We often read of his influence on the Indians. I cannot recall a suggestion, on the other hand, that the Indians might have been good for Roger Williams.
—J. Lewis Giddings, “The Indians and Roger Williams”

**ABSTRACT** Roger Williams is best known for publishing an ethnographic language guide to the Narragansett Indians, *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), and a plea for religious toleration, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644). Although Williams penned these works within a year of each other, historians have paid scant attention to their intersections. This article fills this gap by demonstrating that Williams formulated the underlying premises of both works while acting as a mediator between New England settlers and Native American groups during and after the Pequot War (1637–38). At the beginning of the war, Williams, like his Puritan neighbors, suspected that the Pequot Indians were the devil’s agents. Though the Pequot War hardened the line between white Christians and Native Americans in the minds of most New England settlers, it convinced Williams that religion never justified violence and that Native Americans and Christians shared a moral code. Williams devoted the rest of his life to arguing that people of various religions could join together in civil societies and that “the sword of the Lord” should never be used for civil ends. There were two prongs in Williams’s argument for religious and cultural toleration: first, individuals are prone to misunderstand for-
eign peoples and ideas and thus should not be trusted to judge outsiders; second, civil peace relies on locating existing similarities and tolerating differences. In *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* Williams highlighted the Native Americans as key in his creation of a model peaceful, civil society.

War is often a site where competing groups draw concrete lines between themselves and their foes, articulating preexisting conceptions of their identities and, as the war progresses, locating new characteristics that set themselves apart from their enemies. In colonial New England, scholars have argued, settlers asserted their difference from, and dominion over, New England’s Native American population during the Pequot War (1637–38) and King Philip’s War (1675–76). In her influential work, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity,* Jill Lepore revealed that the Puritan elite used language and narrative to cast themselves as a civilized and law-abiding people, as opposed to their Native American enemies and Spanish colonial competitors.¹ More recently, scholars have turned their attention to the earlier Pequot War, arguing that New England settlers established long-lasting symbolic and physical methods of domination over both combatant and noncombatant Native Americans.² The New Englanders’ brutality during the Pequot War, which some scholars categorize as genocidal, was predicated on the Puritans’ belief in a divine narrative that cast the settlers as defenders of Christianity and the unconverted Native Americans as the devil’s instruments.³ In this scenario, the New Englanders had to defeat the Pequot Indians, who were the natural enemies of Chris-


tainty, in order to establish a godly colony. The settlers embraced violence with religious fervor. The Pequot War was a watershed event; Native Americans lost any chance of being accepted, as equals, into white Christian society.

This article posits that the Pequot War and its aftermath affected another colonist, Roger Williams, in a dramatically different way. At the beginning of the war, Williams conflated Pequot actions with unholy superstition, espousing views that were similar to those of his Puritan neighbors. The war convinced Williams, however, that religion never justified violence and that Native Americans and Europeans shared a moral code. Williams spent the remainder of his life arguing that people of various religions could join together in civil society and that “the sword of the Lord” was spiritual in nature and should never be used for civil or physical ends. Williams provides a case study for historians who are increasingly asking how lived experience affected the debate on religious toleration. In an early modern European world, where the accommodation of different cultures and religions often led to ritualized violence, Williams provides an example of an individual who questioned claims about religious exclusivity after living in a culturally pluralistic environment.

As I demonstrate in this article, not only did Williams become commit-


6. Because his Puritan contemporaries wrote him out of the Pequot War, few scholars give him more than a brief mention. Francis Jennings notes that Williams was a dissenting voice; Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 181. More recently, scholars have turned to Williams’s letters to reconstruct the war. See Cremer, “Possession”; Lipman, “’A meanes to knitt them together.’”

7. For the emerging historiographical debate about the relationship between religious tolerance and cultural pluralism, see Marcy Norton, “Pluralism and Toleration,” *WMQ* 66, no. 2 (2009): 415–17; Stuart B. Schwartz, “Tolerance in Unexpected Places,” *WMQ* 66, no. 2 (2009): 421–26. Historians of religious toleration are also beginning to examine the ways in which living in religiously pluralistic societies led individuals to come to conclusions about the meaning of toleration that were different from those held by intellectuals and political and ecclesiastical leaders; see Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John
ted to achieving peace through toleration during the war, but he also de-veloped a number of rhetorical strategies and dispute-resolution methods that he later replicated in his writings on peace in pluralistic societies. Williams fully articulated his argument against religious violence and his manual for peaceful coexistence in the two pamphlets he published following the war: an ethnographic language guide to the Narragansett Indians titled *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), and a plea for religious toleration titled *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644).

Despite the fact that these two works were published within ten months of each other, few scholars have examined the relationship between Williams's ethnographic and tolerationist thought. Much of the existing work that does discuss *A Key* and *The Bloudy Tenent* in tandem suggests that Williams's religious ideas determined his discussion of Native American culture, rather than viewing the two bodies of thought as being in dialogue with each other. Increasingly, scholars are suggesting that the Narragansetts directly influenced Williams's larger body of thought. The philosopher Scott L. Pratt, the pioneer of this stance, forcefully argues that Williams integrated Narragansett ideas about interaction, pluralism, community, and growth into his ideas of religious toleration. But most scholars who men-


9. In his superb book on Williams's millenarian theology, W. Clark Gilpin concludes after a short discussion of *A Key* that both works were based on the same theological assertion that no existing political state was covenanted with God, and thus pagan and Christian governments were equally valid; W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 124. Also interested in the millenarian dimensions of Williams’s theology, the literary critic David Read argues that Williams constructed *A Key* in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming, a topic that dominates *The Bloudy Tenent*. In the American wilderness represented in *A Key* Williams could clearly see a divine plan and tentatively predict the process of conversion that would occur when Christ returned; David Read, *New World, Known World: Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 95–130. Christopher Felker, a scholar of law and literature, suggests that Williams used *A Key* to explore the malleability of discourse that he first encountered in England when working as a court recorder for Sir Edward Coke. Felker proposes that this malleability gave way to the ideas of toleration in *The Bloudy Tenent*; Christopher Felker, “Roger Williams's Uses of Legal Discourse: Testing Authority in Early New England,” *NEQ* 63, no. 4 (1990): 624–48.
tion, tentatively, that Williams’s intellectual development must owe something to the Native Americans have yet to offer a systematic argument about the linkages. Patricia Rubertone, an anthropologist, writes, “It is tempting to say that they were ‘only’ Indians and therefore did not warrant consideration equal to that of others whose lives intersected Williams’s. Yet it seems that they were as instrumental in shaping the course of Williams’s life in seventeenth-century New England as he was in representing them to later generations of European Americans.” Rubertone’s groundbreaking work, however, is focused on the Narragansetts and *A Key*; an analysis of Williams’s tolerationist ideas is outside its purview. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who offers a wide-ranging examination of liberty of conscience in America, writes about his interactions with the Narragansetts, “Williams’s experience of finding integrity, dignity, and goodness outside the parameters of orthodoxy surely shaped his evolving view of conscience.” But Nussbaum’s decision to examine only Williams’s tolerationist texts and not his writings about Native Americans makes her (correct, I would argue) hunch suggestive and deserving of further inquiry.10

