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

Lead: In 1635, religious dissenter Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. His departure was a milestone in constitutional evolution.

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

Content: English Puritan preacher Roger Williams immigrated to Massachusetts in 1631. A Cambridge graduate, he had sought ordination in the Church of England, but gradually came to advocate separation from the

official church. After his arrival in America Williams and his wife settled in, but it was not long before this quick-witted, pugnacious and innovative thinker began to clash with the local colonial church leaders over his “radical views.” Williams believed that churches in the colony should break completely from the Church of England, and he opposed government involvement in church affairs. The colonial government used the power of the state to enforce church rules, regulations, and discipline. Furthermore, Williams argued that the colony should not expropriate land that rightfully belonged to the Native Americans unless the Indians were compensated. Even more dangerous from the point

of view of the colonial elders, he insisted that his behavior and personal life should be governed, not by the laws of the Commonwealth or even the church, but by his own conscience.

In October 1635 the Massachusetts General Court issued an order banning this seditious agitator from the colony. In January of the next year, Williams, who was to be deported back to England, escaped. Joined by some followers, he fled south through the wilderness and in the dead of winter reached Narragansett Bay, southwest of what is now Newport, Rhode Island. On land he purchased from the Indians, he established a refuge for like-

minded colonists. They called themselves seekers. There beyond the reach of the English government and the puritan Massachusetts Bay he began a noble and strikingly novel experiment in religious toleration. Next Time: A new colony, Rhode Island.

Research assistance by Rae La Pearl, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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