

Establishing Order in a New Society



What Kind of Authority is Necessary for Survival?

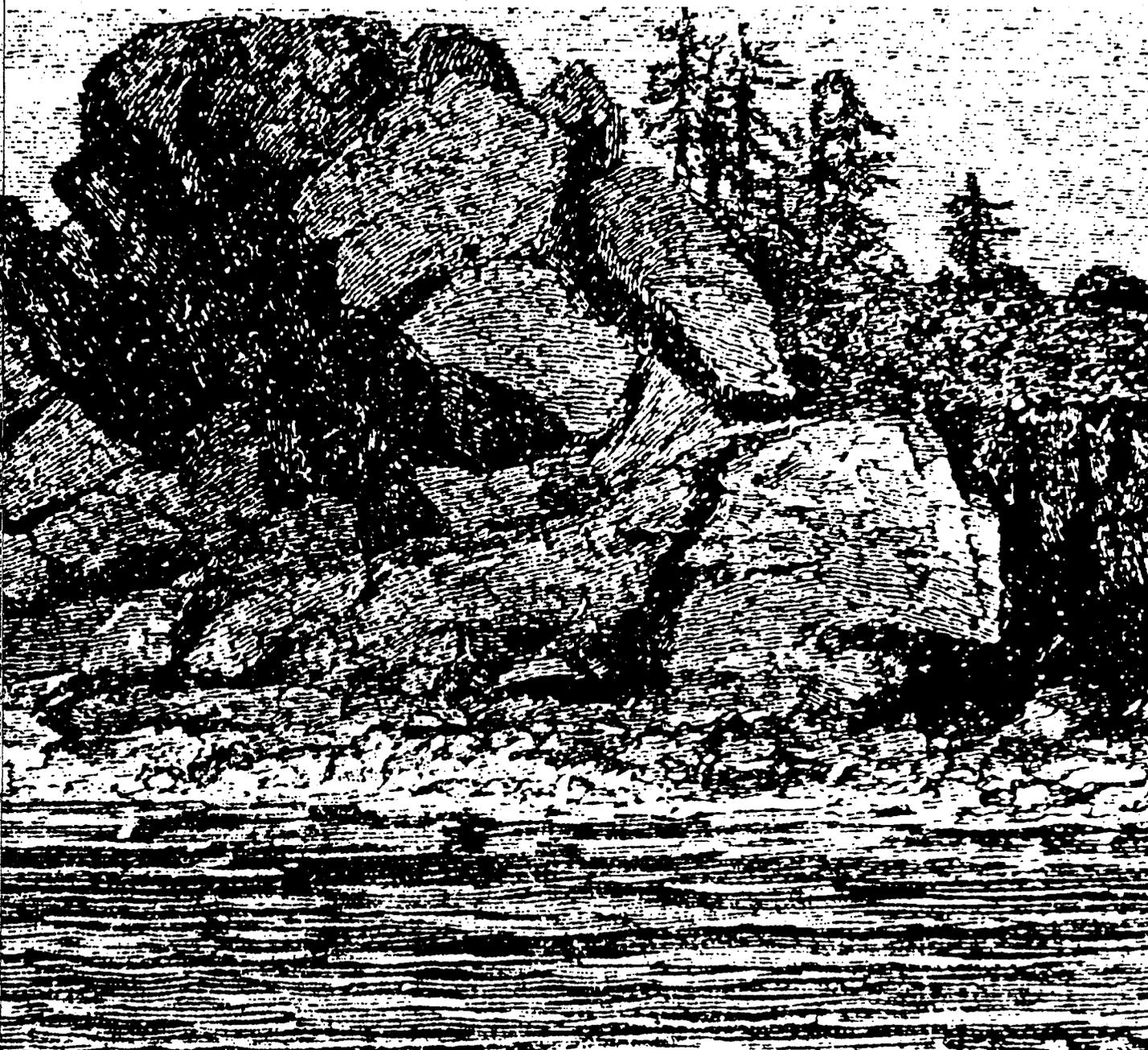
In the wilderness

After three months on the Atlantic the four hundred men, women and children who had journeyed with John Winthrop on the ship *Arbella* landed at Salem in New England.¹ Salem was a community on the edge of a wilderness, an assortment of huts, hovels and canvas booths, set in a very small clearing surrounded by virgin forest. It had been an advance settlement of the Winthrop fleet. But its appearance betrayed the difficulties of establishing a colony in a raw new world. Winthrop and his companions could see that great spiritual faith and physical energy would be needed to hold their own in this setting. Faith they had, but people were exhausted from the sea voyage. It was summer, and the heat, hotter than England's, was hard to bear. Older settlers told of a long and cold winter ahead.