This article contributes to this emerging field of study by suggesting that the letters that Williams wrote during the Pequot War and its aftermath provide a body of sources we can use to understand how he pieced together an argument for toleration while living among the Native Americans. Tracing Williams’s developing thought during the Pequot War reveals that his ideas about religious freedom were products of his experiences in America, and in particular his reflections on Native American and English settler interactions. This argument offers an alternative to the standard view of Williams as a man who was dedicated to the cause of liberty of conscience from the time he landed in Massachusetts Bay in 1631, a vision that is largely the effect of scholars using Williams’s mature (post-1643) writings to understand the sparsely documented stances he took while in Massachusetts Bay (1631–35). Though his contemporaries viewed him as ever transforming, and even volatile, this image depicts him as static. The upstreaming method is also problematic because historians have shown that before 1640 there was nary a voice in England that argued against a magistrate’s right to punish religious transgressions, which makes suspect the argument that

Williams’s ideas for toleration were intact before that time.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, we should look for indications of Williams’s developing thought during his life in America and take advantage of the letters he wrote from 1636 to 1640.

An analysis of those letters demonstrates that two positions in Williams’s argument for religious and cultural toleration grew out of his experiences as a mediator during and after the Pequot War: first, complete cross-cultural and cross-religious understanding, assimilation, and conversion were unattainable; second, civil peace relied on transcending these cultural and religious differences by locating preexisting universal similarities. His first conviction resulted from his witnessing the settlers’ indiscriminate and brutal treatment of the neighboring Native Americans during and after the Pequot War. The settlers, Williams came to believe, simply did not have the capacity to determine which Native Americans were friends and which were foes, and they had no qualms about wrongfully convicting and abusing innocent Native Americans in the name of Christianity. This distrust in people’s ability to judge one another accurately underlies a key argument in \textit{The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution}, that civil authorities could not be trusted to judge one’s spiritual state accurately, and thus should not have the power to persecute one for one’s religious beliefs or practices. Williams’s second conviction about universal moral similarities originated from the time he spent living with the Narragansetts and the work he performed after the Pequot War to protect New England Native American groups and individuals from the colonists’ abuses. He would protect these Native Americans by explaining to Massachusetts Bay officials that they had a fully developed sense of morality that was indistinguishable from that of Christian Europeans and thus could be trusted as neighbors. This claim dominates \textit{A Key to the Language of America}. In \textit{The Bloudy Tenent} this point is crucial to Williams’s argument for religious toleration because it allows him to make the case that all individuals can be trusted to live in society without being forced to convert. In fact, for Williams, peace relies on building a society around these shared moral convictions, and not around Christianity.

The first part of this article argues that while living in Massachusetts Bay, Williams was animated by ecclesiological arguments regarding church purity, which encouraged him to express the radical separatist ideas that led to his expulsion. Shortly after Williams fled to Providence, Massachusetts Bay officials asked him to work on their behalf to prevent the Narragansetts from aligning themselves with the Pequots in what became the Pequot War. The second part analyzes Williams’s involvement in the war and its after-

math, identifying the development of his dedication to, and strategy for achieving, peace. The final section analyzes *A Key to the Language of America* and *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, uncovering the arguments that had their genesis in Williams’s Pequot War letters.

Roger Williams was not always preoccupied with civil peace and the appropriate role of religion in civil government. He was an ever-evolving figure with a willingness to follow his “tender Conscience” wherever it guided him.12 Those closest to him were at times taken aback by the “newfound practices” he charged into.13 His decision to move from England, where he was working as a chaplain for a Puritan-leaning family, to America was no exception. Like many of the Puritans who arrived in New England in the late 1620s and 1630s, Williams was fleeing the policies of William Laud, who was appointed bishop of London in 1628 and archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. Religious nonconformists who refused to lecture from the official Prayer Book, wear a hood and surplice, and conform to other ecclesiastical practices that many deemed popish were subject to fines, imprisonment, and even physical torture.14 Williams had turned down a “new-England call” in 1629 but, after a startling illness in late 1630, which he probably interpreted as a divine message, he boarded a New England-bound boat, later explaining that his “conscience was persuaded against the nationall church and ceremonies, and bishops.”15

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Williams arrived in Boston less than a year after John Winthrop and his followers had landed with a patent to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony. New England was a young region, and though most inhabitants agreed that the Anglican Church needed to be reformed, there was little consensus on doctrine, liturgy, or whether the New England churches should separate from the Anglican Church. Williams, whom Plymouth Governor William Bradford described as "a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts but very unsettled in judgement," spent his time in Massachusetts Bay refining his beliefs about church purity. More than once Williams's unfolding "singular opinions," and his habit of attempting "to impose them upon others," put him at odds with church members, which forced him to move constantly between Boston, Plymouth, and Salem, until the Massachusetts Bay General Court eventually ordered his expulsion back to England, which he escaped by fleeing south and founding Providence.

