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RHODE ISLAND'S PART IN MAKING AMERICA

An Address Delivered at
Rhode Island College of Education
By JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS, A. M., LL. D.

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Rhode Island's Part in Making America

Foreword

Dr. James Truslow Adams, an honorary alumnus of Rhode Island State College, scarcely needs an introduction to Rhode Island teachers and other citizens interested in the history of the state. His two volumes upon the history of New England—"The Founding of New England" and "Revolutionary New England"—have established for him a reputation as a profound scholar and insure his recognition as one of the ablest writers in the field of American history. The address printed here for the schools of Rhode Island is a unique but characteristic interpretation of Rhode Island, and deserves and will amply repay careful reading. It is published by the state division of public education service with the hope that teachers will derive from it a genuine inspiration arising from a finer appreciation of the part that Rhode Island has played in the making of American democracy.

WALTER E. RANGER,
Commissioner of Education.

Rhode Island's Part in Making America

I have been asked to speak to you briefly to-day on "Rhode Island's part in making America." If this topic, which has been given to me, were to be interpreted broadly, I should have to trespass far longer upon your time than it is my intention to do, because America, like all human societies, is in a continuous process of alteration. Its "making" is going on as actively to-day as when the first English settlers built their earliest shelters and planted their first crops at Jamestown and at Plymouth. During nearly three centuries of that evolution, Rhode Island has contributed her share to the process, and merely to cite her contributions to America's military, economic, religious, intellectual, and social history would take much more than the time at my disposal even though I would only baldly narrate them catalogue fashion. I shall not attempt, therefore, to treat the topic thus, but shall try to strike at once into what seems to me to be the heart of the matter.

In order to do this, I shall ask you first to consider for a moment or two what we mean by this America to the making of which we are to consider the contributions made by your state. From the enormous complexity of twentieth century existence can we pick out certain characteristics which set it apart from other nations to which their citizens are as deeply attached as we are to ours? Have we differed from them in our history or in our ideals in other than a quantitative way,—by having more or less of material wealth, by having attained merely to a higher or a lower level in certain spheres of life,—intellectual, artistic and other?

In speaking of America many foreigners as well as Americans point at once to certain attributes of the nation, such as its enormous geographical extent, its population of more than a hundred millions, its power and vast wealth. But these are in no way characteristic of America only. There are not a few other countries whose geographical extent is vastly greater than our own, for example, the British Empire, the French Empire, and even one of the South American countries to which we usually pay but scant attention, Brazil. China, Russia and other nations also far outnumber us in population. It is true that the accidents of the Great War have concentrated a large part of the world's mobile wealth among us, but it is doubtful if we can claim anything like first place in those stored natural resources, which in the long run are one of the main foundations of real wealth. These attributes, therefore, we cannot consider as peculiarly characteristic of our nation as contrasted with others.

Again, people speak of our natural ingenuity, our Yankee inventiveness, our extraordinary utilization of applied science. They point to the fact that one-third of the railroad mileage of the world connects our cities and villages, that five-sixths of the motor vehicles of the world are owned by us, that here there is a telephone for one person in every seven of the whole population. These facts are indeed of great significance and have a profound bearing which the historian must take into account in describing our social and political life and making predictions as to its future, but although characteristic, are they essential? Was not America as essentially as much America in 1776, when not one of these useful contrivances was thought of, as it is to-day, and if these were swept aside would not America still remain America without them if we still retained certain other characteristics?

We come then to consider another class of characteristics, which are in the deepest sense essential, which are at bottom what we mean when we think of America and of Americanism. These it seems to me are two,—the genuineness

of our democracy and the sincerity of our trust in the common man. Both of these, it is true, are marred by many blemishes in practice, but they are the abiding ideals at the heart of the American nation. We breathe them, so to speak, so constantly, we take them so much for granted, we are so used to them, that we are apt to forget how precious they are, and,—I say it with a full realization of the democracies of England and France,—how unique. Some years ago I had as a guest over here a young Frenchman who came back with me from abroad. After a short time he said to me one day, "You know I like it over here. There is something in the air of the place. Everyone looks you right in the eye." English travellers have commented upon the same quality, upon that sense of individual worth regardless of position in the social or economic scale, which is felt by the genuine American. This quality to come to flower must be nurtured by two fundamental facts, a belief in one's own worth and a belief that that worth is accepted by others. It may be characteristic of a class under many forms of government. It can be characteristic of an entire people only in a democracy that is genuine and in which the people have confidence not only in themselves but in their fellows. Making all due allowances for the shortcomings of human nature and human institutions, it is these two things which I believe constitute the most precious qualities in what we mean by America and it is of the part that Rhode Island had in the making of America so understood that I wish to speak.

