to
England late in 1641, along with Salem minister Hugh Peter, to conduct the colony's business there. Bay colony allies
in London had warned Boston authorities throughout the 1630s that the tide was rising against New England settlements,
mostly due to rumors that implicated American settlers in widespread separatism and heresy. Weld and Peter fought off
these accusations—which came primarily from Presbyterians—as best they could, but when they emphasized Bay colony
intolerance they alienated large numbers of more liberal English independents who sought to court sectarians in their
political struggle against the factions that favored a bishopless—but nonetheless hierarchical—state church.15

Williams, schooled as he was in the instability and ongoing negotiations of the Narragansett, sought out all parties who could possibly be of use to him and was comfortable enough in the chaotic atmosphere of London to deal effectively with various committees of the


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revolutionary government. Victories on the battlefield throughout the summer of 1643 had secured for Parliament an almost exclusive role in colonial affairs.16 In November Robert Rich, earl of Warwick, became Governor-in-Chief and Lord High Admiral of "His Majesty's Plantations in America," and, as such, headed a group of five peers and twelve members of the House of Commons to direct policy in England's overseas possessions. The committee was empowered to nominate, appoint, and constitute all such subordinate Governors, Counsellors, Commanders, Officers, and Agents, as they shall judge to be best affected, and most fit and serviceable for the said Islands and Plantations; and to provide for, order and dispose all Things, which they shall, from Time to Time, find most advantageous for the said Plantations.17

At the end of the month Parliament decided to use its own Great Seal, giving its decrees the power of law without royal assent and presenting an opening for Williams to obtain a charter without having to deal with Charles's ministers.18


17 Patent for Providence Plantations, 14 March 1643/44, RICR I: 143-44.

The makeup of the Parliamentary Committee for Plantations, however, appeared at first glance to favor Weld and Peter over Williams. Of the eighteen members of Warwick's group, thirteen were dyed-in-the-wool Independents, presumed backers of the Bay colony's religious endeavors. Most understood the difficulties of colonization, having been involved in the financing or political backing of various ventures. Five committee members—Denis Bond, Viscount Say and Sele, William Spurstow, Henry Vane, and Samuel Vassall—had been directly involved in the establishment and settlement of Massachusetts, while Say and Sele and three others—Arthur Haselrig, John Pym, and the earl of Warwick—had been instrumental in securing a patent for Connecticut. Moreover, Warwick had patronized future Bay colony ministers John Wilson, Thomas Hooker, and Nathaniel Ward, and in the fall of 1626 had brought none other than Hugh Peter to London to preach. He defended Peter against those who accused the nonconformist divine of severe religious irregularities, helped him to escape to Rotterdam in 1628, and even welcomed him back as household chaplain in 1644. Throughout the 1620s and 1630s others on Warwick's committee, like Corbett, Say and Sele, and Sir Gilbert

19 O'Toole correctly argues that, given the shifting nature of English government in 1643, Williams receiving a valid charter for Providence Plantations was a longshot. See "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 352-53.
Gerrard, had patronized ministers sympathetic to the Massachusetts mission, presumably placing Weld in a good position to joust with Williams over the fate of the Narragansett region. 20

Weld acted upon the apparent advantage early on, seeking out a patent for the Bay colony that included both Providence Plantations and Aquidneck. The document authorized Massachusetts to incorporate "that Tract of Land, Lyeing & being with the Continent, of America, called or knowne by the name of Narragansett Bay." In arguing for the grant Weld apparently relied on two positions. First, he claimed, the popularity of the colony's mission had increased so greatly that "theire first bounds granted by his majestie, will be to[o] straight & narrow for them & their posterity"; thus, the aquisition of more land was warranted. Second, Weld appealed to the Warwick committee's sense of evangelism, noting that "the nativ[es] that sitt there in darkness" desired to have the gospel "conveyed & preached" to them. The ministers of the Bay colony were, he added, more than willing to take up the task. Understandably, Weld never mentioned the English settlements already established in the region, probably in an attempt to give the General Court in Boston a claim to the lands

20 This comes from entries in DNB, BDBR, and from George Yule, The Independents in the English Civil War (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1958).
without granting opponents the foundation for a later suit based on intentional deception.21

In the end, for reasons largely beyond his control, Weld failed to get a majority of the committee to back the patent. In the autumn of 1643, at least three--Cromwell, Say and Sele, and Wharton--were with armies in the field away from London and thus were not present to hear Weld's claims. John Pym, a member of the committee who had been involved in the settlement of New England and was likely sympathetic to Weld's cause, died two days before the patent was signed. Of the remaining five who were not signatories, four--Gerrard, Herbert, Holland and Rolle--had no commercial interests in, or personal experience with, New England; their failure to join the nine signers could be read as disinterest. Only one member of the committee, Henry Vane, had good reasons for rejecting Weld's requests. Having come away from Massachusetts in disgrace and certain of the colony's unjust intolerance of "unorthodox" religious opinions, Vane likely would never have put his hand to any document favoring the authorities in Boston. Moreover, his cordial relations with fellow Antinomians in Rhode Island and warm friendship with Williams precluded his acceptance

of a grant that would place their consciences at risk again.22

Williams almost certainly knew about Weld's activities and probably chose to bide his time. Arriving from Providence in August or September, Williams moved easily in Puritan circles and knew many of the rising stars in the Parliament's conflict with the King. While in the Masham household he had worked with a number of Cromwell's relatives and had come to know John Pym. He exchanged ideas and news with the Presbyterian Robert Baillie and knew the earl of Warwick from his patronage of Williams's clerical neighbors. If his later correspondence is any indication, Williams probably spent a great deal of time with Vane and likely learned about Weld's mission from him. Perhaps Vane advised Williams to wait on the result of the Weld suit in order to develop an effective counter-strategy. Possibly, Williams, uncertain of military outcomes and the fate of the Parliamentary cause, delayed his arguments before the committee until he was certain of the permanent, policy-making authority of Warwick's group. The evidence is scant, but Providence Plantations' representative undoubtedly knew of Weld's bid and took plenty of time to respond.

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22 Vane's knowledge of the region and his friendship with Williams were enhanced by his efforts in 1636 to obtain lands from the sachem Wiantonimo for the exiles from Massachusetts. Weld collected only nine signatures, when ten were needed by rule of the Commission to make decrees effective.
In the wake of the Bay colony effort to absorb the Narragansett, Williams sought to improve his position with the committee. His first step was to publish a book that focused upon the efforts of the Providence settlers to communicate with and convert natives to Christianity. A Key into the Language of America came off the presses of London printer Gregory Dexter in September 1643 and was universally well-accepted. English subjects involved in colonization were, after all, inordinately concerned that "barbarous heathens" come to Christianity and reject the Satanism and witchcraft for which they were known among Europeans. Moreover, many colonial backers in London were particularly excited by the eschatological possibilities that native conversions brought, believing that spreading Jesus's teachings to the farthest corners of the earth would initiate the end times described in Daniel and Revelations. Many English subjects believed that Williams's work with the Pequots, Mohegans, and Narragansetts and his grasp of native tongues would help to achieve these ends. His efforts favorably impressed the Commission for Foreign Plantations and even hostile members of Parliament.23

Weld, too, had seen the benefits of a strategy centered on Indian conversions, but after December 1643--where the

Committee on Plantations was concerned—the balance began tipping toward Williams for a number of other reasons. By then the first military engagements of the civil war in England had come and gone, and had served to polarize the kingdom. Though Parliament remained largely in the hands of Presbyterians who favored conciliation with the King, the army became a haven for the more radical sort, especially Independents and various sectarianists, who clung together as the primary victims of Laudian purges and as the main opponents of ecclesiastical hierarchies and corruption. Gaining strength in southern and eastern counties, Independents had begun to rely upon the left wing of the theological and social continuum to defend themselves against the right, and had begun espousing more generous religious terms for their radical allies, ranging from toleration to complete liberty of conscience.24 Thus, in the scramble to gain political advantage, the Bay colony's natural, theological allies in England tended—by the end of 1643—to protect those whose "heresies" had been too grievous for Massachusetts authorities to tolerate less than a decade earlier.

By the time Williams had come to make his case before the Committee most of its members were committed to greater religious freedom. Thirteen of the eighteen were known to

24 See Jordan, Development of Religious Toleration, III: 44-64.

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hold Independent religious convictions and a handful had experience in the Parliamentary army. The leader of an Eastern Association Army filled with Independents, "Brownists," and various sectarians, Cromwell held the view that individuals ought to have wide latitude in matters of conscience so that they might, with time and effort, arrive at the "truth." His early success in the field convinced him that spiritual diversity did not undermine military efficiency, and to that end he defended his deployment of Anabaptist soldiers. Writing just days before the Warwick committee signed the patent for Providence Plantations, Cromwell chastized a colleague for questioning the wisdom of having Baptist officers in the ranks. "Sir," he wrote, the state, in choosing men to serve them, takes no notice of their opinions, if they be willing to serve them, that satisfies. I advised you formerly to bear with men of different minds from yourself; if you had done it when I advized you to it, I think you would not have had so many stumbling blocks in your way. . . . Take heed of being sharp, or too easily sharpened by others, against those to whom you can object little but that they square not with you in every opinion concerning matters of religion.25

Others on the committee were less vocal than Cromwell, but equally eager to break the government's claims to an exclusive hold on "Truth." In May 1641 the Viscount Say and Sele had opposed the Bishop of London on the floor of Parliament in arguing for a bill that would have excluded clergy from any form of interference in secular affairs. He had foregone signing the Weld patent presumably because, by one historian's account, his "Erastian and aristocratic temperament made him unsympathetic with the theocratic Puritanism at Massachusetts."26 Similarly, Arthur Haselrig had promoted the Root and Branch Bill, led the Independents in the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and was a long-time supporter of toleration.27 Having fallen under the influence of Henry Vane early in his life and having absorbed his mentor's views on religion, Cornelius Holland became an outspoken proponent of religious liberty and had close ties with army radicals and probably was well-acquainted with Roger Williams.28 Both Warwick and Philip


26 DNB 6: 1297-1300; Greaves and Zaller, Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals I: 281; Yule, The Independents, 98.


28 Holland, by 1626 had entered Vane's service in the Cofferer's Office, and by October 1641 was stridently anti-Court and anti-episcopal. Moreover, he was a student at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge at the same time as Williams. See
Wharton favored freedom of conscience, having each personally supported a number of ministers without much attention to their specific religious views. The poet Sir Benjamin Rudyerd, also a member of the committee, strenuously argued that bishops' spiritual powers ought to be curtailed and their political powers eliminated, and consistently attacked the Laudians for persecuting those arbitrarily labelled "Puritans" for the sake of conscience.

Given the quickly hardening views of the Committee concerning conscience, Williams focused his next pair of publications upon the issue of religious freedom. His Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered came out in January 1643/44 and discussed, in frank terms, the religious differences not only between John Cotton and himself, but also the gulf in spiritual worldviews between the Narragansett settlements and Massachusetts. While

DNB 9: 1033; BDBR II: 102-103; Yule, The Independents, 131-32.

Warwick probably did not agree with all the ministers that he supported, but reportedly favored sorting through various doctrines. See DNB 16: 1014-1019; BDBR III: 89-92. In November 1645 he issued a declaration freeing worship in the Bermudas from Anglican restrictions and later jostled with John Goodwin over the value of religious freedom. See Jordan, Development of Religious Toleration, III: 121; Liu, Puritan London, 29, 74. Likewise, Wharton apparently liked ideological disagreement amongst his ministers. See DNB 20: 1318-21; BDBR III: 306-07; Yule, The Independents, 125.

praising Bay colony clergy for their collective commitment to Calvinistic principles of church formation, clergy selection, austere worship, and government by the godly, Williams also criticized the framers of the emerging "New England Way" for their refusal to separate completely from "the evil of the false Church Ministry, [and] Worship" of the Church of England.31 This chastizement undoubtedly struck a deep cord with the Warwick committee which was anti-Laudian to the core. The timing of this exchange with Cotton could not have been better for the Narragansett communities.

Williams's later two tracts became more explicit and focused more on the situation in England, largely as the result of the political successes of pro-tolerationist Independents in the winter of 1643/44. Led by the Parliamentary Army, and Warwick committee members Cromwell and Vane in particular, the anti-Presbyterian element in the House of Commons grew stronger, encouraging a spate of tracts that argued for liberalization in religion. Between January 1643/44 and the following summer, a number of radicals in London weighed in on the issue, led by Leveller William Walwyn, whose Power of Love (1643) repeated many of

the arguments for liberty of conscience forwarded by General Baptists three decades earlier. Walwyn was a veteran in the debate, having broached the issue of toleration in preceding years with his controversial works The Humble Petition... of Brownists (1641) and Some Considerations (1642). He was joined in the fray by the likes of Richard Overton, Henry Robinson, Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, John Archer, Sidrach Simpson, William Bridge, and Jeremiah Burroughs, all rising stars among tolerationist Independents in the first six months of 1644.32

The ascendancy of this group gave Williams the ideological cover he needed to publish Queries of the Highest Consideration in February 1643/44, a tract that won for the Narragansett the support of a majority of the Warwick committee. Printed anonymously and addressed to members of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, it asked readers to contemplate whether the Presbyterian plan to force a new orthodoxy on England was not "Opposite to civill Peace, ... Opposite to the Souls of all men, ... opposite to the best of Gods servants ... [and] opposite to the Light of Scripture which is expected to shine."33


33 Williams, Queries of the Highest Consideration (London, 1643), in CWRW II: 35. Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed came out at about the same time.
Such statements were unacceptable to the Presbyterian majorities in Parliament and at the clerical conference at Westminster, but were embraced by Independents and sectarians in the Commons, on the battlefield and, most importantly, on the Committee for Foreign Plantations, which identified with Williams's plight in Massachusetts and appreciated the injustice of his exile. Williams's arguments echoed those of Walwyn and Goodwin: that broad religious freedom and protection of individuals from persecution by civil authorities for matters of conscience were necessary for peace in secular affairs and for the emergence of truth in the spiritual realm.

The increasing urgency of the debate over religious liberty—and Williams's part in it—played a larger role in the Warwick committee's decision to approve the patent for Providence Plantations than has been previously suggested. Dennis O'Toole points to the preamble of the charter, which focuses on prior possession of the territory, "peaceful and Christian" relations with the natives of the area, and the petitioners' intentions to develop lands "for building ships, Supply of Pipe Staves and other merchandize" as evidence that material considerations were of primary concern to the committeeemen. He notes that five of the eleven signatories had also approved Weld's "patent," and surmises that Warwick, Haselrig, Corbet, Spurstow, and Vassall signed both documents in order to protect naval
stores and potential markets from disruption by Indians or foreign powers, particularly the French and Dutch. The committee's only real consideration in awarding the patent, in O'Toole's view, was mercantile.34

But this position neither adequately explains the overlapping signatories on the Williams and Weld documents nor accounts for the backgrounds of other members of the committee. Certainly the six surviving members35 who put their hands to the Providence grant while ignoring the Massachusetts patent felt the same compulsion to safeguard English markets as the five who signed both documents. What, then, accounts for their dissention in the latter case? None was away from London serving in the army during deliberations over the Weld patent and all six, of course, had homes in the capital. Ignorance of New England geography and apathy are poor explanations for the inconsistencies, since those factors would more logically have prompted the six to follow their seven colleagues in signing both or neither.

The characteristics common to the half dozen who supported Williams's cause over Weld's are religious in nature. Four of the group were known to have inclined to Independency and to have favored either toleration or

34 O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 410.
35 Pym had died 8 December 1643, and thus had no opportunity to sign either patent.
complete freedom of conscience by late 1643, while the views on religious liberty of the other two, supporters of the Presbyertian political platform, are unknown. Two of the four Independents, Vane and Say and Sele, had some experience in New England, and both had severely criticized the Massachusetts church-state system. The other two, Wharton and Holland, though without first-hand knowledge of these colonies, were among the most thoroughly out of step with the Bay colony ideologically.

Even some of those on the committee who assented to both patents may have sided, in spirit at least, with Williams. Williams had garnered some favor among members of Parliament with his practical considerations of Indian conversions in *Key into the Language of America*. Moreover, his "attendance upon the service of the Parliament and City, for the supply of the poor of the City with Wood (during the stop of Coale from Newcastle," thereby helping to resolve "the mutinies of the poor for firing," similarly impressed those in power during the fall and winter of 1643/44. Committee member Miles Corbet had put his hand to both the Williams and Weld patents, but when the former decided to return to Providence in the summer of 1644, Corbet and others penned a letter to the General Court of Massachusetts "withal sorrowfully resenting that amongst good men (our friends) driven to the ends of the world, exercised with the trials of the wilderness, . . . their should be such a
distance."36 The Parliamentary letter writers not only granted Williams safe passage through the Bay colony, but effectively chastized leaders in Boston for their reputation for intolerance.

This unfavorable view of Massachusetts among Parliament's Independents was fostered, in part, by Williams's *Bloudy Tenent*. The treatise described his experiences in Salem, made observations on the state of New England's churches and, in turn, applied the lessons learned in the New World to old England. Publishing the manuscript in June 1644, Williams underscored the hypocrisy of the Bay colony clergy for having "disclaimed and written against that worshipping of God by the Common or set formes of Prayer, which yet themselves practised in England."37 He attacked Cotton for having written that "Queene Elizabeth had almost fired the world in civill combustions by such her persecuting," while permitting similar persecution to continue in Massachusetts.38 Comparing the English Presbyterian regime to the church-state scheme in Winthrop's Boston, Williams observed that "constraint lies upon all consciences in Old and New England, to come to Church, and pay Church duties," among other things.39

36 WJ, II: 198, 236-238.
38 Ibid., 189.
39 Ibid., 194-195.
Most incredible to Williams, and the point he wished to get across to his readership in England, was that Massachusetts authorities seemingly made no apologies for their "antichristian" behaviors. In particular, Williams criticized New England ministers for their answers to a number of queries "sent to them by some Ministers of Old England," specifically the notion that "if they and other godly people with them, coming over to them should differ in Church constitution, they then could not approve their Civil cohabitation with them." 40 Williams took great care to refute Cotton's "Model of Church and Civil Power," which, he argued, was based entirely upon a "Mosaical and Jewish pattern" and thus inappropriate for English Christians who had accepted the new covenant of Christ. 41 Williams made effective use of contradictions in Cotton's positions in an attempt to separate his English readers from their religious inclinations and to focus their attentions on the inconsistencies, poor logic, and lack of credibility in the contentions of the Bay colony ministry. 42 Similarly, Williams skillfully utilized his English audience's

40 Williams, Blody Tentent, 215-216. The questions under consideration were forwarded in [Richard Mather], Church-Government and Church Covenant discussed, In an Answer of the Elders of the severall Churches in New-England To two and thirty Questions, sent over to them by divers Ministers in England, to declare their judgements therein (London, 1643).

41 Williams, Blody Tentent, 221-222.

42 Ibid., 227-228.
conception of the native "barbarians" to throw unfavorable light upon the persecutory practices of Massachusetts; "that no persons Papists, Jewes, Turkes, or Indians be disturbed at their worship" was an idea "which the very Indians abhor to practice toward any."43 Perhaps the Indians knew, Williams contended, something that his Bay colony adversaries did not: that individuals may be compelled to attend services, but not to accept the religious teachings thereby foisted upon them.44 The New World Puritans, by Williams's estimation, were illogical and petty when dealing with matters of church and state.

Though poorly received among Presbyterians and high church Anglicans, Williams's work won for him a devoted following among Independents and sectarians, whose power and prestige were increasing with every army victory. Calling Bloudy Tenent a "rock of offense," the majority Presbyterian party in Parliament denounced it and ordered that "one Williams his Bookes . . . concerning the Tolerating of all sorts of Religion" be burned by the public hangman, an action that instantly increased the work's appeal among London's radical circles.45 As a result, a second, unlicensed edition came out quickly, spreading Williams's fame and infamy; perhaps more than 100 pamphlets were

45 Waller, *Liberty and Reformation*, 130.
published attacking the book in the five years following. In one of these, George Gillespie wrote late in 1644 that Blody Tenent laid out "a pernicious, God-provoking, Truth-defacing, Church ruining, State-shaking Toleration" and reduced the subject matter of the book to "whether the Christian magistrate be keeper of both tables." Such critics, obviously fearing the consequences of this position for England, began petitioning against "the spreading of opinions of Anabaptism and Antinomianism" and sought to head off increased debate over toleration--much less liberty of conscience--within and without Parliament.

Williams's writings in England are important, however, not just for the pamphlet debate on religious freedom that they provoked, but for bringing to bear the weight of their author's New World experiences upon England. In Blody Tenent and Queries of the Highest Consideration, Williams was completing a circle that began when he was a young man in London reading the controversial tracts of Helwys and Murton, authors who asserted that diversity in religious matters would not sabotage the effectiveness of operations in government. In making the same arguments during the winter of 1643/44, Williams cited not only the theory of


47 Quoted in Ernst, Roger Williams, 248.
religious freedom so well-known to English sectarianists, but discussed his experiences as an outcast in New England. In the process he managed to indict orthodoxy in Massachusetts Bay while insisting that his own settlement, Providence, proved the workability of spiritual diversity and the efficacy of the separation of civil and religious spheres. Williams had gone from the cusp of nonseparating congregationalism and Separatism, to Anabaptism, to official status as a "seeker," a path which suggested that no form of worship was to be officially deemed better or worse than any other, and which naturally augured well for liberty of conscience. 48

Williams's mission to England, and his use of religious diversity to political advantage there, was just the first in a series of such missions springing from the Narragansett region. His charter for Providence was nominally to include all four settlements in the area, thereby protecting them

48 Jesse Fletcher aptly described the influence of Williams's New World experiences upon the debate over religious liberty in England: " . . . Williams' book gave a timely and needed impetus and leadership to the cause of independency and liberty of worship in England. Williams' ideas were not the theories and hypotheses of Milton, Goodwin, Lillburn, and others but principles of liberty and theories of society actually tested and proven in the crucible of three different governments on Narragansett Bay by 'his company of divers opinions,' heretics, and outcasts'; see "Interaction Between English and American Baptists," 169. For the idea that Williams's seekerism informed his views on religious freedom, see Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 74-75.
from encroachment by outside forces, particularly Massachusetts. But while Williams was in London working to that end, one community--Shawomet--continued to be a source of tension as its settlers, the followers of radical theologian Samuel Gorton, jostled with authorities in Boston over religious issues thinly veiled by a territorial dispute. This tussle would end, like Williams's mission, in the halls of Parliament, with Gortonists similarly making the case against religious persecution before a sympathetic committee, to great political effect.

Like Williams, Samuel Gorton believed that the government in London could, with the stroke of a pen, end external harrassment and promote peace within his settlement. Shawomet's inhabitants, like those of Providence, resolved to live "peaceably together" by "ending all our differences in a neighborly and loving way of arbitrators, mutually chosen amongst us," while subjecting themselves to "the State and Government of Old England" with the faith that "in due season we should receive direction for the well ordering of us in all civil respects."49 The Gortonists believed in the spirit of the Williams mission, but had been kept from explicit involvement in it because of their continuing troubles with Massachusetts.

Gorton and his company, as a result of their theological indiscretions in Boston and the surrounding

49 Gorton, Simplicities Defence, 96.
towns, faced in the spring of 1644 the challenge of finding a refuge outside the bounds of Massachusetts where they could worship freely. Winthrop indicated in April that the natives in the region were friendly to the Bay colony and thus would exclude the Gortonists from their former lands. Undeterred, Gorton and his followers approached Canonicus, sachem of a Narragansett tribe, to negotiate not only resale of the Gortonists' Shawomet homesteads, but to offer the Indians an opportunity to receive protection from a higher authority than Massachusetts. The Gortonists were able to convince Canonicus that his people's submission to a wise and powerful "King & State" across the sea entitled the natives to power greater than any they had known previously. Persuaded, the Narragansetts appointed Gorton and his three chief deputies, John Wickes, Randall Holden, and John Warner, "as Commissioners in trust for the safe custody, and conveyance of their act and deed, unto the . . . State of Old England."50

More than a simple land grab, the submission represented an extraordinary power play on the part of the Gortonists, one that dictated that England would be the venue for resolving future disputes with Massachusetts. Lamenting to the King that they were "farre remote from His Majestie," Gorton and his company indicated that they would

faithfully follow the "commendable custome of Englishmen," and would submit to Charles's "princely wisdome, counsell and lawes . . . upon condition of His Majesties' royal protection, and wrighting us of what wrong is, or may be done unto us." Having "just cause of jealousy and suspicion of some of His Majesty's pretended subjects"--an unabashed reference to the magistrates in Boston--the Gortonists and their Narragansett Indian partners pledged to defeat the King's enemies and "to have our matters and causes heard and tried according to his just and equall lawes, in that way and order His Highness shall please to appoint." Because the Gortonists had been both accused and judged by the same men on the Bay colony General Court, they advised the Narragansetts to refuse to "yield over ourselves unto any, that are subjects themselves in any case," and to exercise the right to appeal under English law.51

Astute politicians, Gorton, Holden, Wickes, and Warner used the Narragansett submission to discredit and embarrass the Bay colony in the eyes of London authorities. They informed the General Court in Boston on behalf of the sachems that the natives were "subjects now (and that with joint and voluntary consent), unto the same King and State yourselves are," and reminded magistrates that any military action against the Narragansetts at Shawomet for any reason

51 Narragansett Submission, 19 April 1644, RICR I: 134-35.
would qualify as civil war. The Gortonists put themselves and their Indian allies in the camp of "true Englishmen" while placing Massachusetts among the destroyers of order. They suggested that intratribal disputes, as well as conflicts between English subjects and Indians be settled in the "Courts of their mutual sovereign, the King of England." In essence, the Gortonists were challenging Massachusetts to reject the notion of common sovereignty so that the authorities at Westminster would finally see the Bay colony magistrates as traitors.