Though Williams created controversy because of some of his ideas about proper conduct within the church, such as insisting that women wear veils, he was most focused on ensuring that the church was composed only of visible saints who did not have communion with corrupt churches. He was critical of the Church of England, which was indiscriminate in its membership, and the Boston church, which posited that individuals could progress toward salvation and remain in the church. Williams believed, like Congregationalist Puritans, that all members of the church, including the ministers, were spiritual equals who kept the church in balance; thus, one unregenerate member could jeopardize the spiritual well-being of the entire church. Williams monitored the New England churches to ensure that

19. Immediately after his expulsion, Williams told John Cotton that it was the lack of visible saints within the New England churches and their insistence on remaining connected with the Church of England that made him break with the churches; John Cotton, summarizing Williams’s argument in “To Roger Williams, ca. early 1636,” CRW 1:35–44. For the veil controversy, see Gilpin, Millenarian Piety, 38–39.
church elders and ministers respected this equality and did not seize control of the church away from the church members. He harshly chastised elders at the Church of Boston when they failed to share a letter from the Church of Salem with the “whole bodie” of the church.21

Committed to these beliefs about church member equality and purity, Williams stood with separatist Puritans who demanded that church members sever their relationships with the tainted Church of England and refrain from mingling spiritually with the unregenerate.22 Williams argued that “if a person uncleane by a dead body, touch holy things, those holy things become unclean unto him.” Likewise, “Ordinances practiced by persons polluted through spirituall deadnesse and filthynesse of Communion, they become uncleeane unto them, and are prophaned by them.”23 His criticisms of Massachusetts Bay policies reflected this conviction that if a civil authority required the unregenerate to enact certain religious practices, then the true believers would be contaminated in the process. The four positions that ultimately led the Massachusetts General Court to banish Williams stemmed from this conviction. First, Williams demanded that all New England churches separate from the impure Church of England, and further that no church members pray with a member of the Anglican Church or listen to an Anglican minister while visiting England.24 Second, he claimed that the term Christendom, which included the wicked under a religious heading, was a fallacious construction that was harmful to the true believers; thus, England could not claim title to Native American land on the basis that it was a Christendom.25 Third, Williams argued that magistrates could


21. “The Church at Salem to the Elders of the Church at Boston, after 22 July 1635,” CRW 1:24. He was also critical of any actions taken by church elders or ministers that resembled a presbytery: Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, between July and December 1632,” CRW 1:8.


25. Winthrop, Winthrop’s Journal, 116–17. Most scholars agree that in his 1633 treatise against the royal charter Williams was motivated against the concept of a Christian king rather than by a desire to defend the Native Americans. Field, “A Key for the Gate,” 355; LaFantasie, “Road to Banishment,” CRW 1:15; Gilpin, Millenarian Piety, 41.
not enforce the first table of the commandments, specifically the observance of the Sabbath.26 This insistence followed from his belief that compelling the unregenerate to attend services would undermine and defile the church.27 And finally, Williams maintained that “a magistrate ought not to tender an oath to an unregenerate man, for that he thereby have communion with a wicked man in the worship of God, and cause him to take the name of God in vain.”28

Though Williams’s criticisms of the colony had civil implications, his concern was squarely with religious purity, a point made by John Cotton, who convinced the General Court that Williams was best dealt with by the Boston ministers.29 In his first letter to John Cotton, written two weeks after his departure from Massachusetts Bay, Williams remained focused solely on the topic of church pollution and separation, breathing not a word about the separation of church and state or liberty of conscience.30 We can see in the pre-1636 Williams a desire to limit the authority of the government over religious matters, but we would be wrong to assume that his ideas about religious toleration, as they would appear in The Bloudy Tenent in 1644, were fully formed at this time. Could Williams have developed a robust theory of religious toleration on the basis of his fear that civil compulsion would corrupt standing churches? Yes, of course. Other tolerationists did just that.31 But ultimately, that ecclesiological argument did not animate The Bloudy Tenent. As Martha Nussbaum convincingly demonstrates, in his published writings on religious toleration (all written after 1643) Williams was not concerned about the corruption of the church that might ensue if the state was given religious authority;32 yet this was his

29. LaFantasie, “Road to Banishment,” CRW 1:18.  
30. Though Williams’s letter does not survive, we do have Cotton’s response, which addresses Williams’s letter point by point, in CRW 1:33–44.  
32. Nussbaum, Liberty of Conscience, 41–42. Coffey claims that in The Bloudy Tenent Williams argues that Christendom is harmful to churches; Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited,” 975. My own reading of The Bloudy Tenent finds that while Williams does criticize the impure churches in existence, he does not do so to argue that freedom of conscience would lead to church purity but rather to claim that it is impossible to uphold the fundamentals of doctrine because the church is
primary concern when he lived in the Bay colony. Williams may have, in
the words of Edmund Morgan, “reached his conclusion [about religious
liberty] in some intuitive way before he had fully articulated the premises
that underlay it,” but the intervening seven years, and particularly the
Pequot War, would provide Williams with justifications for, and elabora-
tions on, what was in 1635 a defense of religious liberty rooted exclusively
in ecclesiology.33 Always one to speak in metaphors, Williams claimed in
1652, when sketching the history that led him to his beliefs about religious
toleration, that his travels had been “directed by a naked Indian boy.”34

In October 1635 Massachusetts Bay magistrates lost patience with Wil-
liams and ordered him to leave the colony within six weeks. He fled, first
into Narragansett Indian territory, and then to the land he obtained from
the Narragansetts, which would become Providence and later Rhode Island.
Williams had become acquainted with New England Native American
groups before his banishment. While living in Plymouth and Salem, he
made a living through trade, following in the footsteps of his father, who
was a merchant in London.35 He also ventured into neighboring towns to
immerse himself in Algonquian, later describing a “Constant Zealous desire
to dive into the Natives Language.”36 This interest in Algonquian was two-
fold, springing both from a desire to convert the Native Americans (a goal
he eventually abandoned) and from a genuine interest in systems of lan-
guage, which Williams demonstrated as a child when he mastered multiple
languages and became an early adopter of shorthand.37 He studied Native
American culture and religion attentively and in 1635 was able to provide
examples of customs that bore resemblance to those of Judaism for the

so corrupted; thus, if a civil government were to punish this fundamental it would
have to punish every Christian (including Cotton); Roger Williams, The Bloudy
Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed, ed. Edward Bean Underhill
(London: The Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), 40–45. Williams also discusses
church purity in his exegesis of the wheat and the tares parable, where he argues
that the Bible dictates that the church, but not civil society, uphold certain religious
dictates; ibid., 70–89.