Outside of the little colonies of Rhode Island and Connecticut, two influences were at work during the colonial period to develop an American democracy. In New England there were the church and town covenants,—an offshoot of the Calvinism of the founders,—and throughout all the colonies there were the influences of life in a new country, which we may succinctly describe as the influences of the frontier. Both of these forces, however, although slowly tending toward a democratic outlook, were blind and unconscious in their operation. No error has obtained a more persistent currency than that the founders of Massachusetts came to establish a state based upon religious freedom and a democratic ideal. Quite the reverse is the actual truth. They came in part to secure freedom to worship as they themselves chose, but that same freedom they constantly and persistently denied to others who followed in their footsteps. As to democracy, it is not too much to say that they abhorred it. Not only did they adopt in practice an aristocratical form of government and society, going so far even as to consent to the setting up of an hereditary order of nobility if certain persons in England would consent to come over as colonists, but we have the statements of both John Winthrop, the civil, and John Cotton, the religious, leader clearly indicating their opinions of democracy. They both unhesitatingly considered it as the worst possible form of political organization.

Nor do we find any thought of establishing a more democratic form of society among the controlling elements in any of the other colonies from New York to the Carolinas. In all of them, some from the beginning and some after a time, we find enormous holdings of land becoming concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. This resulted in the development of what was in all essentials a landed aristocracy, in the absence of conscious democratic ideals, and in the growth of an economically and socially aristocratic type. In the colonies from Maryland southward after the beginning of the eighteenth century, the economic conditions which made slave-holding profitable on a large scale introduced a new element into the situation, and tended yet more to develop and to perpetuate a class stratification in the social and political organization.

On the other hand, we have in all the colonies, the influence of the frontier at work undermining the attempts of the richer merchants and planters of the older settlements to rivet upon society their own ideals of the aristocratic state. The backwoodsmen of Maine, of New Hampshire and of western Massachusetts had as little instinctive sympathy with the mercantile nabobs of the coast towns as had the German and Scotch-Irish pioneers of the Shenandoah Valley and the valleys of the western Carolinas with the great slaveholding planters of the tidewater counties. Moreover, by the middle of the eighteenth century, there had been sufficient growth of urban population in such towns as Boston, Newport, New York and Philadelphia to create a class of craftsmen, wage earners and petty shopkeepers who had become divorced from the soil. These were allied naturally rather with the struggling democrats of the frontier than with those higher classes in the towns who looked down upon them socially and refused as far as possible to consider them politically. As we approach the time of the Revolution, therefore, we find a great struggle impending in which the poor of the towns and of the frontier are preparing to wrest from the upper classes of the seaboard some of the privileges behind which the latter had long been intrenching themselves.

We thus see that the movement toward a democratization of American society, though in a sense inevitable, was largely the resultant of forces operating blindly so far as the leaders were concerned. In New England there were the town and church covenants with all that they implied in the basing of government solely upon the consent of the governed. Yet their plain implications were strenuously denied by the leaders of that section's largest commonwealth. A little later, and throughout all the colonies, there were the influences of the frontier making for a levelling of social life and demands for increased participation in government by the men who dwelt there. But this again was largely unconscious—a striving for self-recognition upon the part of individual groups rather than any recognition by them of a new theory of government and of the worth of the human individual. In two colonies only do we find stated from the beginning a belief in a democratic ordering of life, and in one colony alone do we find added to that a firm faith in the common man,—a faith without which democracy is untenable in theory and imperfect in practice. That colony was Rhode Island, and the man who promulgated those beliefs was one of the greatest figures in all American history, Roger Williams, the founder of your state. I may here say to avoid being misunderstood that I do not use the term Rhode Island in its narrow sense, but as embracing all those early settlements now included in its borders. Nor by citing Williams as the leading figure do I wish to minimize the noble work or the superior executive ability of other pioneers. But Williams because of his character and intellect was of overshadowing influence in contemporary America, and by reason of his brilliant literary work that influence was enabled, as it was not in the case of others, to transcend the narrow limits of time and place.