It was up to Winthrop to stiffen the determination of the colonists. Even the personal loss of his son Henry, who drowned a few days after their arrival, did not make Winthrop despair. He set about the task of surviving in the wilderness.

Winthrop knew that they had to get settled and collect food for the first winter. He looked over the coast south of Salem and decided that the banks of the Charles River were a better place for a community. It could be defended against Indians and had enough unforested land for farming. While the colonists erected huts, dug-outs or other crude forms of housing for the settlement they called Charlestown, Winthrop concerned himself with the problem of food.







He sent a letter and money to his son John through Captain William Pierce of the *Lyon*, asking him to send provisions from old England. He also sent men up and down the coast to buy any corn other settlers or Indians were prepared to sell.

Still the land took its toll. Disease hit the new settlement because of poor water supplies. Winthrop decided to abandon the idea of gathering all settlers together in one town. And so the company of men, women and children spread out in small groups round the Charles River. Gradually the initial fevers were checked. When winter arrived, the ill-fed, ill-housed and ill-clad men and women suffered still more from frost-bite, malnutrition, and fires. Two hundred died the first winter. In February when their supplies were all but gone and starvation was in sight, the *Lyon* sailed into Boston harbor bringing provisions and encouragement to the survivors.

The problem of the first year was one of survival. After this beginning the colonists began to farm and build houses, and due to Winthrop's leadership, to prosper. Although some of the original settlers returned home, more and more arrived each year, fleeing from the England of Charles and Laud. As the colony grew it faced different questions and problems: questions about the rights and duties of the individual and of the government, where the line should be drawn between public and private decisions, how power should be divided between the magistrates or rulers and the people, what laws should be made and by whom? In a sense the survival of the Massachusetts Bay Colony depended on the way

these questions were answered and John Winthrop, as governor, was acutely conscious of his role in preserving the colony. Winthrop wrote that it was the problem of the authority of the magistrates and the liberty of the people which most troubled the community in its early years.

What kind of government and authority would be necessary for survival? What kind of government and authority would be necessary to achieve the goals for which these Puritans had left England?



Whereas the King James the first by Letters Patent under the Great Seal of Great Brittain bearing date the 25th day of March last past in the third year of our said Majesties said Majesty King James the first did give and granted unto the

King of England Scotland France and Ireland
 to all his highnes his highnes of blessed memory in the
 English date given and granted unto the
 England in America and to their Successors a
 firm the Equinoctiall line to forty eight degrees
 Landes from Sea to Sea together with all
 Mines of Gold and Silver and other Mines and
 Francheises and privileges both within the
 said the said Islands or any the promised
 Christian Prince or State nor within the
 direct of his loving Subject in the South Sea

hereditament and p'termit Seas waters fishing with all and all manner
 all and singular their appurtenances and every parte and parcel thereof
 them the said Countrell and their Successors and Assignes for ever. To be
 County of Kent in free and common Soveraigne and not in Capite nor by Knight
 of Gold and Silver which should from tyme to tyme and at all times then after
 or within any parte or parcel thereof for or in respect of all and all manner of
 heires and successors. And in and by the said Letters Patent amongst sundry
 said Countrell established at Plymouth in the County of Devon for the planting
 bearing date the Twentieth day of March last past in the third yeare of our
 Thomas Southcott John Humfrey John Ludlow and Symon Widdowes the
 and extended betwene a greate River there remaining called Monomack alias
 called Massachusetts alias Massachusetts Bay And also all and singular those Land
 Landes here or of any or partie thereof And also all and singular the
 the Southermost parte of the said Bay called Massachusetts alias Mattabon
 of three English Miles to the Northward of the said River called Monomack
 lying within the lymitt aforesaid North and South in latitude and breadth
 Atlantick and Western Sea and Ocean on the East parte to the South Sea on the
 waters fishing and hereditament whatsoever lying within the said bound

The mystery of the missing words

The decision of English Puritans to go to America was part of a desperate move to bring about reform in the Church of England. Since the days of Elizabeth I, Puritans had hoped to simplify church ritual and reduce the power of bishops in the church. In order to get their way, they tried to win control of the government. By the 1620's the House of Commons of

Parliament was largely made up of Puritans. But when Charles I closed Parliament in March 1629, he closed the door to the Puritan hope of reformation. Indeed, one reason he dissolved Parliament was to squelch Puritan efforts for change.