33. Morgan, Roger Williams, 90.
34. Williams, “To Mrs. Anne Sadleir, ca. April 1652,” CRW 1:358.
35. Ernst, Roger Williams, 5; Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Master Roger Williams: A
Biography (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 9; Rubertone, Grave Undertakings, 7,
89–92.
36. Williams, “To an Assembly of Commissioners, 17 November 1677?” CRW
2:750.
37. Camp, Roger Williams, 18–19.
English Puritan minister Thomas Thorowgood to include in his book *Jewes in America*.\footnote{Williams, “To Thomas Thorowgood, 20 December 1635,” CRW 1:30. He eventually abandoned the belief that the Native Americans sprang from one of the lost Hebrew tribes.}

Williams was not driven by a deep respect for Native American culture.\footnote{Some scholars, I believe mistakenly, talk about Williams as if he stepped off the boat with a respect for Native Americans and “always treated them as human beings, not as beasts or devils”; Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience*, 43. See also James Calvin Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 7, 50–51.} He described drawing on a reserve of God-given patience to endure lodging “with them in their filthy Smoakie holes” while in Plymouth and Salem.\footnote{Williams, “To an Assembly of Commissioners, 17 November 1677?” CRW 2:750. He included the phrase “Nippuckis: Smoke Troubleth Me” in *A Key into the Language of America* (1643; repr., Bedford, Mass.: Applewood Books, 1997), 32.} He slowly acclimated to their culture, but he rarely felt comfortable among them. He referred to their wooden beds as cold and their child-rearing practices as overindulgent, and he included the phrase “Mechemocut: it stinck” in a dialogue in *A Key* about their supper.\footnote{Williams, *A Key*, 14, 19, 29–30, 83.} Williams would eventually come to view their government as just as valid as European governments, but he would continue, as he stated in 1668, to “abhor most of their Customes,” which were “Barbarous.”\footnote{Williams, “To the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 7 May 1668,” CRW 2:577.}

During his first year living “remote from others of our Countriemen amongst the Barbarous in this towne of New Providence,” Williams found himself in the middle of what threatened to be a war between New England and the surrounding Native Americans.\footnote{Williams, “To Deputy Governor John Winthrop, before 25 August 1636,” CRW 1:53.} Worsening frontier conditions, which pitted Connecticut settlers against the Pequot Indians, led Massachusetts Bay officials to ask Williams for his assistance (his fluency in Algonquian and familiarity with the New England natives were apparently common knowledge in New England). A series of accidental murders, unsatisfactory atonements, and increased English settlement near Pequot territory strained relations to the point where Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut colonists made preparations to march an army against the
Pequots. In the midst of these preparations, Boston Governor Henry Vane and the Massachusetts Bay General Council pled with Williams to use his “utmost and Speediest Endeavours” to break an emerging pan-Indian alliance by convincing the Narragansett and Mohegan Indians to ally themselves with the English. In 1670 Williams recounted the urgency and dedication with which he completed Boston’s request, recalling that “the Lo. [Lord] helped me immediately to put my Life into my hand, and Scarce acquainting my Wife to ship my selfe all alone in a poore Canow, and to Cut through (a stormie Wind 30 mile in great Seas, every minute in hazard of Life) to the Sachims howse.” Throughout the war he worked closely with the Narragansetts to secure their alliance and to gain information about the Pequot Indians’ military plans. Williams’s proximity to the Narragansett territories gave him a personal incentive to intervene. He admitted to feeling ill at ease during his initial year in Providence, which he described as being “in the midst of these dens of Lyons.” Sir Henry Vane warned Williams to beware, for if the Narragansetts did not comply with Massachusetts’ demands, Williams would find himself in harm’s way.

Williams’s urgency was also due to the fact that he, like his Puritan contemporaries, initially believed that the Pequots were more than military adversaries; they were the devil’s agents. In his first war letter, written at the time of military preparations, Williams informed John Winthrop that although the Pequots knew the settlers were preparing for war, they found comfort in their belief “that a witch amongst them will sinck the pinnaces by diving under water and making holes etc.” He hoped that “their dreames through the mercie of [the] Lord shall Vanish, and the Devill and his Lying Sorcerers shall be Confounded.” He replaced all Pequot rationality with superstition, designating them Satan’s pawns rather than an autonomous people. At this point Williams did not characterize their military tactics in civil rather than religious terms.

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44. The narrative of the events leading up to the Pequot War has been carefully laid out by Cave, The Pequot War, 59–76, 87–100, 104–10; Lipman, “‘A meanes to knitt them together,’” 15–16.
47. Cave, The Pequot War, 106.
As the war progressed, Williams unraveled religion from civil society. In conjunction with this shift, Williams revised his writing style to correspond with his evolving role as intermediary. In his early letters his allegiance was solidly with New England. Christopher Felker, who has analyzed the legal dimensions of Williams’s thought, characterizes Williams as Winthrop’s legal adviser, or agent, in these early 1637 letters. Williams revealed a detachment from both the Pequot enemies and his Narragansett informants. His terse catalog of intelligence information was devoid of the cultural exploration that characterized his later work. In a typical letter, Williams reported that the Narragansett leader Miantonomi, who offered to attack a group of Pequots without English assistance, “will put 40 or 50, or more as the Vessell will stow. He will put in Vitailes [victuals] himselfe for his men. He will direct the pinnace to the places and in the night land his men.” Williams secured English goods for the Narragansetts, who supplied him with information. He did not partake in bargaining himself, but rather traded information and goods from one side to the other. This position of carrier engendered a spy mentality; Williams transported information to be used for foreign purposes. Williams did not concentrate on these differences, as he did in his later letters and writings, but focused rather on the objects that were in his possession, whether information or goods.

While Williams was acting as an alliance builder and intelligence carrier he was intimately involved in devising the New Englanders’ battle plans, a fact that conflicts with his later role as peace advocate. Using information he gleaned from the Narragansetts, Williams advised Sir Henry Vane and John Winthrop about the expected length of the war (“to do execution to purpose on the Pequts, will require not two or three days and away, but a riding by it and following of the work to and again the space of three weeks or a month”); where the Pequots would shelter their women, children, and elderly (“a marvellous great and secure swamp, which they called Ohomowauke”); and from where the colonists should deploy (“Nayantaquit”) and keep their munitions (“Aquednetick, called by us Rode-Island”). The famous drawing included in Captain John Underhill’s account of the attack at Fort Mystic (figure 1) closely resembles the advice Williams passed from the Narragansetts to Vane and Winthrop about how best to attack a Pequot fort: attack at night so the soldiers could easily enter the Pequot homes “and

51. Williams, “To Governor Henry Vane or Deputy Governor John Winthrop, 13 May 1637,” CRW 1:78.
do what execution they please,” and lay an ambush between the fort and the nearby swamp “to prevent their flight.”