In the outline of the situation of democracy in this early period I have accepted two colonies, Connecticut and Rhode Island. Both of them owe their foundation to the religious bigotry and political despotism of Massachusetts. Before Williams was banished from that colony, Thomas Hooker had already found conditions there intolerable, and had voluntarily led his followers to the banks of the Connecticut, where he founded what up to that time was the most consciously democratic community in the world. We have none of his own writings at first hand, but his reported utterances and the Fundamental Orders

which formed the constitution of the new state are justly held to mark a great forward step in democratic doctrine applied to the practice of government. In a great sermon in which he laid down the principles of the new commonwealth he is reported to have said that "the foundation of authority is laid firstly in the free consent of the people" and in another clause—in which he attacked the political practice of Massachusetts,—he further said that "they who have the power to appoint officers and magistrates, it is in their power also, to set bounds and limitations of the power and place unto which they call them." It must be remembered, however, with regard to this utterance, seemingly so broad and democratic, that the "people" as meant by Hooker were the members of the church as established and not the "people" in the sense in which we understand that term to-day. Fundamentally, therefore, we have in these utterances less an advance in democratic doctrine, less a step forward in the belief in the value and worth of the individual, of faith in the common man, than an advance in the polity of a church, for the state still remained an offshoot of the church even in Hooker's Connecticut.

And now we come to note the part which Rhode Island played in the evolution of democracy in America after an introduction which, long as it may have seemed to you, has really been necessary to enable you properly to evaluate the unique position attained by Williams in 17th century America and the services which he rendered. A former Church of England clergyman, well educated, of great breadth of outlook, and endowed with an humanitarianism rare in that age, he had been led to separate from the church due to his religious beliefs, and to emigrate to Massachusetts in 1631. More than one offer was at once made to him to become teacher in local churches and he accepted the call to the congregation gathered at Salem. The little colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts in those days contained a remarkable assemblage of strongly marked characters, one of the most unusual groups, I believe, ever gathered together in so small a community. John Winthrop, John Cotton, William Bradford, John Endicott, the young Harry Vane, Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, John Clark, to name only a few of these very differing personalities, were then living on the shores of the two Bays. In this society the new clergyman at once took a leading place. I have elsewhere noted the somewhat significant fact that whereas in the first century of New England history her historians have frequently pointed to one or another man as the most hated in all New England, none has yet been singled out as the most loved. Perhaps owing to the strong feeling aroused against him in Massachusetts, Williams could not be so described; nevertheless, of all the characters who cross the provincial stage at this period, he is notably the most loveable. And stern as the Puritans were in their outward and inward lives, they yet, being human, had strong affections and were ardent lovers of their families and friends. In early letters and diaries we find expressions of deepest tenderness addressed to wives and husbands, to children and comrades. The singular charm of Williams's character at once won him the warm regard of the leaders in the two colonies, and there is evidence that Winslow and Bradford and Winthrop all felt more than common affection for the man who was to be banished into the wilderness by the authorities of the theocracy. Indeed, as we study the characters of the founders of the various colonies, we find none who exerts upon us even to-day after the lapse of centuries, the singular charm of Williams. There is something rarely sweet and winning in the modesty and human kindness of this young man, who, nevertheless, defied a whole community and suffered banishment to the wilderness rather than yield his opinion. In the learning

