

RHODE ISLAND HISTORY



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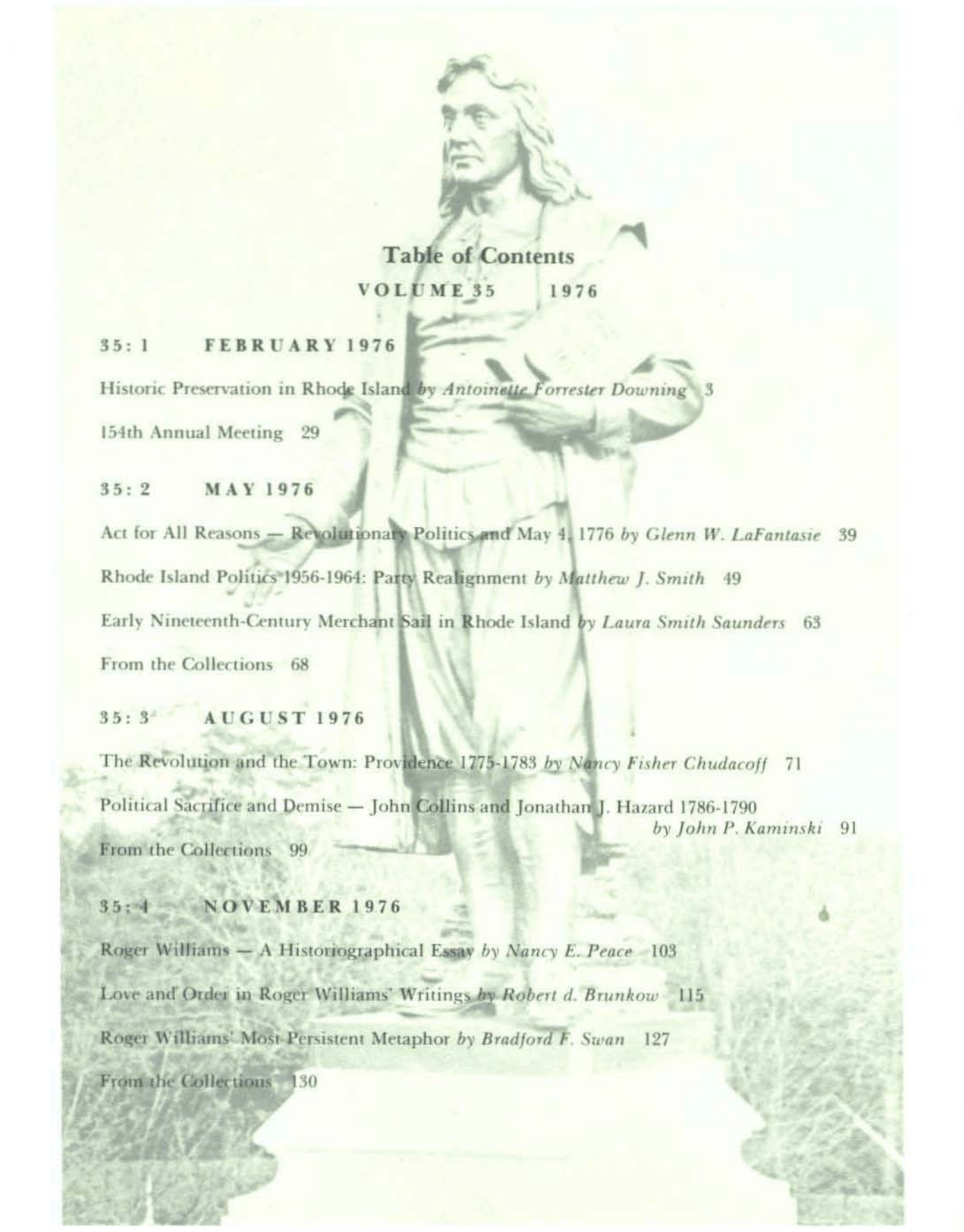


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SETTLEMENT OF RHODE ISLAND.

TUNE.—King of the Cannibal Islands.

Did ever you hear the story told,
Of Roger Williams, the preacher bold,
That settled this State in the days of old—
This little State of Rhode Island.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz,
And repeats herself as the echo does;
What I don't guess at, somebody does,
To settle the State of Rhode Island.

In sixteen hundred thirty-six,
Roger Williams got into a fix,
By saucing the Governor of Massachusetts,
And skevadiddled away to Rhode Island.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

He crossed, as everybody knew,
Seekonk River, in a birch canoe,
Just to save the tolls that were due
On the bridges above and below him.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

The college boats are always out,
They'd have taken him over, I haven't a doubt;
But Roger was mad, and "stuffed it out,"
And paddled his own canoe.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

When on Slate Rock a footing was found,
The Abby Origines were sitting around;
And Roger, thinking he would like to sit down,
Quietly asked, "What Cheer?"

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

The Indians thought it exceedingly cool,
And said, we have neither chairs or a stool,
So sit on the rock, you fussy old fool,
As all the rest of us do.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

Then they asked him if he'd "have a hack?"
Would they "black his boots," or "carry his pack?"
But Roger was mad, and answered back,
That—he thought—he guessed—he'd foot it.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

So he took his pack and trudgeled over the hill,
Where he settled down with a right good will,

And set up a Bank and a Flouring Mill,
And an office to Insure it.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

By the sweat of his brow, I've heard it said,
He paid his way and earned his bread;
And when he gets sufficiently dead,
They'll put a monument over him.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

They buried him carefully away from harm,
In a quiet old orchard on his own farm:
'Twas right in back of Gov. Dorr's barn,
And supposed that he'd keep quiet.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

But a jolly old apple tree, rooting around,
Seeking for phosphates under the ground,
Followed his backbone all the way down,
And old mother Williams, too.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

What's bred in the bone, in the flesh will show,
What's bred in the root, the fruit will know;
For two hundred years this fruit did grow,
Till posterity ate him up.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

In '42 he got up a war,
By having got into Governor Dorr,
By his eating the apples, just as you saw,
So there was another row.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

'Twas Williams's fault, we all know now,
Apples have always caused a row,
From Adam's time way down to now:
So they dug Mr. Williams up.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

They dug up the roots and the coffin nails;
They'll be buried again in boxes or pails,
And unless a big stone monument falls,
Next time they'll keep him down.

CHORUS.—History is a misty fuzz, &c.

And repeats herself as the echo does;
What I don't guess at, somebody does,
To settle the State of Rhode Island.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1868, by C. T. MILLER, of Providence, in the District Court of the District of Rhode Island.

*Ditty satirizing historical lore about Roger Williams. In
1874 Charles Miller, author of this piece and artist Walter
F. Brown published a book illustrating the verse.*

RHIS Library

Roger Williams — A Historiographical Essay

by Nancy E. Peace*

Roger Williams — preacher, colonist, trader and diplomat — arrived in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1634. In 1636 he and a few companions from Salem crossed the Seekonk River to establish the town of Providence. From that time to the present, Roger Williams has interested, mystified, and angered a variety of authors. Nearly ten linear feet of books which attempt to describe and analyze Rhode Island's founder reflect not only a variety of interpretations of the man himself but, viewed over time, provide a vivid indicator of changing perspectives of the authors themselves. Seen as a whole, the numerous studies present a variety of portraits of one man; viewed chronologically, they present a changing panorama of the pre-occupations and prejudices which color all attempts at historical truth.

Despite the number of studies from the seventeenth century to the present, only one historian has published a historiographical analysis of the various interpretations. In "Roger Williams and the Historians," LeRoy Moore, Jr. traced the evolution of historical views of Roger Williams and found they divided into three general categories: the negative approach of Puritan historians such as Cotton Mather, William Hubbard, and John Gorham Palfrey; the romantic approach of George Bancroft and Vernon L. Parrington; and what Moore calls the "realistic" approach of historians like Isaac Backus, John Callender, James D. Knowles, Edmund S. Morgan and Perry Miller. This tripartite framework, cutting across chronological lines, is so oversimplified as to be misleading; it does not provide an adequate pic-

ture of how various interpretations developed and why. Further, Moore's designation of Backus, Knowles, and Morgan as historians who employ a realistic approach is particularly questionable.¹

Far more useful is a chronological framework. By viewing works on Roger Williams chronologically, one is able to detect their interrelatedness and the intellectual and social prejudices they often reflected.

The earliest recorders of New England's history — Williams' contemporaries and their immediate descendants — exhibit a distinct and indeed prejudiced attitude toward Williams. Two contemporaries, William Bradford, governor of Plymouth Colony, and John Winthrop, governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, produced the earliest historical accounts of colonial New England which included references to Roger Williams and the dissension he created in Massachusetts. Although Winthrop's *Journal* was not published until 1790 and Bradford's *History of Plimoth Plantation* until 1856, they did not fail to make their mark on the pattern of New England historiography. As Moore noted, "most of the early histories indicate their indebtedness to one or both, either directly by citation or indirectly via other works or by manifest plagiarism."²

For Winthrop and Bradford as well as other Puritan leaders and their descendants, "unity of the community rather than dogma was their primary concern."³ A dissenter who disturbed this unity was a threat which leaders of Massachusetts Bay Colony could not tolerate. Banishment was their solution for Williams and others. Even

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though Winthrop and Williams remained lifelong friends and correspondents, Winthrop presented an unsympathetic picture of Williams in his *Journal*. After reviewing the charges against him, Winthrop wrote of Williams' views, "The said opinions were adjudged by all, magistrates and ministers who were desired to be present to be erroneous, and very dangerous, and the calling of him to office, at that time was judged a great contempt of authority." The magistrates concluded and Winthrop agreed that one who so obstinately maintained such opinions must be removed.⁴

Governor Bradford provided a less detailed and somewhat more sympathetic judgment, describing Williams as "a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts, but very unsettled in judgment."⁵ Bradford concluded his short discussion by noting that no more needed to be written as the facts of the matter were well known, and added that he hoped that "the Lord [would show Williams] his errors, and reduce him into the way of truth, and give him a settled judgement and constancie in the same; for I hope he belongs to the Lord; and that he will show him mercie."⁶

Later Puritan historians perpetuated Winthrop's and Bradford's unsympathetic portrayals. In 1699 Nathaniel Morton, nephew of William Bradford, published *New England's Memorial*, which incorporated much of Bradford's history. Like Bradford's, Morton's history contained only a short discussion noting that Williams was banished because his dangerous opinions were unwelcome in the community.⁷ Morton added moralistically that he included the short discussion of Williams "that it might be a warning to all others to take heed of a gradual declining from and forsaking [of] the churches of Christ."⁸

William Hubbard, late seventeenth-century historian and Congregational minister who borrowed much of his material from Morton and Winthrop, described Williams as a man of great zeal, but wanting in knowledge. He argued that Massachusetts magistrates were justified in banishing him because he renounced Massachusetts' churches.⁹

Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, published in 1815, continued in the same vein. Mather — grandson of Williams' most prolific antagonist John Cotton and self-appointed cham-

panion of Congregational ideals — described Williams as being like a windmill which overheats in a mighty storm, causing the whole town to catch fire. Borrowing from Hubbard's unpublished manuscript, Mather wrote that Roger Williams was "a preacher that had less light than fire in him, [and who] hath by his own sad example, preached unto us the danger of that evil which the apostle mentions in *Rom.* 10:2 'They had a zeal, but not according to knowledge.'"¹⁰

Whatever the stated causes of Williams' banishment, the Puritan magistrates' and clergymen's relationship to the Bay Colony precluded their toleration of him within its borders. Given their allegiances historical portraits of Williams by Puritan historians were bound to be unflattering.