In an effort to guarantee the security of their New World settlement, Gorton and his followers took their case directly to English authorities. Impressed by Williams's success in getting a charter for Providence, Gorton, Holden, and Greene sailed for England via New Netherlands and Holland in the autumn of 1644. When the three reached London, they immediately set out to find the proper Parliamentary committee to secure the possession of Shawomet.

Like Williams, Gorton formed his strategy around the improvement of the image of the Narragansett communities at the expense of the Bay colony. Early in 1646 Gorton published Simplicities Defence, an account of Massachusetts' 52 Gortonists to Massachusetts General Court, 24 May 1644 and 20 June 1644, RICR I: 137, 140, respectively.

religious intolerance, spiritual errancy, and injustice
toward the Shawomet settlers. Emphasizing the Bay colony's
disregard for the rights of Englishmen, Gorton alleged
that, after his blasphemy trial, when he and others pressed
for an appeal to Parliament, authorities in Boston advised
him "never dream or think any such thing."54 Besides
denying the Shawomet men their rights as English subjects,
Gorton argued, Massachusetts magistrates--by bringing
charges of capital heresy against him and his men--had
denied the efficacy of informing their consciences. This,
and the Bay colony leadership's general intolerance of any
dissent from their church-state system, embarrassed
Massachusetts' supporters in England, especially the clerics
who just a year earlier had signed the Apologetical
Narration in favor of liberalizing laws concerning
religion.55

So serious were the accusations against Massachusetts
in Simplicities Defence and so disconcerting was Gorton's
presence in England that Bay colony magistrates, in
September 1646, began to consider stationing an agent in
London permanently. By 1645 Weld and Peter were no longer
employed by Massachusetts, so the General Court, prompted by
a report concerning Gorton's charges sent by "the honnorable

54 Ibid., 125-32.

55 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 195. Thomas Goodwin
and Philip Nye were among those who signed.
comissionrs for plantacons,"56 ordered that "one hundred pounds should be suddeynly raised for ye furnishing of Mr Edward Winslow, whom this Courte hath chosen & appointed to negotiate for them in England." It instructed Winslow--an inhabitant of Plymouth with extensive ties to the Bay colony--"to cleere us of such falce imputacons as Gorton &c, have there chardged upon us."57

In its response, however, the Court either misread or ignored the large portion of the Gortonists' claims that involved conscience. Besides charging that the Bay colony had trampled their rights as Englishmen by taking their lands and refusing to grant an appeal, Gorton, Holden, and Greene recounted for the Warwick commission the story of their trial and detention for blasphemy, asserting that Boston authorities had been guilty of "disquietinge them in their Consciences."58 The General Court's entire reply to the commission, however, centered upon the colony's adherence to English law. After reviewing the history of the Massachusetts charter and the conditions of their removal from England, the magistrates protested that "wee still have dependance uppon yt state, & owe allegiance & subiecon thereunto." To that end, "our care & indevor also

56 Reprinted in CRW, 454-56.
58 Lord Admiral and Commissioners for Foreign Plantations to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Assistants of the Massachusetts Plantation, 15 May 1646, CRW, 455.
have binn to frame our goument & administracons to ye fundamentall rules" of England and to please "ye high Courte of Parliament" by whose "speciall care & bounty" Massachusetts had prospered. The magistrates acknowledged and answered only two charges: first, that the colony had "transgressed our limitts by sending soldiiers to fetch in Gorton, &c, out of Shawwamett," and second, that the Court "either exceeded or abused our authority in banishing of them out of our jurisdiccon." To both allegations they reiterated that Shawomet fell within the jurisdiction of the original charter of Massachusetts, that the Gortonists had been guilty of abusing the Indians whom Bay colony ministers were attempting to Christianize, and that Gorton and his company were simply incapable of living civilly amongst the other inhabitants of New England. In short, the members of the General Court, in their reply to the Warwick commission, chose to highlight a general pattern of misbehavior among the Gortonists and failed to counter their opponents' specific complaints about trial and punishment for blasphemy.59

This oversight was unfortunate, considering the composition of Warwick's committee. The Commission for Foreign Plantations had--in the aggregate--come to disfavor the idea of government-arbitrated religious "truth" even more than had been the case when Williams made his

appearance before its members two years earlier. Of the fourteen men who sat on the commission, eight had been members in November 1643; of these eight, five had approved Williams's patent and three were known proponents of liberty of conscience. Of the remaining six, four leaned toward the Independent party which, by the summer of 1646, staunchly favored the elimination of state-imposed restrictions on religious expression.

Before Winslow had the opportunity to make the Bay colony's case before the Commission personally, another challenge to the Massachusetts scheme of religious uniformity cropped up. In November 1646 Dr. Robert Child led an essentially Presbyterian movement in its complaints that the Bay colony's clerics consistently denied godly inhabitants the right to have their children baptized as prescribed by the customs of the established church in England. Like the Gortonists, the Child petitioners found that, after their suit had been rejected by the General Court in Boston, avenues of appeal to Parliament were blocked. And like Gorton, Child went to England seeking to

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60 The eight overlapping members were Denis Bond, Philip Herbert, Cornelius Holland, Edward Montagu, Robert Rich, Benjamin Rudyerd, Henry Vane, and Samuel Vassall.

61 The four were Algernon Percy, Charles Howard, William Purefoy, and George Snelling. See Jordan, Development of Religious Tolerance in England, III: 228.
get his story out in print. He, too, was fairly successful in chipping away at the Bay colony's reputation.62

When Winlow finally arrived in London early in 1646, then, his chance for success was limited by the extent of the damage already done to the Bay colony's cause by Gorton and Child, by the composition of the Warwick commission, and by the general trends in England that ran counter to Massachusetts' insistence upon strict, government-imposed orthodoxy. In June 1646 Winslow reported that Gorton had found a "potent friend" among London radicals, probably the earl of Warwick himself, from whom Gorton received an official invalidation of the Weld patent.63 At the same time the future Bay colony agent noted that in London petitioners of all kinds had been "very basic" in attacking intolerance in both old and New England. Challenges to the notion of a national church were mounting as laypersons and Independent ministers, backed by the largely sectarian army,


63 Edward Winslow to John Winthrop, 30 June 1646, WP V: 86-88. Roger Williams reported "that at Mr Gortons complaint agnst the Massach. the Lo. high Admiral (Presidnt) [earl of Warwick] said openly in a full meeting of the Comrs that he knew no other Charter for these parts then what Mr Williams had obtained, and he was sure, that charter wch the Massach English men pretended had never past that Table"; Williams to Major John Mason and Governor Thomas Prence, Providence, 22 June 1670, CRW, 613.
cranked out pamphlet after pamphlet on the value of
religious liberty and evil of persecution.64

Winslow continued to do his best, however, to discredit
Gorton in the eyes of Parliament. He encouraged review of
portions of Simplicities Defence under England's Blasphemy
Ordinance, arguing that sections of the work clearly
violated the legislation's proscription of heresy. Early in
1647 under the title Hypocrisie Unmasked he published a
collection of papers, letters, and commentary indicting the
uncivil actions and religious opinions of the Gortonists,
asserting that free reign of such views would result in
anarchy and the collapse of the building block of English
society, the family.65 He continued his work in the halls
of Westminster, carrying out the General Court's orders to
appease the colony's English patrons without surrendering
the basic commitment to the "orthodox" principles upon which
Massachusetts had been founded.

In all cases the results of Winslow's efforts were less
than spectacular, largely because the ends he sought were
out of step with the mood of the English nation. The
parliamentary committee reviewing Gorton's work dismissed

64 See Jordan, Development of Toleration in England,

65 Edward Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked (London, 1647),
32, 44, 47. Winslow feared that Gorton's assessment that
"the administration of Justice and judgement belongs to no
officer, but to man as a Brother" would result in "the
establishment of all confusions, and the setting up of
Anarchy worse then the greatest Tyranny."
the charges against the Narragansett radical, effectively
discrediting even further the Bay colony, whose leaders had
pushed for legal action against Simplicities Defence.

Winslow's book did not break any new ground in the debate
over religion and only succeeded in further characterizing
Massachusetts as an island of spiritual rigidity in the
rising sea of tolerance. 66 Winslow's desperate attempts
to convince the Warwick commission that Gorton was a
blasphemer unworthy of support fell flat, as did efforts to
link the faults of Gorton and his followers to those of the
Child petitioners. 67

In contrast, by focusing upon their sufferings for
conscience at the hands of an intolerant government, Gorton
and his followers received from the Commission for Foreign
Plantations everything they asked for. While Warner and
Gorton remained in England, Holden returned to New England,
landing in Boston in September 1646 with two documents.
Upon disembarking Holden presented the first to Bay colony
authorities, an order that he and other Gortonists be given
safe passage to Shawomet "and there to inhabit and abide
without interruption." 68 More important than the first,
Holden's second document from the Warwick commission

66 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 195-96; Edward
Winslow to John Winthrop, 30 June 1646, WP V: 87; O'Toole,

67 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 201.

68 WJ, II: 282-83.
commanded Massachusetts magistrates to allow Gorton and his company "and all the late inhabitants of Narrgansett Bay" to live peacefully at Shawomet "without extending your jurisdiction to any part thereof." Significantly, the authorities in Boston were prohibited from "disquieting them in their consciences," a clear signal that Warwick's group sympathized with the Gortonists' in their past religious wrangles with the Bay colony.69 Boston's failure to respond to charges of intolerance in May, the Commission's acceptance of spiritual diversity, and Gorton's successful exploitation of the differences between the two, saved Shawomet from absorption by Massachusetts and promised to prevent a replay of the blasphemy trial of 1643.

The Bay colony reaction to the Warwick Commission's decisions illustrates how out of touch with English religious and political currents New England Puritans were. At first the magistrates in Boston were shocked that a Parliamentary committee would ask them to abandon their policy against the Gortonists "without legal or moral grounds."70 As a result, action on Holden's order for safe passage was delayed. Winthrop passed the request to his council, which debated the options, disagreed on the proper course to take, and forwarded the order to the

69 Ibid., 292-93.

70 This phrase is borrowed from O'Toole, "Exiles, Rogues, and Refugees," 378.
elders. They "also differed," with some being "very earnest for his [Holden's] commitment till the general Court, etc."; finally, thinking better of interning a Gortonist contrary to the order of authorities in England, the elders voted "to give so much respect to the protection which the parliament had given him, . . . as to suffer him to pass quietly away."71

Winthrop's views on the issue were perhaps the most accurate. The governor accused the Warwick Commission of favoring the Gortonists "partly for private respects, and partly for their adhering to some of their corrupt tenets, and generally out of their dislike for us and for our late law for banishing anabaptists."72 Still, Winthrop and others held out hope that Winslow would be able to turn the tide in England. While some magistrates "moved to have an order upon refusal of satisfaction, etc.) to send forces presently against them," others "thought better to forbear any resolution until the return of our messengers, and the rather because we expected our agent out of England shortly, . . . it being very probable, that their charter would be called in, as illegal, etc."73 The latter view, Winthrop noted, ultimately prevailed.

71 WJ, II: 284.
72 WJ, II: 282.
73 Ibid., 334.
Such a passive strategy, and one based upon ideological unity, was bound to be ineffective as long as Gorton remained in London and continued to rail against the Bay colony's reputation. Soon after Winslow's own work came off the presses, Gorton published The Incorruptible Key, a commentary on the 110th Psalm. In it Gorton again complained of the repression of dissent in Massachusetts, and portrayed as typical religious diversity throughout New England. The former assertion flew in the face of recent and renewed Independent and Army petitions for absolute liberty of conscience and further embarrassed the Bay colony's clerical supporters. One of Winthrop's correspondents warned that "you have need to be carefull of your practice there, for whatever you doe that may have the least shaddow of severitie, is heightened here, and cast in your brethrens teeth."74 The latter characterization gave credance to the accusations of Presbyterians like Ephraim Pagitt, who pointed to New England radicalism as evidence of the unworkability of loosened contraints on conscience.75

Gorton's concentration upon themes of heterodoxy in his discussions with parliamentary commissions and in the Incorruptible Key continued to pay political dividends.

74 George Fenwick to John Winthrop, 17 March 1646/47, WE V: 141-43.

75 Ephraim Pagitt wrote that "In New England they persuade the Magistrates to kill all idolaters and Heretickes, even whole Cities, men, women, and children"; see Pagitt, Heresiography (London, 1645), 79-80.
through May 1647. In an effort to cover as many sources of authority as possible in the fluid atmosphere of civil war, Gorton approached the Committee of Lords, an executive branch of Parliament without well-defined powers, and once again presented his case against Massachusetts. Focusing upon his cohort's persecution at the hands of Boston authorities for matters of conscience, Gorton elicited from the group a letter directed to the Bay colony General Court, warning its members to forego any contemplated actions against the settlers at Shawomet. Acknowledging their receipt of "a petition & Remonstrance from you by yor Commissionr Mr Winthrop" and the "prudence & faithfulnes to God & his cause" exhibited by the inhabitants of Massachusetts, the Lords confirmed that the lands surrounding Narragansett Bay were "wholely wth out the Bounds of yor patent." The committee noted that it had received arguments concerning the disputed territory from all four governments involved in the United Colonies, but indicated that history was on the Gortonists' side.76

Again, an examination of the Committee's composition reveals why Gorton's position was more popular than that of the General Court of Massachusetts. Eleven of the thirteen

76 Committee of Lords to Massachusetts, 25 May 1647, Mss. from Connecticut Archives, I: 2-4, RIHS.
members77 of the Committee of Lords were veterans of various parliamentary commissions on foreign plantations, and this group contained a higher percentage (69%) of known religious liberals than any prior committee involved in the dispute over the Narragansett.78 Its constituents were more receptive to Gorton's tales of mistreatment at the hands of Bay colony authorities and his contention that "when a man sinneth, he does not sinne against Maqistrates, and therefore why should they punish them? but they sinne against God and therefore we must leave them to God to punish them."79

This committee, moreover, was an accurate reflection of England's leaders, who were beginning to accept religious diversity and favor the contentions of supposed colonial "heretics" like Gorton. By 1647 English Puritans, including erstwhile Bay colony supporters in London's Independent congregations, were arguing that the state should tolerate all shades of theology. Independent ministers like Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, who were defending Massachusetts' church structures in the Westminster Assembly, worried that

77 Warwick, Manchester, Pembroke and Montgomery, Say and Sele, Dacre, William Waller, Arthur Haselrig, Miles Corbett, Francis Allen, William Purefoy, George Fenwick, and Cornelius Holland. See Committee of Lords to Massachusetts, 25 May 1647, Mss. from Connecticut Archives, I: 4, RIHS.

78 Defined as those who were on record as favoring toleration or absolute religious liberty.

79 Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked, 43-45.
the episodes Gorton was describing from the pulpit and via
the press would destroy the old Puritan cause in England.
They urged their New England brethren "to suspend all
corporal punishment or restraint" against dissenters who
"practise the principall of their Dissent without Danger or
Disturbance to the Civill peace of the place."80
Politicians who favored the Independent position continued
to press for toleration in order to combat remnants of the
Presbyterian party, members of which pointed to the rough
treatment of Antinomians and Anabaptists in Massachusetts as
justified, but inconsistent with the English radical Puritan
line.81 Women and men who had made homes on both sides of
the Atlantic during the 1640s complained of New England's
rigidity in religious concerns and explained that
intolerance—not the ongoing military engagement against the
King—was responsible for putting a halt to immigration.82
High-stature cleric Hugh Peter, despite having been

80 Thomas Goodwin and others to the Massachusetts
General Court, ca. June 1645, WP V: 23-24. The bulk of the
letter was aimed at more generous treatment of Anabaptists.

81 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 220.

82 Salem minister Hugh Peter complained that "None
will come to you because you persecute . . . cannot you mend
it?" See Hugh Peter to John Winthrop, Jr., 4 September
1646, WP V: 102, and Lawrence Wright to John Winthrop, 10
March 1646/47, WP V: 137-38. See also Hannah Dugard to Mary
Wyllys, May 1646, cited in Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory,
202. Dugard wrote that "For now here being Libberty of
Conscience many that heretofore sought to goe [to New
England] will not heare of it now. . . . There is not any
speech or inclination in any that I heare towards new
Ingland but Rather an expectation of some from thence."
responsible for the expulsion of Williams's partisans in the Salem congregation, similarly appreciated the spiritual freedom of England and warned "sweet New England" to "give any encouragement to those that are godly & shall differ," noting that "your example in all kinds swayse here."83

Gorton's understanding of the burgeoning religious diversity in England--and his use of it to political advantage--was aided undoubtedly by his personal involvement with English sectarian groups, chiefly the General Baptists. Gorton's radical connections in London and the surrounding countryside have been well-documented,84 and were known to be extensive. He preached in several of London's conventicles, including the Baptist congregation of Thomas Lamb in Bell Alley near Coleman Street.85 The "grosse Familist" and Thredneedlestreet Anabaptist Robert Bacon reportedly befriended Gorton, as did General Baptist conventicle Edward Barber.86 Gorton has been linked to Ranters and New Model Army chaplains John Saltmarsh and William Dell, as well as to Henry Denne and Paul Hobson,

83 Hugh Peter to John Winthrop, Jr., 4 September 1646, WP V: 102.

84 Philip Gura has been most active in pursuing Gorton's transatlantic life. See his Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 276-303, his articles on Gorton in WMQ; and Barbara Ritter Dailey, "Root and Branch," 174-270.

85 Edwards, Second Part of Gangraena, 174-75.

86 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 289.
leaders among London's General Baptists. These associates--all proponents of greater religious liberty, of course--probably served Gorton well by helping him to formulate persuasive tolerationist arguments before the various commissions of Parliament and lent credence to his criticisms of Massachusetts. Their rejection of intolerance helped Gorton to make his case in England.

The third major mission to England on behalf of the Narragansett communities was also the most enduring. In 1651 Newport resident and Rhode Island magistrate William Coddington procured from a committee of Parliament a commission making him governor of the island for life. Upon learning of the grant, Coddington's opponents immediately cast about for ways to nullify the document and to reinstate the former patent. As residents of the region knew all too well, the situation required a remedy in London, an expensive venture that demanded high-order statesmanship. At stake was the unity--and likely the survival--of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations; what resulted was a close collaboration of the Narragansett communities with one another and with a long-term agent in England. As with previous missions, the colony's religious diversity, its

87 Ibid., 9, 83, 283-84, 286, 289, 294, 299-300, 350.

88 Haller, Liberty and Reformation, 143-88; Wall, Crucial Decade, 121-56.
claims against Massachusetts, and its history of dependence upon English authority helped its cause with all the quickly-shifting governments in London.

The impetus for the third mission, William Coddington, proved himself to be a savvy operator in English government on par with Williams and Gorton. In the winter of 1649/50, just months after the execution of Charles I, Coddington arrived in London and made an initial appeal to Parliament in an effort to separate Rhode Island from the mainland settlements that he believed to be too politically and religiously liberal. After surveying the political situation, Coddington waited several months before requesting his grant from Parliament's Committee of the Admiralty. In March, he petitioned the group "for a grant of two islands," namely Aquidneck and Conanicut, arguing that he had both discovered and purchased the islands from the natives in the region "and has quietly enjoyed [them] ever since." Coddington took the same tact as Williams and Gorton had when they had visited the halls of Parliament years before: according to the records, "being desirous to govern by English laws and to have dependence on the Commonwealth, he [Coddington] prays for a grant of these Islands from Parliament, with such immunities as have been granted to others in like cases." 89

89 CSPC (1574-1660), 336; "Interregnum Entry Book," reprinted in Richard LeBaron Bowen, The Providence Oath of Allegiance and Its Signers, 1651-52 (Concord, NH: The
Coddington was not successful immediately, primarily because the parliamentary committees that he approached tended to investigate the impact of one New World claim upon another. Whereas the leadership of Massachusetts had objected strenuously to Williams's efforts to obtain a patent for the Narragansett region a half-dozen years earlier, only Edward Winslow of Plymouth was in a position to challenge Coddington's petition—and that only partially—contending that Connnicout, a smaller island to the west of Aquidneck, belonged to Plymouth, having been "granted to them by patent from King James" in 1620. During the initial meeting both Coddington and Winslow were ordered to return the following week and "to bring evidence and witnesses for proving their title to those islands, with counsel if they think fit."90 When the two returned on 27 March 1650, Winslow made his case incompletely, alleging again Plymouth's right only to Connnicout, but he produced nothing "why the desires of Coddington should not be granted."91 After several delays, Winslow and Coddington appeared once again before the Committee of Admiralty, and again its


90 CSPC (1574-1660), 336.

91 Ibid., 337.
members ruled that "nothing appearing to alter the former resolution of the Committee, it is directed that the matter, as presented by both parties and their counsel, be reported to the Council of State" for final determination.92

Eventually Coddington successfully argued his case before the Council of State which, of course, knew even less about the competing claims in New England than the Committee of the Admiralty had. In fact, the Council did not fully appreciate Rhode Island's situation; instead it relied upon an ambivalent report from the Admiralty committee and appointed a subcommittee of its own "to consider of the draft of a patent for Wm. Coddington for the government of Rhode Island." Finally, the Council of State, on 3 April 1651, appointed Coddington "Governor of 'Acquedneck,' alias Rhode Island, and 'Quinnunugate Island,' with power to administer the law so far as the constitution of those places will permit, in the name of the Keepers of the liberties of England by authority of Parliament." He was ordered "to raise forces for defense" and "to appoint annually not more than six councillors, to be nominated by the freeholders of the town of Newport and Portsmouth." His tenure was for life; "in case of his death," his council was "to choose a Governor, until Parliament or the Council of State give further order therein."93

92 Ibid., 338.

93 Ibid., 354-55.
The Council of State, in granting the commission, was likely responding to Coddington's assurances that the residents of Rhode Island would remain loyal to the government of England as it was then comprised. Politically the nation was even more unstable than it had been in the 1640s, when the possibility of compromise with the monarchy still existed. Consensus in ruling institutions was hard to come by; thus, members of Council welcomed Coddington's promises to appoint his advisors annually only from "such free holders of the Townes of Newport & Portsmouth . . . as shall be well affected to the Government of this Commonwealth." The Council ordered that Coddington administer to all "those who would vote" an engagement to the Commonwealth "as the same is now established with out a King or House of Lords," and commanded the governor "to give an account of your proceedings from tyme to tyme" to the Council of State and to accept any orders that the government in London might make regarding the colony of Rhode Island.94

Given Coddington's commitment to the Massachusetts church-state scheme, and the threat that his commission posed to a unified Narragansett colony and to liberty of conscience, his opponents moved immediately to send their own envoys to England. In November 1651, Newport and

94 Facsimile of Coddington's commission, 1651, RIHSM XV: 37.

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Portsmouth residents chose Baptist minister John Clarke to go to London to plead the case against Coddington's Island government. At roughly the same time mainland inhabitants interested in continued unity within the Narragansett nominated Roger Williams to pursue the same ends as Clarke. Both men had immense stature in their communities, Clarke as a pastor and two-time assistant for Newport, and Williams as founder of Providence and former colonial representative to England. Perhaps more importantly, both were known to espouse the principle of religious liberty. Williams's views were, of course, outlined in the literature published during his first journey to London. Clarke, too, proved his devotion to spiritual freedom by his foray into Boston and demands for a debate on theological matters with Puritan authorities.