of the schools he was the equal of any man in the colony which expelled him and he engaged even-handed in debate with John Cotton himself. In spiritual courage he was surpassed by none, and his physical courage and endurance were equally great. In breadth of vision he was infinitely ahead of the narrow theocrats who sat in judgment upon him and his magnanimity should have shamed them all. Not long after his banishment, the colony which had cast him forth was panic-struck by the fear that the Narragansett Indians would join the Pequots in the war which that colony had provoked largely through the blundering of Endicott. Undeterred by shame, the governor and council at once hastened to plead for aid from the only man who could save them in the emergency, and sent an embassy to Roger Williams, asking his intercession with the Indian chief Miantanomo. Without hesitation, Williams started at once, "all alone in a poore canow," as he writes, "to cut through a stormy wind with great seas, every minute in hazard of life, to the Sachem's house." There, solitary in the camp of the savages who were thirsting for the blood of his compatriots, he stayed for three days and by means of his friendship with the chief he won the Narragansetts away from the threatened alliance with the Pequots, and saved the colony of Massachusetts from the results of its own folly. Such, in very brief outline, was the nature of the first great American democrat.

While living in Massachusetts, Williams had developed his doctrine that there should be a complete separation of church and state, and that the power of the magistrate could be applied to civil matters only. He even went so far as to deny in that theocratical colony that the state could punish breaches of the Sabbath or other purely religious offences, or that it could require an oath. For these doctrines, and the added one that the title to the lands of America being vested in the native owners, the king had no right to grant it away in charters, he was tried by the Massachusetts courts and was ordered to be banished from the colony. He was to be allowed to remain until spring provided that he would not give voice to his beliefs. This he refused to do, and the authorities believing that he would try to lead a colony to Rhode Island, which was outside their jurisdiction, attempted to ship him to England. He escaped, however, and all alone, in the middle of January took his way toward the shores of Narragansett, through the winter cold and snow-filled forests, with no hospitality to count upon save that of the always uncertain savages. There was, indeed, already another white man living there, a refugee similarly from Massachusetts tyranny, but although William Blackstone apparently deserves the name of the first settler of the colony, the term founder is obviously that of Williams alone and not of the solitary of whose interesting personality we know little and whose mere presence within the limits of the colony was without any marked influence upon its destinies. Soon; others followed Williams into his exile, and the problems of government in a community far removed from any authority other than such as they might establish for themselves had to be met. In this task the mind of Williams was for long the dominating factor, and it was the influence of his personality and theories that moulded the life of the infant commonwealth.

Throughout the century in which it was planted the colony remained small as compared with either of its neighbors. Even as late as 1700 it is estimated to have contained but six thousand persons as against the twenty-four thousand in Connecticut and the seventy thousand in Massachusetts. The size of a community, however, has little to do with the energizing power of the ideas which it may generate, and the ideas generated in that little community were

destined to be of incalculable influence upon the nation of which it was eventually to form a part and upon the world at large. Those ideas, as developed from the thought of Williams and not as elsewhere from the stresses and strains of a contest with the environment, were three in number. Of these, one is constantly dwelt upon in any discussion of Williams or of Rhode Island, the second is frequently noted, but the third has rarely if ever been considered.

The first, of course, is Williams's doctrine of the complete divorce of church and state, and he is justly regarded everywhere, in the old world as in the new, as one of the great apostles of religious liberty. Nowhere in any writings up to the time of the founding of this colony, and for many years after, do we find that doctrine so clearly and so enticingly set forth as in the writings of its founder. Freedom of conscience was one of the very foundation stones upon which he built his structure and is truly considered one of the glories,—in fact, often the chief glory,—of the colony and state. It was not a mere pious aspiration, an ideal in the mind of the clergyman, but was wrought into the living fabric of the life of the community. It was a doctrine made visible that all men might see and judge.

In time, religious liberty leads straight to political liberty, and freedom from authority in the sphere of the conscience leads, by logical implication and a natural evolution, to freedom in other spheres. In the old world it was not care for the souls of the heretics that led the rulers to dread the growth of dissent and the granting of religious liberty, but the full realization that here was a break in the dyke which would surely and inevitably let in the waters of freedom of action in other departments of life. These were also included in the wide sweep of Williams's vision, and the doctrines of democracy were as convincingly set forth by him as by Hooker. "The sovereign, original, and foundation of civil power," wrote the Rhode Island leader, "lies in the people whom they must needs mean by the 'civil power' distinct from the government set up; and if so, a people may erect and establish what form of government seems to them most meet for their civil condition. It is evident that such governments as are by them erected and established have no more power, nor for no longer time, than the civil power, or people, consenting and agreeing shall betrust them with. That is clear, not only in reason but in the experience of all commonwealths, where the people are not deprived of their natural freedom by the power of tyrants." And again, he says, "civil magistrates, whether kings or parliaments, states, and governors, can receive no more than what the people give, and are, therefore, but the eyes and hands and instruments of the people."