The Puritan historians' negative view of Roger Williams continued late into the nineteenth century. Particularly well known and influential was John Gorham Palfrey's *History of New England* originally published in four volumes between 1858 and 1875, this filiopietistic work merely restated the Puritan viewpoint, albeit more clearly and persuasively than its predecessors.¹¹ According to Palfrey Williams received exactly the treatment he deserved because he presented a political threat to the colony. Reacting to charges of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians who portrayed Williams as a victim of religious persecution, Palfrey argued that Williams "was not charged with heresy. The questions which he raised were questions relating to political rights and to the administration of government."¹² In Palfrey's opinion Roger Williams deserved to be banished because he was a threat to the civil peace and political success of Massachusetts at a time when the threat of British interference under Archbishop Laud was so great that internal dissension could not be tolerated.¹³

Another filiopietistic study is Henry Martyn Dexter's *As to Roger Williams and His 'Banishment' from the Massachusetts Plantation*. Published in 1876, it attempts to defend the Puritans against increasingly vocal nineteenth-century liberal critics. Dexter argued that the Puritans came to New England out of necessity, to set up the kind of society they would have preferred to enjoy at home in England, had political conditions made it possible. Since they settled their colony for themselves and their posterity, there is no rea-

son to expect that they should have welcomed any who could not live comfortably and peaceably among them.¹⁴

While the Puritan judgement remained dominant until well into the nineteenth century, Williams was not without his defenders. The earliest favorable accounts published in the eighteenth century were written by Baptist minister and historian Isaac Backus and by two Rhode Islanders, John Callender, minister from Newport, and Stephen Hopkins, prominent businessman and politician from Providence.¹⁵ All three portrayed Williams as a courageous and noble Christian driven out of Massachusetts by the same intolerance which had driven the Puritans out of England. For these historians the issue was not stable government, but freedom of conscience. Callender wrote of the Massachusetts Puritans that "the chief leaders and the major Part of the People, soon discovered themselves as fond of Uniformity, and as loth to allow Liberty of Conscience to such as differed from themselves, as those from whose Power they had fled."¹⁶

To Massachusetts Puritans and their defenders the issue was government and authority versus anarchy. Roger Williams represented anarchy; their opinion of him was therefore negative. To Rhode Islanders and Baptists Williams represented freedom of conscience and toleration. Their opinion of him was therefore positive but not necessarily "realistic," as Moore had maintained. Both Callender and Hopkins presented Williams as a larger-than-life hero who could serve as a model to their contemporaries. Backus called him the "first Baptist minister in New England," although by Backus' own account Williams was in fact associated with the Baptists for less than six months.¹⁷

By the third decade of the nineteenth century the number of Williams' defenders increased remarkably. The age of the common man had dawned in America, and historians and politicians alike were seeking folk heroes in America's past, celebrating all that was honorable and uniquely American in the country's history and culture. Foremost among historians of this era was George Bancroft. In the first volume of *A History Of The United States*, Bancroft devoted over one hundred pages to Puritans and Puritan dissidents. The conflict between the Pilgrim fathers of Massachusetts Bay and such malcontents

as Williams and Anne Hutchinson was a problem for Bancroft because he did not want to denigrate either the Puritans or the dissidents, as both represented for him important sources of American tradition. He therefore praised Roger Williams as the first great mind to propound the proposition of the sanctity of conscience. As such he was according to Bancroft, "the harbinger of Milton."¹⁸

While Bancroft praised Williams for his philosophical positions — his belief in liberty of conscience and his attitude toward Indians — he did not portray Williams as the mainspring of democratic impulse in America. After cataloging the intolerance and harsh punishments meted out to Williams and others by the Puritans, Bancroft rationalized their behavior by arguing that the Puritans were still more tolerant than the English and other Europeans, and that their harshness was necessary for the protection of their political independence. Like Palfrey and other Puritan historians, Bancroft argued that Williams' banishment was necessary because he was a political threat. "Roger Williams, the apostle of 'soul—liberty,' weakened the cause of civil independence, by impairing its unity, and he was expelled, even though Massachusetts always bore good testimony to his spotless virtue."¹⁹ Bancroft further suggested that Williams was perhaps a bit unbalanced from too much thinking.²⁰

If Williams received only half-hearted praise from Bancroft, from James D. Knowles, professor of pastoral duties at Newton Theological Institution, he received uncompromising support. Dedicated "To the Citizens of Rhode Island," Knowles' *Memoir of Roger Williams, the Founder of the State of Rhode Island* was written to restore the long misunderstood and misrepresented Roger Williams to his appropriate place among the chief founders and benefactors of New England.²¹ Although Knowles was one of the first authors to mention the importance of Williams' piety to his philosophy, he, like Bancroft, was more concerned with Williams' political principles, attributing greater democratic sympathies to Williams than he probably possessed. Noting that in Williams' books and letters, every topic was informed by his piety, Knowles claimed that Williams' "religious principles were those of Calvin. His political principles were decidedly in favor of the rights of the people."²²

By mid-nineteenth century interest in Williams was at its height, especially in Rhode Island. In the 1860s a group of Rhode Islanders formed the Narragansett Club to arrange for publication of all Williams' known writings. As Reuben A. Guild, editor of the first volume, noted — "The name of Roger Williams has been handed down to us by Puritan writers loaded with reproach."²³ Members of the Narragansett Club hoped that availability of Williams' own work would produce a more sympathetic understanding of his actions.

The conviction that Rhode Island and her founder had not received a fair evaluation also preoccupied members of the Rhode Island Historical Society during the 1880s and 1890s. In his presidential address to the Society in 1881, Zachariah Allen noted that all New England histories to that time had been written by descendants of the Puritans. "Only one side of the New England controversies has been hitherto set forth. It remains for us, as members of the Rhode Island Historical Society, to bring forward and duly explain the principles of religious liberty, which were originally adopted and established by our forefathers."²⁴ The rest of his speech was a lengthy paean to Roger Williams and other early Rhode Islanders.

In part, Knowles and members of both the Narragansett Club and the Historical Society were reacting to the long-predominant Puritan view of Rhode Island's founder, but other forces at work in society also influenced their interpretations. The preoccupation with America's democratic heritage which one finds in Bancroft is also apparent in local history of this period, resulting in an emphasis on the secular contributions of American forefathers, including Williams. This preoccupation caused a highly skilled historian like Reuben Guild to make the exaggerated statement that Roger Williams was "the founder of a democratic form of government in the new world."²⁵

The 1870s and 1880s, as historian Barbara Solomon has noted, was also the period when Americans became preoccupied with the virtues of their Anglo-Saxon ancestors as a means of setting themselves apart from and above the massive influx of European immigrants then causing dislocations in American society.²⁶ Patriotic and gene-

ological societies sprang up and ancestor worship became a great pastime. Consequently many histories of this period, while attempting to correct the Puritans' bias, exaggerated the democratic contributions of Rhode Island's founder and tended to be more filiopietistic than accurate.

Emphasis on Roger Williams' social and political contributions continued in the early decades of the twentieth century from Progressive historians. Typical of that view was Edmund J. Carpenter's undistinguished biography published in 1909, *Roger Williams, a Study of the Life, Times, and Character of a Political Pioneer*, which claimed that Williams was responsible for establishing religious freedom in America.²⁷

Unlike Bancroft and the Jacksonians, progressive historians viewed the Puritans as narrow-minded people who had not yet broken from old world traditions and ideas. To progressives the dissenters represented the future of America. For them Roger Williams was a link in the chain of liberal thinkers which included John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. Carl L. Becker described Williams as a man who "condemned by the common sense of his age, will ever be celebrated as the prophet of those primary American doctrines, democracy and religious toleration."²⁸

The most influential book to perpetuate the image of Williams as liberal, democrat, and man ahead of his time was Vernon L. Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*. Although published in 1930, after the heyday of progressive historiography, *Main Currents* clearly derives from this historiographical tradition. Parrington's approach is clearly rooted in his western origins, as historian Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr. indicates in his *American Intellectual History* — "Parrington's outlook was dominated by the Populism and progressivism of his native West."²⁹

Main Currents is primarily an intellectual history of the United States. Its theme is the growth and decline of democratic liberalism in the United States. Parrington began his discussion by exploring European roots of ideas he considered uniquely American. In Williams he found the bearer of liberalism to America: "The line of liberalism in colonial America runs through Roger Williams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. The first transported to the new world the plentiful liberalisms of a great movement and a

great century; the second gathered up the sum of native liberalisms . . . and the third enriched [them]."³⁰

As we shall see, to portray Williams as a great democratic philosopher is to distort his values and the meaning of his life. Nevertheless numerous books and articles published after 1900 continued to present him in this manner. Among the more important authors to write about him during this period were Emily Easton, Lawrence C. Wroth, James Ernst and Samuel H. Brockunier.³¹

Ernst and Wroth present a particularly interesting contrast. Emphasizing Williams' contribution to the liberal tradition in America, they further contended that he also influenced the direction of English radicalism after the civil war of 1643. However, while Ernst portrayed Williams as a revolutionary theorist, Wroth maintained that he added nothing to the intellectual foundations of British radicalism. Ideas which Williams advocated were already prevalent in seventeenth-century British political theory. When Williams returned to England in 1643, to obtain a charter for Rhode Island, "he had found the question of religious toleration the topic of the day, the subject of debates in Parliament and in religious assemblies."³² The idea of toleration had been effectively argued as early as 1554, wrote Wroth, and had been a catalyst for controversy numerous times throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Williams' personality, not his intellect, was the source of his contribution to radical Puritanism. In England, as in America, he was not merely a passive observer of events, but through his writing and his many friends in the radical party, he was an active contributor to the shaping of Cromwell's government. His willingness to act on his beliefs, rather than the beliefs themselves, was the source of Williams' greatness. His activist personality made him an effective negotiator and an influential personality in England and a political threat in Massachusetts. The same activist personality, Wroth argued, also enabled him to bring about active incorporation of such liberal notions as religious toleration into American life.

