

Two Dissenters Demanding Freedom of Religion

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Why was Anne Hutchinson tried by both the General Court of Massachusetts Bay and the Boston Puritan Church?
2. What happened to those who followed Hutchinson's beliefs and ideas?
3. What would you say was Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams' most important contribution to American History?

Puritans

- They considered themselves to be true believers who wanted to reform or purify the Anglican Church, which was the official church of England.
 - a) The church was backed up by the English government who would silence Puritans by imprisoning them or kicking them out of the country.
- John Winthrop, a Puritan, left England in 1630 to begin Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- The Puritan view was: “ Although leading a moral life was an important sign of salvation, God alone would make the final choice.”

The “Opinionists”

- Hutchinson left England and fled to Massachusetts with family and they were admitted to the Boston Puritan Church.
- Having a busy life led her to hold prayer meetings in her home. What started off as a small meetings that later became bigger.
- Hutchinson's religious idea was that the only true sign of being saved was the presence of God's spirit within one.
 - a) She claimed that Puritan Ministers lacked spirit of god
 - b) Stated Puritans tricked people by preaching false belief that obeying moral law would lead them to salvation.
- The “opinionists” was the name given to Hutchinson's followers.

Trial Day 1

- John Winthrop, a Puritan, wanted to stop Hutchinson because she claimed that they were unable to preach the true word of God.
- November 7, 1637, Hutchinson was accused of seducing honest persons with false opinions during her prayer meetings.

Trial Day 2

- During her testimony, she claimed that her opinions came directly from God and He had revealed to her what to believe
- Everyone present directed her as crazy and “deluded by the devil”.
- She was guilty of slandering* the ministers and dishonoring the government.

- Banished* from out of jurisdiction*
 - a) From her followers, 80 were punished. They lost the right to vote, had to pay a fine, and some were banished with her.
- She was excommunicated for not changing her religious beliefs by the church and banished by the government. So, she made her way to Rhode Island in March 1638, then to Long Island which was north of present day New York.
- She and all but one member of her family was killed by Indians. Puritans back in Boston were satisfied.

Roger Williams

- He founded Rhode Island and established a government that guaranteed religious freedom.
- Williams lived in Plymouth for three years and was an assistant in the Ministry to Mr. Ralf Smith. He later was moved to Salem in 1634 for expressing many of his own opinions.
- He asked for dismissal to the Church of Salem and asked for it to be separated from the Churches of Old and New- England.
 - a) He stopped showing up to church assemblies and withdrew all private religious communion to profess his separation from them as Antichristian.
 - b) He stopped praying and giving thanks at meals with his family, because they attended church assemblies.
- The Magistrates sentenced banishment against him out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for starting division and disturbance.
- He left to Providence after jurisdiction and many members of the Church of Salem followed.
- His principal was: “Everyone should have the liberty to worship God according to the light of their own consciences.”

Excommunicated* A banishment, or punishment, that’s handed out by a church when one of its members breaks an important church rule.

Banish* Send (someone) away from a country or place as an official punishment.

Jurisdiction* An authorized law given to a court to try cases and have an official power to make legal decisions and judgment.

Slander* Action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person’s reputation.