

Working with Primary Sources:

Roger Williams' *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*

Roger Williams, through both word and action, advocated for free exercise of religion at a moment where Church and State were often indistinguishable from one another. Williams believed in the idea that religion was a matter of individual conscience, not to be regulated by a government. His legacy is evident in foundational documents of the United States like the *Declaration of Independence* and *The Bill of Rights* and is referenced in numerous Supreme Court rulings.

In this lesson, students examine Williams' writings to learn about his influence and relevance on some of the fundamental ideals set forth in both the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution*, particularly *The Bill of Rights*.

Content Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explore Williams' beliefs about personal and religious freedom through a close reading of his work.
- Explore the influence these words had on other foundational government documents.
- Investigate historic and contemporary debates over personal and religious liberties in America.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze a primary source document and identify the main idea.
- Provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Enduring Understanding:

The beliefs and principles of key individuals help shape a nation's founding documents and continue to influence the application of those principles today.

Essential Question:

How did Roger Williams' beliefs about personal freedoms influence the founding documents of the United States and how do we apply these principles today?

Grade-Span Expectations

C&G 2 (7-8) –2

Students demonstrate an understanding of the democratic values and principles underlying the U.S. government by ...

b. using a variety of sources to identify and defend a position on a democratic principle (e.g., self-government in *Declaration of Independence*, women's rights in Seneca Falls Declaration, Habeas Corpus in Laws of 12 Tables, freedom of religion in Washington's letter to the Touro Synagogue)

HP 1 (7-8) –1

Students *act as historians*, using a variety of tools (e.g., artifacts and primary and secondary sources) by...

- a. identifying appropriate sources and using evidence to substantiate specific accounts of human activity
- b. drawing inferences from Rhode Island History about the larger context of history (e.g., Opening of Japan, Separation of Church and State, Industrialism)
- c. asking and answering historical questions, evaluating sources of information, organizing the information, and evaluating information in terms of relevance and comprehensiveness

National Standards for History (U.S. History, Grades 5-12)

Era 2: Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)

Standard 1: Why the Americas attracted Europeans, why they brought enslaved Africans to their colonies, and how Europeans struggled for control of North America and the Caribbean.

Standard 1A The student understands how diverse immigrants affected the formation of European colonies.

- Analyze the religious, political, and economic motives of free immigrants from different parts of Europe who came to North America and the Caribbean. [[Consider multiple causation](#)]

Standard 2: How political, religious, and social institutions emerged in the English colonies.

Standard 2B The student understands religious diversity in the colonies and how ideas about religious freedom evolved.

- Explain how Puritanism shaped New England communities and how it changed during the 17th century. [[Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas](#)]
- Trace and explain the evolution of religious freedom in the English colonies. [[Reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration](#)]

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details

RH.6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Craft and Structure

RH.6-8.6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RH.6-8.8. Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Teacher Preparation:

1. Find an article on a current event about religious freedom. Use as a model for classroom activity.
2. Photocopy the preface (appendix A-C) and key terms page (appendix E) for *The Bloody Tenent* and give copies of each to students.
3. Make copies of excerpts from the Declaration of Independence (Appendix D) and Bill of Rights (Appendix D) to give out to students.

Pre-Launch: 10 minutes

1. Day before teaching lesson, discuss with students the meaning of religious freedom.
2. Have students search for articles on the internet about religious freedom and come to class the next day prepared to have a discussion.

Launch: 25 minutes

1. Allow students to share their news stories with the class. Ask students what can be interpreted from these articles about religious freedom today.
2. Hand out excerpts of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Ask students how these two documents are connected to religious freedom. **(Where the connection with the Bill of Rights is easy to see, they may need some plodding to see that the Declaration of Independence says that people have rights including the pursuit of happiness which could include their own religious beliefs and that the government can be abolished by the people if it denies them these rights.)**
3. Explain the idea that key principles of personal freedom pre-date the Bill of Rights—individuals were debating this issue as early as the 1630s in the Colonies. Emphasize to students that the ideas reflected in the Declaration and in the Bill of Rights evolved over time from concepts such as the Town Meeting, colonial legislatures, and from visionary thinkers.
4. Tell students that this lesson will look at one person's writings and explore what influence his beliefs had on our nation's founding documents. This visionary thinker is Roger Williams, who established the first civil government in Providence. Students will think about how perceptions of personal liberty have changed by studying primary sources and making their own judgments about issues.
5. Present brief biography of Williams.
Born 1603 in London. Died in Providence in 1683. In 1631, Williams sailed with his wife to Massachusetts Bay Colony to escape religious persecution in England. After his arrival, Williams became a separatist—a Puritan wanting to break from the Anglican Church—and also began to speak out, calling for separation of church and state. Banished in 1636 for his beliefs, Williams fled south to Narragansett Bay, where he acquired the land that is now Providence from the Narragansett Indians. Eventually, Williams' efforts led to King Charles II granting a charter for a new colony in 1663, which guaranteed religious freedom.
6. Pass out key terms worksheet. Explain document:
The Bloody Tenent was published in 1644 in as a response to an ongoing debate with Massachusetts Bay Colony minister, John Cotton, about the separation of church and state & toleration of all religions. Because the book was so controversial, Parliament ordered all copies be burned.