Days after the attack on Fort Mystic, Williams was keeping track of the movements of Native American troops as they ran from, and toward, the remaining Pequot warriors. On June 2 he recommended that the Connecticut soldiers under Captain Patrick “pursue Sasacous [a Pequot leader] in all his Motions” and that additional troops “stop for a day or 2.” He apologized briefly for taking over the war plans, breaking into his orders to explain, “I conceaved (with submission) that it might save the Countrey no small

52. Williams, “To Governor Henry Vane and Deputy Governor John Winthrop, 1 May 1637,” CRW 1:73; John Underhill, Newes from America; or, A new and experimenterall discoverie of New England containing, a true relation of their war-like proceedings these two yeares last past, with a figure of the Indian fort, or palizado (London, 1638).
charge and hazard and losse timely to advertize and give Intelligence."53 Williams was adamant that New England defeat the Pequots quickly and decisively. When Williams heard that Winthrop was recalling troops, he urged him to reconsider, warning that it would give the Pequots more time to gain the allegiance of the Mohawks and “put many opportunities of occasionall revenge into their hand.”54

The weeks after the Fort Mystic offensive gave Williams space to reflect on the nature of the war and evaluate his initial assumptions and goals. Throughout the remainder of his life, Williams would justify the Pequot War as a defensive war, but after the Mystic conflagration he became nervous that the leadership in the Bay colony saw this war as a religious war, a chance to stamp out all non-Christians. Some Puritans were creating pamphlets and sermons exalting a vengeful God who uprooted Satan’s agents. John Underhill, for instance, defended the events at Mystic by referring to the story of David, which instructed that in the event that a people “sinne against God and man . . . the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents.”55 Williams, on the other hand, increasingly invoked a God who wanted his followers to be guided more “by love and pitie then by fury, and wrath.”56 “Blessed be the holy name of the most High who breakes the Bow and cuts the spear,” Williams wrote on July 10, 1637, characterizing God as an active agent of peace.57 Though Williams’s early letters were consistent with the writings of the Puritan elite in his detachment from Native American subjects, hostility towards the Pequots, and religious interpretations of the Pequots’ military defeats, Williams ceased believing the Pequots were Satan’s agents and instead viewed the war in civil terms. Rather than likening them to the devil, Williams wrote six weeks after the attack at Mystic that the Pequots’ “treacheries exceede Machiavills.”58 Although the Pequots were “another miserable drove of Adams degenerate seede,” they were, he contended, “our brethren by na-ture.”59 Williams himself was reevaluating his initial assumptions about Na-tive American virtue. With surprise, he noted in the Narragansett leader Miantonomi “some sparkes of true Friendship,” despite the fact that “there

55. Underhill, Newes from America, 35–36.
56. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 10 July 1637,” CRW 1:98.
57. Ibid., 95.
58. Ibid., 94.
is no fear of God before their eye."60 Williams was separating civil relationships from religious uniformity, and eventually he would suggest that peace was dependent on this separation.

Williams’s developing devotion to peace is probably related to his growing distrust of existing churches, which culminated in his turn to Seekerism sometime between 1639 and 1643.61 Seekers concluded that the line of apostolic succession had been broken and therefore valid churches did not exist on Earth and could not be convened until a second advent of Christ.62 Instead of ensuring that churches were pure, as he did while in the Bay colony, Williams now shifted his goal to readying Earth for the coming apostles. As Williams explained in 1644, in the anonymously published pamphlet *Christening Make Not Christians*, apostles would not be sent to Earth until there was peace. As proof of this claim he referred to 2 Samuel 7, the story of David, who had to live in a tent until God permitted a peace that could sustain a standing house of God.63

Like those of most early modern ethnographers, Williams’s cultural views were inseparable from his religious and civil views, and they developed in tandem.64 He opened *The Bloudy Tenent* by promising to present “arguments from religion, reason, experience,” and it was the experience of the


61. Williams would not have known that a group of people who shared his beliefs were called Seekers until he returned to England in 1643; J. F. McGregor, “Seekers and Ranters,” in J. F. McGregor and B. Reay, eds., Radical Religion in the English Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 122–23. There has been some resistance to the argument that Williams was a Seeker; see Morgan, Roger Williams, 152n56. A letter John Eliot wrote to John Cotton reveals that Williams was reading and disseminating Seeker writings; “John Eliot to John Cotton, June 6, 1651,” in The Correspondence of John Cotton, ed. Sargent Bush Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 447. A letter that Williams wrote to Winthrop in October 1636 provides strong proof that Williams had by that time shifted his focus from establishing a pure church to sowing the seed for the Second Coming; “To John Winthrop, 24 October 1636?” CRW 1:65–69.


Pequot War that allowed him to hone the peacemaking skills necessary to prepare the world for the Second Coming. During July 1637, in “the midst of a multitude of barbarous distractions,” Williams began to construct his first argument against religious persecution. He had been carrying a letter from John Cotton for over a year. In dialogue with the Williams of 1635, Cotton’s letter dealt exclusively with the topic of church purity and Williams’s spiritual state. Cotton asserted that God was putting Williams in harm’s way to fight against his “corrupt Doctrines.” When the “sword of his mouth” did not convince Williams to change paths, God threatened Williams’s life. Cotton, in other words, was arguing that Williams was erring against his conscience, or willfully ignoring God’s corrections.

Christians called man’s pipeline to God “conscience,” and they struggled with the limits and accuracy of one’s conscience. Perpetrators of religious persecution were emboldened by their belief that they could “discern clearly the difference between such as are to be punished and persecuted, and such as are not,” Williams explained in The Bloudy Tenent. Williams had increasingly little faith in man’s ability to discern another’s spiritual state. As I will discuss more fully in the final section of this article, the basis of

65. Williams, The Bloudy Tenent, 4. James Calvin Davis also argues that “Williams’s theological orientation permitted him to appeal to a number of sources for moral insight, including practical reason and the precedents of human experience”; Davis, The Moral Theology of Roger Williams, 21; see also 64–69.

66. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 21 July 1637,” CRW 1:106. The writings that Williams mentions in this letter have not been recovered, but his description reveals that he was still focused on the dangers of separatists listening to English preachers. Yet a new strand of his thought was emerging that focused on liberty of conscience and the separation of church and state. When Williams published his response to Cotton’s letter in London, he similarly said: “This Letter I acknowledge to have received from Mr. Cotton (whom for his personal excellencies I truly honour and love.) Yet at such a time of my distressed wanders amongst the Barbarians, that being destitute of food, of cloths, of time I reserved it (though barely, amidst so many barbarous distractions) and afterwards prepared an Answer to be returned.” Roger Williams, Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered (London, 1644), n.p. (first page).

67. John Cotton, “To Roger Williams, ca. early 1636” CRW 1:34.

68. This letter has not survived, but Cotton’s letter, and a different response by Williams, were published in England in 1644, and dialogues between them served as the basis of The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution.


both Williams’s criticism of the Pequot War and his criticism of using civil punishments for religious ends was his realization that humans lacked the ability to differentiate accurately between the godly and the ungodly.

His acknowledgment after the events at Mystic that colonists were carelessly killing all Native Americans heightened Williams’s sensitivity to man’s faulty judgment. During the Pequot War, Williams began to “feare that some innocent blood cryes at Qunnihticut.” He was suspicious of the “generall speech” circulating in New England that “all must be rooted” out for the sake of the Lord. Williams believed that New Englanders were incapable of distinguishing loyal Indians from enemy Indians, and thus were killing friends whom they mistook as foes. He watched as Narragansett individuals who had fought alongside New England soldiers were hastily lumped with Indian enemies. This crisis of identification began at the attack on Fort Mystic, when the English mistakenly killed a substantial number of Narragansett Indians. Williams brushed the killings aside as an accident and asked that in future battles the New Englanders supply their Indian allies with “some yellow or red for their heads” to prevent confusion. But these accidents continued to occur with great regularity, and Williams repeatedly complained that the Narragansetts and other allied Indians were being “much disregarded by many.” Further, loyalties and spiritual states were fluid, and the Pequots who were acting as enemies at one point might not be enemies later, and thus should be spared execution. Whereas some Pequot individuals were “perswaded to fight,” Williams explained, “the greater sort dissented.” Williams criticized the Massachusetts Bay officials for failing to recognize that not all Pequot individuals were dangerous enemies. He became an advocate for those Pequot individuals who wanted peace, and he wrote to Massachusetts Bay in their behalf, asking for their lives to be spared. In *The Blowy Tenent* Williams would similarly argue that God might plan to save an individual later in life, and thus man must not kill another man because of his current spiritual state or denominational membership.

71. Williams, “To John Winthrop, 15 July 1637,” *CRW* 1:102. For Williams’s insistence that the Pequots be dispersed instead of murdered, see “To Governor John Winthrop, 7 June 1638,” *CRW* 1:161. For Williams’s horror at reports of Indian executions, see “To John Winthrop, after 21 September 1638,” *CRW* 1:184.
73. Williams, “To John Winthrop, 2 June 1637,” *CRW* 1:84.
74. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 20 August 1637,” *CRW* 1:114.
75. See Williams, “To Governor Winthrop, 2 July 1637,” *CRW* 1:96–97; see also Williams, “To John Winthrop, August 1639,” *CRW* 1:200.
The summer of 1637 also marked a stylistic development: Williams’s first use of transcription, or carrying verbatim messages between the Narragansetts and Massachusetts Bay officials. Miantonomi’s brother Yotaash, who was transporting a letter to Winthrop, requested this method. Williams, uneasy with the prospect of Yotaash’s words traveling unfiltered to Winthrop, insisted on interspersing Yotaash’s request for Pequot captives with his own opinions on the matter: “Miantunnomu requests you to bestow a Pequot squaw upon him. I object, he had his share sent him. He answers that Caunounicus receaved but a few women and keepes them: and yet he sayth his brother hath more right: for himselfe and his brothers men first laid hold upon that Company. I object, that all are disposed of. He answeres, if so, he desires to buy one or 2 of some English man.”

Initially a reluctant transcriber, Williams adopted the method in his subsequent letters and publications. He continued to record the dialogue between himself and the Native American speaker, sometimes transcribing the Algonquian words. Eventually, he expanded his participation from objections to questions, clarifications, and alternative explanations. This role demanded that, instead of simply noting facts, he also include the logic behind the information. By so doing, he moved from being an outside observer to a participant-observer, engaging with, instead of just watching, Native Americans. Even as he objected to their claims, he began to recognize the coherence of the Native Americans’ reasoning and the nature of their sense of justice.

Williams employed the transcription and dialogue method of mediation in *A Key* and *The Bloudy Tenent*. In *A Key* an Englishman and a Narragansett engage in dialogue; in *The Bloudy Tenent*, Peace and Truth are interlocutors: Peace is often charged with quoting the official positions of John Cotton or Massachusetts Bay, and Truth patiently offers counter positions. He allowed both sides to make their own judgments but also attempted to present them with a fuller picture of one another, and ultimately the interlocutors in both pieces find common ground. As Williams wrote to Winthrop, he believed that by recording the actual words of the Native Americans, he could better foster understanding. After transcribing a Narragansett leader’s speech, Williams admitted he disagreed with the leader but explained, “I was willing to gratifie him in this because as I know your owne heart studies peace, and their soule good: So your Wisedome may

77. Williams, “To John Winthrop, ca. 12 August 1637,” *CRW* 1:110.
make use of it unto others who happily take some more pleasure in Wars."79 His determination that peace required dialogue prompted Williams to organize face-to-face meetings between New England Native Americans and English colonists who were at odds with each other.80