In 1652, Williams and Clarke arrived in London intending to nullify Coddington's commission, but quickly became caught up in the English debate on conscience. The two men who had witnessed schism and the espousal of practically every doctrine under the Narragansett sun actively participated in the English movement toward absolute religious liberty. Clarke eloquently argued that earthly power constrained only "the outward man and all those outward and visible things," that the purpose of power was to maintain "the peace, liberty, prosperity, and safety" of civil states, and that the heavenly, spiritual power was
reserved for God alone, and affected only "the spirituall or
hidden part of man, to wit, his Spirit, mind, and
conscience." Thus no Christian "hath any liberty, much less
authority, from his Lord, to smite his Fellow servant, no
nor yet with outward force, or arm of flesh to constrain or
restrain another's conscience, or worship of his God."95
Williams concurred, making similar arguments for liberty of
conscience in his Bloudy Tenent yet More Bloudy. Drawing an
analogy between physycal rape and "Spirituall or soule-
rape," Williams wondered "whether in the present state and
juncture of affairs in England, wherein . . . every Sect,
every Order, and conscience plead the integrity and purity
of their way, and the People of God themselves are so
divided and differently persuaded that God would send us
such Magistrates, who should authoritatively judge, whose
Conscience, whose Worship, whose Godlinesse is true?"96
Responding to Cotton, Williams echoed Clarke's insistence
that civil punishments were reserved "for the defence of
Persons, Estates, Families, Liberties of a city or a Civill
State" and that only God was to judge and punish spiritual
evil.97 In fact, so in line were Williams and Clarke on
the principle of religious liberty that Williams inscribed a

95 Clarke, Ill-Newes, 22.

96 Williams, Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy, 325. See
also, [Anon.], The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober

97 Williams, Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy, 325.

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copy of Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy to "his honoured &
beloved mr John Clarke and Eminent Witnes of Christ Jesus
agst ye bloodie Doctrine of persecution &c."98

In answering "orthodox" Puritan claims that the
separation of the civil and religious spheres would always
tend to chaos, Williams again fell back upon the arguments
for toleration that had been perfected by English General
Baptists. In all four of his books published during his
short stay in England, Williams laid out what had been a
central position for Helwys and Murton: that Christ was head
of the church, not the state, that God's will was to allow
heretics to live together in civil societies, that civil
powers should not interfere in spiritual matters, and that
all opinions—no matter how offensive to the majority—must
be protected. Williams's goal, like Clarke's, was to allow
members of the same nation to live together without being
forced into spiritual hypocrisy, and to have government
authorities deal with the secular results of this freedom,
however unpleasant.99

98 Roger Williams's inscription to John Clarke, 1652,
RIHSM XV: 5.

99 Williams, The Fourth Paper, presented by Major
Butler (London, 1652), in CWRW VII: 115-41. Major Wilhelm
Butler was an officer in Cromwell's army who presented a
petition to Parliament arguing for absolute religious
freedom. Williams testified in favor of it. Williams
published three other books during his mission in 1652,
including Experiment of Spiritual Life & Health, Hireling
Ministry None of Christ's, and of course, The Bloody Tenent
Yet More Bloody. Williams expressed disgust that "In vaine
have English Parliaments permitted English Bibles in the
In making these arguments for toleration and diversity while in England, Clarke and Williams were again defending the image of the Narragansett settlements against the continuing attacks of Bay colony opponents. Giles Firmin, for one, condemned separatists and sectarians in both old and New England who "please[d] themselves with their owne gifts and opinions," while Clarke's long-time nemesis at Lynn, Thomas Cobbet, in concurring with this assessment, harshly rejected heterodoxy as resulting only in anarchy. Refuting the arguments of both Williams and Clarke, Cobbet highlighted "the late broyl betwixt Mr. Cottington their governor, and the rest" and wondered that "differing parties who had tryalls in their Courts should have such sidings, some for one party, some for the other, and that even amongst the very governing parts of the Island, so that force of Arms was used against [the] other."100

In Ill-Newes from New England, however, John Clarke turned the tables on "orthodox" American Puritans. Clarke concerned himself not simply with doctrine, but with the "divinely ordain'd" principle of liberty of conscience, a concept he had seen violated repeatedly during the poorest English houses and the simplest man or woman to search the Scriptures if yet against their soules persuasian from the Scripture, they should be forced . . . to beleve as the Church beleeves." See Williams, Bloudy Tenent, 13.

Antinomian controversy; so harsh was the treatment of dissenters at the hands of magistrates, that Clarke decided to exile himself from the Bay colony. "I thought it not strange to see men differ about matters of Heaven, for I expect no less on Earth," he argued, "But to see that they were not able to bear each other in their different understandings and consciences, as in those utmost parts of the World to live peaceable together" was, for Clarke, inexplicable. Criticizing Puritan doctrine as "false and evil," Clarke noted that the Bay colony ministry's reliance upon the magistracy to enforce church attendance and theological unity tended to "disorder, confusion," and hypocrisy. Worship, he contended, was a matter of the heart, and spiritual opinions therefore were not to be influenced "by carnal weapons."101

Residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations obviously agreed with these positions, and so publicly expressed support for the missions of Williams and Clarke as promising greater stability in the Narragansett. In July 1652 the townspeople of Providence requested from Warwick a letter of encouragement to Williams.102 Warwick replied by suggesting that both Providence and Warwick "treat either by word or writing with the [Is]land . . . to see if there

101 Clarke, Ill-Newes, 18-20.

may bee a unanimous agreement for the 4 Towns to send over together [a letter] as desiring the former charter to bee renewed."103 Providence agreed with the suggestion, but also unilaterally praised Williams "for your care and dilligence to watch all opportunityes to promote our peace, for we perceive your prudent and comprehensive mind stirreth every stone to present it unto the builders, to make firme the fabrick unto us." The townspeople explicitly recognized, for the first time, the connection between English authority and peace in the Narragansett region. They expressed gratitude to Williams for his steady presence, despite "so sad events, as the subjection of some amongst us, bothe English and Indians to other jurisdictions." They noted the value of an agent in England "to prevent such neere approach of our neighbours upon our borders on the Nanhigansett side, which might much anoy us, with your endeavours to furnish us with such amunition as to looke a forreigne enemie in the face." They sought out Williams's assistance to help the people of the region "to unite in one again, such as of late have had seeminge separation in some respects," and "to incourage and strengthen our weake and enfeebled boddy to performe its worke in these forreigne partes, to the honour of such as

103 Providence to Warwick is in RIHSM X: 133; Warwick's response is recorded in ERPr. XV: 56. Certainly, because the request involved receiving direction from England, the Gortonists were happy to suggest a unified front to that end.
take care, have been, and are so tender of our good, though we be unworthy." At the same time, the town promised to ensure that Williams's "weighty affares may not seeme tediose, nor bee any discouragament unto you," and pledged to pay him well for his work in England. The Plantations concluded by showering praise on Williams, and gave credit to God

who hath pleased to selecte you to such a purpose, as we doubt not will conduce to the peace and safety of us all, as to make you once more an instrument to impart and disclose our cause unto those noble and grave Senatours our honourable protectors, in whose eies God hath given you favour (as we understand) beyond our hopes, and moved the hearts of the wise to stir on your behalf.104

Despite the Narragansett inhabitants' best wishes, through the summer of 1652 relatively few members of the London committee charged with deciding the fate of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations favored the granting of new charters. As had been the case during Williams's negotiation for the patent about a decade earlier, the constituents of the Council on Foreign Plantations initially supported or rejected the Narragansett suit based upon their own religious views. Williams reported that the

104 Town of Providence to Roger Williams, 28 October 1652, RICR I: 248-49.
compositions of colonial committees were always changing, that they were "appointed & disappointed" constantly, and that the most recent Councils had not been favorable to Providence's cause. Apparently packed with participants in the Connecticut colonizing venture, like Fenwick and Hopkins, the committee also boasted the likes of anti-tolerationist Presbyterian William Waller and the enigmatic Arthur Haselrig. As a result of the council's decidedly pro-Bay colony leanings, other members of the committee, Cornelius Holland and Henry Vane, out of their "cordiall respect to o[u]r cause" offered to delay any action on the Narragansett charters. Vane, "o[u]r cher[ished] ffriend," agreed to "put it of[f]" in order to make "some overture .. . with o[u]r Adversaries"; at that time the Narragansett communities were certain to "make some P rogrees," but "little or none (ffor so is Mr Hollands mind) till then."105

In short, Coddington's commission had taken a disastrous toll on the English image of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Williams reported that, due to perceived disorder in the Narragansett region, even the colony's supporters in England were having misgivings. Vane's protege Cornelius Holland insisted that the colony

105 John Throckmorton, clerk of Providence to Warwick, 29 July 1652, "Copies of Antient Records in Warwick," mss., Vault K-Wa2, RIHS. Haselrig was also Fenwick's father-in-law.
settle "all prejudices that may be crept in amongst you" and
"indeavour with all your might to carry on your government
according to order with a peaceable and Condesending, &
umunanimous Spiritt." This done, Holland promised not only
peace among inhabitants, but also "Further Favour (noe
doupt) in the eyes of the Councell." By maintaining order
the settlers and leaders of the colony could "strengthen the
hands of those in whose heart it is to doe you good," like
Henry Vane who, along with Roger Williams, vowed to petition
the Council of State consistently "for the confirmation of
the charter, until the determination of the
controversy."106

Vane, who as a supporter of religious liberty in
England had much invested in the success of the Rhode Island
"experiment," did his best to encourage unity and peace in
the Narragansett. In February 1653/54 Vane wrote a scathing
letter to Providence, at the request of Roger Williams, in
which he dispensed very clear advice "out of the Christian
love I bear you." Disheartened that the chief Anglo-
American experiment in religious diversity appeared to be
failing, Vane asked

How is it that there are such divisions amongst you?
Such headiness, tumults, disorders and injustice? The
noise echoes into the ears of all, as well friends as

106 Cornelius Holland to Rhode Island, ca. February
1652/53, RIHSM V: 2; Roger Williams to the Towns of
Providence and Warwick, 1 April 1653, CRW, 385-86.
enemies, by every returne of shipps from those parts. Is not the fear and awe of God amongst you to restraine? Is not the Love of Christ in you, to fill you with yearninge bowells, one towards another, and constrain you not to live to yourselves, but to him that died for you, yea, and is risen again? Are there no wise men amongst you? No publick self-denying spirits, that at least, upon the grounds of public safety, equity and prudence, can find out some way or meanes of union and reconciliation for you amongst yourselves, before you become a prey to common enemies, especially since this State, by the last letter from the Council of State, gave you your freedom, as supposing a better use would have been made of it than there hath been? Surely, when kind and simple remedies are applied and are ineffectuall, it speaks loud and broadly the high and dangerous distempers of such a body, as if the wounds were incurable.

Vane continued to "hope better things from you," and insisted that representatives from both the mainland and the Island communities, "in a general meeting," affect "such a union and common satisfaction might arise, as, through God's blessing, might put a stop to your growinge breeches and distractions." He prayed that such a resolution would "silence your enemies, encourage your friends, [and] honor the name of God (which of late hath been much blasphemed by
reason of you)."107 Vane's blistering letter was a reminder that he and others in English government--from the time of the charter of 1643/44--had protected the region's religious outcasts from the dangers of New World Puritan orthodoxy because they sympathized with the common plight of Narragansett communities and, perhaps more importantly, supported the notion that civil and spiritual spheres could and should operate separately.

Williams echoed these sentiments. Writing to Providence in August 1654, the mainland's agent complained that he had spent almost five years in and about London dampening "the rage of the English agst us." Having constantly endured taunts "that I have laboured for a licentious and Contentious people" and being "calld Traitour by the One partie, agst the state of Engl.," Williams "wisht I might never have landed." He explained that by God's grace alone the "Grand Cause and Truth of Freedome of Conscience hath bene upheld to this day," and that divine intervention had "quencht so much of our Fires hietherto." At the same time Williams advised convening "Some Conference tending to Reconciliation" with the other towns and reminded his factious brethren that "Love covereth a Multitude of Sins" and helped to affect "pacification and

107 Henry Vane to Providence, 8 February 1653/54, RICR I: 285-86.
Accomodacion of our sad Differences."108 As his urgent tone suggests, Williams was having difficulties convincing Cromwell's advisors to protect the diverse and divided groups of the Narragansett.

Undoubtedly with Vane's help and the encouragement of both Williams and Clarke, however, the Protector's council finally agreed to intervene in the Narragansett region to protect its spiritually and politically diverse population from the territorial and ideological encroachments of orthodox enemies. In a letter to Massachusetts, the Protector recognized Williams's "good affections and conscience, and his sufferings by our common enemy and oppressor of God's people, the prelates," noted his work with the Indians of New England, and explained that both Houses of Parliament had agreed ten years earlier "to grant unto him and friends with him, a free and absolute charter of civil government for those parts of his abode." He expressed great sorrow, however, that English colonists in New England, "driven to the ends of the world," and tested by the wilderness, had failed to get along well together. To remedy that disappointing situation, Cromwell declared, with his council, "upon divers considerations," that Williams, the Narragansett settlers, and Massachusetts, should come together with "good affections . . . in the

108 Roger Williams to the Town of Providence, ca. August 1654, CRW, 400-402.
actual performance of all friendly offices." Though he expressed concern about Cavaliers in Virginia and the possibility of "unfriendly [Royalist] visits from the West of England and from Ireland," Cromwell prayed that "howsoever it may please the Most High to shake our foundations, yet the report of your peacable and prosperous plantations, may be some refreshment to Your true and faithful friends." 109

Cromwell continued to encourage these movements toward peace and unity in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, framing his correspondence in terms of imperial interest. He ordered the government officially to continue with the charter government, since "Your agent here [Clarke] hath represented unto us some particulars concerning your Government which you judge necessary to be settled by us here." Expressing regret that the "great and weighty affaires of this Commonwealth" required him "to deferr ye consideration of them to a further opportunitie," he also admonished the Narragansett government to preserve "ye peace and safetie of those plantations," making sure that "neither

109 In late August 1653, the Rhode Island General Assembly had voted to send letters to Clarke concerning possible peace through reunion; see Rhode Island General Assembly orders, 20 August 1653, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 62, RIHS. The letter from Cromwell is printed in RICR I: 290-91. The signatories of the letter were long-time friend of the Narragansett region, Cornelius Holland; John Blackistow, Isaac Pennington, Miles Corbett, Oliver St. John, Gilbert Pickering, Robert Warley, John Gurdon, Northumberland, and Philip Wharton; and Williams's old friends Thomas Barrington and William Masham.
through any intestine commotions, or forragne invasions, there doe arise any detriment or dishonour to this Commonwealth or yourselves."110

These instructions not only helped gain the submission of William Coddington to the government of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, but also helped to strengthen the bond between the colony and England. In gratitude for Cromwell's help, the Court of Commissioners declared that all residents in the Narragansett were to take an oath of obedience and engagement to England, "to subject to ye authority of His Highness, and ye Parlement of England, as ye government is now established" and ordered that all who refused were to be summoned to appear before the Court of Trials. Furthermore, all inhabitants were required to "own ye authority" of Cromwell and of Parliament, or lose all privileges granted by the colony's charter government. Inhabitants were to assist colonial officers in gathering rates and collecting fines in Cromwell's name, or face charges of treason and liability for whatever "mischeife that shall ensue for want of his assistance." The colony protested its loyalty to Cromwell and answered complaints against residents "that we abound with whoredom," insisting that all who engaged in immoral behavior were bound to answer in trial and were subject, upon conviction to "some

110 Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 28-29 June 1655, RICR I: 316-17.

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moderate corporal punishment." The General Court, for its part, demanded that the charter of 1643/44, all orders from the Council of State, and the letter from Cromwell were to remain in the hands of appropriate authorities, who were also charged to "bring in their accompt of ye State's part due to his Highness to ye next court of Commissioners." At the same time, letters of thanksgiving were prepared for the Council of State and Protector, to be distributed by John Clarke.

The residents of Providence in particular, as a result of Cromwell's missive, sought to redevote themselves to order with diversity. In response to Vane's criticisms, the townsmen recognized that religious liberty had perhaps created problems among them. Speaking for the town, Gregory Dexter noted that, not only in Providence, but all Narragansett settlements "a sweete cup hath rendered many of us wanton and too active." The town settlers acknowledged that "we have long drunck of ye cup of as great liberties as any people yt we can heare of under the whole Heaven." Having not only been free "from ye iron yoaks of wolfish Bishops and their Popish ceremonies (against whose cruell oppressions, God raised up your noble spirit in Parliament)," but having been spared from civil war in England as well, and avoiding "ye new chains of ye

111 Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 25 May 1655, RICR I: 305-306; Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 28-30 June 1655, RICR I: 317-18, 321.
Presbyterian tyrants," they expressed gratitude for having been saved from "ye over-zealous fire of ye (so-called) Godly and Christian magistrates" of Massachusetts. The townspeople admitted that they had "almost forgotten what tythes are; yea, or taxes, either to Church or Commonweale," and at the same time thanked "ye Most High" for providing in Henry Vane "so noble and true a friend to an outcast and despised people." 112

Providence residents were quick to defend liberty of conscience, however, by pointing to other causes for the town's and colony's unrest. First, they argued, the region had been "greatly disturbed and distressed by ye ambition in coveteousness of some amongst ourselves." Peace had reigned, they contended,

untill Mr. Coddington (wanting yt publike selfe denyeing spirit which you commend to us in your letter), procured by most untrue information a monopolie of part of ye colonie, viz.: Rhode Island to himselfe, and so occasion our generall disturbances and distractions.

Moreover, William Dyre "with no lesse want of a publike spirit," in his jousts with Coddington, "contrarie to ye State's intentions and expressions," had embroiled the region--by his insistence upon naval commissions--"in most

112 Gregory Dexter to Henry Vane, 27 August 1654, RICR I: 287-89.
unnecessary and unrighteous plunderings, both of Dutch and French and English; all to our great grief." The Providence men made themselves out to be victims of Dyre's greed and "protested against such abuse of power from England; and ye end of it, even to ye shame and reproach of himselse, and ye very English name itselse, as all these parts doe witness." The writers concluded by thanking Vane for his "constant loving kindness and favour" towards them since the very founding of Providence "occasioned by ye banishment of some in these parts from ye Massachusetts" and prayed that Vane "shall noe more complaine of ye saddinge of your loving heart, by ye men of Providence Towne, or Providence Colonie." 113

A scant four days after writing to Vane, Providence Plantations acted more sincerely than ever to achieve reunion, order, and fidelity to English law. The Assembly began by declaring that though "there hath been differences and obstructions amongst ye foure Townes of this Colonie of Providence Plantations in New England," as a result of Coddington's commission, its representatives would agree to accept "on ye accompt of ye two Townes" of Rhode Island the laws passed by Portsmouth and Newport since Coddington's commission. In an attempt to maintain legal continuity, the Assembly agreed not only to maintain Aquidneck's laws, but to review the laws created by Warwick and Providence and to

113 Ibid., 287-89.

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weed out "defective" and "jarring" regulations incompatible with the laws of Rhode Island and England. The aim, ultimately, was "to order this Collonie by the authoritie of ye Charter granted to us by ye Honored Parlement of ye Commonwealth of England, bearing date ye fourteenth day of March 1643."114

Simultaneously, Narragansett magistrates promised to restore peace and order to the region by cracking down on factions. The Court ordered inhabitants to be careful of "strangers," and to report all breaches of the peace to authorities. It referred a dispute between Christopher Almy and William Dyre to England, and took up the case of Thomas Olney, William Baulston, and John Roome, who were accused of "risinge or takeinge up of armes to ye oposeinge of authoritie." Explaining that "we have been rent and torne with divisions; and his Highness hath sent us an expresse command under his hande and seale" to make peace in the name of England, the Court ordered that any person found "to be a ringleader or ringleaders of factions, or divisions amongst us," to be sent to England "to receive his or their tryall and sentence at ye pleasure of his Highness and ye Lords of ye Counsell." Moreover, to avoid any dispute over the legitimacy of certain regulations, the representatives

114 "Articles of agreement by ye Commissioners of ye foure Townes uppon ye re-unitinge of this Colonie of Providence Plantations," 31 August 1654, RICR I: 276-78.
demanded the recording of all acts "passed since ye union of ye Colonie" in a special book.115

At the same time the colony made full use of its agent in London, John Clarke, who involved himself heavily in English religion and politics and faithfully reported social trends to his constituents. His New England sponsors proved to be very flexible; within five years England's government changed several times, from the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell to that of his son Richard, to a Parliamentary convention, to the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. Each time, the representatives of the Narragansett colony responded quickly, pointedly submitting to the English authority of the day while contrasting their devotion to London with the indifference of their orthodox neighbors. Residents of Providence Plantations and Rhode Island learned quickly and well that political and religious identification with England strengthened the colony's case for a continued independent existence.

In Clarke the residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had an informed, well-connected ally. Always involved closely in English politics, Clarke signed the April 1657 address asking Cromwell to refuse the crown and

115 Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 25 May 1655, *RICR* I: 307-309, 313-14; Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 28-29 June 1655, *RICR* I: 318-21. The courts of May and June 1655 also ordered that appropriate ammunition be available, and that all liquor being brought into the area be registered.

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maintained correspondence with top national leaders. He enjoyed a long-term, personal and religiously-oriented relationship with Council of State member, Parliamentary representative for Cornwall and fellow Calvinistic Baptist Robert Bennett. In his English letters, Clarke mentioned Civil War treasurer and Baptist Richard Deane, his "worthy friend" Sir Henry Vane, Swan Alley elder John Perry, well-known London Anabaptist Hanserd Knollys, and infamous regicide John Carew. He knowledgeably recounted Cromwell's efforts to subdue colonial possessions, discussed elections for and the succession of Parliaments in the late 1650s, and explained all aspects of the transfer of power to Cromwell's son Richard. Clarke had a keen grasp of republican constituencies and followed closely the comings and goings of those involved in the "Good Old Cause." Moreover, Clarke traced--and apparently reported back to his constituents on--social and religious trends in and about

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117  A wealth of information is contained in a pair of letters from John Clarke to Robert Bennett, one dated 25 August 1655 and the other from Westminster dated 25 December 1658. Both are deposited in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library, Louisville, Kentucky.

Clarke was tied to at least two of these figures financially as well. Forced to mortgage his house in Newport to obtain the funds necessary to remain in England on the colony's business, Clarke turned to Deane, who forwarded him 130 pounds. Clarke sold outright to Hanserd Knollys "one Part & portion of an house also a garden & Lot adjoyning" his farm near Newport "and also all his Land and interest in an Iland lyeing near to the said Rode Iland." Both documents reside in the Newport Historical Society, Box 36A, Folder 1, Newport, RI.
London. He even participated in the Fifth Monarchy movement for a time; the authorities arrested him in April 1658 at Swan Alley, Coleman Street along with John Canne, Wentworth Day, John Belcher, and others and charged him with sedition. In a manner characteristic of the colony he served, Clarke defended himself by referring to ancient case law and more recent Parliamentary statutes. He thereby won acquittal.

Perhaps most important to the Narragansett magistrates was Clarke's ability to clarify—and, if necessary, reform—the reputation of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in England, a skill that they believed would help to preserve the colony's independence and unique liberties. Clarke constantly dispatched letters to the colony from Cromwell and the Committee for Foreign Plantations, and leaders of Rhode Island regularly sought Clarke's perspective on matters of policy. Clarke's constituents publicly praised him for his "ability and dilligence" as well as his "love and care to be such concerninge the welfare and

118 BDBR I: 146.


120 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 10 March 1657/58 ordered letters read from the Lord Protector and the Warwick Commission. See RICR I: 367.

121 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 2 November 1658, RICR I: 395. All letters to Cromwell, of course, were sent through Clarke.
prosperity of this Collony." Most importantly, though, Clarke, having "beine intrusted with the more publique afairens" of the colony despite its "straites and incumberances" led residents "to repayre to you, for your further and continewed counsell, care and helpe, findinge that your sollid and Christian demeanure hath gotten noe small interest in the harten of our superiours, those worthy and noble Senators with whome you have had to doe on our behalfe."122 In particular, magistrates were concerned about how specific legal cases had been perceived in England and requested that Clarke place a positive face on various judicial jousts.123

Colonial leaders also relied upon Clarke to guide Rhode Island and Providence Plantations through the transition of government in England after the death of Oliver Cromwell. Upon learning of the elder Cromwell's passing, Clarke advised the governor and assistants of Rhode Island to decree in special session that a proclamation "concerning his Highnes Richard, Lord Protector, late successor unto his Highnes his father, be copied out, and a copy thereof sent

122 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to John Clarke, 5 November 1658, RICR I: 396.

123 In the Christopher Almy case, for example, the General Court cited "by reason of some two refractory amonge ourselves [Almy and Nicholas Easton] . . . wee appealed unto you for your advice for the more publique manifestation of it, with respect to our superiours." See General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to John Clarke, 5 November 1658, RICR I: 396.
to each towne, that accordingly a day may be apoynted for the solemnization thereof." The Council wasted no time, ordering that ceremonies be executed throughout the colony within the week, that "all well eefected people in each towne assemble together," and that train band officers come together "in their military posture," while the clerk of each company read the proclamation "at the head of the company." The document was to include a particular phrase: "that wee doe joyfully accept of his sayd Highnes succeeding in that dignity and power of Protectorship; and as loyall subjects doe resolve to owne his government, and yield all faythfull obedience thereto." The Council minced no words about the form of the proclamation, demanding the reading "to be done in the most publique place of each towne where usually the trayne-band doe exercise."124

More than merely proclaiming the new Protector, the assembled representatives of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations identified generally with England. Through Clarke leaders in the Narragansett undoubtedly understood how unstable the situation was in London, and divisions in Parliament between "Cavaleers, Comon-wealth men, & such as are for the presentt Government," as well as those "who would introduce & uphold the old wayes, lawes, & worships, &

the former Monarchy."125 As a result Rhode Island's leaders chose their words carefully in their address to Richard Cromwell, and focused upon relatively benign issues. They described their "unexpressible sorrow . . . to receive the tydeings of your and the three nations, and our owne and soe a loss in the late departure of your and the nation's most renowned lord and father." Continually stressing their close connection to Britain, the General Court declared that "it was and is as great a joy unto us that it hath pleased God to provide for the three nations and ourselves such a cordiall as your highness is"; in identifying with English sorrow the leaders of Rhode Island hoped "that the three nations and ourselves may finde a hearinge of our soe great a wound and stroake."126

More importantly, Rhode Island's magistrates--armed with accurate knowledge of the younger Cromwell's views on toleration--distinguished their colony from "intolerant" neighbors and identified themselves with the religious diversity of England. The General Court reminded Cromwell "that this poore collony of Providence Plantations mostly consists of a birth and breedinge of the providence of the most high; wee beinge an outcast people, formerly from our mother nations in the Bishop's daies, and since from the


126 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to Richard Cromwell, 18 May 1659, RICR 1: 414.
rest of the new English over zealcus collonys, our whole frame beinge much licke unto the present frame and constitution of our dearest mother England." Most importantly, like England, the Narragansett colony accepted "several judgments and consciences," stressing that "our neighbour collonys doe not; which is the only cause of their great offence against us."127

Aside from stressing commonalities with England in religious diversity, the General Court of Rhode Island pointed out to the new Protector the traditionally close relationship between New World "outcasts" and the various governments in London. Narragansett leaders methodically recounted the history:

Notwithstandinge this our outcast state, may it please your highness to be informed, that God was pleased to turne the heart of the late first great parliament towards us in vouchsafeinge us a Charter of Incorporation and government, see that it pleased the then Lord Admirall (the Earl of Warwicke) and the Honorable commissioners, in the name, and by the authority of parliament, by many of their gracious letters and orders, to confirme and strengthen us.

