

**Williams Monologue
(Religious Freedom)
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I am Roger Williams. Most Americans know me, because I founded the state of Rhode Island. What most people do not know is that I also started the first Baptist church in this country. Both of these events were tied together, so let me explain how they came about.

I was born in England in 1599. After I graduated in law from Cambridge University, I was ordained as a priest in the Church of England. I met some Puritan teachers at Cambridge and soon accepted their strong dislike of the liturgy and hierarchy of the Church, so much so that I left England and sailed for America in 1631. This was just a year after the Puritans had planted the city of Boston.

Three months after landing on these shores, I moved to Salem with my wife, Mary, and became a church teacher there. I did not like the dictatorial rulership in the Puritan community, so we moved on that summer to Plymouth, to try to fit in with the folks known as the Pilgrims. I was able to remain there for 2 years until I offended the overlords in Boston by saying that they had no jurisdiction over the minds of men.

I insisted that neither church nor state should persecute the heretic or the atheist. I insisted that everyone – even Jews, Turks, and anti-Christians might be peaceable and quiet subjects, loving and helpful neighbors, fair and just dealers, true and loyal to the civil government. I want to give much credit for my ideas on religious liberty to a person who greatly influenced my thinking, namely, Mistress Anne Hutchinson, whose Monday school class I attended. Mistress Hutchinson was to undergo some of the same ostracism that I received from the authorities.

For the expression of these opinions, I was brought to trial in 1635 and ordered to get out of Massachusetts. When the authorities came to arrest me, I left my home and family in the dead of winter and went to live with some Indians I had befriended. The following summer, four other men joined me, and together we founded the town of Providence Plantation. We established friendly relations with the local Indians and bought land from them upon which to settle.

An Indian war broke out the next year, and I was able to make an alliance that saved the lives of the people who had driven me out. They expressed appreciation for what I did for them, but they refused to welcome me back into their communities.

My new settlement had a high ideal of allowing freedom of conscience to all who joined us. This brought in many settlers, and some of these were Baptists. After discussing religious ideas with them, I was baptized in 1639, and led the group in founding the first Baptist church in America.

Like another Baptist leader before me, John Smyth, I kept my heart open for God to fill it with more light and truth. I soon left the Baptist fellowship and became a seeker or an

independent. In the years that followed, I went to England and secured a charter for the towns of Providence, Newport, and Portsmouth. These became the principle cities of the colony of Rhode Island.

The 1663 charter of the Rhode Island colony stated that: "no person within said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any differences of opinion in matters of religion; but that all and any persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences in matters of religious concernment throughout the tract of land hereafter mentioned."

I hope that Baptists will appreciate the hardships I endured for the ideal of religious tolerance, and I pray that this principle is never lost or compromised in this great land of America.