The wording of these statements is not very different from what Hooker may have said in his sermon at Hartford some years earlier, but it makes all the difference in the world whether we construe the word "people" in the above dicta as meaning the members of a particular religious sect or as individuals composing the body politic independently of any peculiar and personal religious beliefs. This obvious difference, however, has usually been considered only from the standpoint of religious liberty. There is another aspect of it to which I wish to call your attention, and which seems to me of very great importance in the history of the rise of democratic thought. The great advance that Williams made as compared with even Hooker has a bearing upon civil liberty quite as much as religious, and in it lies the very foundation of the whole modern structure of democracy and the hope of the modern world.

The granting of religious liberty was much more than merely giving to others the right to believe and worship as they would, and the new meaning

given to the word "people" carries an implication without which there is no meaning to democracy and without which the democratic philosophy is untenable. That implication is trust in the other man. "These other men in the community," said Williams, in effect, "do not think as I do on all subjects, nor as I do upon one of the most vital of all, religion. Nevertheless, not only have they as men a right to their own opinion as I have to mine, but if they are given the power to regulate and govern the state, even as do those who think as I do, they can be trusted so to do that we may all together build up a genuine commonwealth, sheltering the lives and views and happiness and welfare of us all equally." Religious toleration, in the political sphere thus meant something more than merely permitting men to worship according to their particular faiths. It meant bringing into the world a new faith, the faith in humanity itself,—the faith that men, however differing in position, in opinion and in outlook will be able to govern themselves with wisdom and with justice. So little faith did the governors of Massachusetts have in their fellow men, that they did not dare to relinquish the governing power from the hands of the few even in the church communion, and jealously guarded every encroachment upon their power. In Connecticut, Hooker spoke for a broader franchise and a greater power of control among the members of the church, but even he did not dare to consider the people at large as capable of ruling justly if the power were placed in their hands. First of all, in Rhode Island, under the intellectual leadership of Williams did man stand forth as man and take his place in the community. Here for the first time did man independently of inherited position, of property, and of affiliation with prevailing and controlling religious establishments stand forth to take his share in governing himself and others, and became trusted by them to show the same wisdom and the same justice that they believed themselves capable of exhibiting.

That, I take it, was the great experiment which was being tried out for the first time in human society in the little colony of Rhode Island in the mid-years of the seventeenth century.

And now let us consider whether Williams was justified in this momentous venture in the practical art of governing. The way was not easy. There were rebellious spirits, wild fanatics, and men who did not measure up to the extraordinary new responsibility thus placed upon them. Some modifications of the doctrine had to be made. Nevertheless we can test the results in one of the great crises that confronted the young colony in its new experiment, and it is worth our careful attention as being the first real test of what a community based upon mutual self-confidence did when confronted by threat of overwhelming physical power directed against their doctrine of liberty and trust in man.

In the year 1656 there arrived in Boston on a ship from Barbadoes two women who were of the Quaker faith. Governor Endicott was absent at the moment, but the deputy governor, Bellingham, at once began proceedings against them. Their baggage was examined and a hundred printed volumes, which the authorities of Massachusetts chose to consider heretical, were burned without any compensation being made. A few weeks before, there had been considerable excitement in the Bay Colony over witchcraft, and Ann Hibben had been burned for her alleged dealings with the evil powers. Although there was nothing about the two Quakeresses to suggest their being witches, they were treated with much indignity, stripped stark naked, and examined for the supposed marks of witches. Imprisoned, they were deprived of all light in

their cell, denied the right to hold communication with anyone, and after five weeks of such treatment, were shipped back to Barbadoes.