The Court boasted that Rhode Island had sustained, "notwithstandinge our sister collony's anger against us"

127 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to Richard Cromwell, 18 May 1659, RICR I: 414-415.
extraordinary favor with the Council of State "from whose noble hands, wee also received letters of gracious confirmation." Moreover, magistrates reminded the younger Cromwell that his father, "under his owne hand and seale," had deemed the Narragansett colony worthy to continue as an independent entity. With that information, the Court brought the full weight of history to bear upon its request that the new Protector look favorably upon colonial agent John Clarke and that the younger Cromwell mimick his legendary father who "refresh[ed] us with some gracious lynes of confirmation and encouragment to our poore plantations and government." Magistrates sought from Richard Cromwell "some such pressent gracious refreshment from the hand of your Highness also."128

The closeness of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to the various governments in London was no accident, but rather developed from the profound understanding of English society and religious culture on the part of each Narragansett envoy. Williams, Gorton, and Clarke all had matured in an environment of religious diversity, of hostility to the "orthodox" colonies, and of dependence upon English power. All of them understood the proliferation of spiritual opinions in England because they

128 Incidentally, this address was never delivered to Cromwell, since he was already out of power when it arrived in London. See General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to Richard Cromwell, 18 May 1659, RICR I: 415-16.
themselves had experienced the same thing in the Narragansett. They absorbed the arguments being made in London by tolerationists, gauged the opinions of various important members of Parliament, and continued to emphasize the commonalities between Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and England. Thus, over time, residents of the Narragansett colony found themselves squarely in mainstream Anglo-America whereas before they had been a "poor, despised people."

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PART THREE

CULMINATING EVENTS, 1656-1665

By the late 1660s, inhabitants of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had long established their support of religious liberty and had successfully employed strategies to guarantee for the colony protection from various governments in London. They had worked to separate spiritual and more worldly, political matters, while fending off neighboring colonies that sought to squelch the expression of various faiths. Their representatives had glorified their colony's "unique liberties" to would-be supporters in England, and had carefully noted the relative peace and coherence of the region and its four communities.

These beliefs and successes would be challenged by two major Anglo-American events, the arrival of radical sectarians known as Quakers and the transition in England to yet another government, that of restored Stuart monarch Charles II. The first of these episodes provided perhaps the most crucial test to Narragansett leaders' resolve to defend conscience. In seeking to stamp out this "heretical" group before it gained a foothold in New England, member
governments of the United Colonies demanded that the lawmakers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations join with them in instituting tight restrictions on incoming Quakers. In this the representatives from Massachusetts led the charge, threatening economic sanctions and implying impending military action against their upstart neighbors. The Narragansett government withstood the pressure, not because many inhabitants became Quakers (most, in fact, did not embrace the sect for several years), and not because leaders thought the group benign (many clearly feared the potential destabilizing effect of the sectaries), but because the code and custom of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations allowed all who lived civilly to stay, preach, and worship in the colony. The Quakers enhanced the Narragansett region's reputation as a refuge and fit nicely into the colony's conscious pattern of challenging orthodoxy. The group not only increased the religious diversity of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, but also served as a reminder of the sectarian explosion in England paralleling that in the Narragansett area; the Quaker missionaries helped to organize many, especially in Aquidneck, who had been theologically predisposed and long-prepared to join such a sect.

The Restoration of the Stuart monarchy provided a different sort of challenge for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, but also afforded the colony's leaders an
opportunity to exploit strategies used in previous dealings with English governments. These lawmakers maintained an agent in London, John Clarke, to survey the mood at court and to make recommendations for colonial policy based on his observations. They quickly declared their devotion to the Crown in ceremonies and proclamations, and reminded Charles II of their prior service to the English nation. They rewrote their colony's history, playing up the colony as a refuge for the exiled and persecuted. Recognizing that the young monarch would be sympathetic to such notions, they stressed the inhabitants' devotion to peaceful diversity and liberty of conscience. Moreover, they noted the strict adherence of residents to English law and, in contrast, confirmed the royal view of Massachusetts as insolent and intolerant. In short, lawmakers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations successfully reapplied old strategies to a new English government and proved again that the colony fit well in the Anglo-American mainstream.
CHAPTER 7

THE "QUAKER INVASION" AND THE DEFINITION OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

In 1656, missionaries for the religious group known as Quakers arrived in New England and immediately began preaching against the standing ecclesiastical order in the Puritan colonies. The sect had developed in the chaos of civil war England and, under the guidance of early leaders like George Fox and Margaret Fell, attracted to its ranks Baptists, Ranters, and Levellers, and others who sought to abolish mandatory tithes and the state church, to reform the law and education, and to deemphasize social distinctions. Feeder groups to Quakerism generally accepted, as Christopher Hill has noted, "the irrational element in human experience," and relied upon the Holy Spirit within all individuals. Having separated themselves from the world these sectaries saw themselves as among the "elect." They were both spiritual and political revolutionaries who fought alongside Fifth Monarchists, Ranters, and Diggers in the New
Modal Army, and who challenged oaths, while frequently working to affect change within existing institutions.1

No place in the New World was more sensitive to--or more offended by--these teachings than Massachusetts Bay, where missionary Quakers landed before moving in to Rhode Island. Like other proselytizers, Quakers chose initial "targets" based upon the potential for opposition; their sense of mission was wrapped up in suffering for God and the sake of the cause.2 Thus, English Quakers viewed North

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2 English Quakers were acutely aware of obstacles to change and barriers to their acceptance within the larger society. James Nayler, recognizing that repression of the sect's unique beliefs continued at the hands of "those who pretended to be against oppression," railed against any leaders who usurp "the Throne of Christ, persecute or imprison any for Conscience." See Nayler, A Lamentacion (By one of Englands Prophets) over Ruines of this Oppressed Nation (York, 1653), 4, 8. Similarly, George Fox viewed "perfect conscience" as synonymous with the "Light," and
America—and particularly the insulated Puritan Bay colony—as good ground for spreading their teachings. This martyrlic ideal motivated large numbers of Quakers years afterward to risk imprisonment and execution by returning to Boston. Conversely, when persecution stopped in Massachusetts, this impulse failed and the sect's growth slowed significantly.

In contrast, Quakerism thrived in the Narragansett territory, where many residents held views consonant with the sect and sought the greater sense of organization and religious community that the group brought. Guided by the Holy Spirit-centered theology of the early Antinomians, scores of Rhode Island residents accepted the theology propounded by Quaker missionaries from England, who arrived characterized it as unchangeable; he contrasted this notion with constantly altered laws, especially those "contrary to that in the conscience" and "against God"; see Fox, A Warning to the Rulers of England, Not to usurp Dominion over the Conscience, nor to give forth Laws contrary to that in the Conscience (York, 1653), 12-13, 19. He repeated this view a few years later in This is to all Officers and Souldiers of the Armies of England, Scotland, and Ireland; and to all Magistrates, And them in Authority in these Nations, and the Dominions thereunto (London, 1657), 2-5. Fox never tired of reeling off examples of violent persecution, particularly executions of the "innocent and righteous"; Fox, A Message from the Lord to the Parliament of England (London, 1654), 1-8, 11. At the same time he recognized that Cromwell was not to blame for the situation and that unscrupulous local justices, in order to extort fines, applied to Quakers laws meant only for Papists. See Fox, To the Protector and Parliament of England (London, 1658), 54. This persecution, then, prepared English Quakers well for Massachusetts.

in the colony in 1656. By 1660, several of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Newport had accepted the doctrines and, more importantly, the organization of the new sect. Once-devoted orthodox Puritan William Coddington had adopted Quaker modes of speech by August 1660 and had joined Nicholas Easton, Henry Bull, Jeremy Clarke, John Albro, and Adam Mott in forming a yearly meeting sometime in 1661.4

The success of Quakerism in the Narragansett region and its rejection in the "orthodox" colonies points to the essential differences between Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and the constituent entities of the United Colonies. During the "Quaker invasion" of New England, the leaders of the Narragansett government again defended diversity and liberty of conscience as positive and basically English principles. They fended off a host of threats from Massachusetts Bay, whose authorities continued trying to hold the line against "heresy." Moreover, through the mid-1660s, Quakerism presented an opportunity for Narragansett leaders to exploit again their devotion to both

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4 In letters to John Winthrop, Jr., Coddington adopted Quaker dating practices, referred positively to the sect's early martyrs, and used words peculiar to Quakerism. See William Coddington to John Winthrop, Jr., 23 August 1660, MHSC 4th ser. VII (1865): 286-87; and Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few,* esp. chs. 2 and 4. For the transition of Rhode Island Antinomians to Quakerism, see Irwin, "Cast Out from the 'City Upon a Hill,'" 34; and Maclear, "'The Heart of New England Rent,'" 621-52. On the first New England Yearly Meeting, see Jones, *Quakers in American Colonies.*

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English law and religious freedom, ideals that would help 
endear the colony to yet another government in London.

Rhode Island provided a safe atmosphere for Quaker 
missionaries and fertile ground for their teachings. A 
large proportion of its inhabitants were linked to the 
Antinomian controversy, in which Anne Hutchinson had made a 
case for the Covenant of Grace and the validity of 
revelations from the Holy Spirit. This view was, in 
essence, just a short jump from acceptance of the Quaker 
"Inner Light." By 1656 relatively few inhabitants of the 
Narragansett region had found satisfaction in the religious 
organizations extant there; of the 247 who appear on lists 
of freemen, only twenty-nine were known to have been members

5 Gura noted that "By the mid-1640s the Rhode Island 
settlements had been exposed to the kind of radical 
spiritism that in England prepared the way for James Nayler 
and George Fox, a fact that goes far toward explaining why 
of the New England colonies Rhode Island proved most 
receptive to the Quaker emissaries who arrived in the late 
1650s." See Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 63-64; and Jones, 
Quakers in American Colonies, 8; Lovejoy, Religious 
Enthusiasm, 88; Barbour, Quakers in Puritan England, 88; 
Caroline Hazard, The Narragansett Friends' Meeting in the 
XVIII Century (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 5-10; 
William C. Braithwaite, The Beginnings of Quakerism (London: 
Macmillan, 1912), 404; Margaret H. Bacon, The Quiet Rebels: 
The Story of the Quakers in America (New York: Basic Books, 
1969), 35-36; Elbert Russell, The History of Quakerism (New 
York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), 40-41; Reay, Quakers and 
the English Revolution, 15-17; Maclear, "Heart of New 
Park, "Puritans and Quakers," New England Quarterly 27 
(1954): 69; C. Burrage, "Antecedents of Quakerism," English 
Historical Review 30 (1915): 78-90.
of Baptist congregations.6 Presumably, the remaining 88 percent had no official affiliation, and a large proportion of this group had been profoundly shaped by Hutchinson's insistence upon the movement of the Holy Spirit within Saints.7

Among those in the region most predisposed to Quakerism were the followers of Samuel Gorton. In some aspects of his thought Gorton himself seems to have espoused a type of proto-Quakerism prior to 1655. He argued not only that God appears in and speaks through "Saints" in matters of doctrine and deportment, but that ordinances of all kinds and in-born social distinctions were products of evil. Many Gortonists followed these views--laid out in a number of Gorton's works--to their conclusions in the confines of Quaker meetings; perhaps the most notable of these Gortonists, Elizabeth Truslar, became connected to the sect through her son, Nicholas Phelps, who offered his house in Salem to visiting Quakers for lodging and meetings.8

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6 For the freeman's list, see RICR I: 299-302.

7 Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 270-79. As Rufus Jones and others have observed, "There was, it plainly appears, thus differentiated here in Newport, fifteen years before the coming of the Quakers, a group of persons who were Quakers in everything but name"; see Quakers in the American Colonies, 24-25.

8 Gura, Glimpse, 86-87, 148-49; Gildrie, Salem, 79-80; Jones, Quakers in American Colonies, 120-21. Thomas Underhill perhaps best articulated the link between Gorton's teachings and the tenets of Quakerism; see his Hell Broke Loose: Or An History of the Quakers Both Old and New (London, 1660), 12-13.
Moreover, in an expression of theological kinship Gorton wrote to imprisoned Quakers in Boston in 1656 and was the first to offer them asylum upon their release.9

While the theological dispositions of the Narragansett region's residents were important to the relatively friendly reception of Quakers in and around Rhode Island, perhaps more important was the sense among inhabitants that theirs was a land of outcasts, and that this image was, in fact, acceptable and positive. When the Woodhouse, captained by Robert Fowler,10 brought the first Quakers into Newport harbor in August 1657, the town was nearly twenty years old, and over half of its ninety-six free male inhabitants had settled there for reasons of conscience.11 They had become accustomed to working in government with others of slightly different spiritual views and, along with others in the region, knew well the challenges of itinerancy produced

9 Gorton actually wrote a series of letters to Christopher Holder and other Quakers in Boston in which he marvilled "what manner of God your adversaries trust in, who are so fearful of being infected with error, or how they shall escape the wiles and power of the devil, when the arm of flesh fails them, whereby they seek to defend themselves for the present." Letters were exchanged between September and October 1657; see Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I: 181; and Gorton, An Antidote against the Common Plague of the World (London, 1657), 38-39. As Gura has noted, "Gorton was instrumental in preparing the way for the reception of the Quakers in his colony"; see Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 9.


11 RICR I: 300-302.
by persecution. Thus, in 1659 Quaker Humphrey Norton remembered that he and his brethren had been "well received" by "such as were by the English accounted the basest of men, whom many of them they had barbarously banished" to the Narragansett.12

As a result of this hospitality Rhode Island became a base of operations for Quakers undertaking missions to Massachusetts. Virtually all English Quakers who came to New England traveled, at some time, through the Narragansett region.13 In June 1659 future martyr William Robinson, after extensive travels in Virginia, Maryland, and Barbados, met up with Peter Pearson and Marmaduke Stephenson in Rhode Island where "we tooke courage, & such as had been like to faint, was [sic] refreshed; & gathered strength again, and stood upon there feet, & begins to walk in the name of the Lord our God."14 After suffering imprisonment in the Bay colony, George Fox's assistant John Rous explained, "we were


released, so we returned to Rhode Island."15 Sarah Gibbons and Dorothy Waugh travelled by foot from Newport to Salem to meet with members of the emerging Quaker community there. Christopher Holder, who eventually settled in Rhode Island, came from old to New England via the West Indies and in 1658 joined with John Copeland in Newport and proceeded from there to Massachusetts to test anti-Quaker laws.16 George Fox's first female convert, Elizabeth Hooton, ended up in Boston, was imprisoned, and banished twice to Newport.17 In short, for Quakers Rhode Island represented


16 Newman, Procession of Friends, 30. These renewed, more severe restrictions upon Quakers neither succeeded in keeping them out of the Bay colony nor did they deter the sectaries from spreading their messages. Among the most insistent proselytizers were Quaker residents of Rhode Island, who found a special calling to reach the unconverted in Massachusetts, despite the great personal danger that accompanied it. English missionary and Newport inhabitant Christopher Holder reported to Boston authorities "& People of the Masathusets Bay" that he knew well "the Terrors of ye lawd: agat: sine & Transgression: & agat: yt Spirit: yt leadeth. into. Rebellion agat. god." He believed that God had moved him to warn the leaders and residents of the Bay colony "to lay to hearte. & to consider. wt. spirit. you have Joyned wth.: come Bringe. yor. Actions. to ye light: that they may be proved." See Christopher Holder to Massachusetts, 1 September 1659, reprinted in Worthington C. Ford, "Letter of Christopher Holder," PCRM: Transactions, 1902-1904 (1906): 72.

the "habitation of the hunted-Christ, where we ever found a place of rest when weary we have been."18

By 1658, many longtime residents of Rhode Island had embraced not only the Quaker missionaries, but their religious positions as well. The first "convinced" New Englander, Nicholas Upsall, came from Boston to Rhode Island after his banishment and helped the English preachers to spread the word among settlers in the region.19 Nicholas Easton, arguably the most radical of Hutchinson's followers, was among the first in the Narragansett region to embrace the new sect's teachings, as were others who had identified closely with the idea of revelation.20 Within two years,

18 Norton, Ensigne, 69. William I. Hull observed that "In Newport, at least, they [the Quakers] found congenial soil among the community of Coddington and Easton; and not only did this community convert itself into the first Quaker meeting in Newport, but the town became a base of operations for both native and English Quakers in their invasion of the rest of New England. . . . The familiar procedure was for a company of English Friends to come to Newport, then to go with Newport Friends to Massachusetts, where they protested against the penal laws, and were imprisoned and whipped, and then to return to Rhode Island . . ."; see William I. Hull, "The Early History of the Friends in Newport," in Early Religious Leaders of Newport: Eight Addresses Delivered Before the Newport Historical Society, 1917 (Newport, RI: Newport Historical Society, 1918), 35-36.


20 Hull, "Early History of the Friends in Newport," 33, 35. Rufus Jones notes that William Coddington, Joshua Coggeshall, Nicholas Easton, John Easton, Peter Easton, Philip Sherman, Adam Mott and Caleb Carr and "other leading citizens" joined the Quakers, along with their families; see Quakers in the American Colonies, 53, 53 n2, 173-74, and Beals, Colonial Rhode Island, 114. For the notion that Rhode Islanders were groping for religious organization, see
Quaker missionaries had made inroads among residents; in 1658 the colony's General Court wrote to its agent in England John Clarke that "a sort of people called by the name of Quakers have come amongst us, and have raised up divers who seeme at present to be of their spirit."21 That same year in Newport the group designated its first meetinghouse, initiated regulations to govern the sect, and established a monthly meeting.22 By 1660, among all the colonies in New England, Rhode Island had by far the largest population of Quakers.23

William P. Sheffield, Historical Addresses of the City of Newport Delivered July 4th, 1876 (Newport, RI: John P. Sanborn and Co., 1876), 25.

21 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners to John Clarke, 5 November 1658, RICR I: 396.

22 In Newport, Quakers often met in houses of prosperous colonists like William Coddington and even occasionally called them "churches." The first meetinghouse erected for the purpose of Quaker worship was erected in Rhode Island as early as 1672. See Jones, Quakers in the American Colonies, 137, 137 n2. Hull, "Early History of the Friends in Newport," 41; Beals, Colonial Rhode Island, 114; Ross, Discourse Embracing, 131. The most extensive discussion of early organization is in Jones, Quakers in the American Colonies, 141-44. See also Arnold Lloyd, Quaker Social History, 1669-1738 (London: Longmans, Green, 1950); and Newman, Procession of Friends, 43-44.

23 Gura, Glimpse of Sion's Glory, 149; Arthur J. Worrall, Quakers in the Colonial Northeast (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1980), 62; Lovejoy, Religious Enthusiasm, 121. Meanwhile, the proportion of the population devoted to Quaker teachings increased steadily through the end of the century; by 1700, Quakers formed fully half of Newport's population. See Jones, Quakers in the American Colonies, xv. Rhode Island Quakers also actively proselytized in Massachusetts; see "Arrival of the Quakers in Rhode Island," Providence Magazine 32 (1920), 499-501; Braithwaite, Beginnings of Quakerism, 405;
In contrast, for New England Puritans the Quakers' reputation for persistence and dangerous eccentricity preceded their arrival in the New World. At least one resident of Massachusetts, while traveling in England, had encountered snippets of Quaker teachings and had formed decidedly negative opinions about them. Other American Puritans, too, perceived a threat from this "cursed sect of heretics" on many different levels. To ministers and magistrates in Massachusetts, Quakers were purveyors of disorder in religion, the family, and social hierarchy. They threatened to upset the basis of the Bay colony in scriptural precepts, favoring as a source of authority


25 Edward Breck to a Lancashire congregation, Dorchester, 17 August 1655, in "An Answer to a Scandalous Paper, Wherein were some Queries Given to be answered . . . ." *PCSM: Transactions, 1911-1913* XIV (1913), 58. English Quakers published the letter *An Answer to a scandalous Paper, Wherein were some Queries Given to be answered* (London, 1656) along with a reply from George Bishop.

individual ravings checked only by the revelations of equally deluded agents of the devil. Those who followed in the footsteps of initial Quaker missionaries Anne Austin and Mary Fisher interrupted Puritan worship services and gathered themselves illegally and "disorderly." They ridiculed the education and logic of the pastors in congregational pulpits, thumbed their noses at the trappings and traditions of the magistracy, traveled about as vagabonds, and inverted the mores of sexual and familial power by allowing women and children to preach. In short, incoming Quakers assaulted every institution that New World Puritans held dear.

The orthodox Puritan response to this threat was predictable and stern. Initial legislation banned Quakers from the colony under pain of corporal punishment and fines, sanctions that made little difference to dedicated missionaries who were eager to suffer in order to spread word of the "Inner Light." Still, for five years the Bay colony General Court continued on this course, mandating progressively more severe penalties against members of the sect who dared to challenge the ideological foundations of the "City Upon a Hill." In October 1658, after considering a petition from Boston merchants, magistrates finally made the preaching of Quaker tenets within the Bay colony jurisdiction a capital offense, and ordered a number of the
sect's most vocal members banished for what authorities in Boston hoped would be the final time.27

Understandably, given the mindset of missionaries, enforcement of these more stringent measures brought Massachusetts little relief from the Quaker menace. In fact, increasing numbers of missionaries and indigenous Quakers made a point to witness the executions of sentences against their co-religionists. Faced with the prospect of even more itinerant "heretics" flooding into the colony as spectators, the General Court made good on its promise: in October 1659 it pronounced the death sentence upon three of those who had been banished earlier under a capital warrant.28 Two of these—William Robinson and Marmaduke Stephenson—were quickly and publicly hanged, while the third, Anne Hutchinson's old friend Mary Dyer, was pardoned. Within the next two years two more Quakers, including Dyer, would be executed for their persistent proselytizing within Massachusetts.

The differences in the ways that Massachusetts and Rhode Island handled the "invading" Quakers instantly resurrected major issues of contention between the two colonies. Within a month and a half of the arrival of the missionaries, the Commissioners of the United Colonies wrote

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to authorities in the Narragansett about the sectarians who had come to Boston "upon noe other account than to disperse theire pernicious opinions." Considering "the danger that might befale the Christian religion heer professed" if the Quakers were tolerated, the Bay colony suggested to the representatives of the United Colonies that all "such notorious heretiques might bee prohibited coming among us." The Commissioners were merely passing this advice along to the Narragansett, contending "that if such should arise from amongst ourselves, speedy care might bee taken to remove them," as indeed the other New England colonies were already acting to do. The Commissioners added that success depended upon a united front; the effort would "fall short without further care by reason of your admission and receiving of such from whence they may have opportunitie to creep in amongst us, or meanes to infuse and spread theire accursed tenates to the great trouble of the collonies, if not to the subversion of the [lawes] professed in them." 29 Clearly, the greatest concerns for Rhode Island's neighboring colonies were the social and political consequences following from the widespread publication of Quaker religious views.