But Williams became increasingly convinced that dialogue between two peoples could not always dislodge deeply entrenched beliefs or stereotypes. He saw this clearly in his efforts to convert Native Americans to Christianity, a project he abandoned sometime after 1638.81 He gave up on the goal of conversion because, he explained in 1644, “In matters of the Earth men will helpe to spell out each other, but in matters of Heaven (to which the soule is naturally so adverse) how far are the Eares of man hedged up from listening to all improper Language?”82 In other words, Williams had found it possible for people to negotiate in most secular matters, but not in spiritual matters. In *A Key* Williams revealed how tightly men held to their erroneous religious beliefs, even when confronted with the truth. For example, Englishmen who attempted to teach Native Americans the Genesis story of Creation would probably meet the following response: “Wee never heard of this before: and then will relate how they have it from their Fathers, that *Kautántowwit* made one man and woman of a stone, which disliking, he broke them in pieces, and made another man and woman of a Tree, which were the Fountaines of all mankind.”83 For Williams, this anecdote exemplified the resistance to change, particularly religious change, exhibited by all people. Williams proceeded to argue in *The Bloudy Tenent* that society could not be trusted with judging the veracity of religious beliefs, and thus all should be afforded the right to practice their religion as they saw fit. The epistemological basis of this argument, that man cannot fully recognize a new spiritual order, mirrors the conclusions he reached during the Pequot War and in *A Key*, that man could not easily read a new culture.84

If people could not easily understand a new culture, a mediator was needed to translate this culture into terms that were familiar and acceptable. Williams became this mediator. A year after the Mystic attack, Williams

79. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, ca. 9 September 1637,” *CRW* 1:119.


81. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 28 February 1637/8,” *CRW* 1:146.


84. David Read has also noted Williams’s particularly acute sensitivity to man’s capacity for misjudgment in *A Key* and *The Bloudy Tenent*; see Read, *New World, Known World*, 100–101, 116, 118–19.
had completely replaced his earlier role of intelligence gatherer with a self-proclaimed duty to mediate disputes and dispel the rumors that ran rampant on the frontier. While the Pequots no longer posed a threat to New England, the colonists continued to round up and enslave surviving Pequot individuals, sometimes treating them cruelly. Even those Native American groups who had not been at war against the New England colonies were treated with immediate suspicion. Williams’s goal, he wrote in August 1638, was to “negotiate their business, and save blood, whether the natives’ or my countrymen’s.” Judgment and justice were central to Williams’s conception of peace after the Pequot War, and these two concepts would remain central to his argument for civil and religious peace in *The Bloudy Tenent*. He envisioned himself as “a patient and gentle hand to rectifie Misunderstanding of Each other and misprisions.”

Williams acted as a judge by convincing the Massachusetts Bay authorities of the guilt of some Indians and the innocence of others in issues ranging from murder and theft to trespassing. His goal was to spare innocent Indians death, imprisonment, or economic dispossession. For instance, in the summer of 1638 Williams ascertained that a Pequot man named Pametesick had murdered three Englishmen who were traveling on the Connecticut River. He wrote to Winthrop, “I refer it humbly to your wisedome whether (although I desire not the destruction of the surviving Pequts but a safe dispersion of them yet) the actuall murtherers be not to be Surrendred up and this Pametesick (I am partly Confident this is he) at present apprehended.”

85. The most striking and potentially disastrous rumor that Williams had to dispel was that the Narragansett leader Miantonomi intended to kill Thomas Stantons. If the English had acted on this rumor, the results would have been calamitous: Williams, “To John Winthrop, 10 January 1637/8,” *CRW* 1:140. Complicated tribal identities led to rumors implicating one group of Indians in a wrongdoing when another group was to blame; see “To Governor John Winthrop, 7 June 1638,” *CRW* 1:161. Williams rectified disputes that did not stem directly from the Pequot War but that he feared could cause more bloodshed if left unresolved. For example, in the summer of 1639 Williams resolved a dispute regarding hunting lands; “To Governor John Winthrop, 2 May 1639,” *CRW* 1:194–95.


87. Williams, “To John Winthrop, ca. 1 August, 1638,” *CRW* 1:171. See also “To Governor John Winthrop, 7 June 1638,” *CRW* 1:162; “To Governor John Winthrop, 14 August 1638,” *CRW* 1:176–77.


89. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 7 June 1638,” *CRW* 1:161. For other examples of Williams reporting on the guilt of particular Indians, see “To Governor John Winthrop, 10 September 1638,” *CRW* 1:179–80; “To John Win-
that only the guilty Pequot individual face sanction, not the entire Pequot people.

Significantly, at a time when many Puritan writers were claiming that Native Americans lacked morality, Williams had to rely on a shared sense of justice as he worked with Native Americans and New Englanders to locate, capture, and prosecute criminals on the frontier. Williams demonstrated that rather than being amoral rogues, the Native Americans professed “that what evil soever shall appear to be done by any (Subject to them) against the Bodies or goods of the English, Satisfaction shall readily be made out of the Bodies or goods of the Delinquents.”

Further, Williams insisted that Native American witnesses were as, if not more, reliable than English witnesses. For instance, when Massachusetts Bay officials accused Wattattaaguegin of unlawfully laying hunting traps that injured a number of horses in land newly acquired by Massachusetts Bay, Williams argued that the Natives had not been adequately informed of the new land boundaries and, further, that Wattattaaguegin saw two of the horses that the colonist claimed were maimed ride away from the traps unharmed. Williams insisted that Wattattaaguegin be allowed “to return to the Bay to enquire more perfectly the damage.” Although the Narragansetts, according to Williams, did not believe “that Wattattaaguegin broke any knowne covenant in laying his traps in that place, nor willingly wrought evil against the English,” they promised that if found guilty by the English they would make any economic restitution required.

Williams’s emerging conviction that Native Americans had a coherent and moral system of justice that was consistent with that of the English formed the basis of his arguments in A Key and The Bloudy Tenent that civil societies need not be founded on Christianity or religious uniformity.