For over a century writers had portrayed Williams as a political figure — liberal and democratic. By the 1950s, this portrait began to be challenged. In "Neglected Aspects of Roger Williams' Thought," Mauro Calamandrei criticized histor-

ians who made Williams "an advocate of rational philosophy, the herald of modern humanism and individualism, a proponent of liberty of conscience in the Jeffersonian way — or even in the twentieth century way."³³ Williams was first of all a Puritan, and as such his primary concerns were religious. Like the Puritans of England and Massachusetts Bay, he believed in God and looked to the Bible for guidance in understanding God's plans for His world and its people. He acknowledged the need for government, but only as a temporary expedient until Jesus returned again to establish God's kingdom on earth. Williams was a Biblicist and a Puritan, and his political thought must be considered within his intellectual frame of reference, which was primarily theological and religious.

Calamandrei's article marked an important milestone in Williams' historiography. He was the first historian to argue that an accurate portrait of Williams depended upon recognition of his Puritan roots. In so doing he raised new questions for later historians to explore. He noted that if one accepted the premise that theology is the key to understanding Williams' ideas, then a number of questions regarding the origin and originality of those ideas remained unanswered. Were Williams' political ideas really new, Calamandrei asked, and if so, how are they related to the history of political thought within and without Puritan groups? Are Williams' political concepts logically connected and related, or is there merely an artificial, fortuitous combination?

Ernst and Wroth had already explored the first question. Calamandrei criticized Ernst precisely because he did not recognize the religious basis of Williams' ideas. "Ernst's enthusiasm, aggressiveness and dogmatism preclude that historical accuracy which alone makes possible an understanding, for instance, between a 'digger' and a Marxian communist, or the Puritan Williams and the rationalist Thomas Jefferson."³⁴ While he does not mention Wroth, his reference to Williams as "a gifted theorist" would seem to indicate that he would not have concurred with Wroth's conclusion that Williams' ideas merely reflected those commonly held by the mainstream of seventeenth-century British Puritans.³⁵

Although Calamandrei recognized that Williams' political views evolved from his religious

convictions, he still accepted the commonly held view that Williams was a democrat and a liberal. "So far as our research can show, Roger Williams was a Puritan in his theology . . . Politically Williams was a progressive and a liberal, an irrepressible democrat at heart." Later historians would question this evaluation.³⁶

The importance of a religious and theological framework for understanding Williams' thought is a theme also advanced by Perry Miller in his 1953 study *Roger Williams, His Contribution to the American Tradition*, not a traditional biography but rather a series of excerpts from Williams' writings with an interpretive essay by Miller.

Like Calamandrei, Miller emphasized Williams' devotion to Bible study. Miller however was the first historian to argue the importance of the method of Biblical interpretation, known as typology, which Williams employed. Williams "believed the Bible from cover to cover, yet he would not read the Old Testament only as a historical document; he expounded it 'typologically.' Here is the secret of his separatism and his divergence from his colleagues."³⁷ A typological interpretation presents events in the Old Testament as prefigures of events in Christ's life — types and anti-types. Jonah swallowed by the whale is a prefigure of the anti-type of Christ's descent into hell. Miller contended that typology was the source of Williams' beliefs regarding separation of church and state and his religious attitude of seekerism — a continuous search for the true church. While he may be correct, his discussion of this thesis is so vague that he does not really convince the reader. Fortunately Miller's successors have been more successful in developing this argument.

As his title indicates, Miller also attempted to assess Williams' contribution to American religious and political traditions. Williams was an important figure in American history because he was the first to represent the concept of religious liberty. Miller did not argue, however, that he had any direct influence on the ideology of the American Revolution. Rather he saw him as prophet and symbol, reminding righteous men "that virtue gives them no right to impose on others their definitions. As a symbol, Williams has become an integral element in the meaning of American democracy, along with Jefferson and Lincoln," a

rather neat way of placing Williams within the American liberal-democratic framework while avoiding extravagant claims of earlier historians that he was the father of American democracy.³⁸

One is still forced to question Williams' importance even as a symbol. LeRoy Moore argued that he was hardly known prior to the late nineteenth century, since most of his works were unfamiliar in America and the major reference books of the time contain no word about him or Rhode Island.³⁹ The most widely circulated history books, when they mentioned Williams at all, presented him in an unfavorable light. Clearly more work needs to be done before we can judge his importance as an American symbol.

Another important article during the 1950s, Allan Simpson's "How Democratic Was Roger Williams?" maintained that historians like Parrington, Ernst and Brockunier, who portrayed Williams as a social democrat, had misunderstood the man completely. Simpson supported Miller's contention that Williams was essentially a religious man, but criticized Miller for failing to explore the political implications of Williams' religiosity. Politically Williams believed in a well-ordered, stratified society — a religious man who had no notion of creating any kind of new social organization.⁴⁰

Later historians have generally agreed with Simpson's argument. LeRoy Moore argued that it is a mistake to view Williams as a precursor of Jefferson in his advocacy of separation of church and state. Jefferson advocated separation of church and state because he wanted to protect the state from the church. Williams, a religious man, was concerned with protecting the church from the state.⁴¹

In 1957 Ola E. Winslow's *Master Roger Williams, a Biography* attempted to incorporate the new interpretations of Miller and Simpson. She was not particularly convincing, because while she included such observations as Williams "was an orthodox Calvinist"⁴² or "essentially in his deepest self a religious man,"⁴³ she did not provide any evidence to back up these statements. In the preface she wrote "The Idea now all but inseparable from his name was anathema to his contemporaries and he himself something of a conundrum because of it. Nevertheless he dared to put it to the test in the small corner of America

in which he was permitted to live, when declared unwelcome elsewhere."⁴⁴ Nowhere in the preface or conclusion did she make explicit which idea she was referring to — separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, or democracy. The publisher's blurb on the front cover (seldom a reliable source) indicated the third: "he voiced in ringing terms many of the democratic principles America has come to live by." Winslow clearly stated that "in the beginning Providence was not the democracy it has sometimes been asserted to have been, nor was such a way of government intended."⁴⁵ One is still left wondering which idea is now "inseparable from his name." Despite Winslow's interpretive weaknesses, her book presents the details of his life in an accurate and readable style.

Historians of the 1960s continued to explore the hypothesis — previously suggested by Calamandrei, Miller, and Simpson — that theology is the key to understanding Williams. In a review of volume seven of the *Complete Works of Roger Williams*, Edmund Morgan clarified Miller's discussion of Williams' use of typology. Volume seven, edited by Miller, contained an interpretive essay based on his earlier biography. Morgan praised Miller for emphasizing Williams' religious nature and motivation, agreeing that the source of Williams' political and religious views was his use of typology. He also supported Miller's contention that interpretations of Williams as a democrat are erroneous.⁴⁶

Morgan later published a systematic analysis of Williams' ideas in *Roger Williams, the Church and the State*. He again stressed the importance of typology to Williams' understanding of church-state relationships, concluding that his ideas exhibit an intricate and beautiful symmetry in spite of the polemics of his writing style.⁴⁷

Darrett B. Rutman also reviewed volume seven but instead of accepting Miller's (and Morgan's) evaluation of the relationship of typology to Williams' religious and political views, he offered an alternative interpretation. Rather than a source of Williams' separatism, typology was a convenient interpretive tool which Williams employed to demolish Puritan theological arguments for their form of church and state. More important to his theological beliefs was his literal acceptance of the Bible, especially *Revelation*, which led him to

develop a negative philosophy. Roger Williams "never argues constructively for what might be right, but in utter and complete negativism, against wrong. This negativism is the key to Williams." Negativism also explains Williams' secular world view, according to Rutman. Honor, money, and prestige were merely temptations for him.⁴⁸

The most recent biography, theologian John Garrett's *Roger Williams, Witness Beyond Christendom*, is primarily interested in the religious roots of Williams' ideas. Like Calamandrei, Garrett contended that in order to understand these roots, one must appreciate the central importance of the Bible to all Puritans and especially to Williams. "The interaction of recurrent biblical themes enables us to share imaginatively in the way Roger Williams felt about his personal pilgrimage and the worlds of life and thought that were fused in his more than eighty stormy years."⁴⁹

Garrett agreed with Miller that typology played an important part in forming Williams' world view. He noted however that it is not enough to know that Williams' method was typological; "we have to follow Williams' ideas by referring back to the particular passages of the Bible he used and by trying to interpret their meaning on his terms." Garrett has done exactly this and the quality of his study supports the validity of his method. *Witness Beyond Christendom* is a well researched and well written work which brings together in an organized and comprehensive manner much of the earlier work of Calamandrei, Miller and their successors. Garrett's contention that Williams' rejection as a suitor for Jane Whalley could have been the source of his separatism seems a bit extravagant, but otherwise his portrait is both sympathetic and believable. A new biography will not be needed for some time.⁵⁰

It is apparent that Roger Williams' image in history has fluctuated greatly. To the Puritans and Puritan historians he was the troublemaker, "the bad guy"; to other dissidents and their descendants — Baptists and Rhode Islanders — he was a martyr for freedom. To historians preoccupied with identifying democratic heroes, he was the first great planter of democracy in America. Not until the 1950s did any sort of balanced evaluation appear. Development of a more bal-

anced view resulted from changing historical and theological perspectives. Following World War II historians demonstrated a renewed interest in intellectual history. Arthur A. Ekirch noted that "the period of the Second World War with its increasing concern over ideological issues and conflict seems especially to have encouraged the study of ideas." Interest in the history of ideas in America naturally encouraged an interest in the ideas of America's first European settlers.⁵¹

A second historiographical trend which contributed to a new assessment of the Puritans and therefore of Roger Williams was the development of the consensus school of historiography. Reacting to progressive historians' emphasis on the role of conflict in American society, consensus historians argued that while conflict certainly occurred, it was not so divisive as the progressives claimed.

Renewed interest in the Puritans by theologians also contributed to the new assessment. As early as the 1930s certain theologians began to criticize the liberal theology of the social gospel, "with its optimistic doctrine of man hence its doctrine of historical progress."⁵² These neo-orthodox theologians maintained that religion in America had become too institutionalized and secular; it no longer fulfilled its mission in the world because its leaders were more concerned with men's needs than God's. Religious historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom noted in *A Religious History of the American People* that neo-orthodox theologians dwelt "on the need of the Church, not to march out to battle (it had been marching to too many drums) but to withdraw from the world's embrace awhile and find itself, to rediscover its gospel, and then perhaps to fulfill its mission."⁵³

In *The Kingdom of God in America*, neo-orthodox theologian H. Richard Niebuhr argued that Christians needed to reaffirm the sovereignty of God and God's word through scripture.⁵⁴ For Niebuhr and other neo-orthodox theologians, the Puritan church presented a model of the Christianity they hoped to see restored in America. Consequently they focused new attention on Puritans in the years preceding renewed interest of historians in Puritan studies. By the time historians began to reexamine Puritan life and ideas as a means of understanding America's intellectual roots and evaluating the nature of conflict in

American history, neo-orthodox interest in Puritans and their theology had already focused on the central role religion played in the Puritan world view. Through a fortuitous combination of intellectual interests and disciplines there emerged a new interpretation of Puritan life. Not until historians came to appreciate the religious nature of Puritanism could they recognize the essentially Puritan nature of Roger Williams.