In the request that followed, officials from the surrounding colonies revealed that--in terms of their

29 Commissioners of the United Colonies to the General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 12 September 1657, RICR I: 374-75.
relationships with Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, and their struggles against "heresy"--little had changed. The United Colonies Commissioners hoped that those magistrates meeting in Newport would "take such order herein that youre neighbours may be freed from that danger; that you remove those Quakers that have been receaved, and for the future prohibite theire coming amongst you." The gathered representatives in Plymouth were not above implied threats in getting their way, either. United Colonies Commissioners hoped that Rhode Islanders "will not be wantinge," and promised go to any lengths "to preserve us from such a pest, the contagion whereof (if received) within youer Collonie were dangerous." In case of noncompliance the Commissioners threatened Rhode Island and Providence Plantations with a complete trade embargo. Moreover, the representatives of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut left the door open to more stringent measures, noting "that it will bee our duty seriously to consider what further provision God may call us to make to prevent the aforesaid mischiefe" of the Quakers.30

The response of the General Court in Newport clearly indicates that colonial leaders not only embraced religious freedom in principle, but that they were willing to publicize and defend their contention that "soul liberty" need not be conducive to disorder. Leaders of Rhode Island

30 Ibid., 375-76.
and Providence Plantations began their reply to the United Colonies Commissioners with a reminder that the residents of the Narragansett in the past had been very cooperative and fair with their neighbors in the Bay colony and elsewhere, that they had always made certain "to preserve a just and equal intercourse between the colonists and us, by giving to any that demand it among us," and by offering to return escaped servants and others who had fled "from the hands of justice, for matters of crime done or committed amongst you." Where the Quakers were concerned, however, the laws of the various colonies did not agree; in fact, legally the regulation of religion was the only area of profound disagreement among New England's political entities. The Court declared that "we have no law among us, whereby to punish any for only declaring by words, &c., their minds and understanding concerning the things and ways of God, as to salvation and an eternal condition." As a result, the representatives of the Narragansett communities argued, "in those places where these people aforesaid, in this colony, are most of all suffered to declare themselves freely, and are only opposed by arguments in discourse, there they least of all desire to come." In fact this openness, the Court asserted, served as a deterrent to troublemakers who came to the region under the guise of propagating spiritual "Truth." Such women and men "begin to loath this place, for that they are not opposed by the civill authority" and instead "with
all patience and meeknes are suffered to say over their pretended revelations and admonitions."31 These claims turned out to be untrue, but show how staunchly Rhode Islanders defended their "experiment."

Though outwardly confident that Quakerism would not present an undue strain on orderly government, the Court clearly, by October 1657, understood the basis of their neighboring colonies' concerns. While conceding that Quaker doctrines "tend to very absolute cutting downe and overturninge relations and civill government among men, if generally received," the General Court simultaneously held that "as to the dammage that may in likelyhood accrue to the neighbour colloneys by theire being here entertained, we conceive it will not prove so dangerous." Narragansett magistrates, while not rejecting Quaker doctrines, vowed to refer the matter to the next General Assembly "where we hope there will be such order taken, as may, in all honest and contentious manner, prevent the bad effects of theire doctrines and endeavours."32 One month after the arrival of the Quakers Rhode Island's leaders were so uncertain about the effects the English sect would have on political order and the religious dynamics of the colony that they

31 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to Commissioners of the United Colonies, 13 October 1657, RICR I: 376-77.

32 Ibid., 377-78.
wound up issuing a statement riddled with inconsistent or conditional positions.

Quickly, though, Narrgansett magistrates returned to the historical foundations of their colony and, where the Quakers were concerned, separated the religious impact of sect from the group's potential affects on government. Though it had previously declared that the sect would not "gain many here to their way" because "they delight to be persecuted by civill powers" the General Court, in a letter to the Bay colony, conceded that Quakers had quickly earned adherents. Rhode Island's leaders resolved that if any Quakers "which are here, or who shall arise or come among us, doe refuse to subject themselves to all duties foresayd, as trayninge, watchinge, and such other ingadgements, as other members of civill societies, for the preservation of the same in justice and peace," then they would "take and make use of the first opportunity to inform our agent residinge in England, that we may humbly present the matter . . . unto the supreme authority of England, humbly craveing their advice and order, how to carry ourselves in any further respect towards these people." The magistrates were careful to prevent a backlash against the sectaries "that therewithall theire may be noe damadge, or infringement of that chiefe principle in our charter concerninge freedom of consciences." To that end, General Court members were "incouradged to make our addresses unto
the Lord Protector, his highness and government aforesayd," because authorities in London had extensive experience with Quakers.33

While recognizing potential disruptions by Quakers in the civil sphere, leaders of the Narragansett colony tightly clung to their most concrete point of divergence from the Bay colony, their advocacy of religious freedom. In a remarkable letter to the Massachusetts General Court, Rhode Island magistrates informed their counterparts that liberty of conscience was both the cause and result of the colony's charter; the right to differ over religion "was the principle ground of our Charter, both with respect to our humble sute for it, as also to the true intent of the Honourable and renowned parleiment of England in grauntinge of the same unto us." They declared that such "freedom we still prize as the greatest hapines that men can posess in this world" and were willing to protect "the right of his Highness and the government of that most renowned Parliament of England in this collony," against encroachment from all enemies, internal and external.34

33 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 13 March 1657/58, RICR I: 379-80. The Court asked for English help because "we understand there are, or have beene many of the foresayd people suffered to live in England; yea even in the heart of the nation."

34 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to the General Court of Massachusetts, 13 March 1657/58, RICR I: 378-79. The Court vowed to "adhere to the foundation principles on which this Collony was first settled, to wit: that every man who submits peaceably to
More importantly, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had found in the issue of Massachusetts' intolerance toward the Quakers something that they hoped would give them further leverage with English lawmakers. The General Court kept its agent well-informed, noting that "Wee have now a new occasion given by an old spirit with respect to the Collonys about us, which seeme to be offended with us, because of a sort of people called by the name of Quakers, who are come amongst us." Narragansett leaders explained that the missionaries had "theire liberty amongst us," and were "entertayned into our howses, or into any of our assemblies." Contrary to the wishes of neighboring colonies, Rhode Island magistrates had "found noe just cause to charge them with the breach of the civill peace"; instead, the Quakers were "constantly goeing forth amongst them about us, and vex and trouble them in poyn of their religion and sperituall state." Most important to the leaders in the Narragansett, these sectarians went out to Massachusetts only to "returne with many a fowle scarr in their bodies" for their proselytizing; to that end, "the ofences our neighbours take against us is, because wee take not the same course against the sayd people, either to expell them from among us, or take such courses against them, as themselves doe, who are in feare lest their civil government in this Colony, shall worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, without molestation"; this quote comes from Ross, Discourse Embracing, 12.

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religion should be corrupted by them." Leaders informed Clarke of the letter from the United Colonies seeking to "Bringe us in, to act accordinge to theire scantlinge, or else take some course to doe us greater displeasure." They enclosed a copy of the missive so that their agent "may perceive how they express themselves" and determine the response that would be most favorable to England.35

After describing the particulars of the situation, Rhode Island's lawmakers underscored serious differences with their neighbors that warranted intervention from England. The General Court pointed out that the representatives of the United Colonies had "covertly expressed" the threat that England itself would crack down on New England as a whole if the Quakers were not silenced, and that the London government "might prohibitt all trade with them, both in poyn of exportation and importation of any comodities." At the same time, the United Colonies "seeme[d] seacretly to threaten us, by cutting us off from all commerce and trade with them," in order to starve the Narragansett colony into submission and "to disable us of any comfortable subsistence." These neighbors, the Court observed, "for the safeguard of their own religion" ironically neglected the charitable, tolerant teachings of Christianity. For Rhode Island leaders the goal in writing

35 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 5 November 1658, RICR I: 396-97.
to Clarke was to demonstrate that, "in our answer to the
United Collonies, that wee flie as to oure refuge in all
civill respects to his highness and honorable councell, as
not beinge subject to any others in matters of our civill
State." They warned their agent "to have an eie and eare
open in case our adversaries should seeke to undermine us in
our priviledges graunted unto us," and to prepare to argue
such a case. The Court singularly demanded Clarke's defense
of the colony's earmark liberty: that "wee may not be
compelled to exercise any civill power over men's
consciences, soe longe as humane orders in poyn of civility
are not corrupted and voyaled, which our neighbours about
us doe frequently practice, whereof many of us have large
experience, and doe judge it to be no lesse than a poyn of
absolute crueltie."36 The colony was gratified that
Cromwell and the Council of State had questioned the
severity with which Massachusetts had treated those banished
to Rhode Island.37

Clarke's advice to his colony—based on trends within
England—confirmed Rhode Island's course with regard to the
Quakers. Clarke knew where the Protector, his council, and

36 General Court of Rhode Island and Providence
Plantations to John Clarke, 5 November 1658, RICR I: 398.

37 In a letter dated 10 December 1657, John Leverett
responded to the charges of Cromwell and the Council of
State by noting "looseness and profaneness" in the region,
which was so rampant "that they had not only declined
Christian religion, but moral observations." See Pelt,
Ecclesiastical History, I: 181.
religious moderates in the upper echelons of government stood on the subject of action against sectarians of various stripes. While local courts indicted and convicted Quakers under the Blasphemy Ordinance of 1648, Cromwell proved himself consistently lenient toward the sect and in all dealings with Quakers attempted to distinguish between religious persecution and the maintenance of civil order. He maintained a cordial relationship with George Fox and invited the Quaker leader to visit him, finding that "If thou and I were but for an hour of the day together, we should be nearer one to the other. I wish no more harm to thee than I do to my own soul." In October 1656 Cromwell's council had ordered the release of all Quakers imprisoned in four southern and eastern counties and commanded magistrates in western England to maintain a lenient posture toward the sect. In following years the Protector and his council reviewed cases brought against Quakers, regularly ruling in favor of the sectaries, and entertaining their petitions for liberty of conscience.38

After the death of Oliver Cromwell late in 1658, imperial policy on Quakerism and toleration continued to lend validity to Rhode Island's own official position. The new Protector, Cromwell's son Richard, continued his father's struggle with Parliament over the legitimacy of

repressing various religious groups, and accepted petitions from Quakers in particular, who complained that too many of their number had been imprisoned on account of their faith or "hauled out of their meetings and whipped." Petitioners recalled a longtime link with the Protectorate, claiming that "most of us have been instruments with you in casting off the burden of oppression." The younger Cromwell agreed with the Quaker assessment that freedom of conscience indeed had been "the great cause of the late wars," but lacked the wherewithall to convince conservatives in Parliament of that fact. 39 Still, the executive power, combined with large numbers of legislators in the House of Commons, guaranteed that persecution would not be England's policy.

On the issue of Quakerism, leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations continued to define their colony in opposition to New England "orthodoxy," to defend the principle of liberty of conscience, and to reiterate their connection to the English policy against persecution. Perhaps no episode illustrates these themes better than the efforts of William Dyer to save his spouse from execution in Massachusetts for her religious beliefs. Mary Dyer, who had been a close friend of Anne Hutchinson, had embraced

39 Ibid., 244-52.
Quakerism during a visit to England in 1656.40 She returned to New England as a devoted missionary and quickly achieved some notoriety in the Bay colony for her persistence. Having expelled Dyer from the colony twice, the General Court in Boston banished her a third time with the promise of death for her reappearance. Like many other Quakers Dyer violated this order, was imprisoned, and in October 1658 was slated to be executed alongside Marmaduke Stephenson and William Robinson. The court almost immediately granted Dyer a reprieve, but recommitted her to jail for an extended term.41

Almost a year after her death sentence was commuted Dyer's husband appealed to the Massachusetts Court of Assistants for her release. In an August 1659 letter Dyer hinted at the width of the ideological chasm between Rhode Island and the Bay colony on the issue of Quaker persecution. He compared conditions in Massachusetts to old England under Laud in which "many of them you call godly ministers" filled prisons "out of a tender conscience." Actions of Bay colony authorities, Dyer surmised, were similar to the most severe of Popish inquisitors; such acts came directly from "yt nurserie of Deuills, the persecutors of the Waldenses," through the ages to English Catholic


41 Pestana, Quakers and Baptists in colonial Massachusetts, 32-34, 37.
prelates Edmund Bonner, Stephen Gardiner "and ye rest of yt Bloody Crew" who "sent their bloodhounds about" during the reign of Mary Tudor.

More powerful for William Dyer than comparisons of Massachusetts magistrates to infamous persecutors of the past was his defense of Rhode Island's separation of civil and religious spheres. Authorities in Boston, by Dyer's estimation had, "contrary to gods Law assumed a Coerciue power ouer the Conscience." They had committed the grievous sin of punishing his wife "w'without law & against the Law of god & man." Dyer reminded his adversaries that Massachusetts had been established by regulation of the Scriptures and that "yee haue no Rule of gods word in the bible to make a law" against Quakers. In short, according to Dyer, by erecting or enforcing any law over conscience, the Bay colony was acting contrary to divine mandate and showed itself to be diametrically opposed to the tenets on which Rhode Island had been founded.

In line with fellow Rhode Islanders in this period, Dyer also displayed unshakeable faith that English law and tolerance would eventually act to overturn Massachusetts' brutal policy against the Quakers. As proof that the intellectual tide in and around London was turning against the Bay colony, Dyer referred to new books trickling into the region that condemned persecution in all forms, and made special mention of a tome "lately come ouer to Mr [Walter]
Cunnigraue [of Warwick] from his wife in England intituled the Popish inquisition exerted in N England." Dyer pointed out that legally, too, authorities in Boston scarcely had a leg to stand on. Massachusetts lacked "any order from yor Supreme State of England to make such Lawes" against Quakers; more than that, magistrates in the Narragansett had word that such a policy "may bee resented by the suprem Authority of England." As a result, Dyer warned, "time will declare" the disposition of the incarcerated sectaries.42

Dyer's prediction was correct. Within a year, an English convention invited the exiled Charles Stuart to occupy the throne vacated in 1649. Though too late to save Mary Dyer, Charles II intervened directly to stop the hanging of Quakers in Massachusetts.43 The death of Dyer, aged and female, probably did much to persuade Charles of the wisdom of this policy, which not only spared the lives of imprisoned Quakers in Boston, but vindicated the founding and development of the Narragansett communities upon the principle of civil indifference in spiritual matters. The

42 William Dyre to the Massachusetts Court of Assistants, Newport, 30 August 1659, Mss., Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts. A letter from Dyer to Governor Endicott just four days before his wife's execution is much less confrontational. In fact, Dyer pleads for his wife's life, distances himself from Quakerism, and asks for magistrates' compassion in light of Mary's "inconsiderate maddness." See William Dyre to Governor John Endicott of Massachusetts, Portsmouth, 27 May 1660, reprinted in Ford, New England's Struggles, 79-80.

43 Hazard, Narragansett Friends, 23-38.
entire matter of a Quaker "invasion" was a turning point for
the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.
Pressured to bend to the wishes of their orthodox neighbors,
Narragansett magistrates again—as they had in practically
all other moments of crisis—turned to England, and
explicitly emphasized their colony's heritage of religious
diversity, Rhode Island's similarity to the mother country
in this respect, and its contrast with staunchly Puritan
neighbors. Leaders of the "poore outcast" settlements
exploited their traditional reliance upon English government
and found in their religious instability a source of
strength.
CHAPTER 8
"AMONG OUR ENGLISH SUBJECTS": RELIGION, POLITICS, AND
THE STUART RESTORATION IN NEW ENGLAND, 1660-1665

When the monarchy was restored in England in May 1660, the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations seemed an unlikely ally for the new Stuart king, Charles II. Having an acknowledged history of religious radicalism, the residents of the Narragansett communities appeared to be at odds with the nominal head of the Church of England, a man bound by oath to defend the national faith. Charles II seemed to have little in common with the small colony whose leaders' connections to English sectarians would have justified their punishment just two decades earlier in the kingdom of Charles I. The settlements of outcasts in the New England wilderness, moreover, had been suspiciously ambivalent to royal authority, having established and sustained governments for many years without the Crown's assent. More than that, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations not only had accepted a patent from Parliament at the beginning of the civil war, but had dealt with all Interregnum governments on friendly terms. On its face,
then, this colony of outcasts seemed far removed from the new centers of power in England.

The leaders of Narragansett colony succeeded, however, in winning over the Restoration government by employing its own time-tested strategies, methods that, ironically, had once helped to curry favor with the enemies of the Stuart monarchy. Representatives of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations sought out—and identified with—key officials at Court and paid careful attention to the changing political tides within the King's inner circle. The colony maintained a savvy, experienced agent in London, John Clarke, who guided his constituents on everything from legislation to ceremony and deportment, all of which was carefully calculated to achieve maximum effect in England. With the help of Clarke, Narragansett leaders presented their region to fit the specific expectations of the King, emphasizing their general attachment to the laws and customs of England rather than any particular previous government.

Most important, though, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations continued to focus on the colony's grandest theme, its history of religious diversity, liberty, and tolerance, principles with which the new King and his ministers agreed. In this effort, Clarke and others were again aided by the English environment of spiritual liberalization that came out of the civil war, a context in which various sectarian groups flourished, just as similar
"heretics" thrived in the open spaces of the Narragansett region. Charles II had come to maturity in that heady time and witnessed firsthand the pitfalls of attempting to enforce uniformity and the difficulties in sustaining a comprehensive national church. The new King surrounded himself with like-minded advisors on the question of religious liberty, a fact that did not escape the attention of colony agent John Clarke. Discerning the mood at court, Clarke constructed a strategy for his constituency based upon the identification of Narragansett inhabitants as despised exiles—as the younger Charles Stuart had been—and upon the traditional contrast of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations with intolerant, neighboring "orthodox" colonies.

When Charles was called to return to London as king, governance of the American colonies was uncertain. Throughout the previous two decades in England, the administrative and political infrastructure had changed rapidly. During the Interregnum, committees appointed by Parliament or the Protector had regulated overseas possessions, establishing trade rules, enlisting colonists' aid against foreign enemies, and insuring loyalty to England. After 1660, the new monarch exercised his perogative to do the same, and to go much further in the administration of the colonies. Specifically, Charles II
appointed both foreign and domestic committees to assist in the "reduction" of New England. The primary goal for the King--given the histories of North American Puritan colonies and his own memories of rebellion at home--was "to drawe those our distant Dominions and the severall Interests and Governmts thereof into a nearer prospect and consultacon."

To that end he ordered the formation of a council for foreign plantations to collect information on royal possessions overseas, to determine how well disposed toward London each colony was, to find out how experienced residents were in trade and development of resources, to ascertain what supplies these distant subjects required, and to note the status of their fortifications.1

Acknowledging Charles's colonial program, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations employed a number of strategies to gain favor from the new King's government, all made possible by the constant presence of John Clarke near the Court in London. The first colonial Court of Commissioners after the Restoration, meeting in October 1660, drew up a document declaring that, "in the name of his most gracious and royall Majestie," it intended to reappoint John Clarke of Westminster "our undoubted agent and Aturrey." Noting ever-present threats to the colony, representatives recommissioned Clarke to preserve "all and

singular the priviledges, liberties, bownderiers and
emunities of the Colony . . . against all unlawful
userpations, intrusions, and claimes of any person or
persons, on any pretences, or by any combination
whatsoever." The Court naturally assumed that the same
divine hand that had "moved the most potent and royall power
. . . to give and graunt" the Patent of 1643/44, would also
"continue to preserve us in our just rights and priviledges,
by the gracious favour of the power and royall majestie" to
whom the entire colony offered submission.2

The best way to retain these special rights, leaders
found, was through direct and frequent communication with
Clarke. After learning of the Restoration, Rhode Island's
representatives acted quickly not only to recommission
Clarke but to establish a committee "authorized to open any
letters which shall come to the collony."3 Between 1660
and 1665, the magistrates and lawmakers for the colony
publicly opened, read, and placed in the record letters sent
from Clarke.4 During that same time, Rhode Islanders

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2 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 18 October
1660, RICR I: 435-36.

3 Ibid., 433.

4 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 27 August 1661,
RICR I: 447-48. In this instance, Benedict Arnold received
a letter from Clarke, which was ordered "read in the public
Court." At the same time, Clarke corresponded with the
colony as a whole, and his letters were opened and read in
the full view of the assembly; all letters were then
"committed to the Recorder" for inclusion in the public
record. For other examples, see Rhode Island General Court
convened at least two General Assemblies to consider the
colony's correspondence with the King, with Clarke, and with
Parliament itself. In the spring of 1663, when negotiations
over a new charter were reaching a critical stage, the
colony's leaders jealously guarded the line to Clarke; in
one session, Clarke's letters were "first read privately in
the Court of Commissioners," and only afterwards
communicated "openly before the freemen of the Collony."5
Clarke occasionally wrote separate letters to colony
magistrates, including Governor Arnold and Deputy Governor
Brenton, and leaders frequently requested advice from their
agent in England.6

Though some evidence suggests that Clarke was hesitant
about continuing as the colony's representative in England
and that lawmakers considered replacing him, leaders of

of Commissioners, 28 October 1662, RICR I: 492; Rhode Island
General Assembly, 1 March 1663/64, RICR II: 25.

5 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 14 October
1663, RICR I: 505.

6 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 17 June 1662,
RICR I: 480. On at least one occasion, a committee was
ordered "to write to Mr. John Clarke . . . on the Collonyes
behalf," and to accompany its missive with a copy of "the
letter that came from the commissioners of the United
Collonyes, and the answer that is sent from this Court
agayne." See Rhode Island General Court of Commissioners,
28 October 1662, RICR I: 496. In May 1662, the Court of
Commissioners chose a committee "to draw up a letter to Mr.
John Clarke, of thankfulness, and information concerninge
the bounds of our Collony, and concerning the severall
letters and things that concerneth our business." See Rhode
Island General Court of Commissioners, 17 June 1662, RICR I:
484–85.

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Rhode Island and Providence Plantations never sought to withdraw their presence from London. In May 1661 the General Court appointed a committee "For the drawinge up of somethinge to consider with respecte of sending a man to England"; it nominated six men—William Brenton, Benedict Arnold, John Greene, William Dyre, Randall Holden, Samuel Gorton, and Roger Williams—as potential replacements for Clarke, from which the General Court was to choose one or two. Within three months, however, the Court of Commissioners had convinced Clarke to see his mission through and ordered "that two hundred pound be rayzed, and returne of it made unto Mr. John Clarke for his incouradgment to go on in our business."

Financial support was important to Clarke, who incurred considerable personal expenses as a result of his mission, and colony leaders saw their agent as such a crucial link.

7 Rhode Island General Court, 22 May 1661, RICR I: 440-41. The committee chosen was Benedict Arnold, William Baulston, John Greene, and John Wickes.

8 Rhode Island General Court, 22 May 1661, RICR I: 442. The Court ordered "that these men named, are apoynted by this Court to be such out of which the select men are to make choyce of one or two to be sent as agent or agents to England. But in case neither of the aforesayd men which shall be pitched on can be induced to goe to England, then the select men shall be at liberty to make further choyce in the Collony."

9 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 27 August 1661, RICR I: 448. This pledge of money convinced Clarke to stay in London until June 1664, when he returned to Rhode Island after twelve continuous years of service to the colony. See Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 396.
between themselves and the King that they went to extraordinary lengths to provide funds for him. In order "to declare our loyalty and humble service unto his majestie," Narragansett lawmakers appointed Clarke and ordered funds sent to cover the agent's expenses. Believing that the overwhelming majority of residents would support Clarke's mission financially and recognizing that a levy might provoke resentment among some, the Court declared that the money was to be raised by "free contribution" within each of the towns.10 When this strategy failed, leaders persisted in their efforts to supply Clarke by mandating a rate and authorizing the General Sargeant "to destryayne on all such mens' goods as refuse to pay."11 With this order, colony leaders hoped that Clarke would "be saved harmlesse in his estate," and that his debts would "all be repayed, payd and discharged by this Collony."12 Authorities flatly refused to forego the services of an

10 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 21 May 1661, RICR I: 444. The Court asked "our trusty and well beloved frend and agent, to present our acknowledgments accordingly; and to that end, doe unanimously and cheerfully desier to contribute the summe of two hundred pound starlinge, accordings to money pay in this Collony, toward our sayd agents expences in the management of the sayd voyage and undertakinge in our behalfes unto England, to be performed and improved with all expedition possible."

11 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 17 June 1662, RICR I: 481.

12 Rhode Island General Court of Commissioners, 24 November 1663, RICR I: 510.
experienced agent in London, especially one as competent as Clarke in the fickle ways of English government.

Besides providing for an agent, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations leaders set about proclaiming the Restoration of the house of Stuart in a series of highly visible ceremonies. In this they followed the advice of Clarke, who communicated to the colony the importance of public pomp in solemnizing Charles II's ascension.13 Eager for their actions to be noticed in London, the colony's leaders took the extra step of ordering that "the proclamation of his Majesty, be kept upon record, and annexed to our publique records." Moreover, the Court of Commissioners ordered that the King's restoration be hailed "in presence of this present Court" and that the officers of each community's train band rally to solemnize the proclamation. The Wednesday of the following week was set aside for each town to honor Charles II officially and was thought to be an important enough occasion to allow "all children and servants" to "have theire libertie for that daye."14 In the following court session, colony leaders, in "consideration of that dutifull obedience, legally and

13 William P. Sheffield, "John Clarke and Newport," typescript mss, 13, RIHS. The Court of Commissioners passed along Clarke's advice to the towns. See, for example, Providence Town Meeting, 20 September 1660, PTP 0109, RIHS; and Portsmouth Town Meeting, 29 September 1660, PR, 102.