A week before Charles I dissolved Parliament, a group of Puritans managed to get a charter for a grant of land in New England in the name

of meeting were missing. Other charters granted by the King had named the place of meeting of the Company. But the Puritans knew that as long as the Company held its meetings in London, it would be under the scrutiny of the King, his ministers and his Archbishop.

The members of the Massachusetts Bay Company made a daring proposal. Their place of meeting would be New England. In fact, they would take the Charter with them to America instead of keeping it in London!

By removing the Charter and the Company to New England, the Massachusetts Bay Company would remove the colony from the immediate control of the King. In New England the Company could become a self-governing colony with freedom to enforce the laws of God as it saw fit. It could create the kind of society God wanted: "a city on a hill," a model of a Puritan state for all the world to see.

On October 29, 1629, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Company, the title of the meeting of the Company members, chose John Winthrop for governor. *So it is*, he wrote his wife Margaret, *that [it] hath pleased the Lord to call me to a further trust in this business of the plantation.*² And so John Winthrop became the governor of a colony instead of the governor of a trading company.

The one thousand men and women who agreed with Winthrop to leave England were mostly Puritans and were painfully aware that they were walking away from a difficult situation. Although they convinced themselves that

they were acting in behalf of the Puritans they left behind, they knew, too, that many Puritans would call them deserters—deserters not only from dangers of the state but deserters from the Church of England they had hoped to purify, as well. Some would say they were really separatists who had rejected the Church of England completely and were leaving England to do in America as they pleased.

But the Puritan people and ministers who joined Winthrop to make the voyage to America loudly protested that they were not separatists. One Puritan who left England earlier had said:

*We do not go to New England as separatists from the Church of England; though we cannot but separate from the corruption in it; but we go to practice the positive part of Church reformation, and propagate the gospel in America.*³

By leaving England the Puritans did not believe they were turning their backs on the Church of England. They hoped to begin in America a reformation that would some day be carried to completion in England itself. They would create a model of how a group of people could form a pure church, framing their lives, government and ceremonies according to the word of God. It would be a model for the world, and especially England, to follow. So it was that armed with their Charter and their sense of being on a special mission for God, they journeyed to New England.

The Puritans who had made the journey into the wilderness with John Winthrop had two problems: to survive and to carry out their mission.

Which authority is most necessary for the survival of a Puritan colony?

The authority of the King?

The King had signed the Charter and given the Puritans the right to establish a colony. All kings are . . . *judges over all their subjects and in all causes accountable to none but God only.*⁴

(James I, King of England)

The authority of the Charter?

The Charter of Charles I . . . *by the grace of God, King of England . . . gave the governor and deputies the right to make . . . all manner of wholesome and reasonable orders, laws, statutes not contrary to the laws of England.*⁵

(Charter of Massachusetts Bay Company)

The authority of God through His Word in the Bible?

The Puritans had entered into a covenant, or contract, with God. *We are entered into a covenant with Him for His work . . . The end is to improve our lives and to do more service to the Lord . . . that ourselves and posterity may be better preserved from the common corruption of this evil world.*⁶

(John Winthrop)

The authority of Winthrop as Governor?