Perry Miller's work exemplifies the convergence of new historical and theological concerns. While studying Puritans, Miller became interested in Roger Williams' controversy with Massachusetts. While neither Miller nor any of his successors argued that Williams was in complete agreement with Massachusetts Puritans, they have clearly shown that he was not so different from them as earlier historians would have us believe. Miller recognized that like the citizens of Massachusetts Bay, Williams was a Calvinist and a Puritan. His break with Massachusetts was not rooted in his rejection of Puritanism, but in his unerring commitment to it. A separatist, Williams believed that the people of Massachusetts Bay had not separated enough.

By emphasizing Williams' essentially religious nature, historians of the 1950s and 1960s clearly demonstrated that Williams was a seventeenth-century man with seventeenth-century concerns. He was not an advocate of liberalism and democracy in the secular nineteenth- and twentieth-century understanding of those terms. His concern was not with this world, but the next. For him, as for all Puritans, what ultimately mattered was salvation. He differed from Massachusetts' Puritans only in his understanding of the means for achieving that salvation.

On the basis of the post-1950s interpretation, LeRoy Moore's tripartite framework for categorizing Williams historiography is invalid. Such a simplified framework fails to express important differences in interpretations of historians included in Moore's categories. Moore classified both Bancroft and Parrington as depicting Williams as a romantic hero. While this is true, such a classification does not recognize an important difference in the view these two had of Williams. Writing only fifty years after the nation's independence, Bancroft praised Williams' philosophy, his advocacy of freedom of conscience and fair

treatment of Indians, but he did not argue that Williams was the mainspring of democratic values in America as did progressive historians. In the 1830s Puritans were still highly regarded and Bancroft concurred with this assessment. For him, the Puritans, not Roger Williams, were the planters of democracy in America. By the 1930s the Puritan image was at a low ebb because it represented elitism and tradition to an age preoccupied with democracy and reform. Writing within this later tradition, Parrington viewed Williams as the first of a line of liberal American thinkers and proclaimed Rhode Island and Connecticut to be the first examples of "a democratic church in a democratic state."⁵⁵

Moore's framework became even more misleading when he grouped Backus, Callender, Knowles, Miller and Morgan together as historians using a "realistic" approach to Williams. While Backus and Callender certainly rejected the negative view of the Puritan historians, and did not claim, as did Parrington and others, that Williams was the planter of American democracy, both invoked the image of Williams as a means of justifying and glorifying the origins of their respective constituencies. James Knowles could perhaps be classified as approaching a realistic evaluation in that he was the first to recognize Williams as a deeply religious man. He did not recognize, however, the influence of Williams' religion on his world view and particularly on his political philosophy. In light of recent scholarship, Knowles' contention that Williams' "political principles were decidedly in favor of the rights of the people" indicates that Knowles did not perceive great differences in seventeenth- and nineteenth-century concerns and views.⁵⁶

A realistic assessment could not occur until renewed interest in theology caused historians to realize that not politics, but religion or more specifically Puritanism was the cornerstone of Williams' philosophy. Once Calamandrei and Miller had articulated this, others could begin to study Williams in his proper, seventeenth-century context. To pronounce any of the earlier studies as exhibiting a "realistic approach" as Moore did, confuses rather than clarifies our understanding of the course of Williams historiography.

With development of what appears to be a balanced and reasonably accurate assessment of both

the facts of Williams' life and of his religious and political beliefs, one must ask if there is anything left to learn about this man. I believe there is, but I doubt that any new major interpretations will appear for some time. New-left historians have shown no interest in Puritanism, and if they should, it is doubtful that Williams will be of much interest to them. He was too independent a character to become a symbol of the oppressed masses and too humane a Christian to be designated an oppressor.

Rather than attempting additional biographies or major new interpretations, I believe that historians will now concentrate on particular aspects of Williams' life and thought. Several have already begun working in this vein. LeRoy Moore has looked at Williams' influence on the ideology of the American Revolution, while Irwin H. Polishook, Sacvan Bercovitch and Jesper Rosenmeier have examined the issues of the Williams-Cotton controversy. As yet no one has systematically studied Williams' attitude toward Indians or explained how Williams and his associates supported themselves and their families after they settled in Providence.⁵⁷

Two recent historians have argued that Williams had little effect on the development of American thought. Moore claimed that Williams had no effect on American ideology. His argument is that Williams' ideology was probably unknown in the eighteenth century because his books were unavailable in America and most available books which did mention him were written by Puritans, and were therefore unfavorable. William G. McLoughlin, in his study of New England Baptists, contended that Rhode Islanders — including Williams — had no effect on the battle for religious liberty because their contemporaries ignored them. "Roger Williams' experiment was a failure because of the inability of Rhode Islanders to shape, by example or evangelism, the destiny either of New England or any of the other colonies. Despite the valiant efforts of Williams, almost no one in colonial New England ever praised his experiment, or tried to imitate his practices."⁵⁸

Moore and McLoughlin considered Williams' national influence only. A systematic examination of Rhode Island printed and manuscript sources needs to be undertaken to determine what influ-

ence, if any, Williams had on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rhode Islanders. Did he become a useful symbol, or except for Callender, Hopkins and Backus, was he ignored there until the nineteenth century?

New interpretations often derive from discovery of new material. While it is unlikely that quantities of previously unknown Williams' manuscripts will surface, hopefully the late Bradford F. Swan's annotated edition of Williams' letters, a project which is being guided to completion by the Rhode Island Historical Society, will be an impetus to further studies.



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Roger Williams

THE
BLOVDY TENENT,
 of PERSECUTION, for cause of
 CONSCIENCE, discussed, in
A Conference betweene
TRVTH and PEACE.

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



Printed in the Year 1644.

Love and Order in Roger Williams' Writings

by Robert d. Brunkow*

As scholars generally recognize, Roger Williams was an early proponent of the absolute separation of church and state and the right of free religious conscience. For vigorously advocating doctrines whose time had not yet arrived he was treated as a dangerous radical by many of his contemporaries. Certainly he deserves to be remembered for his support of these ideas. There is, however, also a lesser known, conservative Williams who held traditional attitudes about the nature of order and orderly society. As Edmund Morgan has noted, where Williams was not concerned with the relationship of church and state his thought was "conventional and static." Williams did not desire to alter civil and social relationships in secular things but sought to maintain them, believing that they were the instruments which preserved order in society. Within this society he believed that love — selfless benevolence — could and should characterize relationships between neighbors. This essay examines that neglected side of his thought concerned with political and social order. It describes Williams' perception of proper relationships between an individual and agents of order — his government, his peers, and his family — a subject which has not previously received extensive attention.¹

My methodology has been to use early and late sources interchangeably to illustrate Williams' attitudes about such relationships, for he was

generally consistent in these areas. His later writings tend to embellish ideas he previously expressed, rather than to supplant them. His attitudes about social relationships are similarly stated in both *Key into the Language of America* (1643) and *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes* (1676).² It is possible that in between those works he held different attitudes, but surviving records do not reveal this. Williams was also generally consistent in his attitudes about political behavior from his move to Rhode Island until his death. It is true that he paid more attention to the idea of revolution during the English civil war and Interregnum when he wrote to the parliamentary forces. He was, however, careful to delimit the right of rebellion and in the same works noted the importance of obedience to lawful authorities. If he did not later expressly write about the right of revolution, he did not explicitly repudiate it either. Where possible I have used the scant remaining records to show how Williams' behavior reflected his attitudes.

The relationships he described were familiar to his contemporaries. They were of a patriarchal and hierarchial nature: civil and social inferiors owed obedience to lawful commands of their political and social superiors. Yet superiors had to act with restraint because power did not grant a license to be arbitrary. The covenant which citizens drew up to establish a government bound the

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magistrate to protect lives and estates of his subjects in a prescribed manner or face the prospect of rebellion. The magistrate had no real authority to impose religious dogmas or require that particular rites of worship be followed. If he attempted to usurp Christ's power over His church, he could be legitimately resisted. The citizen had to obey only insofar as the magistrate's commands remained within bounds set by the civil covenant and did not interfere with legitimate exercise of religious conscience. His obedience, however, had to be absolute to the lawful exercise of the magistrate's power. In relation to his neighbors he should act in a spirit of social responsibility, willingly laying aside his desires when they conflicted with the community's goal of secular unanimity. A family member had to defer to the will of the male head of the house, but only in civil things, and the master's actions were subject to government review.

The interplay of obedience and restraint — a central though usually overlooked feature in Williams' description of order — must be noted when considering his perception of the nature of orderly society. His view of the need for order, with its necessary components of obedience and restraint, arose from his conception of man, and it is first to Williams' perception of human nature that we turn. We may then proceed to consider his views about the structure and function of government, his beliefs about the duties of governors, his conceptualization of the good citizen — including obligations of citizens to their governments and to their peers — and his sentiments about proper relationships between family members.