14 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 18 October 1660, RICR I: 432-33, 435-36.
unfayned humble affection that this Collony doth owe and beare unto the crowne and dignity of his most excellent majestie" acknowledged submission to Charles II and thanked the King for "the great merceye of peace and freedome that wee enjoy under his most gracious protection and governments." Lawmakers reminded the King that the colony had not only submitted officially, but had "by publike proclaiminge his majestie our most undoubted liege Lord," committed itself to royal government, in spite of continuing instability in England.15

At the same time, and for the same reason, Narragansett settlers resolved to conduct all aspects of government in the name of Charles II. The Court of Commissioners immediately declared that "all writts, warrants, with all other publique transactions, shall be from henceforth issued forth and held in his royall majesty's name."16 All trial courts were called and subpoenas issued by the King's authority17; magistrates were commanded "in his majesties

15 Rhode Island Court of Commissioners, 21 May 1661, RICR I: 442-43.

16 Rhode Island General Court of Commissioners, 18 October 1660, RICR I: 432. This order was carried out for bonds as well; by the end of 1660, defendants were being charged "to owe and bee Indebted to his Majesty" the sum of the bond. See, for instance, the cases of Joshua Winso and William Field, Providence Town Meeting, 16 February 1660/61, PTP 0113, RIHS.

17 This example comes from the Providence Town Meeting, 20 September 1660, PTP 0109, RIHS. During the same meeting the general sargeant ordered Providence to proclaim the restoration of Charles II. Prior to November 1660, the
name Charles the second king of England Scottland, france, and Ireland and of all the domeniones thereto belonging to give notice" to town residents of the upcoming court of trials. Similarly, jurors were summoned, and deeds issued in the King's name; this formula became so important that at least one court case was suspended because administrators had failed to place the King's name on the indictment. Perhaps most significantly, Rhode Island legislators, recognizing that their assembly met only with

18 Providence Town Meeting, 18 February 1660/61, PTP 0112, RIHS. Regnal dating was first used in warrants for the Court of Trials in September 1662. See Providence Town Meeting, 29 September 1662, PTP 0130, RIHS. For yet another example, see Providence Town Meeting, 19 February 1662/63, PTP 0124, RIHS.

19 Jurors were summoned by the colony general sargent "in his Majesties name: Charles the seconde: King of England; Scottlande; ffraunce & Irelande: & of all dominions theirunto belonginge: to call your Townesmen together; & to choose out of your free inhabittantes soe many: Just; able; & honest men; of good repcrte; as may serve [ ] the grande inquest according to law:. and as many true & just men: as may serve on the Jury: accordinge to law to attende: the Generall Courte of tryalls." See Providence Town Meeting, 29 January 1661/62, PTP 0122. By late 1663, deeds were being made by the King's authority and were using regnal dating. For an example, see Nicholas Cotterell to Edward Richmond, Newport, 1 February 1663/64, Newport Historical Society, Box 6, Folder 1.

20 See William Harris v. William Barton, Richard Townsend, John Wickes, Jr., et al, 28 October 1662, RICR I: 496. The Court ruled that "upon the want of the King's name in the indictment, judgment was suspended."
the monarch's approbation, commanded towns to choose six commissioners apiece "in his maisties name" for the colony's court of commissioners,21 and ordered that public warnings for the beginning of the court go out by the nominal authority of the King, usually with regnal dating.22 Colony leaders were careful to open and conduct courts with due acknowledgement of Charles II, and legitimized their dealings by declaring that all "acts of power should issue forth" in the King's "Royall name."23

In a similar vein, the colony promised to control its territory in the King's name and to confirm its political structures. Lawmakers claimed the right to annex lands, to create and sustain new towns within the colony and, with the King's consent, to confer upon those communities all privileges belonging to Providence, Portsmouth, Newport and Warwick (previously Shawomet).24 The Assembly also claimed the "power and duty, at any time as occasion requireth, to constitute a constable or constables" in

21 Providence Town Meeting, 20 August 1661, PTP 0118, RIHS.
22 Providence Town Meeting, 1 February 1662/63, PTP 0131, RIHS; Providence Town Meeting, 18 February 1663/64, PTP 0146, RIHS.
23 John Clarke's first address to Charles II, ca. June 1662, RICR I: 408.
24 General Assembly of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 4-5 May 1664, RICR II: 40, 54-57.
outlying areas "to keape the king's peace there." 25 Meeting in November 1663, the General Court agreed that "all Bonds and indictments" stand in force and that "any judgments of Courts, either in the Collony, or in any pertickeler townes . . . may be served as formerly by the former Generall or Towne Sargent" until further order. Magistrates formally voted to continue all officers in both town and colonial government, from clerks and sergeants to the general attorney and treasurer. Military officers were similarly ordered to "continue their places in ye exercise thereof" until the new royal government indicated otherwise. 26

Perhaps the most straightforward strategy that the colony followed involved simple officer and citizen oaths of allegiance to the new monarch. Immediately upon receiving the news that Charles Stuart had been restored to the throne the General Court ordered inhabitants to promise fidelity to officers "in his majesties name throughout the whole collony." 27 The towns themselves similarly changed oaths to reflect the new imperial government; Providence lawmakers, for instance, ruled "that in the formes of

25 General Assembly of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 22 May 1662, RICR I: 474-75.

26 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court, 25-26 November 1663, RICR I: 511-14.

27 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court, 21 May 1661, RICR I: 442.
Ingagimentes in our Town booke, these Wordes shall be inserted (viz) in his Majestys Reign."28 Perhaps more important to the body politic was the subscription of officers to pledges of loyalty and service to the King. As early as May 1661 officials were required to take oaths to uphold royal government in the colony; those who refused to serve under these conditions were obligated to pay five pound fines "to the use of his Majesty," or face arrest.29

This position on oaths was consistent with yet another method employed by Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in order to win favor with the King: the somewhat creative retelling of the colony's general history of fidelity to England. In its recommission of John Clarke, the Court of Commissioners remembered the significance of the 1643 patent, especially the fact that it had been issued "in the name of King and Parliament of England" and noted that, by virtue of the charter, "this collony hath beine distinguished from the other collonyes in New England." Most importantly, leaders argued, colonial authorities "have ever beine and to this time mayntayne government and order in the same collony by administeringe judgment and justice

28 Providence Town Meeting, June 1662, ERPr. III: 24-25.

29 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 21 May 1661, RICR I: 440-41.
accordinge to the rules in our sayd charter prescribed."30 Colony leaders recalled that inhabitants had originally purchased the land around Narragansett Bay "in all desirable freedome and liberty in all respects" including "in point of freedome of conscience" and had made "application unto that sovereign power" the King in order to preserve these privileges. To that end, Clarke assured Charles II that the colony, since the mid-1640s, had structured its legal codes "upon the lawes of England" and had "ordered that all writts, both originall and judiciall should proceed in his Majesties name, as the rest of the corporations in England were wont to doe."31 He told the King that, in order to maintain both liberty and stability, leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had "firmly adhered in their allegience and loyalty to the soveraignty" of England,32 a loyalty manifested in "our humble addresses unto his said Majestye."33 These assurances, of course, were blatantly untrue, given both that the first patent was issued by the enemies of Charles I and that the colony had subsequently dealt with Parliamentary committees that included regicides

30 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Court of Commissioners, 18 October 1660, RICR I: 433.


32 John Clarke's Second Address to Charles II, ca. June 1662, RICR I: 490.

33 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Assembly, 1 March 1663/64, RICR II: 24.
as members. But the rewritten history helped the cause of the colony, as Clarke undoubtedly knew.

A larger and certainly more honest course undertaken by Rhode Island and Providence Plantations depended upon the new King's religious settlement, one that fit nicely with the Narragansett region's history of religious tolerance. In the Declaration of Breda, issued almost a month before his return to England, Charles referred to the "passion and uncharitableness of the times" and promised to pursue with Parliament "liberty to tender consciences." He insisted that during his reign no one would be "disquieted or called in question" for their preferences in worship, so long as their beliefs did not threaten the peace of the kingdom.34

Long after his arrival in London, Charles persisted in his efforts to institute religious toleration. Barely two months after Parliament had voted to restore the Stuart dynasty, the King reportedly assured Lincolnshire Quakers that it "was not his mind that any of his subjects who lived peaceably should suffer any trouble upon account of their judgments or opinions in matters of religion."35 At a


conference at Worcester House in late October 1660 the King made a more general statement before his religious advisors, resolving to uphold the promises he had made at Breda.36 When Parliament convened the following spring, Charles instructed his chancellor, Lord Clarendon, to remind members of the two houses to be compassionate in their revisions of ecclesiastical laws;37 in October, speaking again for the King, Clarendon announced to the House of Lords that toleration would be afforded to all peacable dissenters who petitioned for it.38 During the same parliamentary session Charles demanded and received confirmation of his supremacy in matters of religion.39

Having granted to the King primary authority in ecclesiastical matters, Parliament still proceeded to place restrictions on various groups, arguing that public safety and order demanded them. In May 1661, the House of Commons recommended a bill against Quakers, Baptists and other "fanatics,"40 and during that summer, the other house


37 Seaward, Cavalier Parliament, 164.


39 Palmer, Charles II, 196.


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summarily dismissed the steady stream of petitions from sectarians asking for protection from local officials' harrassments.41 The following year Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity, legislation designed to strengthen the Church of England by making competing conventicles illegal; moreover, sponsors believed that the bill would facilitate monitoring of religious groups thought to be seditious. Under overwhelming political pressure, the King reluctantly assented, and by the end of 1662 more than three hundred Baptists and an equal number of Quakers found themselves interned in London prisons.42

Charles seemed determined, however, to resist Cavalier intolerance and immediately implemented plans to circumvent the Act of Uniformity. With the encouragement of like-minded advisors Charles agreed to assert royal priviledge in the matter. In May the King had reminded MPs that "the execution of these sharp laws depends upon the wisdom of the most discerning, generous and merciful prince,"43 and the


43 Journal of the House of Lords XI: 475-76.
following December the King published a Christmas greeting in which he revealed his intention to suspend enforcement of all laws against religious dissenters who lived as peaceful and loyal subjects. At the same time he resolved to win from Parliament confirmation of even wider dispensatory powers "which we conceive to be inherent in us." The bid was rejected, and in February 1662/63 the House of Commons declared that because of the Act of Uniformity the precepts of the King's Declaration of Indulgence were null and void; moreover, the body publicized its intention to refuse any future efforts to extend liberty of conscience, arguing that such directives would only serve to increase the number of sectarians, thereby endangering the established church and, by extension, the King himself.

While the King and Parliament were bickering over policies of toleration and uniformity, John Clarke was living in the center of the English government and sending his constituents frequent reports concerning the official line on religion. A resident of Westminster and a politically astute observer, Clarke understood an important caveat in the high-level discussions on liberty of conscience: that the realm's executive, not its legislature, would ultimately be responsible for the settlement of

44 CSPD (1661-62), 583, 595-99; CSPD (1662-63), 10, 50.

45 Journal of the House of Commons, 440, 441-42.
religion in England's overseas possessions. In December 1660 the King had charged his advisors "to take effectuall care of the Propagacon of the Gospell" in America by ensuring that there be "learned & orthodox Ministers" able to reform the evil habits of farmers and servants "whose ill example doth bring scandal upon Christianitie." He ordered that New World Puritans accord Anglicans freedom to worship, that members of the Church of England be allowed to take the Lord's Supper in all churches--including Massachusetts' congregational assemblies--and that infant baptism be extended to all English subjects who desired it. Clarke understood perhaps better than most the King's movement to introduce the Church of England to New England colonies and his resolve and power to move from that point to a liberalization of imperial religious policy under the terms of the Declaration of Breda.

Using his knowledge of the English context, Clarke established a strategy for the colony based upon its history and on-going celebration of religious diversity and tolerance, something that he knew would curry the favor of the new monarch. Within a month of learning of the Restoration of Charles II, Clarke sought leave from the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to


47 Olmstead, History of Religion, 87.
explain to the King--by way of petition--the colony's situation. In carrying out this mandate, Clarke skillfully crafted a document that emphasized the region's unique past. Identifying with the King in his former "low and exiled state" Clarke explained that "long since for cause of conscience, with respect to the Worship and service of God," inhabitants of the colony departed England for the "barbarous and howling wilderness" of New Engand. Once there, they became refugees a second time so that "they might with freedome of conscience worship the Lord their God, as they were persuaded." Clarke proceeded to thank the King for protecting "our Civill and Religious concernment in these remote parts of the World" and prayed that residents would be "quietly permitted with freedom of Conscience" to live in a distinct, independent colony.48

Narragansett residents quickly followed Clarke's lead, pointing to a common history of oppression, especially at the hands of Massachusetts. Late in 1661, for the first time Roger Williams spoke publicly of Providence as "a shelter for persons distressed for conscience" and claimed that he had established the settlement only for "Divers of my distressed Countrymen" as a "place of succour." In the wake of Williams's revision, Providence built upon its historical image as a refuge solely for religious outcasts; 

48 Petition of John Clarke to Charles II, 29 January 1660/61, Stevens Transcripts No. 17, JCB. This document is also reproduced in RICR I: 485-86, 488.
George Sheppard, a later arrival, noted in April 1663 that he had come to the town "to enjoy his conscience, and not for the land which they had assigned him." 49 In August 1661 Samuel Gorton and his allies observed that the General Court in Boston had oppressed them for the sake of religion and had refused to rescind "our tedious Exile" from the Bay colony. Puritan magistrates had, they argued, trampled the Gortonists' "lawfull Liberties," encouraged nearby Indians "to oppresse us intollerably to this day," and had blocked any relief from England or other colonies. The Warwick men recounted eighteen years of "causeless Banishment & Exile," and degradation of their reputations. They accused Bay colony authorities of executing a program of civil and ecclesiastical hegemony, noting that ministers and magistrates had claimed "the power of ye Sword," which they employed "to subdue all to the forme of [their] Church & State." 50 By this recounting of past injustices at the hands of intolerant "orthodox" Puritans, residents believed they could gain royal assistance.

Authorities in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations also employed this history in an attempt to win the support of members of the King's inner circle and his

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49 Testimony of Roger Williams regarding his purchase of lands, 21 December 1661, RIHSM X: 22; Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 327.

50 Town of Warwick to the General Court of Massachusetts, 22 August 1661, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 133-34, 139, RIHS.
representatives in New England. As they had with the King, Narragansett leaders recounted the colony's history of loyalty to England and its reputation for religious freedom and diversity. Magistrates corresponded with Lord Clarendon and with at least two members of Charles's infamous "Cabal," all of whom sympathized with the tiny colony's efforts to protect conscience and its struggles against larger neighbors. Moreover, by late September 1662 the King had decided to send four commissioners to New England with instructions to settle the region and guarantee its loyalty to the Crown. All four—Richard Nichols, Samuel Maverick, Robert Carr, and George Cartwright—quickly came to identify with the leaders of Rhode Island and to contrast their steadfast tolerance and devotion to the Crown with perceived disloyalty and bigotry on the part of "orthodox" neighbors.

51 Virtually all of Charles's closest advisors argued in favor of greater toleration in England. The earl of Anglesey, for example, patronized the works of Sir Charles Walsley, which called for an end to religious persecution and urged toleration in the spirit of rationality; see Blair Worden, "Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate," in Persecution and Toleration: Papers Read at the Twenty-Second Summer Meeting and the Twenty-Third Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, ed. W.J. Shells (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 227-33. The Duke of Buckingham maintained close relationships with dissenters and became more vocal in his support of toleration later in the decade; see Seaward, Cavalier Parliament, 31. Lord Ashley came out strongly against religious compulsion; see K.H.D. Haley, The First Earl of Shaftesbury (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1968), 28-29, 48-49, 66-67. Rhode Islanders corresponded regularly with Sir Henry Bennet, who was Charles's secretary and perhaps the strongest advocate at Court for a general toleration; see Seaward, Cavalier Parliament, 32. For Rhode Island's dealings with Clarendon, see below.
This strategy succeeded in garnering the support of Charles's top advisor, Lord Chancellor Clarendon. Clarendon had corresponded with the colony as early as November 1663, when he noted that Rhode Island "did me much honour in acknowledging the little service I did you" in obtaining a new charter and "in expediting his Matys Grace towards you." He assured the colony's General Court that he would continue to assist them "to the utmost of my power" since Rhode Island "seems to me to have some advantages above the rest." In particular, he cited a tradition of fairness towards local Indian tribes, a devotion to justice in the King's name, and a commitment to tolerance and the general, non-sectarian principles of Christianity, all of which "will bringe great reputacon to your goverment, and greate honour to the Christian Religion."52 Clarendon embraced the tiny colony's philosophy that spiritual truth-seeking was an individual enterprise, arguing that all knowledge necessary for salvation could be discovered by reason and without coercion from government. Though he viewed the Church of England as important to the realm's unity, Clarendon did not believe that the established church had a monopoly on the truth; in fact, he was close to and frequently discussed

52 Earl of Clarendon to the Governor and Assistants of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, c. April 1664, RIHSM X: 97.
liberty of conscience with dissenters like Bulstrode Whitelocke and staunch Independent cleric John Owen.53

The link between the colony and Clarendon went far beyond assistance in obtaining a new charter. Narragansett leaders not only thanked the Lord Chancellor profusely "for his exceeding great care and love unto this Collony," and constant correspondence with agent John Clarke,54 but also continued to rely upon Clarendon for assistance and his intervention with the King. In the following two years their on-going correspondence with the Lord Chancellor was channeled through the royal commissioners in New England.55 Throughout the struggle with neighboring colonies over the right to lands in the Narragansett region, leaders depended upon Clarendon, and even asked him to accept a thousand-acre farm in the colony in gratitude for his previous assistance.56


54 Rhode Island General Court of Commissioners, 24 November 1663, RICR I: 510.

55 Governor Benedict Arnold and Deputy Governor William Brenton to Colonel Nichols, Newport, 3 February 1664/65, RICR II: 88-89.

56 Rhode Island General Court to Clarendon, 3 May 1665, synopsized in Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 398. Colony leaders also asked the Lord Chancellor to assist them in getting a line fixed between Rhode Island and Plymouth and to help them erect fortifications.
Narragansett leaders also sought the help of the four representatives sent by the King to New England in 1664. Residents knew well in advance—probably from late 1662 or early 1663—that executors of royal policy were on their way to the region. Lawmakers prepared accordingly; late in 1663, a General Assembly was called in the King's name "ffor Consideration of his Majesties gratious letters, and Treatment of his most Honorable Commissioners."57 When the quartet arrived in the winter of 1664/65, the colony's heads issued a hearty welcome and promised to treat them well.58 Hoping "to express our duties in a more suitable manner," the General Assembly appointed a commission "to repaire to Seacunck to wayt on their honours," to escort Colonel Nichols and the others to Providence, and to assume "the whole charge of the reception and treatment of the said Commissioners."59 Leaders claimed to welcome royal representatives because of their "Loyalty (to his Gratious Majesty) lying upon us as subjects" and "out of that deepe sense which is fixed upon the heart of this whole Colony of the great and wonderfull grace and favour by his Most Royall Majesty, granted unto this his Majesties Plantation," in

57 Providence Town Meeting, 18 February 1663/64, PTP 0146, RIHS.

58 Benedict Arnold and William Brenton to Colonel Nichols, Newport, 3 February 1664/65, RICR II: 88.

59 Rhode Island General Assembly, 23 February 1664/65, RICR II: 91-92.

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making them a body Politick & Corporate." They marked the commissioners' "safe and happy ariveall," thanked the King for seeking to settle Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in peace, and noted that their agent, John Clarke, had helped with arrangements.60 Individual towns also agreed to take up some of the costs of travel and entertainment of the royal representatives. Warwick, for its part, appointed Stukely Wescott, Anthony Low, Richard Carder, and Henry Knowles, to keep an ordinary "for ye entertainment of strangers during ye time the Kings Comissioners keep ther Court" in their community.61 Similarly, Portsmouth compensated townspeople who provided escorts for the royal representatives on trips to Plymouth and Boston.62

The Commissioners that the King sent "to settle the respective interests of the several colonies" in New England were--like the closest royal advisors--predisposed to look favorably upon the Narragansett's history of free conscience. All four representatives had been hand-picked by the most consistent supporter of complete religious liberty in England, the Duke of York, and each had reason to

60 Benedict Arnold and William Brenton to the King's Commissioners for New England, 7 September 1664, Stevens Transcripts No. 42, JCB.

61 Warwick Town Meeting, 23 March 1664/65, Town Records of Warwick, Rhode Island, First Book, 1647-1667, typescript, Vault K-Wa-6, 211, RIHS.

62 Portsmouth Town Meeting, 1 May 1665, PR, 126.
be suspicious of the church-state system of Massachusetts, the chief threat to Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Moreover Charles, in his private instructions to the commissioners, charged them to insure that free expression of spiritual views would not be infringed in his American possessions. Though the King looked upon a single faith "as the greatest blessing God Almighty can conferre upon us in this world," he simultaneously viewed religious uniformity as impractical and a mortal impossibility, especially in New England. "[W]e could not imagine it probable," Charles argued, that a Confederate number of persons, who separated themselves from their own Countrey, and the Religion Established, principally (if not only) that they might enjoy another way of worship prescribed or declared unto them by their owne consciences, could in soe short a tyme, be willing to returne to that forme of service they had forsaken.

As a result, Charles—who believed religious diversity was "of God"—quietly counseled his representatives to resist the temptation to tamper with existing churches in the region, congregational or otherwise. Instead, the Commissioners were charged to protect all faiths equally, and to encourage complete liberty of conscience since that

63  CSPC (1661-68), 110.
concept had been "the great and principall ends of all those who first enagaged themselves in those Plantacons."64

When the King's Commissioners arrived in New England, then, the well-worn Narragansett method of recounting the colony's history of oppression at the hands of neighboring colonies, especially Massachusetts, had great effect. Recognizing that the Commissioners would eventually review their written proceedings, the General Assembly from time to time pointedly reconfirmed liberty of conscience; in May 1664 it read into the record the King's command "That noe person within the sayd Collony at any time hearafter, shall be in any wayes molested, punished, disquieted or called in question for any difference of opinion in matters of religion, and doe not actually disturbe the civill peace of the sayd Collony."65 Deputy governor William Brenton, in

64 Charles privately warned the Commissioners of "great Factions and animosityes in one colony against the other, [and] in one and the same Colony between persons of different opinions in Religion." The royal representatives were commanded not to take sides in these disputes or even to be "thought to enclyne to a party, or to bee yourselves engaged in their passions." In particular they were to guard against two kinds of people: those who sought to institute the Book of Common Prayer, episcopacy, and the discipline of the Church of England and those who voted money to the Crown as a kind of payoff against further royal involvement in religious matters. Charles pointed out that the Massachusetts authorities ironically "doe in truth deny that liberty of conscience to each other which is equally provided for, and granted to every one of them by their Charter." See Charles's private instructions to Nichols, Carr, Cartwright and Maverick, 23 April 1664, Stevens Transcripts No. 37, JCB.

65 Rhode Island General Assembly, 4 May 1664, RICR II: 57.
October of the same year, reminded commissioner Nichols and his colleagues that "wee are a pore despised outcast people" who—unlike many in the Bay colony—were not among those guilty "of unloyalty or Rebeling against his Maty." To the contrary, Brenton pledged that "If in any theing I may serve his Maty or your Honours, you may command me to the Utmost of my abillitie" and promised to entertain Nichols and the other three commissioners at any time in his "pore house." 66 Corporately, the colony leadership similarly characterized the inhabitants of Rhode Island as survivors of oppression. In an official letter to Nichols, Brenton and Governor Arnold reminded the King's representatives that the residents of the colony were unworthy of Charles's "great and wonderfull favour," since such treatment was usually reserved for "the best of subjects" and not for "such unworthy and (otherwise despised and) oppressed ones as wee are." 67 Moreover, they noted that "the members of this Colloney have suffered very much under strange pretences from the Neighbour Colonyes, and perticularly from that of Massachusitts" for the sake of religious freedom. 68

66 William Brenton to Colonel Nichols, Newport, 8 October 1664, Stevens Transcripts No. 43, JCB.

67 Governor Benedict Arnold and Deputy Governor William Brenton to Colonel Nichols, 3 February 1664/65, RICR II: 86.

68 Ibid., 86-87.
The Gortonists in particular believed that they could prove a history of suffering for the cause of liberty of conscience, and frequently recalled their past squabbles with Massachusetts in order to win the sympathy and assistance of royal officials, including Clarendon. In a letter to the Lord Chancellor, Samuel Gorton and his chief lieutenants explained "our selves, your humble servants . . . Could not close with our Countreymen [in Massachusetts] in the order of their Church Government" and thus Boston authorities "expelled us from amongst themselv[e]s." The Warwick men noted that, within two years, Bay colony leaders had sent an armed force "with Comision to put us to the sword in Case we would not Relinquish our religion, which god had taught us in our Native Countrey, where from our youth we had attended the publick ministry." After characterizing themselves as traditional Anglicans—a strategy undoubtedly calculated to achieve maximum sympathy from Clarendon, perhaps the Restoration Church of England's greatest supporter—the Gortonists explained that they had not been alone, that fellow outcasts in the Narragansett region had been there to back them up against the armed band, but that they were no match for Bay colony men who "Caried us all away like Captives and Slaves," and imprisoned them in Boston. The most important part of the story for the King's edification was that the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court had examined Gorton and five others
"with profession [that] they had nothinge against us, but only in Case of our Religion." Moreover, when the ministers and magistrates in Boston had "put us to answer to their demands upon lif[e] and death," the Gortonists sought to appeal to Charles I, a request "which was denayed unto us, the Govenor seeming to sleight us for propoundinge any such thinge." Gorton and his associates, seeking to inflame royalist opinion further against the Bay colony, argued that the denied appeal was based upon Massachusetts' parliamentary interest in the "troublouse tymes" of the civil war; as a result they were banished again at the hands of intolerant, anti-royal Puritan magistrates, "farr out of the bounds of their patent, and all thus in palne of death."69

Having had a great deal of practice in the previous two decades, the Gortonists presented the most polished contrast between the "disloyal" position of Massachussets leaders to Warwick's own history of loyalty to the Crown and to England generally. Samuel Gorton and his lieutenants were particularly proud of their efforts to convince the Narragansett Indians to submit to the King's father, Charles I. The Warwick men recalled for Clarendon that they had told local sachems "of that eminencie and Royaltie of his [Charles I's] person [and the] Justice of his lawes."

information that was, Gorton reported, compelling enough to get the Narragansetts "to make over themselves and lands, making Choice of us, in the Solemnizinge of their act." The Gortonists insisted that they had attempted, despite hardships created by Massachusetts, to deliver the document of submission to the King personally, but "in the midst of those troublouse tymes in the unhapie warrs, we Could not finde a way of access unto his maiestie." And when Bay colony authorities attempted to take the land—which they knew "to be farr out of the bounds of their pattent"--the Gortonists replied "that we were the Kings subjects as themselves were, and when we Knew his maiesties pleasure Concerninge ourselvs we were Ready to obey."70 In short, Gorton and his band wanted the new King to remember their own past, heavily embellished, service to the Crown, their sterling intentions during very difficult times, and the Bay colony's insolence.