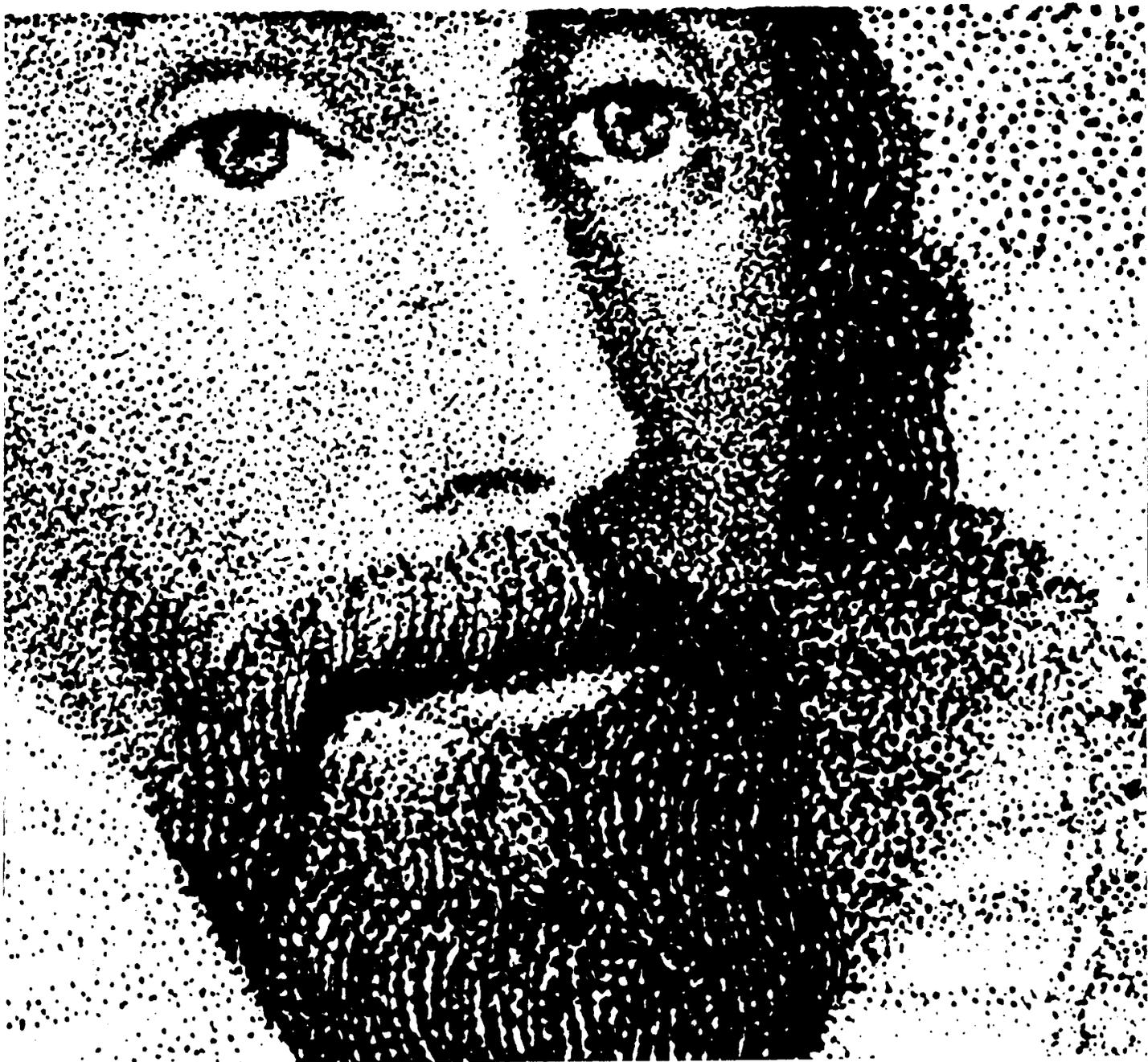
John Winthrop had been chosen governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and with the deputies of the Company had by the Charter the right to make all laws.

The authority of the covenant of the people with each other?

For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual

*consent [that we decide] to seek out a place where we live together under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical [church]. In such cases as this public concerns must overrule all private concerns. . . . For this end we must be knit together, in this work as one man. For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us . . . We shall find the God of Israel is among us . . . when He shall make [us] in a praise and glory so that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "The Lord make it like that of New England."*⁷

(John Winthrop)



At this first meeting of the General Court on October 19, 1630, Winthrop invited not only the members of the Massachusetts Bay Company, as the Charter stipulated, but all the settlers assembled at Charlestown. He then proposed to the colonists that they elect the assistants. By allowing the people to elect the assistants, Winthrop changed what had been an executive council of a business corporation into an elected legislative assembly.

The gift Winthrop had given the people was the right of citizenship—to vote and hold office—not stated in the Charter. One limitation placed upon this right was “for time to come no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic but such as are members of some of the churches within” the territorial limits of the colony.