A few days after, eight more Quakers arrived on a ship from London. These also were at once seized and imprisoned, and Endicott warned them that they break not the ecclesiastical laws of the colony or they would be "sure to stretch by a halter." At their trial they asked to see a copy of the laws against them, but these were refused. In October, the Massachusetts General Court passed an act that any master of a ship knowingly bringing a Quaker to the colony should be fined £100; that Quakers were to be committed to the house of correction to be severely whipped; that they were to be constantly kept at work and not permitted to speak to anyone. If any resident of the colony defended a Quaker opinion, he was to be fined, or on the third offence banished. Anyone reviling a magistrate or minister, which was too apt to mean criticising their policies, was to be fined or banished. As I have said elsewhere, few bits of legislation can have been more complete than this, "which provided punishment for an offender, denied anyone the right to speak in his behalf, and made it a crime to criticize the men who had passed the law." This was done in the colony in which only the saints, as they styled themselves, were supposed to be capable of governing the people, and in which it was feared that the commonwealth would surely be wrecked were the people allowed to govern themselves.

Let us now turn to Rhode Island and see how that little community, which was trying the great experiment of trusting the people, and which their Massachusetts neighbors were fond of considering as a nest of anarchy, was able to meet the situation. The year following the events in Massachusetts, a band of Quakers landed at Newport and were kindly treated by the residents. This roused the ire of the other colonial governments and at once the Commissioners of the United Colonies wrote to the Rhode Island government relating the "prudent care," as they called it, which Massachusetts had taken when Quakers reached her shores, and requesting the Rhode Islanders to banish the Quakers already at Newport, and to prevent any others from coming so that the "contagion" should not be allowed to spread. This letter ended with the threat that if the little colony did not take such action, "wee apprehend that it will be our duty seriously to consider what further provision God may call us to make to prevent the aforesaid mischief." It must be remembered that the population of the other colonies thus bullying Rhode Island was at that time approximately twenty-four thousand, whereas that of Rhode Island was a mere eight hundred.

In their reply, the Rhode Islanders after expressing their wish to continue in loving correspondence with all the colonies went on to state their position. I consider this letter so important in the history of democratic thought, in which I believe it is a landmark, and it so clearly brings out the philosophy of the Rhode Island theory of government that I shall read a few lines from it entire.

"As concerning these Quakers (so-called)," they wrote, "which are now among us, we have no law among us, whereby to punish any for only declaring by words, etc., their minds and understandings concerning the things and ways of God, as to salvation and an eternal condition. And, we moreover, find, that in those places where these people aforesaid, in this colony, are most of all suffered to declare themselves freely, and are opposed only by arguments in discourse, there they least of all desire to come, and we are informed that they begin to loathe this place for that they are opposed by the civil authority, but

with all patience and meekness are suffered to say over their pretended revelations and admonitions, nor are they like or able to gain many here to their way; surely we find that they delight to be persecuted by civil powers, and when they are so, they are like to gain more adherents by the conceit of their patient sufferings, than by consent to their pernicious sayings: And yet we conceive, that their doctrines tend to very absolute cutting down and overturning relations and civil government among men, if generally received."

That document is unique in our colonial era and marks a point never reached again perhaps in our subsequent history. Here is the utmost of the sublimity of faith in the common man put forth not by the scholar in his closet as an ideal, but as a state document serving as the basis for the action of the state in a crisis of no mean dimensions. It must be recognized, and it is only fair to Massachusetts so to recognize the fact, that the doctrines of the Quakers were not merely religious, but in the opinion of the men who opposed them tended, as the Rhode Islanders themselves said, to "very absolute cutting down and overturning" civil government. This was not overlooked by the Rhode Island government, and to this real internal danger was added the threat of retaliatory action by the neighboring colonies which outnumbered them sixty to one. Nevertheless, the Rhode Islanders were true to their ideal. "We believe in free speech," they said in effect, "and that there is less danger to the state in permitting it than in making martyrs of those who express doctrines however radical. We believe in our fellow citizens, and that there is less to fear from their being infected with these dangerous doctrines than there is in denying to any the right to say what they have in their minds. Here is a test case. Doctrines are being promulgated by these people which if they are accepted by our fellow citizens will overturn the commonwealth. We are being threatened with starvation or invasion by our neighbors who are so powerful in comparison with ourselves that they may do as they will with us. Nevertheless we will abide by our political beliefs and will not because of the supposed crisis deny our faith in democracy and the people."