The various strategies that the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations employed to gain the favor of the restored monarchy resulted, overall, in very positive outcomes. Undoubtedly the key to the colony's success was, as it had been for the previous two decades, its reputation for religious diversity and freedom of conscience. Sometime in 1662, John Clarke formally requested that the King

70 Ibid., 14-15, 11.
protect the tiny colony from the threats of neighbors and, not surprisingly, used liberty of conscience as the primary rationale. He asked Charles II "to hold forth a lively experiment, that a flourishing civill State may stand, yea, and best be maintained, and that among English spirits, with full liberty in religious concerns." Clarke argued that the best way to guarantee the success of the "experiment" was to issue a new, "more absolute, ample and free charter of civil incorporation," one that protected Rhode Island from the ideological and territorial ambitions of Massachusetts and other members of the United Colonies.71

In the summer of 1663 the King responded favorably to John Clarke's retelling of Rhode Island's history and the colony's desire to become Charles's living laboratory for liberty of conscience. The King clearly saw the outcast entity as a test case by which he would be able to prove to critics in both America and England that religious freedom and civil order were indeed compatible.72 To that end, he issued in July a charter that explicitly favored liberty of conscience and that validated the colony's history of and commitment to spiritual plurality.73 In the document's

71 John Clarke's Second Address to Charles II, undated, RICR I: 490-91.


73 William P. Sheffield, "John Clarke and Newport," typescript mss., 16, RIHS.
preamble the King praised the Narragansett's inhabitants for their pursuit of "sober, serious and religious intentions, of godlie edifieing themselves, and one another, in the holie Christian fffaitth and worshipp as they were persuaded," and lauded residents' development of programs designed to win over the natives "to the sincere professione and obedience of the same fffaitth and worship." He recognized that the colony was full of two-time outcasts, who had come out of Massachusetts "ffor the avoideing of discorde, and those manie evills which were likely to ensue upon some of those oure subjects" because of "theire different apprehensions in religious concernments." The King ordered that the Indians be won over to a general, nonsectarian Christianity, one that emphasized the basics: "obedience of the onlie true God, and Saviour of mankinde." Moreover, he ordered that the heterodoxy of Rhode Islanders not be an impediment to trade or travel throughout New England.74

The King's specific views on the matter of conscience were clearly established in the charter for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Charles fully accepted Clarke's suggestions that religious freedom be legally protected and declared that "it is much of their hearts (if they may be permitted), to hold forth a livelie experiment, that a most flourishing civill state may stand and best bee maintained."

74 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Charter, 8 July 1663, RICR II: 3-21.
The King defended the position—found in the writings of both Clarke and Williams—"that true pietye rightly grounded upon gospell principles, will give the best and greatest security to sovereigntye." Charles praised all the residents of the colony for persevering and suffering in pursuit of such a noble goal; he vowed "to preserve unto them that libertye, in the true Christian ffaith and worshipp of God, which they have sought with soe much travaill, and with peacable myndes." Contending that free consciences made men more loyal to leaders in the secular sphere, the King expressed confidence that the colony would continue to show due "subjectione to our royall progenitors and oursewles." At the same time Charles warned residents to allow for "the publique exercise of religion, according to the litturgy, formes and ceremonyes of the Church of England," and ordered that Anglicans be accorded the same considerations as all others. In short, as long as civil order was maintained, "all and everye person and persons may, from tyme to tyme, and at all tymes hereafter, freelye and fully have and enjoye his and theire owne judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments."75

Undoubtedly, the King made such statements because the colony's leaders had no problem coming across as sincere advocates for religious diversity in concert with political order. Williams and Clarke had quite publicly expressed

75 Ibid., 4-6.
their views in England and America; both had argued that no necessary connection existed between heterodoxy and social or governmental disorder and continued to believe that their communities could sustain unlimited spiritual diversification. Indeed, by 1665 the colony was home to approximately forty Gortonists, two General and two Particular Baptist churches, a nondescript congregation led by Roger Williams, monthly and yearly Quaker meetings, and a half-dozen Episcopalians.76 Outside observers marveled at the spiritual variety; the King's representatives, for instance, noted that the province had "not any places set apart for the worship of God, there being so many subdivided sects, they cannot agree to meet togeather in one place, but according to their severall judgments, they sometimes associate in one house, sometimes in another."77

This diversity and the principle of religious liberty also became a point of contention between Rhode Island and its neighbors in the struggle for disputed territory on the western frontier. Massachusetts authorities attempted to justify their colony's possession by arguing that settlers in the region from Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

76 Felt, Ecclesiastical History I: 397. The reputed Episcopalians, as reported by the King's Commissioners, were Thomas Mumford, Samuel Wilbore, John Porter, William Brenton, Benedict Arnold and Samuel Wilson.

77 Report of the King's Commissioners on the colony of Rhode Island [December 1665], Stevens Transcripts No. 63, JCB.
were spiritual—and therefore political—anarchists and therefore not fit to own land in civil society. Bay colony men complained that their opponents frequently spoke "of their trevelling to view the land upon the Lord's day"; "those men do constantly profane the Sabbath," one Massachusetts partisan testified, "& Indians with trouble told in my hearing that they cutt wood, & goe up & downe a guning on the Sabbath day."78 Prospectors from Boston often lamented that Quakers passed through the territory freely and that Rhode Islanders' "godlessness" served as a poor example for the region's natives.79 For such reasons, area inhabitants from Connecticut requested that Hartford "p'vide an able orthodox minister, to despence ye word of god to them."80 "Orthodox" residents of the region did all they could to counter "ye falsenes" of the Rhode Islanders and even captured and imprisoned Baptists.

78 Testimony of Twalt Strickland, 6 May 1662, Mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 203-205, RIHS.

79 United Colonies Commissioners to settlers of the Pequot country from Rhode Island, 16 September 1662, RICR I: 495-500; Commissioners of the United Colonies to Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Hartford, 9 September 1664, RICR II: 69-70.

80 Meeting of the Council (Governor John Winthrop, Matthew Allyn, Richard Treat, Captain Talcot, John Allyn), Hartford, 2 April 1664, mss. from Connecticut Archives, I: 27-28, RIHS.
from Newport who were in the area to survey potential homesteads.81

Where outlying lands were concerned, the strategy for the government Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was to wear this heterodoxy as a badge of honor and to work actively to maintain the colonists' "unique" liberties. In October 1660 colony leaders wrote to John Clarke to mention sundry obstructions emerging whereby this Collony hath beene putt to trouble and charge for the preservation and keepinge invoyolate those privilidges and emunities, to us graunted in the foresayd free charter [of 1643]; which sayd obstructions arise from the claims and encroachments of neighbours about us, to and upon some parts of the tract of land mentioned in oure charter, to be within the bownds of this Collony.82

In the struggle to extend liberty of conscience to the Pequot region, Baptist settlers from Newport led the way, explaining to the General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations that the group was "confrontinge the adversaries of the Collonie, which by a specie of intrusion are seeking to macke inroads upon our preveledges of Collonies jurisdiction." To remedy the situation, the

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81 Edward Hutchinson and William Hudson to Governor John Winthrop, Jr., Boston, 20 May 1664, RICR II: 49; Warrant to the Constable at Souhertowne from Massachusetts General Court, 14 November 1661, RICR I: 456.

82 Rhode Island Commission to John Clarke, 18 October 1660, RICR I: 433-34.
settlers asked the General Court for its "favourable approbation, countenance and assistance to us in the settlinge of a Plantation or Towneshipe." Noting that Massachusetts' "frame of spiritt [was] much disturbed and full of anymosity against us" where the western lands were concerned, Narragansett leaders resolved to "defend the privileges of our Colony," and accused their Bay colony counterparts of protecting "persons and estates," while ignoring "justice and righteousnes." Rhode Islanders worried that Massachusetts residents—with the encouragement of that colony's leadership—"proceedied] to encroach and take into their hands, the lands lying in the heart of this Collony, even lands that some of ours does alsoe clayme." 

This method of protecting religious liberty in the disputed territory and pointing out differences with Massachusetts proved effective because it played to existing royal suspicions of the Bay colony. "Books, Petitions, and Remonstrances" against New World Puritan ministers and magistrates were plentiful in London, partly because of


84 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court to Massachusetts, 22 May 1662, RICR I: 469, 471.

85 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court to Massachusetts, Warwick, 27 October 1662, RICR I: 494.
Boston's long-standing reputation for acting contrary to laws instituted during the reign of Charles I. Commentator Henry Gardener noted that the Bay colony had been "acting as a Free State" and thereby had "cast an Odium on all that vast Countrey," a black mark that could be expunged only by Boston's immediate submission to the King and the government's pledge to make satisfaction for wrongs done in the past, particularly thirty or so specific infractions, like denying appeals to England, printing and coining money, and rejecting the King's colors.86 Thomas Breedon, writing from Boston to the Council for Foreign Plantations, reported that residents of Massachusetts "looke on themselves as a free State," and that a large faction was "against owneing the King, or there having any dependance on England." He asked simple questions of the leadership in Boston: why had they not proclaimed Charles? why did they not act in the King's name? and "why doe they not give the oath of allegiance to his Matie but instead thereof force an oath of fidelity to themselves and the Government"?87

86 Henry Gardener, New-Englands Vindication [Vindication] (London, 1660), 4-5, "Epistle to the Reader," 5-6. Gardener also argued that Massachusetts' allowing twenty-two years to pass between calls for its patent was irregular, and complained that the colony's printing of money degraded the King's coinage from twelve to nine pence.

87 Captain Thomas Breedon to the Council for Foreign Plantations, 11 March 1660/61, Stevens Transcripts No. 29, JCB.
Others claimed that the Bay colony had invaded Maine and New Hampshire, that its ministers had harbored the regicides Edward Whalley and William Goffe, and that "in these late times of General Disorder [Massachusetts had] strayed into many enormities, & hath invaded the rights of their Neighbours." Perhaps most importantly—and something that struck a chord with the King and his ministers—the General Court in Boston had reportedly enacted laws and administered justice in a way "repugnant to the Laws of England," while imposing "unreasonable & unequal . . . restraints in matters of Conscience & of Divine Worship." One observer even went so far as to surmise that religious disagreement between the Crown and the Bay colony was at the heart of all others; residents of Massachusetts—given their collective view that tyrannical religion grew out of the monarchy—were bound to "shake off the Royal Jurisdiction of England" in its reincarnation.

The King's representatives in New England concurred and reported personal difficulties that they had encountered in and around Boston. For his service to Charles II within the

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Bay colony, Breedon wrote that he had been "abused by many, by calling me malignant" and had been villified for receiving certain acts of Parliament and the "King's Proclamation." Breedon explained to his constituents that he had written to the Bay colony Deputy Governor, asking him to give a response to the messenger, but a magistrate "badd him [the messenger] be gon[e], [and] tolde him hee had not[h]ing further to say [to] him."90 According to Increase Mather, this abuse did not stop until Breedon, "carrying himselfe insolently and Contemptuously before the Court, slighting there authority, & requiring them in the K[ing]'s name to assist him with 500 soouldiers to goe against the Mahawkes," was sent to prison in the autumn of 1662.91

In order to win their claims to the western Narragansett lands, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were more than happy to add to the mounting evidence of Massachusetts' disloyalty. In contrast to the Rhode Island men in the territory, settlers from the Bay colony did not offer to send the dispute to London for arbitration by the King. Instead, the General Court in Boston, "informed of sundry rude fellows" who had "in a riotous manner entered upon, and taken possession of

90 Captain Thomas Breedon to the Council for Foreign Plantations, 11 March 1660/61, Stevens Transcripts No. 25, JCB.

91 Increase Mather to John Davenport, Boston, 21 October 1662, MHSC 4th ser., VIII (1866): 205-206.
the lands of sundry of our inhabitants in the bounds of your
towne," ruled that suspects should be rounded up and tried
before Massachusetts courts.92 Whereas Rhode Islanders'
ingrained insecurities led them to pursue a new charter
under a new King, Bay colony authorities, well established
politically and religiously, reasoned that their 1628 patent
had given the colony autonomy in the settlement of land
issues; they pointed, moreover, to a grant "from the Lord of
Warwick, and divers other Lords and Commons (impowered
thereunto by Parliament), of all that tract of land, from
Peguot River to Plymouth line, with power of government
there granted unto the Governor and company of the
Massachusetts." By this interpretation of the document the
colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations did not
exist, full judicial and administrative authority over the
lands flowed from Boston, and English monarchs had never
played--and would never play--a part in resolving disputes
in the Narragansett. The Court thus forbade "you or any of
yours to possess, improve or exercise government within any
part of the aforesaid tract" and warned Rhode Island
settlers in the area not "to disturbe or molest any of the
people of this jurisdiction who . . . stand possessed or lay
claime to any of the said lands." If they refused, these
"intruders" could expect that Massachusetts would not only

92 Warrant to the Constable of Southertowne, 25
October 1661, RICR I: 455.
issue a protest, but would "account it our duty to make good our rights against the unjust intrusions of you or any of your people by all lawfull and due meanes." The authorities were referring to exclusive use of the courts of Boston since, magistrates declared, the intruders displaced Bay colony residents "upon pretense of authority" from the Court at Newport. That Massachusetts representatives denied the possibility of royal arbitration in the matter was a fact that Narragansett leaders would exploit quite successfully.

Perhaps the chief explanation for Massachusetts' efforts to avoid royal intervention in the dispute over the Narragansett territory involved the King's embrace of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and its "lively experiment." In May 1662, the Bay colony had denied that the Crown had any role in the settlement of issues in the region, claiming instead that Massachusetts' right to the region's lands came only secondarily from England and even then originated solely from Parliament. In the wake of the arrival of the royal charter for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, however, leaders in Boston abruptly

93 Massachusetts to Rhode Island, 8 March 1661/62, RICR I: 461.

94 Massachusetts to Rhode Island, 10 May 1662, RICR I: 462.

95 Ibid.
changed their tunes. In a letter to the King's secretary Morrice penned barely three weeks after the first public reading in New England of the Rhode Island charter, magistrates asserted that the claims of the renegade colony to the Pequot lands were based solely upon an outdated grant from Parliament and "a pretended purchase from a runagado Indian." They assured the King that the General Court had written an amiable letter "to your pretended government of providence plantations desiring them to restraine their inhabitants from such insolent & unjust proceedings" and to ask their citizens to vacate, but had not received a reply. Where before Massachusetts leaders had simply ignored the possibility of returning land dispute cases to London, they now explained that such matters were too minor to trouble the King. They admitted receiving a letter from Charles dated August 1663, which mentioned the appeals to London of Newport men Tobias Saunders and Robert Burdick and which required Massachusetts either to resolve its differences with Rhode Island or to remit disputes to England for the King's judgment. To this General Court members replied that they "could well hold our peace & suffer, leaveing the decision of this case to God, who knows our innocence & the falsehood of these men's accusations." They then outlined for Morrice the history of the Pequot region, arguing that the Bay colony had conquered the Indians there long before
Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had been settled.  

For leaders in the Narragansett colony, such avoidance of royal arbitration represented clear affronts to the King's authority. A May 1662 warrant from the General Court of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations prohibited Bay colony magistrate Daniel Gookin and his associates from planting at Pawcatuck [Misquamicutt] since such action was "contrary to the minds of this Collony," and was "in a high degree Contrary unto the peace, crowne & dignity of our Lord the King." The Gookin party was ordered in the King's name to "forbeare such intrusions on these his subjects rights and privileges, untill his Majesties express order shall determine herein" and to stop any building or fencing. Moreover, the Court of Commissioners ordered

96 [John] Endecott and Council to Secretary Morrice, Boston, 16 December 1663, mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 225-33, RIHS. Endecott and the others noted that "The place where the complainants, Sanders & Burdett were taken, wee doubt not of our just interest therein before God & man, being more than 26 years since given us by God himself in our conquest over the bloody natives the Inhabitants thereof in a defensive warr, at which time these plantations of Road Island & Providence Plantations had no existence & the warr being ended was by the other United Collonys fairely & orderly settled in this our Colony."

97 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court, 20 May 1662, Warwick, warrant to prohibit planting at Paucatuck or Southertowne, mss. from Massachusetts Archives, I: 179-80, RIHS. Incidentially, the Court used regnal dating in the warrant.

98 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Court, 20 May 1662, RICR I: 463.
that the men whom Massachusetts had imprisoned for
trespassing in the region were not "to plea before any court
in this country, saveing unto our courts of judicature." In
fact, the Bay colony, in the Assembly's estimation, was
violating the 1646 order from the Lords Commissioners for
Foreign Plantations "under his Majesty, our Sovereign Lord
the King," which absolutely prohibited any Massachusetts
resident "from entering upon any part of this jurisdiction
by our charter given us." Narragansett leaders doubted that
the General Court in Boston had not seen the document,
"which was delivered unto your honourable Governor about
sixteen years ago, and may happily either be lost, or in
some custody so obscure, as that you have not had the least
hint thereof." As a remedy the Court in Warwick was more
than happy to send along a copy.99

Similarly, leaders of Rhode Island and Providence
Plantations condemned Connecticut for various actions that
they perceived to be disrespectful of the King's authority.
In March 1663/64, the General Assembly observed that

99 Rhode Island to Massachusetts, 22 May 1662, RICR I: 470. Rhode Islanders saw Connecticut settlers in the
Narragansett territory as equally disrespectful of the
King's authority. In October 1662, the Rhode Island General
Court of Commissioners boldly declared that Connecticut's
title to the region had been derived "by a underhand
dealing" and that the English authorities "that granted it
doth so resent it, and resolves to do that which is right
therein, being now fully informed of the sleights used by
those that did purchase the same." See General Court of
Rhode Island to Massachusetts, 27 October 1662, RICR I: 494-
95.
settlers in the region from neighboring colonies had displayed "high contempt" toward the colony's new charter "confirmed, and established by his Majestye"; to that end, these men had "intruded and indevered to possesse themselves, even in the heart of this jurisdiction, at Naragansett, and places adjoineing thereunto, and ther takeing upon themselves a kind of government and jurisdiction contrary to the honor of his Majestye's crown and dignitye."100 Arnold and Brenton informed Governor Winthrop of Connecticut that outrages had been perpetrated in the region by settlers of Southerton; reportedly, men had crossed the Narragansett River "into this Collony and there assaulted, and by vyolence brake open an English house and thereout hauled one of his Majestyes subjects," an almost unforgiveable offence against the King himself. The Rhode Island magistrates announced that they would handle the "Southerton-men's aforesayd outrage" since "our allegiance to his Majesty bindeth us to redresse such wrongs done unto his subjects in this jurisdiction."101 In July of 1664, Arnold and Brenton repeated their concerns to Winthrop, observing that Richard Smith and William Hudson of Boston presumed "to exercize authority at Narragansett,

100 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Assembly, 1 March 1663/64, RICR II: 29.

101 Governor Benedict Arnold and Deputy Governor William Brenton to Governor John Winthrop of Connecticut, Newport, 10 March 1663/64, RICR II: 66.
pretending countainance from your government"; they promised "to fetch them before authority, and to proceed against them for their presumption herein; and for their contempt of the govourment here established by his Majestie." Narragansett colony magistrates clearly viewed the administration of the disputed territory as an obligation to the King; Arnold and his Assistants explained "that wee dare not declyne the exercize of jurisdiction in all parts of the Narragansett and Nahantick countries and partes adjacent" according to the charter and the King's letters.102

Within five years of the Restoration, Narragansett officials' effective use of the colony's history of religious tolerance and its outstanding loyalty to the Crown and English law relative to its "orthodox" neighbors had won over the royal commissioners and had given Rhode Island and Providence Plantations the advantage in its territorial disputes. The Gortonists in particular used their past "sufferings" for the cause of liberty of conscience to win unqualified support from the King's representatives. Over the course of two years, Charles's commissioners had received petitions from Gorton, Holden, John Potter and others, and apparently took their complaints seriously.103 Having heard the Gortonists' charges that

102 Ibid., 66.

103 Sir Robert Carr and Samuel Maverick to Royal Secretary Sir Henry Bennet, Lord Arlington, Boston, 20 November 1665, Stevens Transcripts No. 62, JCB.
Massachusetts had persecuted them and had denied appeals to London,104 the royal representatives praised the original Shawomet settlers for nonetheless obtaining and confirming the Narragansett Indian submission and for their efforts to deliver the agreement to the late King personally.105 As a result of this faithful service, the commissioners assured Gorton and his followers that the King would extend his protection to their community.

In a more general sense, too, the Crown's agents accepted both Rhode Islanders's criticisms of neighboring colonies and their representations of the tiny's colony's past. Observer of New England Sir Joseph Williamson gathered that the Narragansett plantations had been settled by English women and men "for scruple of Conscience," that these communities received a charter in 1643 "empowering them to choose their owne Officers, and to make Lawes to be as neare as might be to the Lawes of England," and yet "all Writts proceed in the Kings name."106 Similarly, the King's Commissioners concluded that Rhode Island had a decidedly pro-English history, evidenced by its concern for obtaining their patent from the King and--in the absence of Charles I--their authorities' pursuit of a charter "from the

104 Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I: 397.
105 Commissioners' Report on Rhode Island, [December 1665], Stevens Transcripts No. 63.
106 Notes by Sir Joseph Williamson on New England, c. 1663, Stevens Transcripts No. 33, JCB.

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Lords and Commons," which was much more than surrounding colonies could claim. Yet, in astonishment, the Commissioners found that Connecticut and others had prospered, while "Road Island [had been] slighted."\textsuperscript{107}

For the colony at large, then, underscoring a persuasive history of oppression—in combination with genuine genuflection to royal power—paid off handsomely. The Commissioners had been impressed by their reception in Newport,\textsuperscript{108} by the inhabitants' stories of mistreatment at the hands of Massachusetts simply for religious differences, and by the stock magistrates placed in the King and English law generally. "Their civility to us, and their loyalty to the King being greater then of those in other places," observed Cartwright, "will be one good reason why they should not be opprest by those who have lesse of each."\textsuperscript{109} The Commissioners reported that residents of

\textsuperscript{107} Report of the King's Commissioners on Rhode Island [December 1665], Stevens Transcripts No. 63, JCB.

\textsuperscript{108} Sir Robert Carr to Colonel Nichols, 2 February 1664/65, Stevens Transcripts No. 49, JCB. Carr recalled that "on Saturday in the afternoone wee gott to Road Island, the Deputy Governor Mr Brinton living at his Country house, I went to the Governours howse, whoe made me very welcome, the next morning the Deputy Governour came to towne with whome Mr Clarke and the Governour, I did communicate your directions and delivered their letters, after perusall they did declare themselves so much satisfied, that their lives and fortunes was to little to give satisfaction for that Royall favor they had received from his Matie and likewise from the Chancellor [Clarendon]."