That Winthrop would limit the right to vote for assistants to members of churches was not surprising. The Puritans had come to New England with a special mission: to establish pure churches. He would scarcely have wished to take into the colony people who might come for the wrong reason. By limiting the right to vote to church members he might even attract the right kind of settler: more Puritans like themselves. But the question to answer is: Why did Winthrop extend the right to vote to the people at all?

Winthrop in no way believed he was turning Massachusetts into a democracy by extending to the people the right to elect the assistants. He did not believe that governors derive their powers and authority from the consent of the governed. They derived their powers and

authority from God. Rulers were accountable to God, not to the people. The people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony agreed with Winthrop's ideas. It was part of their heritage.

In a speech to the people on board the *Arbella*, Winthrop spelled out a set of beliefs and goals which he and the people held in common. One was a notion of who should rule and have power; the other contained the role of the people in their mission to the wilderness.

*God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection. For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent . . . to seek out a place where we live together under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical. In such cases as this, public concerns must overrule all private concerns.*⁸

Why did Winthrop extend the right to vote to the people?

How Much Dissent Can the Colony Allow?

Roger Williams raises the question

Roger Williams came to Massachusetts in 1631. He was a charming, deeply religious and holy man who before leaving England had become a Puritan of the most radical kind. Educated in religious studies at Cambridge, he had spent several years as chaplain in a wealthy Puritan household. But by December 1630, when he sailed for New England, fleeing the England which seemed turned upside down by the closing of Parliament, Roger Williams had rejected completely the Church of England. Unlike other Puritans who remained members of the Church of England in the hope of reforming it, Roger Williams believed that even to worship with members of such a corrupt church was evil. By following his conscience, he had become a separatist.

The Puritans of New England were not separatists. They regarded themselves as members of the Church of England, a purer part of the Church, perhaps, but still members. Their goal was to create in New England a model of church membership and organization where men really could become holy. They could then transport their ideas back to England. Even though they limited church membership to those who could prove that they were holy, they still permitted, even demanded, that all people in the colony attend church services. Separatists took a much stricter view of the Church. Because they believed that the Church of England was corrupt, they believed that people would be corrupted by any contact with its members. They came to this conclusion because they felt that the Church of England was beyond saving.

This personal desire for perfection in a church made some men — like Roger Williams — conclude that they must separate themselves completely from the Church of England, and so they became known as separatists.

John Winthrop admired Roger Williams. Williams' personal zeal for goodness and holiness were sincere. But John Winthrop also saw danger in his views. Winthrop knew that Roger Williams could create a serious problem for Massachusetts.

On his arrival in Boston, Roger Williams was at once invited to the post of teacher to the Boston church. Williams' reputation for holiness and sincerity had preceded him. No post in New England was as important to a young minister as that of preacher and teacher to the Boston church. Such a chance did not come often to a young minister. But Roger Williams did the unthinkable: he refused the offer. He declared that he could accept the invitation only if the people of the Boston church repented for having any connection with the churches of England while they had lived there. If they did not, "I durst not officiate to an unseparated people,"⁹ he declared. The Puritans of Boston were shocked.

But John Winthrop had a way to deal with separatists: patience, argument and gentle warning. He tried his means of persuasion on Roger Williams; Williams agreed, so for the time being they worked.

But when Williams eventually found that the Boston church was not pure enough for him, he went to Salem. There he was offered the



position of minister. Alarmed at this, Winthrop wrote to Salem of the dangers of such a teacher and the offer was withdrawn. Roger Williams then made his way to the only separatist colony in New England. He went to Plymouth.

In Plymouth Williams at first found a church to his satisfaction, and he preached sermons as his conscience directed. But shortly after his arrival, he became convinced that Plymouth itself was not as separatist and pure as he supposed. People in Plymouth who had made return trips to England and while there had worshipped in the churches of England were not cast out on their return. Williams was dismayed at this and began preaching against it. But it was another statement Williams made at Plymouth which was to alarm not only the people there but the entire New England community.

A growing threat

While at Plymouth, Williams had come more and more into contact with the Indians of Cape Cod. He learned not only to respect them, but to sympathize with their claims that their land was being taken from them. Williams came to believe the Indians were right and that their claims had many implications for the English who had come to America and the King who had told them they could have the land.