Exploration: 25 minutes

1. Divide class into groups of four and give each group a copy of the selected text from *The Bloody Tenent*.
2. Have each group write a summary of the selected text and answer the question:
How did Roger Williams' writings influence the Declaration of Independence and First Amendment of the Bill of Rights? Use evidence from the writings to support your answer.

Summary Activity:

1. Review with students how Roger Williams' ideas of religious freedom are shown in today's world. In the discussion, ask students to make connections between the articles they read and Williams' writings.
2. Ask each student to write an essay in response to the following question:
List three ways and elaborate on how your life in your school, community, state and nation might be different if the First Amendment was not part of the Constitution.

THE
BLOODY TENT
OF
PERSECUTION

FOR
CAUSE OF CONSCIENCE DISCUSSED:

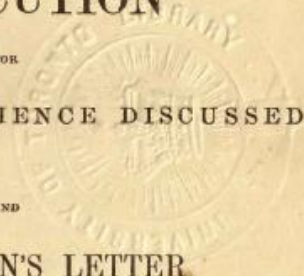
AND
MR. COTTON'S LETTER
EXAMINED AND ANSWERED.

BY ROGER WILLIAMS.

EDITED FOR
The Hanserd Knollys Society,

BY
EDWARD BEAN UNDERHILL.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY,
BY J. HADDON, CASTLE STREET, FINSBURY.
1848.



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26.12.31

Selections from the Preface of *The Bloody Tenent*

First. That the blood of so many hundred thousand souls of protestants and papists, spilt in the wars of present and former ages, for their respective consciences, is not required nor accepted by Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace.

Secondly. Pregnant scriptures and arguments are throughout the work proposed against the doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience.

Thirdly. Satisfactory answers are given to scriptures and objections produced by Mr. Calvin, Beza, Mr. Cotton, and the ministers of the New English churches, and others former and later, tending to prove the doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience.

Fourthly. The doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience, is proved guilty of all the blood of the souls crying for vengeance under the altar.

Fifthly. All civil states, with their officers of justice, in their respective constitutions and administrations, are proved essentially civil, and therefore not judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship.

Sixthly. It is the will and command of God that, since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries: and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only, in soul matters, able to conquer: to wit, the sword of God's Spirit, the word of God.

Seventhly. The state of the land of Israel, the kings and people thereof, in peace and war, is proved figurative and ceremonial, and no pattern nor precedent for any kingdom or civil state in the world to follow.

Eighthly. God requireth not an uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity, sooner or later, is the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls.

Ninthly. In holding an enforced uniformity of religion in a civil state, we must necessarily disclaim our desires and hopes of the Jews' conversion to Christ.

Tenthly. An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Eleventhly. The permission of other consciences and worships than a state professeth, only can, according to God, procure a firm and lasting peace; good assurance being taken, according to the wisdom of the civil state, for uniformity of civil obedience from all sorts.

Twelfthly. Lastly, true civility and Christianity may both flourish in a state or kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of divers and contrary consciences, either of Jew or Gentile.

Important connections to *The Declaration and the Constitution* (phrases to emphasize when presenting to students)

The Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — **That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,** — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness.

The Bill of Rights:

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Key Terms

The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience: Written by Roger Williams in 1644, the *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* was one of Williams' most famous works. In the book, Williams responds to a series of letters he had received from John Cotton, an influential leader in Massachusetts Bay Colony following Williams' arrival in Providence. Williams argues for a government with a clear separation between Church and State. The book was so controversial that the British government demanded that any copies found be burned.

Civil Power: The collective political power of the people in a government.

Civil Government: A government that acts only in issues related to the political life of its people. Williams believed that 'civil government' should be kept entirely separate from the influence of religion.

Civil Condition: A term used by Roger Williams to describe the customs, practices, regulations and traditions of a society that concern its political and social structure.

Sovereign: A term describing the authority or rule of a person or group of persons. In Williams' text, Sovereign refers to being most or supreme concerning 'Civil Power.'

Commonwealth: The traditional term used in English to describe a political community established for the common good.

Ordinance of God: an authoritative decree by a deity. In this instance, Williams' argues that civil government is an ordinance of God, meaning that the right to a civil society is something granted by God.

Tyrant: Any person of power who uses their authority unjustly.

Natural Freedoms: Freedoms that exist beyond control of a government, but are those associated with basic needs of human nature. (i.e., life, liberty, pursuit of happiness)

Government: The agency through which a political body exercises its authority and controls the actions of its citizens by creating and enforcing policy and law.

Truth & Peace: The main characters of *The Bloudy Tenent*. Williams' wrote his work as a conversation between truth and peace.