\textsuperscript{109} Colonel Cartwright to Colonel Nichols, Boston, 3 June 1665, Stevens Transcripts No. 58, JCB.
the colony had reserved court cases for them and had made sure that "All proceedings in justice are in his Majesties name."110 This loyalty—contrasted with the actions of the Bay colony to the contrary—convinced the Commissioners to represent well the Narragansett colony's causes to the King. Whereas the "Gentlemen of Boston would make us beleeeve, that they verily think that the King hath given them so much power in their Charter to doe unjustly, that he hath reserved none to himselfe to call them to an account for doing so," the settlers of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had proven themselves to be extraordinarily pliant. Thus, though Massachusetts "refused to let us hear complaints against them," the Commissioners vowed to the Gortonists and the other exiles "to go for England where (if God bless me thither) I shall truly represent your sufferings and your loyalty." Cartwright prayed that Gorton "remember my kind love" to Wickes, Holden, and Greene, "and let them know I am resolv'd to be their Solicitor and shall ever remain theirs and Your assured freind."111 In the end, their retelling of the colony's history rang true; in December 1665, Nichols, Cartwright, Carr, and Maverick reported to the King that Rhode Island "(which now admitts

110 Report of the King's Commissioners concerning Rhode Island, [December 1665], Stevens Transcripts No. 63, JCB.

111 Cartwright to Samuel Gorton, Boston, 26 May 1665, Stevens Transcripts No. 111B, JCB.
all religions, even Quakers and Generalists) was begun by such as the Massachusetts would not suffer to live among them, and is generally hated by the other Colonies, who endeavoured several ways to suppress them."112

The primary tangible benefit Rhode Island and Providence Plantations derived from its obedience to the King and his commissioners came in late 1664, when the royal representatives awarded the colony complete discretion over the disputed Narragansett territory, thereby ensuring a buffer against hostile neighbors. Initially the Commissioners ordered that the disputed territory be called the "King's Province," and that no one was to exercise any jurisdiction within the area, "but such as receive authority from under our hands and seales." But late in 1664 Rhode Island authorities continued to hammer away at the claims of other colonies, explaining to the Commissioners that "intruders" continued to display "strange empirudence" that had "scarcely bene elsewhere found." These squatters had acquired lands "contrary to the Law in such cases here established" and continued to exercise authority "in contempt of his Majesties letters Pattents to us given."113 Having heard such reports, Carr, Cartwright,

112 Report of the King's Commissioners on Rhode Island [December 1665], Stevens Transcripts No. 63, JCB.

113 Governor Benedict Arnold and Deputy Governor William Brenton of Rhode Island to Colonel Nichols, Newport, 3 February 1664/65, RICR II: 87-88.
and Maverick quickly excluded Massachusetts from the region, ruling the colony's purchases to be void. They commanded Humphrey Atherton and the other Bay colony settlers to "quit and goe of[f] ye said pretended purchased lands," to remove their cattle from the area, and to vacate the Narragansett by "ye feast of St. Michael next." To underscore the point, two weeks later the Commissioners wrote directly to the Massachusetts settlers in the area, ruling that all purchases east of the Pawcatuck river and north to the Bay colony "made by his Majesty's colony of the Massachusetts to any person whatsoever, or by that usurped authority called the United Colonies," were void. Four days later, Carr, Cartwright, and Maverick granted to the magistrates of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations "the power and authoritye of justices of the peace . . . throughout the whole compass of this his Majestyes Province," and charged them "to doe whatever they thinke best for the peace and safety of the sayd Province, and as neare as they can to the English lawes till his Majestyes pleasuer be farther knowne therein." The Governor and his Assistants were made a court of appeal for the region and were, in the King's name, given full

114 Order of the King's Commissioners regarding the Narragansett, 20 March 1664/65, RICR II: 59-60.
authority "to determine any business" in the Narragansett.115

The battle over disputed territory on the western flank of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was far from over, but as a result of the royal commissioners' proclamations the colony's position improved greatly. Settlers from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Plymouth had been given fair warning to vacate and to abandon their attempts to bring their claims to the courts of "orthodox" colonies. Their complaints about heterodoxy among Rhode Islanders in the region were made irrelevent; Charles and his representatives had declared that religious diversity in the "King's Province" was acceptable and workable. The Crown's decision to grant Rhode Island and Providence Plantations power over the western territory effectively doubled the size of the outcast colony and all but destroyed the long-time ambitions of the members of the United Colonies to dismantle their smaller neighbor and restore a sense of religious uniformity to the region. The efforts of Charles II, his ministers and representatives thus greatly increased the security of "Rogues Island" and the mainland Narragansett settlements, thereby improving the chances for survival of the "livelie experiment" in New England.

115 Order from the King's Commissioners to the Magistrates of the King's Province, or Narragansett Country, 8 April 1665, RICR II: 93-94.

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Equal in importance to this protection of spiritual diversity and liberty of conscience in America is the way in which it happened. Between 1660 and 1665, leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations executed a series of familiar moves dictated by their colony's history and the current English context. Since the early 1640s, the Narragansett communities had banded together for common defense against neighboring colonies and had sought legitimacy from various London governments. The key to the region's success was its foundation in complete religious freedom, an environment duplicated in England as the result of civil war and virtually normalized in the Restoration. In a sense, then, the leaders of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were a step--and perhaps ten years--ahead of their English counterparts. Their colony had become dependent upon London for legitimacy and protection, but at the same time had won favor as a social experiment of much greater interest and relevance to the new King than the "New England Way" constructed by American Puritans. Unlike their more famous and powerful northern neighbors, Rhode Islanders registered gains from the Restoration.
CONCLUSION

In June 1670, Roger Williams concluded that the presence of religious diversity in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and residents' devotion to liberty of conscience distinguished the colony in an imminently positive way from its neighbors. He insisted that, from the founding of Providence onward, religious dissent had been the primary source of contention between Rhode Islanders and the surrounding colonists, but that for the inhabitants of the region's four towns freedom to pursue their various doctrines was primary; most Rhode Island settlers, Williams argued, valued liberty of conscience above all else, even over economic considerations. Believing himself to be the spokesman for this majority, Williams offered to debate the issue of conscience in each of the surrounding colonies and contended that a sharper focus upon the general principles of Christianity would bring New Englanders together as subjects of the same King rather than advocates of different spiritual views.1

1 Roger Williams to John Mason and Governor Thomas Prence, Providence, 22 June 1670, CRW, 612, 615-19. In fact, Williams believed that New Englanders should unify to take on common enemies like the Dutch or, more importantly, the Jesuits in Canada.
By this declaration, of course, Williams implied that neighboring colonies continued in their attempts to force religious uniformity upon Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Not only were opponents of liberty of conscience in Massachusetts blocking the repeal of Williams's banishment, but that same "evil" majority, according to Williams, threatened the territory and the very sovereignty of the Narragansett region and thus endangered the survival of religious freedom in the colony.2 Williams expressed his concern that Connecticut was plotting with its neighbors to annex large portions of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and to dispense with liberty of conscience. Moreover, he suspected the United Colonies of conspiring against the inhabitants of the Narragansett colony to invade the area and to eliminate the liberties they had come to know.3

Plymouth, the Separatist colony for which a younger Williams had so much affection, was also the focus of great concern for the elderly Williams in his crusade to protect liberty of conscience. Rhode Island and Providence Plantations had a long history with its eastern neighbor

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2 Roger Williams to John Mason and Governor Thomas Prence, Providence, 22 June 1670, CRW, 612-13.

3 Roger Williams to the Town of Providence, Providence, ca. late April, 1672, CRW, 646; Roger Williams to John Mason and Governor Thomas Prence, 22 June 1670, Providence, CRW, 618.

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over land boundaries and law enforcement, and thus
Williams surmised that Plymouth, too, wanted to put an end
to the Narragansett colony's extensive reputation as the home of "soul liberty." In pursuit of that goal, he argued, Plymouth had lied to the royal commissioners about Rhode Island's treatment of Anglicans and its true commitment to the King. Despite assurances from Governor Prence of Plymouth, Williams remained convinced that his colony's eastern neighbors were in league with Massachusetts and Connecticut to partition Rhode Island and eliminate liberty of conscience in New England forever.

Perhaps because his fears for the future of peaceful religious diversity were so acute, Williams embellished his personal history and recounted the past of the colony he founded in a way that vindicated and glorified liberty of conscience. He referred to his earlier days in England and his authorship of Bloody Tenent, noting that, while Presbyterians burned the book, Charles I actually favored the ideas contained therein, and instilled these beliefs in his son, the future monarch. He reviewed his experiences

4 William Blackstone's appeal to Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 2 May 1666, RICR II: 148; Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Assembly, 4 September 1666, RICR II: 152.

5 Roger Williams to John Mason and Governor Thomas Prence, Providence, 22 June 1670, CRW, 609, 617.


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with former Salem minister Hugh Peter, outlining the changes that subsequently occurred in Peter while residing in England. The Bay colony minister, Williams observed gleefully, had gone from New World persecutor to old world indulger of consciences after being immersed in an atmosphere of religious diversity. Williams confessed that he himself had been a Separatist long before coming to New England, that he was therefore detached from the ideal established by nonseparating congregationalists and that he was disposed to seek greater freedom in religion. In fact, he noted, the New World had been the place where he intended to develop his ideas on liberty of conscience all along.7

Williams's recollections encapsulated the essential themes of the first three decades of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and expressed well the continuing anxieties of Narragansett inhabitants. The product of residents' early English experiences, religious diversity in the region continued through the 1670s as the result of transatlantic sectarian missions. Encouraged by the colony's reputation as a place where all doctrines could be expressed without government restriction, religious radicals

7 Roger Williams to John Cotton, Jr., Providence, 25 March 1671, CRW, 628-30. The truth of this statement was dubious considering Williams's pre-1635 arguments that conscience could, in certain circumstances, be corrected by magistrates. Clearly Williams was again glorifying religious freedom to suit his needs and those of Rhode Island.
organized in the Narragansett and, by launching itinerant preaching tours through neighboring colonies both racheted upward the tensions between "orthodox" and "heterodox" polities and explicitly defended the principle of liberty of conscience. Williams knew well not only the arguments for religious freedom, but also the process by which these outcasts made that idea viable in a civil and orderly society. Perhaps more than anyone else, he was responsible for the colony's reliance upon England legally and symbolically, having been at the center of Narragansett efforts to decouple religion and politics and its multiple attempts to secure legitimacy and protection for this "experiment" from various imperial governments.

Williams's devotion to religious freedom and to the survival of a New World entity where people of all doctrinal persuasions could co-exist peacefully was shared, in the long term, by the leaders of all of the region's communities. This consensus, in fact, continued--as it had in the previous thirty years--to help resolve points of contention among residents. Early in 1666, for example, Roger Williams relied upon the shared commitment to the concept to convince Warwick's residents to fall into line with the rest of the colony on important fiscal matters. Specifically he chided Gortonists for refusing to pay the rate for Clarke's service as agent, reminding them of the history of the mission and its result. The charter that
Clarke negotiated had, said Williams, given Rhode Island and Providence Plantations peace, freedom, and liberty of conscience. Despite severe hardship, Clarke had continued in London, Williams argued, because he believed in the notion of religious freedom. All Christians who believed in exercising their consciences freely, Williams concluded, should pay an equal share to the man who had ensured the survival of that principle. Williams urged Warwick to protect the colony's image and warned Gorton and his company that refusal to show outward support for Clarke's mission would send the wrong signal to the King, in effect declaring that the residents of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were ungrateful. Eventually this logic was successful, and Warwick paid the rate in full.

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8 Roger Williams to the Town of Warwick, 1 January 1665/66, CRW, 534-39. Warwick was offended by Williams's letter and offered only to apply excess monies raised for Williams's 1643 mission to Clarke's account. See Town of Warwick to the Rhode Island General Assembly, 14 January 1666[5/66?], RIHSM X: 141; Warwick Town Meeting, 26 March 1666, Town Records, Warwick, Rhode Island, First Book, 1647-1667, Vault K-Wa6, typescript, 227, RIHS.

9 The colony as a whole chastized the town for neglecting its obligation and urged the Warwick men to put aside their allegations and pay their share for Clarke's mission. See Rhode Island General Assembly to the Town of Warwick, Newport, 27 March 1666, RIHSM X: 141. The Gortonists, though they believed that they were being charged the rate unjustly and initially resolved to appeal to England, finally backed off and agreed to pay a portion of the debt of the mission, but only if future rates came by the authority of the King himself. See Town of Warwick (Edmund Calverly, clerk) to the General Assembly of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 30 April 1666, RIHSM X: 139; Report of the Colony Auditor, 21 March 1670/71, RIHSM X: 145; Town of Warwick (Edmund Calverly, clerk) to Governor
For the Baptists, too, support for liberty of conscience came with a heavy price: schism. Between 1665 and 1671 a movement, heavily influenced from England, developed within the Newport congregation. At issue was not believers' baptism or the nature of atonement, but whether the Sabbath should be celebrated on the first or the seventh day of the week. The discussion became contentious, resulting in the departure of a dozen members of the Newport group and the temporary exile from the church of elder Obadiah Holmes, perhaps the most severe critic of a Saturday sabbath.10 By December 1671 these Sabbatarians had established their own congregation and were worshipping separately, gaining strength and encouragement from similarly disposed Baptists overseas.

The controversy within the Newport Baptist church, while resulting in yet another religious fissure, gave Narragansett leaders an opportunity to express their commitment to conscience. In June 1670 Roger Williams argued that the Sabbath was not a major political issue in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as it was in places


where religious uniformity was enforced,11 and apparently the colony's General Assembly agreed with this assessment. In its September 1673 meeting, shortly after the Newport schism, legislators addressed the matter frankly. They again referred to Charles's grant of liberty of conscience a decade earlier and reasoned that due to religious freedom the colonial government could never sanction any particular Sabbath day. Instead, leaders warned against "debaseness" and prohibited liquor sales on Sunday, but insisted that the government was not—and would not—meddle in the consciences of its constituents.12

For Rhode Island Quakers, too, the beginning of the colony's fourth decade brought with it an opportunity to confirm satisfaction with and the workability of liberty of conscience. For example, as Quaker political power grew, so did the movement to modify oaths in order to protect spiritual scruples. The Quakers in Rhode Island acquired influence in government quickly, and by the spring of 1666 were finding success in the legislature and judiciary of the colony.13 In light of their swelling power, Quakers

11 Roger Williams to John Mason and Governor Thomas Prence, Providence, 22 June 1670, CRW, 617.
12 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Assembly, 2 September 1673, RICP II: 503-504.
13 Dyre vs. Coddington, a case of slander, ended in Coddington's acquittal, a result that angered Anglican governor William Brenton, who was moved to dissent from the decision and eventually to retire from public service. In a letter to "my hon[ore]d ffriend Capt John Green, Assistant
revelled in the protection of consciences, revising the
engagement for inhabitants and officers alike, guaranteeing
that those with "tender consciences" would be able to take
an alternate pledge.14

Quaker leaders in Rhode Island, bolstered by a visit
from the sect's founder George Fox and by English Quakers'
public debates with Roger Williams in 1672, also publicized
more aggressively their opposition to persecution within
neighboring colonies. While he and his fellow Quaker
magistrates trumpeted the history of Rhode Island and
Providence Plantations as a bastion of religious freedom,
Coddington expressed dismay that Massachusetts continued to
persecute Quakers and other dissenters.15 The Quaker-
controlled government thanked the King for indulging
consciences generally and praised him for understanding the
scruples of Friends specifically. Magistrates knew very
well that Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was alone

in the Towne of Warwick," Brenton complained of wrongs done
to him by Newport Quakers and vowed to leave public service
forever and perhaps even the colony of Rhode Island. He
retired and surrendered the public papers in his possession
and, in 1672, when he was elected governor of Rhode Island,
the General Assembly accepted his reasons for declining
service. See William Brenton to John Greene, 15 March
1668/69, RIHSM X: 139; Rhode Island General Assembly, 6 May
1669, RICR II: 243-44.

14 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General
Assembly, 27 March 1666, RICR II: 141-42.

15 William Coddington to John Winthrop, Jr., 23 August
1672, MHSC 4th ser. VII (1865): 291-92; Rhode Island General
Assembly, 13 August 1673, RICR II: 495-96.

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among New England colonies in ruling that no resident could be punished for refusing to bear weapons and in allowing those bound by conscience to serve in times of war in non-combat roles. 16 Quakers proclaimed, moreover, that free consciences ultimately brought peace and even helped to prevent conflict with other English colonies. 17

Perhaps the most influential—and initially most unlikely—Quaker in Rhode Island, William Coddington, led a charge against Connecticut's persecutory practices, especially against Quakers. In a series of letters to Governor John Winthrop, Jr., Coddington expressed dismay that persecution continued in that colony, despite the mercy its governor had shown Quakers in the past and his known opposition to persecution. Coddington informed Winthrop that Fox, during his American visit, singled out Winthrop as a magistrate who might stop such uncharitable and "unchristian" practices. Coddington agreed and suggested that Winthrop communicate to his magistrates a number of Fox's books which, he thought, made a persuasive case for liberty of conscience. 18

Indeed, over the next several decades the inhabitants of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations continued to

16 Rhode Island and Providence Plantations General Assembly, 13 August 1673, RICR II: 496-99.


18 Ibid., 287-89.

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define their colony by its most obvious and unique characteristics, religious freedom and diversity. In a May 1680 letter to the Lords of Trade, Governor John Sanford noted that while Baptists and Quakers dominated the area, "there are others of divers perswasions & principles all which together with them injoy their liberties." "[W]ee leave every Man to walke as God shall perswade their hartes," Sanford explained, as long as each person "doe actively or passively yeld obedience to the Civill Majestrate." He described with pride the history of the colony, founded by "our predecessors about fourty yeares since," who had left England as nonconformists and had come to dwell in the Narragansett wilderness "that they might injoy their liberty in their opinions."19 Months later, in an attempt to solidify the King's support for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Sanford and his council similarly stressed that the colony had been established by loyal subjects who had settled initially in Massachusetts, only to be "forced by the opression and persecution of their neighbours with jeopardy of their lives."20

Upon the accession of James II in 1685, the Governor and Assistants of the colony continued to explore the

19 Governor John Sanford and Council, answer to queries from the Lords of Trade, Newport, 8 May 1680, Stevens Transcripts No. 153, JCB.

20 Governor John Sanford and the Council of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to Charles II, 4 September 1680, Stevens Transcripts No. 161, JCB.
history of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as the intersection of religious freedom, dependence upon England, and contrasts with intolerant, disloyal "orthodox" colonies. In underscoring their desires that "you will please to continue our privileges in Stato quo prius, with respect to indulgence in matters of religious concernem[en]ts," Narragansett leaders were repeating a four-decade-old plea.21 The region's Quakers similarly sought to persuade the new King to continue liberty of conscience in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations by referring to the past. Noting Massachusetts magistrates' attempts "to compell all to conform to them and their pretended Religious ceremonies," earlier Quakers had been "exposed to great travels and hardships, being dispersed in the [Narragansett] wilderness to seek refuge for their wives and children." They explained that Rhode Island not only became a safe haven for them, but a place where dissenters of all kinds "endeavoured to establish such Methods and Rules of Government, as might suite and agree with all Religions & conscientious People, which his late Majty [Charles II] was graciously pleased to allow of and confirm them in."22

Through the end of the seventeenth century, Narragansett inhabitants' self-identification with religious

21 Governor et al of Rhode Island to James II, Newport, 3 July 1686, Stevens Transcripts No. 208, JCB.

22 Petition of Rhode Island Quakers to James II, 25 August 1686, Stevens Transcripts No. 215, JCB.
victimization at the hands of intolerant neighbors and their
professed and constant loyalty to England continued to win
favor in London. In 1678, for instance, in response to a
petition from some residents of Warwick, Charles II noted
his gratitude for the history lesson he had received from
surviving Gortonists in the Narragansett. After faithfully
detailing the 1643 episode in which his subjects had been
seized, imprisoned, tried, and "mistreated" by Massachusetts
authorities, the King expressed "compassion to his grieved
subjects and [concern] for their future securitie." Charles
therefore rescinded the Bay colony order of banishment
against Randall Holden and the rest of Samuel Gorton's
living lieutenants, characterizing as "pretended" the
"crimes or misdemeanors" for which the Gortonists had been
tried in 1643. The whole episode had hinged solely upon the
consciences of the defendants, and thus, he added, the
proceedings had been illegal.23

The leadership of Rhode Island and Providence
Plantations, in gaining royal favor based largely upon the
colony's emphasis on religious liberty and accompanying
dependence upon English law and authority, led a trend that
developed in New England over the course of the seventeenth
century. The policies of the Bay colony concerning

23 King in Council, Whitehall, 20 December 1678,
Stevens Transcripts No. 450, JCB; Order of the King in
Council, Whitehall, 4 December 1678, Stevens Transcripts No.
448, JCB.
dissenters, in the two decades or so after 1660, for instance, underwent a dramatic transformation. Though the new definition of heresy adopted by Massachusetts magistrates in 1672 differed little from previous statutes, by the following year Governor John Leverett and other lawmakers allowed, for the first time, sectaries to meet and worship in private. 24 The colony also put on a more tolerant public face, repealing, in 1676, the order of banishment against the elderly Roger Williams. 25 In the same year, upon the insistence of Bay colony leaders, royal officials verified that the Massachusetts clerical corps was loyal to the King. 26 By 1682, near the end of Charles II's reign, Massachusetts Bay's agents in London stressed that the colony's laws were not prejudicial against Anglicans; moreover, indicating a strong change of heart from Bay colony magistrates over the course of two decades, they noted that "What ever has been formerly, there is now noe Law put in execution agst Dissenters, but what is

24 For the development of this trend, see Pestana, Quakers and Baptists in colonial Massachusetts, esp. 59-60. See also Ford, New England's Struggles, 91-92; and Beth, American Theory of Church and State, 46.

25 Repeal of Roger Williams's banishment, 31 March 1676, RIHSM X: 103.

26 Edward Randolph's answers to queries about the state of New England, 12 October 1676, Stevens Transcripts No. 104, JCB; William Stoughton and Peter Bulkeley, answer to Randolph's narrative, 28 June 1678, Stevens No. 117, JCB.
consonant to the Law of England and of like force against those of the Congregationall way as any others."27

Similarly, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations clearly led the way in New England's movement toward England that continued through the mid-eighteenth century. By the mid-1660s, Massachusetts inhabitants were more conscientiously applying strategies toward the royal government that Narragansett leaders had perfected long before. In 1666, warning of the King's displeasure, a group of Massachusetts residents petitioned the General Court to make changes in the policy toward the government in London. They sought an official apology to Charles II for the colony's dissent and for "the appearance of disaffection or disloyalty to the person and Government of their Lawfull Prince and Soveraigne."28 Others interpreted the history of Massachusetts in a way that suggested that the Puritan magistrates had been always loyal to the King and that Bay colony residents were, as exiles suffering in the wilderness, deserving of "their Estates and liberties."

Following a strategy well exploited by inhabitants of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, such petitioners argued that Massachusetts sought to defend England against foreign

27 "Massachusetts agents' answer to several letters from Charles II," 29 August 1682, Stevens Transcripts No. 139, JCB.

28 Petition of Massachusetts Inhabitants to the General Court, Boston, October 1666, Stevens Transcripts No. 103, JCB.

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threats and to advance the cause of the Crown. 29 In an official response to accusations from opponents in England, Massachusetts representatives William Stoughton and Peter Bulkeley insisted that Bay colony authorities had been, and remained, loyal to Charles II; that they accepted the corpus of English law; that the colony had not subdued its neighbors and had not created a commonwealth; and that confrontations with groups like the Gortonists had been blown out of proportion and had not been based on doctrinal matters. 30 By 1682, Massachusetts agents claimed ardent loyalty to the King, arguing that the General Court in Boston had instituted all of Charles's demands, from the oath of allegiance to the Crown to the full enforcement of the Navigation Acts. 31 Following close on the heels of these declarations, an anonymous letter writer to one of the King's councillors contended that Massachusetts lawmakers had done much to prove their loyalty to Charles II and that their colony, more than any other in New England, had been

29 Samuel Nadhorth to Secretary Morrice, Massachusetts, 26 October 1666, Stevens Transcripts No. 82, JCB.

30 William Stoughton and Peter Bulkeley, answer to Randolph's narrative, 28 June 1678, Stevens Transcripts No. 117, JCB; Statement of Stoughton and Bulkeley, 30 July 1678, Stevens Transcripts No. 119, JCB.

31 Massachusetts agents' answer to several letters from Charles II, 29 August 1682, Stevens Transcripts No. 139, JCB.
established by "poor subjects" who had been the victims of persecution.32

In the long view, then, the development of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations anticipated the transformation of religion and politics elsewhere in New England and America. The colony's first residents, representing a wide range of early seventeenth-century English doctrines, came to the New World already outside of the Puritan movement that dominated New England. As a group, however, those that eventually settled the Narragansett region more accurately reflected the religious variety of England than the relatively homogenous "orthodox" colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut. The wilderness that became Rhode Island and Providence Plantations served as a laboratory for the development of spiritual opinion and sectarianism in a relatively unrestricted environment; this experiment would be duplicated a decade later in the chaos of civil war England. Narragansett settlers devised a way to live peacefully that emphasized the separation of religious and civil spheres and that depended greatly on English law; moreover, governments in London held for the New England colonies the keys to legitimacy and protection. The environment in England of the 1640s, 1650s, and 1660s gave enormous advantage to the representatives of Rhode Island

32 Anonymous [signed PhileRoy. Philopatris] to [Jenkins?], 14 December 1683, Stevens Transcripts No. 184, JCB.
and Providence Plantations over their competitors from neighboring colonies and guaranteed that the "outcast colony" would not only survive, but that it—-not Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, or Connecticut—-would fit squarely in the Anglo-American religious and political mainstream.
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