This, then, is the unique contribution of Rhode Island to the making of America. She has stood from the beginning for religious toleration, yes, and all honor to her for having so done. She has stood for democracy, and again, I say, all honor to her. But the cornerstone of both of these doctrines is faith in the other man, faith in those of whatever station and whatever belief, who share with yourself in the common life of the commonwealth. That is what Rhode Island, and she alone, stood for in the making of America. Again and again, America has fallen away from that ideal. Particularly under stress of war has freedom of speech been denied. In the stormy years of the Revolution, in those of the Civil War, and in the past few years of the Great War and after, it would be untruthful to say that all men were allowed to say what they would. It is not within the scope of my present address to discuss to what extent I may believe these fallings away from the ideal may or may not have been justified by the exigencies of the several situations. But I may point out that none of these crises were, speaking comparatively, of greater danger than the one which in 1657 your little colony of eight hundred people faced both within and without. The basis of the action taken by Massachusetts and the other colonies, even Connecticut, was fundamentally based upon fear, upon lack of faith in the common man. The rulers felt that he could not be counted upon to judge rightly for himself or to act rightly. He must be defended from infection, as they called it, in a word from his own ignorance and lack of wisdom. On the other hand

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the Rhode Island policy was based upon courage and upon faith, courage to take the risk of the infection because of their faith that the common people if allowed to judge themselves would in the long run judge rightly. Which was right in 1657, Rhode Island or Massachusetts? The policy of the little colony was then looked upon as the height of folly, yet it succeeded, whereas the policy of Massachusetts, the policy of fear and mistrust, failed miserably after leaving the indelible stain of the blood of martyrs upon the history of the powerful colony. Whatever men may have thought then of the practical course to be pursued, whatever they may think today, there is no question that if democracy is not a mockery, it must be based upon the doctrines exemplified by Rhode Island. If we are ostensibly to place power in the hands of the people and yet are not to trust the people, then the few must attempt to govern by subterfuge of one sort or another. It may be that the ideal set by the Rhode Islanders of two centuries ago is not yet possible of its fullest realization in practice even in the America of the twentieth century, but just in so far as it is not, just in so far as our democracy is yet imperfect, and it is the duty of the commonwealth to see that the people by education, by training, by the conditions of their environment are made capable and worthy of the trust which democracy places upon them. We hear many discouraging sayings as to the results of democracy, as to the impossibility of democratic culture, and of democratic institutions. When sometimes thus discouraged myself, I like to think of a scene which I see every day during my winter's work at the Library of Congress in Washington. There in the reading room in the great rotunda of one of the world's great libraries, not the gift of some prince of the state or of commerce, but erected by the people themselves with their own taxes, may be seen several hundred persons, of all ages, colors and races, quietly studying, diligent, law-abiding, intent upon the acquisition of knowledge. There may be seen old men with flowing white beards, school children of ten or twelve years of age, colored men and women, Chinese, Japanese, and innumerable other types and races. Three million volumes of the world's treasured knowledge are at their disposal for the asking, and several tens of thousands of volumes may be had for the mere taking off the shelves. No pass is required, no questions are asked, no references called for. Anyone may wander in from the street and the world is there for the asking. Even at the door if one passes out with an armful of books, no questions are asked, and yet though the facilities of the reading room are frequently taxed to their utmost, no books are stolen, no disorder occurs; nothing but the decorum of quiet study is visible. The people are trusted and they thus repay the trust confided in them. That is one of the fruits of our democracy. It is the policy of Rhode Island once more in action. Whether we regard this policy as an ideal or as an accepted fact in practical politics, it is unquestionably the most precious and the most characteristic feature of American life. And it is the most glorious element in Rhode Island's part in the making of America that her founder gave us the first and clearest verbal expression of such an ideal, and the authorities of her government the first concrete example of that ideal put in practice in the face of an overwhelming crisis. Remember then that Rhode Island stood for religious liberty and for democracy, but beneath both of these things there must be, and there was here in the very beginning, that cornerstone upon which each must rest in the polity of a state,—unflinching faith in the common man.