Roger Williams was no anarchist. From religious scruples he supported a religious anarchy, believing that only through religious toleration and a free market of beliefs could truth be found and spread. Nevertheless he saw the need for strong political and social institutions to protect men from themselves. Man was part of "Adams degenerate seed" and his own worst enemy. By nature rapacious, he sought worldly pleasures and glory. In New England, land hunger was the most obvious symptom of man's base nature, for even those possessing large tracts sought to acquire more from poorer neighbors. Anarchy or violence awaited those who lived beyond the sway

*Great pains in hunting th' Indians Wild,
And eke the English tame;
Both take, in woods and forrests thicke,
To get their precious game.
Pleasure and Profit, Honour false,
(The word's great Trinitie)
Drive all men through all wayes, all, times,
All weathers, wet and drie.
Pleasure and Profits Honour, sweet,
Eternall, sure and true,
Laid up in God, with equall paines;
Who seekes, who doth pursue?*

Key into the Language of America

of "settled government." Williams' theology, his observation of the English civil war, and experience told him what he needed to know about the nature of man. He was preoccupied with preserving civil authority from engrossing and contentious men who sought to create kingdoms of their own at the expense of the larger society. When warned that Rhode Island was in danger of losing its charter because of its reputation for disorder, he replied in effect that strife was to be expected of natural man and that under this particular government acts of wantonness occurred because of the heady draught of religious freedom available and the absence of war. For good order to exist, then, Williams found that not only government but also good citizenship was necessary.³

Human nature required civil and social institutions to maintain order. Yet, as shall be seen, Williams established high standards of behavior for his fellow men; in his letters of advice he wrote that obedience, mercy, humility, self-sacrifice, and love ought to characterize human relationships. In a sinful world peopled by evil men, men in society could act as if they were Christians, for Williams identified these types of conduct with Christianity. Compared to his Puritan neighbors he was more optimistic about human nature in his inconsistent way, particularly when he considered the power of love. He wrote

as if love could move the regenerate and reprobate alike while other New England thinkers contended that its affect was limited to the regenerate. Williams' idealistic attitude was particularly impractical in Providence, since no test was given to limit settlement to those of a doctrinal purity and uniformity who shared a common vision of the perfect society and the means to attain it.⁴

This idealistic theme in Williams' thought can in part be explained by his belief and that of his Puritan contemporaries that even natural men — the vast majority of people whom God did not choose to be His saints — were capable of good behavior, though for the wrong reason. Their motive was earthly reward. Christians were different because they acted out of "fear of God and love to man." Despite making this distinction Williams indiscriminately wrote to members of Parliament and townsmen alike as if all were capable of acting out of Christian love.⁵ Christian concerns differed from those of natural men. Christians in their prayers "chiefly eye heavenly things"; natural men "in their prayers most commonly respect earthly things, they cry and howl upon their Beds, for corn and wine: or at the best they respect but themselves, Etc. although it be in the pardon of their sins and saving of their Souls." Williams nevertheless appealed to all as if they were natural men seeking their material well-being: rewards went to those who practiced "Christian" virtues. By losing his pride, one gained security and prosperity. By denying himself his immediate desires, an individual enjoyed the prospect of a better society in which to live. It was good selflessly to leave public land undivided for the use of the destitute who might later come to Providence. This would promote peace and prosperity, for a watchful deity would reward the town for its altruism. His desire for consistency failed him at this point, for at other times he maintained that Christianity and prosperity were incompatible; a Christian who became prosperous would be deflected from his true purpose in life. In letters of advice, however, he did not make this clear. Rather he dangled the prospect of rewards to all who lived civilly, but by the rigor of his logic the more Christians prospered from following his advice "the further and further have they parted from God." He simultaneously expressed contrary notions about human nature: men were

base and motivated by self interest, yet they were also capable of proper behavior for the correct reasons. Williams consequently used both materialistic and moralistic arguments to promote harmonious and orderly social behavior; he was both a pragmatist and an idealist.⁶

Natural man, whatever his capabilities and imperfections, innately knew that there was a deity who would punish, that an afterlife existed, that men needed government, and that "Mariage [was] honorable." To Williams "Government and Order in Families Towns etc. is the Ordinance of ye most High . . . for ye peace and Good of Mankind." It is to his analysis of man in society that we now turn: the institutions of state and family — divinely sanctioned and naturally apparent — and obligations and rights of individuals in social relationships.⁷

Although government was ordained by God, Williams contended that its particular form be left for men to work out as best they could, in order to meet their particular needs. When needs changed, citizens had the right to change their form of government. He left to the "wisdom and prudence" of individual governments the opportunity to develop specific means to promote peace and order. Governments in general existed to protect the persons, reputations, and property of their inhabitants. He wrote specifically that the state had to uphold the fifth commandment which he believed required that one be obedient to superiors — both civil and familial — for preservation of order. Governments should promote peace, but Williams acknowledged that violence was justified when used to punish disturbers of civil peace, whether individual law breakers or foes of the state itself. Nevertheless he cautioned that a righteous war — a defensive war — should only be declared after careful consideration, since war-makers claimed that they only fought in self defense. In Williams' characteristic manner of combining practical with moral considerations, he further noted that the outcome of war was never certain, hasty action was sometimes regretted.⁸

The power of government was limited. It could not interfere with the relationship of an individual and his deity or regulate matters of worship, because the state was founded only by humans, who lacked authority in matters divine. God alone ruled His church. The state could deal with

We whose names are hereunder written, being desirous to inhabit in this Town of New Providence, do promise to subject ourselves in active or passive obedience to such orders and agreements as shall be made from time to time, by the greater number of the present householders of this Town, and such whom they shall admit into the same fellowship and privilege.

Letters of Roger Williams

individuals as members of religious groups when such groups were identified as being prone to disturb civil order by acts such as murder and sedition. Members of such seditious groups as the Roman Catholics could be disarmed and be required to wear distinctive clothing. In but one other area could government deal with citizens as church members; it could grant tax exemptions to members of preferred religious groups.⁹

Beyond those broad guidelines expressing his views about the responsibilities of government, Williams did not venture. He expressed no preference for any particular form of government. His own proposal for the government of Providence noted that his plan was temporary "until we hear further the kings royal pleasure concerning ourselves." Under this government inhabitants pledged to obey orders made by the majority of those given the franchise as heads of households. Providence adopted this plan. Williams experimented with the idea of exerting a veto right over admission of new inhabitants, but he apparently discarded it. Consequently propertied heads of households decided the town's policies and determined who would be admitted as citizens.¹⁰

Whatever the type of government, Williams wrote that the magistrate had specific responsibilities, and he seems to have assumed that the ruler led a virtuous life. The magistrate had to insure that justice, sobriety, and especially peace existed in the state. To promote these conditions he had to remove restrictions that "pinched" the consciences of his subjects. Williams required that the magistrate punish insubordination and quarreling as well as lasciviousness, theft, and murder. The ruler could use censorship, a legitimate tool to limit knowledge of immoral practices.¹¹ The ruler had also to serve as an intermediary between

his subjects, interceding on behalf of wives, children, and servants when these "inferiors" petitioned for relief from mistreatment. An ungodly ruler should seek to reconcile himself with God and thereby receive God's blessing for the nation. A godly ruler should humble himself, beg for mercy for himself and his subjects and "stir up [his] people to Repentance; but not . . . force the consciences of people to worship." Williams suggested that in time of crisis a ruler worship his deity as best he could and practice humility, mercy, and righteousness; at the same time he needed to exhort all his subjects to seek God and to request that God's people seek His intercession. While a magistrate was not to impose religious obligations, he was required to encourage the propagation of religion.¹²

Magistrates themselves, those fitted to rule, were "the *Wise* and the *Noble*." The poor by definition — even if spiritually superior — should not rule. If the poor took power Williams asked "if this be not to turne the *World* upside down . . . [to] pluck up the roots and foundations of all *common* societies in the world . . . and to reduce the World to the first chaos or confusion?"¹³

He also described attributes of a good citizen. Community interest, self-interest, and altruism together caused such an individual to obey the lawful rule of superiors and to act with restraint in relationships with inferiors and neighbors. Obedience, public spirit, love, mercy, self-sacrifice, toleration, and civility marked his behavior. The requirements of obedience and public spirit are particularly evident in Williams' allegory of the ship of state, in which the captain (the ruler) could not compel the crew (the citizens) to join in official religious observances of the ship. He could, however, command obedience in matters of

sailing, lest ship and mariners sink, and could also prohibit expression of anarchical ideas on board.

*If any should preach or write that there ought to be no commanders, or officers, because all are equal in Christ, therefore no masters nor officers, no laws nor orders, nor corrections nor punishments; I say, I never denied, but in such cases, whatever is pretended, the commander or commanders may judge, resist, compel and punish such transgressors according to their deserts and merits.*¹⁴

In another place he again employed the ship's image to show the interrelationship between individual and state.

*Now in a Ship there is the Whole, and there is each private Cabbin. A private good engageth our desires for the publike and raiseth cares and fears for the due prevention of common evils. Hence, not to study and not to endeavour the common good, and to exempt our selves from the sense of common evil, is a treacherous Baseness, a selfish Monopoly, a kinde of Tyranny, and tendeth to the destruction both of Cabin and Ship, that is, of private and publike safety.*¹⁵

Obedience was essential, self-preservation required it.

Williams felt compelled to specify that citizens were obligated to pay taxes. In a letter to Providence — divided into twenty enumerated headings — he "proved" again that government was both ordained by God and necessary, and thereby justified to levy taxes. He showed that freemen participated in making the tax in Rhode Island and should accept their own handiwork. Finally he noted that colony officials resolved that taxes be collected and that all had responsibility to support their governors.¹⁶

The Christian citizen had responsibilities of a special nature — to pray for the peace and prosperity of the civil authority, even if unbelievers controlled it and to pray for conversion of his peers. In civil things he had to be content with a lowly position: suffering was the fate of a true Christian, though Williams was not consistent on this issue. The Christian should follow Christ's example seeking to do good to all, especially to fellow Christians, but even to his enemies. He should also reproach evil wherever he found it — though perhaps causing temporary instability a

better society would emerge.¹⁷

Such was Williams' devotion to the concept of obedience to lawful civil authority that he chastised his fellow townsmen for preventing officials of Massachusetts Bay — the colony seeking to annex Rhode Island and install a brand of orthodoxy which Williams abhorred — from apprehending a suspect on territory which had been part of Providence, but which at the request of the inhabitants was under jurisdiction of the Bay Colony. He complained that his fellows had shown contempt for Bay officials, for the Protectorate then deciding the issue of jurisdiction, and for town officials not consulted about this matter. Their action scorned peace itself.¹⁸

Williams' support for civil obedience was even greater than he realized. While he contended that the state could not interfere with one's religious beliefs, he severely restricted the range in which one could exercise his free conscience. The individual must obey civil laws, those concerned with bodies and goods, as opposed to religious laws which dealt with matters of worship and soul. Put another way, the individual must obey laws of the second table of the Ten Commandments — commandments five through ten — which the state had authority to enforce; the individual was free to observe commandments of the first table — one through four — as his conscience dictated without interference from the state.¹⁹

The division between two types of law was complete in his own mind, but his readers may note their interpenetration. He proclaimed the right of soul liberty, but circumscribed it with a reading of the second table of the Decalogue which insured that one could not assault life, property, or due honor to superiors in the name of God. In theology, freedom of conscience did not apply to doctrines which threatened social order; it did not apply to religious practices which offended conventional morality. Williams acknowledged that he stood for "that grand cause of Truth and Freedom of Conscience," fully believing that there was one truth which in civil things each person understood by the light of nature and experience, by education, and by good examples.²⁰

He could not conceive that an act considered to be one of religious conscience could legitimately challenge the natural order of society; he felt that

