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**Roger Williams and the Founding of
Rhode Island II**

Lead: In 1636 Roger Williams, banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, founded the colony of Rhode Island, a unique constitutional experiment in religious toleration.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Puritan preacher Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts because his unorthodox views threatened colonial officials. Williams, a champion of religious freedom and favoring

payment to Native Americans for unjust expropriation of their land, was banished from the colony in 1635 and ,before he could be deported back to England, he escaped south during the bitter winter and settled on Narragansett Bay near present-day Newport. There he became friendly with the Narragansett Indians and purchased from them land at the head of the bay. There, Williams established a village and a new colony, Rhode Island. Williams named the settlement Providence for what Williams said was his gratitude “for God’s merciful providence unto me in my distress.”

What made Rhode Island unique in the passage of constitutional

evolution, was that the government of the new colony was adopted the principle of complete religious freedom, toleration and the separation of church and state. It became a refuge for Anabaptists, Quakers, and other sects with nonconformist religious inclination.

Williams secured a charter from Parliament in 1644 and remained active in the political life of Rhode Island until his death in 1683. Although he help found the first Baptist Church of America in 1639, in typical Williams fashion he withdrew from the church and lived the rest of his life as a “seeker” – one who accepts fundamental Christian beliefs but is opposed to formal creeds, and

is always seeking further revelation as to what religious truth is. Williams, a prolific writer, spent the balance of his career airing his views on religious freedom and became an outspoken advocate of fair treatment for Native Americans.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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