Roger Williams began to preach that Massachusetts belonged to the Indians and that King Charles had no right to grant the land to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The King's authority to have done so rested, according to Williams, on "a solemn public lie." The General

Court, horrified that a minister would publicly denounce the Charter and the King, demanded that Williams come from Plymouth and appear before the Court and be convinced of his errors. Williams did comply, but by 1634 he was again saying that the Charter was not legal and it should be sent back to the King to be corrected. Williams wanted the King to omit all clauses relating to the *donation* of the land to the colonists. He also charged that the





colonists by accepting the false Charter were guilty of sin because they had acquired the land from a liar. Williams himself began to prepare a letter to the King pointing out the "lie" in the Charter. In great alarm a group of ministers managed to dissuade Williams from preaching against the Charter and finally from sending the letter to the King.

But Williams, who always followed his conscience no matter where it took him, saw other things to question about the government of the colony. In 1634 the residents who were not church members were asked to take an oath to support the colony and its government against all enemies. Williams was quick to point out that by making *all* people take the oath — which Puritans regarded as an act of worship — the godly people and the ungodly were linked together. Such an act was to take the name of God in vain. Was not the civil government overstepping its bounds and asking the people to commit an evil act?

Williams did not stop there. A few months later he began to say that the civil government had no authority whatsoever in religious matters. It could not even demand that people observe the Sabbath. The General Court concluded that he had gone too far. The government had to view this preaching as a direct attack against its power. His preachings were directed against the very foundations of the state. Why else had the Puritans left old England and fled into a wilderness but to establish a state where churches could exist the way they wanted them? For what purpose was government established but to see that they could? Williams was a dangerous man.

The General Court decides

In 1635 an event happened which forced the government to move against Roger Williams. He went back to Salem and was chosen minister by the Salem congregation. In the people of Salem he had found a following. As minister of a church, he had the power which the other ministers of Massachusetts could not touch. For according to the New England way, each church or gathering of a congregation was independent of the others. The ministers in the colony could not judge one of their number who had been called to office by the people. The ministers were powerless to act against him. And so they took the only step they thought they could. They called for the civil government to suppress him. When the General Court called him to trial Williams made a dramatic counter-charge. He claimed that by asking the magistrates to censure him, the churches of Massachusetts had given up the principle on which they were founded, that of independence. They were no longer pure churches, any of them. Williams asked the people of Salem to separate from the colony to form a community of their own.

On October 9, 1635, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay sentenced Roger Williams. They banished him from the colony. In January, warned by John Winthrop that the authorities were about to send him back to England, Williams fled in the winter of New England to the uninhabited regions to the south, outside Massachusetts. There he founded a settlement he named Providence.

Could the colony allow Roger Williams to stay?



A Threat to the Colony

The statements of Roger Williams

1. Roger Williams had claimed that the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was illegal; the King had no right to grant Indian lands to the Massachusetts Bay Company.
2. He preached that the churches of Massachusetts should declare themselves separated from the Church of England.
3. He preached that the magistrates of the colony could not require non-church members to take an oath to support the colony along with those who were church members.
4. He preached that civil magistrates had no authority in any religious matter. They could not even require people to keep the Sabbath.
5. He asked the people of the church of Salem to separate from the colony to establish a pure church and a community of their own.



Could the colony allow Roger Williams to stay?

As a civil magistrate of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, decide for which offenses Roger Williams is to be charged.

Prepare a brief for either the prosecution or the defense of Williams' case.

Could the colony allow Roger Williams to stay?

Church organization in the Massachusetts Bay Colony

A church is a . . . company or congregation of the faithful called and gathered out of the world by the preaching of the Gospel, who following and embracing true religion, do in one unity of Spirit strengthen and comfort one another, daily growing and increasing in true faith framing their lives, government, orders and ceremonies according to the word of God.¹⁰

- Salem
- Boston
- Roxbury
- Dorchester
- Newtowne (Cambridge)
- Charlestown
- Watertown

Churches of the colony

Church organization

1. Each church is a gathering of people and is independent of the other churches.
2. Each has a minister chosen by the people of the church.
3. Each church has the right to select its own members and limit those who could be members. Within each church there are people who attend its services even though they are not members.
4. No minister can be a civil magistrate.