Quakers should be punished for refusing to show due deference to their social superiors, even though they claimed that their behavior had a religious basis. Personal subjectivism had no place in Williams' perception of what constituted legitimate behavior. Ultimately, however, his standards of behavior provided the touchstone against which all behavior was judged. Quakers were guilty of insubordination for failing to render "that honor" to superiors, but Williams in his own view was not guilty of insubordination for challenging the authority of civil leaders of Massachusetts Bay, though they prosecuted him on this ground. He supported disfranchisement of Joshua Verin who prevented his wife from attending Williams' religious services on the ground that the wife was deprived of her right to soul liberty, though others contended that now the husband's right of religious conscience and the fifth commandment were violated. Williams was apparently satisfied that the man's conscience was in error and needed to be corrected — even those guided just by the light of nature knew that they ought not to restrain the right of worship. Like his Bay Colony persecutors he upheld the authority of civil power to punish an erring conscience.²¹

To civil authority a citizen did not owe absolute obedience. Williams acknowledged the right of resistance though he did not stress it. His major task in the new world, after all, was to preserve his wilderness community from collapsing before the blows of rebellious men. He, as well as numerous others, espoused a contractual theory of state which contained an implicit right of rebellion. Citizens, according to this theory, created the state to serve their interests; they had the right to bring it down if it violated their charge or resisted their efforts to change it to meet new circumstances. Citizens had a right to oppose a tyrant. He did not develop fully this argument except where civil authority threatened God's church. In the allegory of the "ship of church" which was the church of Christ, he advocated the right of rebellion when a ruler sought to direct church affairs: the "*Ships Company* [ought] to refuse to act in such a course, yea and (in case power be in their hands) resist and suppress these dangerous *practices* of the *Prince* and his followers and so save the ship." Williams did not countenance rebellion

against a ruler simply because the ruler was not a Christian if that ruler adequately performed his civil responsibilities. To be sure a follower of Christ stood on a higher spiritual plane than did a non-Christian ruler, but a saint was still obligated to obey lawful commands of a superior, though he be a sinner. Williams, then, was a political conservative among Puritans since he believed that religious convictions of a ruler ought not to be considered justification for rebellion. He stressed the need for obedience rather than for rebellion. God required obedience: to render unto Caesar his due — submission, respect, and taxes — was to obey God's will. In civil things, God's sword and Caesar's sword were one for promotion of "*Chastity, Humanity, etc.*"²²

In dealing with his own community, Williams sought other means than rebellion to foster orderly and responsible government. Providence was particularly vulnerable to political instability because it was settled by contentious people who drifted into the community after leaving other places where they refused to temper their religious convictions. Since rebellion or polarization of the community into political factions were imminent possibilities that could destroy Providence, Williams consequently sought to foster a spirit of consensus. As a basis for community action consensus was not unique to him. Michael Zuckerman has found the principle in use in colonial Massachusetts — in a society in which civil authority was weak, law and order could best be maintained through peer pressure; a decision reached after consultation and compromise by the political community could more readily be enforced because it reflected the popular will. Williams thus sought unanimity through arbitration and compromise; this procedure for governing inhibited development of an arbitrary rule based upon the whim of a simple political majority. He did not, however, shun the use of social pressure to encourage desirable activity. If efforts at reaching consensus failed, he accepted the practicality of permitting divergent elements to secede.²³

In civil affairs Williams believed that the intransigent pursuit of truth had to be tempered by a spirit of compromise. Proud of his efforts to achieve a sense of "oneness by arbitration," he pointed to his acceptance of a land settlement of which he had not fully approved. Though not its

author, Williams subscribed to an agreement of 1640 which attempted to codify the system of arbitration. According to this compact the townsmen would select a committee which had authority to demand that contending parties each choose arbiters to settle the issue in question. The committee had the power to appoint new arbiters if the original arbiters could not resolve the dispute. If litigants refused to select arbiters, the committee could make its own selection. Neither Williams nor the townsmen expected this procedure to arrive at a standard of absolute justice, rather they expected it to produce a decision with which the contending parties could live. Periodically Williams suggested that arbiters be chosen to settle specific differences and that new arbiters be appointed if an impasse developed. At other times he called for public forums and open discussion of blazing issues until a compromise could be reached. If an agreeable solution could not be found, he suggested that the issue be dropped rather than pursued at the risk of fostering discord.²⁴

Williams recognized the power of public opinion to influence behavior and seems to have perceived that shame was a factor in determining behavior. These perceptions about behavior are apparent in an agreement that he and others made in which they resolved to act with decorum while meeting on town business. Violators would be "publicly declared, branded [stigmatized] and noted upon Record" for their transgressions. On a more personal level a lonely Williams wrote a letter to the townsmen of Warwick and Provi-

dence in which he entreated them to persuade his wife to join him in London. If not attempting to instill a sense of shame in his wife, he at least sought to make her subject to the moral suasion of her peers.²⁵

If attempts to reach consensus failed, Williams recommended separation of the community as a last resort. Providence witnessed a perpetual battle over land ownership and rights of inhabitants. In an early dispute one faction seceded from the town, placing itself under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts Bay. Williams did not seek to prevent this and, as earlier noted, accepted the cession at least until the Protectorate ruled on the question. The town was later reunited, but tensions over land ownership and citizenship continued. To solve the problem he volunteered to assist in the purchase of land so that a new community could be formed by those, including himself, who supported a "homestead policy" more generous than that desired by a significant part of the town. Here, it seems, he tried to recreate his earlier act of separation from the Bay Colony. The plan failed. Williams never repudiated the principle of separation, but the clear direction of his advice pointed to the goal of consensus.²⁶

For the good of the whole, individuals had to repress their private interests. Compromises had to be negotiated for the general good. Nevertheless self-interest would be realized as the community survived and prospered. Beyond these crass considerations Williams wrote of a nobler bond which would hold society together, a bond of love. Good citizenship and good human relation-

But from this Grant, I infer, (as before hath been touched) that the Sovereigne, originall, and foundation of civill power lies in the people, (whom they must needs meane by the civill power distinct from the Government set up). And if so, that a People may erect and establish what forme of Government seemes to them most meete for their civill condition: It is evident that such Governments as are by them erected and established, have no more power, nor for no longer time, then the civill power or people consenting and agreeing shall betrust them with.

ships in general existed where love and humility flourished. These qualities would defeat pride, the cause of contention. Love was the complement of obedience to the law: "the summe and Substance of the *Law* is *love*, and he that walkes by the rule of love toward all *men* (*Magistrates* and *subjects*) he hath rightly attained unto what the *Law* aimes at." The strength of love was such that it could preserve "peace and Liberties" of society and was of such magnitude that it could bury most sources of discord into the "Grave of Oblivion."²⁷

Williams believed that mercy like love should temper human relationships. In addressing the townsmen of Providence, he expressed the customary attitude that the town had social obligations, but he advised that mercy should moderate these lawful responsibilities. The town government should overlook the legal stipulations of a will when those provisions created hardship for survivors; in this way the spirit of the will as well as justice and mercy would prevail. He recommended that the town take up financial responsibilities of supporting a "distracted" woman. This was only just: God was so merciful to the town that it should render mercy in gratitude. Williams appealed to a sense of altruism; he also appealed to self interest. As other of his suggestions indicated, social concern and community well-being were linked. Out of paternal concern he suggested that the town look more closely into affairs of an orphan under its care, for the orphan's fiance was of such a questionable background that most parents would be concerned if their daughters were betrothed to him. Townsmen should establish that the man was reformed and that he was not engaged to other women, "lest the maid and ourselves repent when misery hath befallen her, and a just reproof and charges befall ourselves." On a larger scale he requested that his fellow townsmen keep undivided parts of the common so that later destitute immigrants might receive land for their sustenance, for God would not overlook such mercy.²⁸

Williams contended that toleration of divergent religious beliefs and cultures was a means to promote civil and social order. Religious toleration not only had divine sanction but its results were beneficial as well: God forbade coercion of religious beliefs since the coming of Christ, and toleration promoted peace. Recent history proved

that rulers who sought to impose religious doctrines on their subjects only caused disruption of "Civility and all Order." By removing coercion from religion, Williams believed that violence would diminish; he realized, however, that social tensions would increase over the "matter of Religion and conscience." Members of families might dispute. Even wives who in civil affairs submitted to their spouses "with all wife like *submission* and affection" could challenge their husband's beliefs and seek to save them. Similarly servants might argue with masters, children with parents, and subjects with rulers. In this atmosphere of ferment Christ's doctrines would prosper. Providence was founded to permit the exercise of religious freedom, and Roger Williams approvingly recorded how the townsmen handled Joshua Verin, thus upholding the doctrine of toleration.²⁹

Toleration, he contended, should be extended to Jews. To be sure they were deicides and "their known Industry of inriching themselves in all places where they come" made them unattractive neighbors. Still they were God's chosen people and should be tolerated on this account. A policy of toleration, in addition, would atone for England's persecution of them and promote propagation of the Gospel among them. As suggested above, Roman Catholics should be tolerated as well, so long as they did not interfere with the legitimate operation of government.³⁰

Dealing with groups outside his society, Williams also counseled toleration. In the *Key* he emphasized the virtues of Indians, finding that they lived up to standards of behavior which Europeans regarded as civil and Christian but which he believed Europeans violated. His few criticisms were directed against their trading practices and their pride, which of course no human could escape. By the time he wrote *George Fox*, he described the attributes of Indians only to shame his countrymen into civil behavior by admonishing them that even Indians behaved better than did they. Eventually he wrote that Indians would benefit from adopting European civilization. He felt that they would be more likely to find Christ at this "higher" level of development. Williams' attitudes toward Native Americans then became increasingly hostile. Even with this change of attitude, however, he did not seek to impose English social and religious standards on them: at the

Awáffish
 Máttapsh yóteg
 Tocketúnnawem
 Keén nétop?
 Peeyàush nétop
 Péтитеes
 Kunnúnni
 Kunnúnous
 Taubot mequaun
 namêan
 Taûbotneanawáyeaun
 Taûbotne aunanamêan

Warme you.
 Sit by the fire.
 What say you?
 It is you friend.
 Come hither friend.
 Come in.
 Have you seene me?
 I have seen you.
 I thank you for your
 kind remembrance.
 I thank you.
 I thank you for your love.

Key into the Language of America

request of Narragansett Indians he actively supported their petition to the Protectorate "that they might not be forced from their religion." He recognized the legitimacy of Native American cultures, as is evident in his land transactions with Indians. He acknowledged their right to the land. In dealing with them he did not knowingly take advantage of them: he treated only with legitimate sachems and did not resort to unscrupulous tactics to acquire land. He, indeed, vigorously protested when some of his neighbors through misrepresentation sought to defraud neighboring Indians of land not only for personal gain but for the benefit of Providence as well. In an angry letter to Massachusetts Williams affirmed his belief in the legitimacy of Indian government as he attacked the efforts of Nipmuc Indians to escape their tributary status to Narragansett Indians by placing themselves under the jurisdiction of the Bay Colony; they then could have the English void their position of subordination. Williams wrote to the Bay government in support of Narragansetts' claims of supremacy and scolded it for being part of an attempt to overthrow a legitimate government: "I abhor most of their customs; I know they are barbarous. I respect not one party more than the other, but I desire to witness truth; and as I desire to witness against oppression, so, also against the slighting of civil, yea, of barbar-

ous order and government, as respecting every shadow of God's gracious appointment." Though he concluded Indians were barbarous, their institutions came from God and served His purpose of bringing order and peace: the first Americans and their way of life should be tolerated.³¹

Williams expected people in social relationships to exhibit decorous conduct. For him a vocal salutation and a kiss were proper means of respectful greeting, rather than the Quaker practice of silence and the "New Way of feeling and grabbling the hand." More importantly one must acknowledge by gesture and word his respect for social betters. Scripture commanded this, and the "Light of Barbarous Nature" revealed it, for even Indians showed reverence to their rulers. He demanded that appropriate titles be applied to one's associates as a sign of respect. In his letters he carefully addressed recipients according to their stations in life. Failure to grant a person his proper due was a sign of pride; the remedy was "moderate restraint and punishing of these incivilities (though pretending Conscience) [which] is as far from Persecution (properly so called) as that it is a Duty and command of God unto all mankinde, first in Families, and thence into all mankinde Societies." Proper dress was important, according to him, and use of "Ornaments of Garment" justified because it was part of the variety

of God's world and should instill admiration for God's creation. Dress of itself was necessary for obvious but unexpressed reasons which are apparent in Williams' complaint that Quakers were guilty of "stripping stark naked their Men and Women and Maidens and passing along in public places and Streets unto the *Assemblies* of Men and *Youths*." Acts of modesty, refinement, and submission were aids for the maintenance of order. They continually reminded one of his just place in society and checked lascivious impulses. Civil conduct was universal obligation, even among natural men, and standards for it were based on English manners.³²

One's family was a miniature of the state in Williams' view. Obligations which one had to the state and behavior each person in the state owed to his fellows should also characterize relationships within the family. Marriage was a voluntary institution in which the husband had no right to coerce his wife to change her conscience. A believing husband, however, ought to encourage his wife to convert and save her soul; the wife had the same opportunity. Williams accepted divorce as a remedy when discord over religious conscience became unbearable.³³

Williams believed that "the Sex of Women is more filled and framed by God for a *Covering*, for *Retiredness* and keeping at home and for *Modesty* and *Bashfulness*." Women had the duty to instruct children, to educate other women — especially younger ones — if called outside the home, and to witness for the truth when persecuted. Scripture, nature, and experience proved that women were weaker vessels. Though God occasionally set such rulers as Queen Elizabeth over men or gave certain women special religious powers, these were exceptions and did not upset the natural order in which women were not fit to

engage in such "Manly Actions and Employment" as preaching. A wife should support her husband; Williams expressed no disapproval when he reported that Joshua Verin's wife willingly accompanied her husband into exile. Regarding his own wife's freedom, he noted that he had written to her advising her of the dangers involved but requesting that she join him in England. She did not come. Several months later he wrote to his townsmen seeking their intercession with her since the dangers of passage recently had been mitigated. As for children, he said they should be obedient to their parents and noted hearing Quaker children addressing their parents by first name and accusing them of lying: such children deserved to be severely punished. Williams' family scheme, then, was patriarchal. The wife was of limited capacity in civil things, but in matters of the soul she was her husband's equal. Patriarchy was not the same as absolutism, however, since inferiors within the family could appeal to the state for relief of grievances.³⁴

Among Puritans the family was felt to include servants. Williams did not have much to say about indentured servants, though he did consider putting out his daughter to a neighbor. He did briefly consider the nature of involuntary servitude, a condition which he described in terms of service rather than in terms of caste. In his only extended commentary on the matter he observed that slavery was a solution for the problem of Indian war captives. He gained possession of an Indian boy taken during the Pequot War. He noted that scripture was not clear on the matter, but if punishment rather than death was the captive's lot, then perpetual slavery might be suitable. Still, since the purpose of captivity was to deprive the enemy of all comfort, once peace was restored the captive might be freed after having been duly disciplined

*Families are the foundations of a government,
for what is a Commonweale, but a Common-
weale of Families agreeing to live together for
common good?*

and trained to work. Exemplifying this idea he helped draft a schedule which established the length of time that captives of various ages must serve. After King Philip's War he served on committees which arranged for the dispersal of the share of captives which belonged to Providence, and shared in the profit of the sale. Masters, as might be expected, did not have absolute authority over their charges. Mercy ought to characterize their rule as a sign of God's mercy. Further, he believed that this type of relationship should have social utility: speaking of the captive he desired, he wrote "I shall endeavor his good and the common, in him." Williams had nothing to say about the servitude of Africans. Indirectly he revealed some acquaintance with the issue when he explained the defection of an individual from the camp of his political opponents as the result of their treating him "as a slave or neger." There is no reason to suppose that he would suspend in this relationship the restraint which he felt should characterize behavior of social superiors in other relationships.³⁵

With the exceptions of Williams' view of church and state separation, his belief in religious toleration — however much circumscribed — and his insistence on the legitimacy of non-English institutions, few men of wealth and status in either Old or New England would find fault with his position on the nature of political and social order in the areas most likely to affect life in the workaday world. In a government properly framed to protect people from their baser actions, the subject owed the magistrate — a man of high social standing — due respect and obedience. The magistrate in turn was obligated to protect the lives, estates, and reputations of subjects, to mediate differences between subjects, and to promote religious toleration. He was threatened by the specter of rebellion if he did not live up to his civil obligations. An individual owed his neighbor service as a brother's keeper. Love motivated him to respond to the needs of his neighbor, and the quest for unanimity in civil things guided his actions. He accepted the natural hierarchy found in society and yielded proper deference to his superiors. A member of a family lived in a patriarchal unit governed by the husband. This magistrate of the family was required to govern according to the dictates of mercy and was accountable

to civil authority for his acts. He had no legitimate control over the spiritual affairs of his family. Obedience and restraint were the keys to the successful interaction of an individual with his government, his peers, and his family. Williams' yearning for patriarchal and hierarchical society was successfully realized where subjects obeyed the lawful commands of magistrates and masters and where these governors exercised their authority within the limits set by God and man.

1 Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: Church and State* (New York, 1967) 5. Students of Williams in this century have been of two minds about him. Progressive historians depicted him as a wilderness democrat and a secular politician who promoted development of the secular state and freedom of conscience, and who believed in the equality of man. He was, then, a seventeenth-century edition of the progressives' Thomas Jefferson. Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1927) 1: 62-75; James Ernst, *Political Thought of Roger Williams* (New York, 1929); and Samuel Brockunier, *Irrepressible Democrat Roger Williams* (New York, 1940) are within the progressive stream.

More recent scholars portray Williams as heir of Calvin rather than an intellectual progenitor of Jefferson. His attitudes, they conclude, were shaped by religious convictions: his perception of the nature of man was that of his Puritan contemporaries. Works which develop this theme include Mauro Calamandrei, "Neglected Aspects of Roger Williams' Thought," *Church History* 21 (1952) 239-56; Perry Miller, *Roger Williams, His Contribution to American Tradition* (New York, 1953); Alan Simpson, "How Democratic was Roger Williams?" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 13 (1956) 53-69; Morgan's *Williams*; and John Garrett, *Roger Williams: Witness Beyond Christendom* (New York, 1970). My essay supports recent historians by more completely focusing on Williams' attitudes about the nature of government and characteristics of proper social relationships.

2 Most of Roger Williams' surviving writings are printed in the Russell and Russell reissue (New York, 1963) of the Narragansett Club publication, *Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, with an additional volume of tracts which the nineteenth-century editors did not print. Contents of the volumes I have used: v. 1, James H. Trumbull, ed., *Key into the Language of America* (orig. pub. London, 1643); v. 3, Samuel L. Caldwell, ed., *Bloody Tenent of Persecution* (orig. pub. London, 1644); v. 4, Samuel L. Caldwell, ed., *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody* (orig. pub. London,

- 1652); v. 5, J. Lewis Diman, ed., *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes* (orig. pub. Boston, 1676); v. 6, John R. Bartlett, ed., *Letters of Roger Williams*; v. 7, Perry Miller, ed., *Christerings make Not Christians* (orig. pub. London, 1645); *Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health* (orig. pub. London, 1652); *Fourth Paper Presented by Maior Butler* (orig. pub. London, 1652); *Hireling Ministry None of Christs* (orig. pub. London, 1652); *Examiner defended In a Fair and Sober Manner* (orig. pub. London, 1652). In citing these sources my procedure is to use a short title of the work and give the page number.
- 3 *Hireling Ministry*, 150; *Bloody Tenent*, 398; to John Winthrop, July 1637, *Letters*, 35; *Key*, 253; to John Winthrop, May 28, 1664, *Letters*, 319; to Major Mason, June 22, 1670, *Letters*, 342-43; Town of Providence (actually Roger Williams) to Sir Henry Vane, August 27, 1654, *Letters*, 267-68.
 - 4 To Mason, *Letters*, 344. For the Puritan conception of love see Stephen Foster, *Their Solitary Way* (New Haven, 1971), 41-64.
 - 5 Edmund S. Morgan, *Puritan Family*, rev. ed. (New York, 1966) 1-3; *Bloody Tenent*, 246, 399.
 - 6 *Experiments*, 76; to Providence, n.d., *Letters*, 318; *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, 404.
 - 7 To Providence, June 5, 1681, *Early Records Town of Providence*, 21v. (Providence, 1892-1915) 15: 219.
 - 8 *Bloody Tenent*, 249-250, 171, 152, 420; to General Court of Massachusetts Bay, October 5, 1654, *Letters*, 271-72.
 - 9 *Bloody Tenent*, 249-250, 252; *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, 313-14.
 - 10 To John Winthrop [1636 or 1637] *Letters*, 5-6.
 - 11 *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, 365; To Providence, January 1655, *Letters*, 279; *Hireling Ministry*, 178; *Bloody Tenent*, 108-109; *Examiner*, 253.
 - 12 *Bloody Tenent*, 388-89, 418-19, 5; *Examiner*, 230.
 - 13 *Bloody Tenent*, 415.
 - 14 To Providence, *Letters*, 279.
 - 15 *Examiner*, 203-04.
 - 16 *Early Records* 15: 219-20.
 - 17 *Bloody Tenent*, 237; *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, 48; *Experiments*, 114, 97.
 - 18 To Arthur Venner, February 24, 1654 *Proceedings Rhode Island Historical Society* (1883-1884) 79-81.
 - 19 *Bloody Tenent*, 252-54, 152.
 - 20 To Providence [August 1654] *Letters*, 264; *George Fox*, 211, 360, 443; *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, 365.
 - 21 *George Fox*, 306. For a short summary of the details behind Williams' expulsion from Massachusetts see Irwin H. Polishook, ed., *Roger Williams, John Cotton and Religious Freedom* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967). To John Winthrop, May 22, 1638, *Letters*, 96; James K. Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop's Journal*, 2 v. (New York, 1908) 1: 286-87; *Bloody Tenent*, 252 margin.
 - 22 *Bloody Tenent*, 249-50, 420, 378-80; *Examiner*, 232, 243. T.H. Breen, *Character of the Good Ruler, A Study of Puritan Political ideas in New England, 1630-1730* (New Haven, 1970) 43-47.
 - 23 Zuckerman, *Peacable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970).
 - 24 To commissioners and also inquest or jury, November 17, 1677, Sydney S. Rider, ed., *Rhode Island Historical Tracts* 14 (1881) 58; *Early Records* 15: 2-5, 12; *Letters*, 207, 265.
 - 25 *Early Records* 15: 12; *Letters*, 255-56. See John Demos, *Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970) for a discussion of the use of shame in a society contemporary with Williams' Providence. New England, of course, had no monopoly on the use of shame for public utility. In Old England public humiliation was a form of punishment according to Lawrence Stone's *Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1530-1641* (Oxford, 1965) 42. John Calvin noted that shame was a restraining force on behavior in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Ford L. Battles, trans. (Philadelphia, 1960) 292.
 - 26 To John Winthrop, jr. (apparently a copy of a letter sent to Providence) October 27, 1660, *Letters*, 314-15.
 - 27 *Letters*, 265; *Bloody Tenent*, 152; *Early Records* 15: 11-12.
 - 28 *Letters*, 207-09, 318.
 - 29 *Bloody Tenent*, 3; *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, 207; *Examiner*, 211-12, 222-24; to John Winthrop, May 22, 1638, *Letters*, 96; *Winthrop, Journal*, 1: 286-87.
 - 30 *Fourth Paper Presented by Maior Butler*, 136-37.
 - 31 *Key*, 96, 98-99, 225, 243, 296; *George Fox*, 211; *Letters*, 270, 276, 327; *Winthrop, Journal*, 1: 116. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston, 1854) 4 (pt. 2): 358.
 - 32 *George Fox*, 211-12, 307, 403, 59; *Key*, 97-98, 143.
 - 33 *Bloody Tenent*, 242.
 - 34 *George Fox*, 62, 360-63, 211; *Letters*, 237, 255; *Key*, 118; *Bloody Tenent*, 389.
 - 35 *Letters*, 35, 54, 189. *Early Records* 8: 12-13; 15: 154. *Tracts*, 34.

Roger Williams' Most Persistent Metaphor

by Bradford F. Swan (1907-1976)*

One of the most notable aspects of Roger Williams' literary style is his use of what one could describe as seagoing or nautical metaphors. It is easy enough to ascribe this to his actual experiences after his first transatlantic crossing on the ship *Lyon* in 1630, for we know he was an intelligent man, with a strong sense of intellectual curiosity about things and men and their ways whenever he came in contact with something which was new to him, witness his studying the language and customs of the Indians. We can say that his fondness for such phrases was increased by later ocean crossings and life on Narragansett Bay.

He made five trips across the Atlantic in his lifetime and they must have been tedious experiences the boredom of which he probably relieved by talking with sailors and those on the quarterdeck charged with responsibility for navigation and with giving orders for handling the ship. When he had settled at Providence he had some sort of vessel which he called a canoe but which seems to have used sails. In this he traveled back and forth between Providence and his trading post at Co-cumscussoc, and this would certainly have familiarized him with nautical terms used in small boat handling. At various times Williams also owned a shallop and/or a pinnace, for he refers to these vessels on several occasions as being used to transport as many as fifty Indians at a time. Other

references to them would indicate that when he was in the colony he used them constantly on Narragansett Bay.

No one could have lived on the Bay in those years without learning how sailors talked, and such friends of his as John Throckmorton constantly sailed these coastal waters, carrying Williams' messages and letters, as well as his trade goods.

But none of this adult experience explains two aspects of Williams' use of seagoing terms. Why did he use such literary devices in the earliest letters of his which have survived? His second letter to Lady Joan Barrington — written from Otes in 1629 before he sailed for America — launches his message with just such a figure:

"Madame, I am forced (with the seaman) for want of a full gale to make use of a side wind and salute your Ladyship by another, being for a time shut out myself."

Why does he resort to nautical speech when he wants to put across to his readers a thought or a philosophical concept which in other phrases might seem quite esoteric? When he returned from England in August 1654 and found the colony in a state of political chaos, he wrote to his fellow townsmen:

"Well-beloved friends and neighbors, I am like a man in a great fog. I know not well how to steer. I fear to run upon the rocks at home, hav-

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ing had trials abroad. I fear to run quite backward, as men in a mist do, and undo all that I have been a long time undoing myself to do."¹

The most striking example of this literary device is the famous letter in which he uses the parable of the ship to make clear how he differentiates between freedom of conscience in religious matters and using it to promote civic anarchy:

There goes many a ship to sea, with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common, and is a true picture of a commonwealth, or a human combination or society. It hath fallen out sometimes, that both papists and protestants, Jews and Turks, may be embarked in one ship; upon which supposal I affirm, that all the liberty of conscience, that ever I pleaded for, turns upon these two hinges — that none of the papists, protestants, Jews, or Turks, be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship, nor compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any. I further add, that I never denied, that notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command the ship's course, yea, and also command that justice, peace and sobriety, be kept and practiced, both among the seamen and all the passengers. If any of the seamen refuse to perform their services, or passengers to pay their freight; if any refuse to help, in person or purse, towards the common charges or defence; if any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship, concerning their common peace or preservation; if any shall mutiny and rise up against their commanders and officers; if any should preach or write that there ought to be no commanders or officers, because all are equal in Christ, therefore no masters nor officers, no laws nor orders, nor corrections nor punishments; — I say, I never denied, but in such cases, whatever is pretended, the commander or commanders may judge, resist, compel and punish such transgressors, according to their deserts and merits. This if seriously and honestly minded, may, if it so please the Father of lights, let in some light to such as willingly shut not their eyes.

*I remain studious of your common peace and liberty.*²

Reverend J. Lewis Diman points out Williams' frequent use of such metaphors:

"A feature which deserves attention is the mar-

ked preference, shown in all his writings, for metaphors drawn from his experience of sea life. Thus in addressing the King, he speaks of Charles V. as having his 'Trick at Helm;' he tells Baxter and Owen 'that many able and honest Sea-men differ in their Reckonings;' he terms the declaration of the Quakers 'an English Flag in an Enemies Bottome;' in his argument he was 'glad to hale his Tacks and Bolings close home, and now and then loof up into the wind;' of Edmundson he says, 'upon a sudden, a violent, tumultuous, disorderly Wind filled all his sails;' to one of Fox's answers he rejoins, 'may not half an eye see what a simple Sophister this is, to make such Yaws as not to come near the Ships Course and point in hand.' These instances show how much force should be attached to the phrase 'steered my course,' in proof of the theory that Roger Williams came from Salem to Seekonk by water."³ Several biographers of Williams have attempted to find in the phrase "steered my course" evidence that Williams fled from Massachusetts Bay by sea. It is generally held by more recent historians that he fled by land.

Ola Elizabeth Winslow, a recent biographer, offers as an explanation for Williams' use of nautical metaphors his boyhood years in Smithfield, close to London docks:

"Perhaps better still for teasing a boy's imagination and inviting his thought to the unknown parts of the enlarging seventeenth century world, were the docks with their forest of tall masts, their sailor talk of ships and shipping, their cargoes from far places. All this was almost within shouting distance of the Williams home, to add a dimension to a boy's thinking and to engage his dreams. Roger Williams' most famous sentence begins, 'There goes many a ship to sea.' The sea figures in everything he wrote, and whenever his thought left the ground and sought imagery to suit, the sea answered his need. It is his most persistent metaphor. Why not? In later life he crossed the Atlantic five times in voyages of many weeks and long before one could be quite casual about such a crossing. The persistence of the image probably owed more, however, to the fact that his boyhood years in Smithfield were lived close to 'the River,' white with its hundreds of swans, and the docks to which it led. For him as for other London boys who grew up on the fringe of

the Elizabethan era, the New World began at London docks, and as he watched ship after ship disappear over the far horizon, the Smithfield area henceforth claimed only part of him."⁴

Williams had an older brother Sydrach, "a Turkey merchant," meaning presumably a trader with the Near East. He may have picked up some sea-going talk from him. No effort has been made in so brief an essay to compile a list of all Williams' sea-going metaphors. As Diman notes, it may be dangerous for the historian to take these figures of speech literally. What does Williams mean, writing to John Winthrop, Jr., in December 1648, about Jonathan Brewster's troubles?

"He was intended for Virginia; his creditors in the Bay came to Portsmouth and *unhung his rudder* (italics mine), carried him to the Bay where he was forced to make over all house, land, cattle and part withal to his chest." Does Williams mean that the Bay men actually stole Brewster's rudder, or is it just his way of saying that

they prevented Brewster from sailing?

At times it is difficult to decide whether Williams wanted to be taken literally, or whether he was merely trying to achieve a colorful figure of speech. Two cases that raise the question are that use of "steered my course" and this of "unhung his rudder." It is my conclusion that as a general rule we should accept these nautical phrases not literally but figuratively.

1 John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Letters of Roger Williams 1632-1682* (Providence, 1874) *Publications of Narragansett Club* 6:262.

2 Bartlett, 278-279.

3 Roger Williams, *George Fox Digg'd out of His Burrows*, ed. by Rev. J. Lewis Diman (Providence, 1872) *Publications of Narragansett Club* 5:lvii.

4 Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Master Roger Williams* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 21.



From the Collections

To end this issue, the selection from the Graphics Collection focuses on the carte de visite, an ingenious French contrivance of the 1850s which became popular in America during the 1860s. The process using a multilens camera produced multiple images of the subject on a single negative which was contact printed, the prints cut apart, and mounted on a format the size of a calling card, approximately 2½ x 4 inches. This mass production of photographs made the carte de visite an inexpensive acquisition and people flocked to the photographer's studio to pose for the camera. Friends exchanged cartes as they did visiting cards and collected them in albums, a popular feature of the Victorian parlor. Portraiture was the most common subject, though included in this grouping are a model fire engine and view of a steamboat at dock. The cartes reproduced here are actual size and the sitters remain anonymous, to let the images speak for themselves — a lap dog among furs, the gleam of a hat, a young boy's hoop.