Both Williams’s New England and Narragansett contemporaries noted a transformation in him. The Narragansetts attested to Williams’s competency in understanding their language, intentions, and desires; they were hesitant to attend councils with the English unless accompanied by Williams. Williams’s willingness to give credence to the Native Americans’ views increasingly put him at odds with Massachusetts Bay elites. By the summer of 1640 he argued that the war against the Pequots had not been a

91. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 2 May 1639,” CRW 1:195.
92. Williams, “To Governor John Winthrop, 28 February 1637/8,” CRW 1:145.
holy war and criticized Europeans who used Christianity to justify murder. On catching wind “of another cause of Warr upon the Nayantaquits,” Williams questioned “whether any other use of Warr and Arms be lawfull to the professours of the Lord Jesus but in Execution of Justice upon malefactors at home: or preserving of Life and the lives in defencive warr as was upon the Pequts etc.: Isay. 2. Mic. 4.”93 He recounted, with disgust, “How oft have I heard both the English and Dutch (not onely the most civill but the most debauched and profane) say, These Heathen Dogges, better kill a thousand of them then that we Christians should be indangered or troubled with them; Better they were all cut off, & then we shall be no more troubled with them: They have spilt our Christian bloud, the best way to make riddance of them, cut them all off, and so make way for Christians.”94 In 1654 he wrote a scathing account of the Puritan New Englanders’ and Christian Indians’ propensity to wage war on unconverted Native Americans. The Narragansetts, Williams claimed, were “daily visited with threatenings . . . that if they would not pray, they would be destroyed by war.”95 In response to these critiques, Puritan writers omitted Williams’s name in all the contemporary accounts of the Pequot War, despite his indispensable contribution to the safety of the colonies.96

Williams protested against this marginalization. In the summer of 1638, presumably coming under suspicion for turning Indian, he wrote a letter to Winthrop asserting his English identity. He could not be considered an Indian, he argued, because he was not perfectly fluent in Algonquian: “Let me humbly beg belief, that for myself, I am not yet turned Indian, to believe all barbarians tell me. . . . I commonly guess shrewdly at what a native utters, and, to my remembrance, never wrote particular, but either I know the bottom of it, or else I am bold to give hint of my suspense.”97 Williams

94. Williams, Christening Make Not Christians, 1–2; emphases in original.
96. Cave, The Pequot War, 126. This process of suspicion and exclusion based on a Puritan individual’s defense of Native American groups occurred during King Philip’s War as well. See J. Patrick Cesarini, “‘What Has Become of Your Praying to God?’ Daniel Gookin’s Troubled History of King Philip’s War,” Early American Literature 44, no. 3 (2009): 500, 502.
could have pointed to any number of traits while trying to set himself apart from the Native Americans. Europeans drew attention to the barbarity of Native American clothing, habitation, agricultural practices, marriage partners, and hairstyles. Williams himself reported that William Baker, who was previously a Massachusetts Bay resident, had “turned Indian in nakedness and cutting of hair.” But Williams concentrated on one characteristic, language, and narrowly defined fluency as the ability to recognize every word, and identity as believing every word.

Language and understanding were the cornerstones of mediation, and they became the focus of Williams’s larger questions of religious identity. As his hopes for peace between the Native Americans and the New England settlers changed, so did his method of mediation, creating a dynamic in which understanding and peace were inextricably entwined; peace required


99. Williams, “To John Winthrop, 10 January 1637/8,” CRW 1:140. See also “To Governor John Winthrop, ca. 26 October 1637,” CRW 1:126; Rubertone, Grave Undertakings, 94–95.

100. Williams undoubtedly saw language and cultural identity as interrelated. But we should not overlook the fact that it was not until the eighteenth century that Europeans believed that language was a societal invention. Before that point, most European linguists believed that all languages were divine, originating from Eden and diversified after the fall of Babel. One of the largest concerns was that after Babel language had lost its power to communicate. Throughout the seventeenth century philosophers and other scholars began a search for this universal language that resembled that used before Babel. There was an effort among many New World missionaries, including Williams, to explain Native languages using grammar models derived from Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. See Edward G. Gray, New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Lieve Jook, “Descriptions of American Indian Word Forms in Colonial Missionary Grammars,” in Edward Gray and Norman Fiering eds., The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492–1800: A Collection of Essays (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 293–309; David S. Katz, Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603–1655 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Rudiger Schreyer, “‘Savage’ Languages in Eighteenth-Century Theoretical History of Language,” in Gray and Fiering, The Language Encounter in the Americas, 310–26.
the establishment of a shared language and the refusal to persecute those with a foreign tongue. During the war Williams was an intelligence carrier, a transcriber, and, lastly, a cultural interpreter. Williams's mid-1637 through early 1638 letters that literally transcribed conversations he had had with the Narragansett leaders gave way to a more digested account of conversations. These post-1638 letters translated Native American demands and concerns, instead of just presenting intelligence information that would be useful to the New Englanders. Williams's role as cultural interpreter grew out of his realization that unfiltered words could easily be misconstrued if heard by a lazy or unsympathetic ear. Therefore, he translated the logic of the Native Americans into cultural terms that the Puritans could understand and vice versa, ultimately constructing a cross-cultural code of morals and justice that he would present in A Key and refer to in The Bloudy Tenent.

As religious sectarian violence started to brew in England, culminating in the English civil war, Williams offered the English the model for creating a peaceful civil government that he was devising in America. Williams's two manuals for peace, A Key into the Language of America and The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, were founded on his determination that limited moral similarities could serve as the basis for peaceful civil relationships and ultimately aid in the progression of Christianity by creating a safe environment for the next apostles. Williams “drew the Materialls” for A Key “in a rude lumpe at sea” as he traveled back to London in 1643 to secure an official charter for Rhode Island. While in London he also published The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution in an effort to further the cause of religious tolerationist authors who were emerging in England in the 1640s. In the seventeenth century those who raised their voices in support of universal religious toleration were few, whereas “the voices in defense of religious intolerance were legion.” Situating himself within this budding debate about religious toler-

102. Williams occasionally continued to include direct dialogue in later letters as well. See, for example, “To Governor John Winthrop, 9 May 1639,” CRW 1:196–98.
103. Williams, A Key, A2.
104. Williams, The Bloudy Tenent, 130. For the early tolerationist context, and Williams's place in it, see Marshall, John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture, 312–34.
105. Marshall, John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture, 6; see also 312–13; Andrew R. Murphy, “Complicating the Standard Narrative,” WMQ 66
ation, Williams began *The Bloudy Tenent* by reprinting parts of John Murton’s anonymously published tract, *A Most Humble Supplication of the King’s Majesty’s Loyal Subjects* (1620). He followed Murton’s tract with John Cotton’s opposition to Murton’s ideas of religious liberty and Cotton’s “Model of Church and Civil Power,” written to summarize the official position of Massachusetts Bay. Williams then rebutted Cotton’s positions using biblical exegesis, historical examples, and arguments about human nature, thus reasserting Murton’s key ideas: God is the only giver of truth, only spiritual weapons should be used against religious transgressions, men could be saved by God in their last hour and should be spared until then, civil government extends only to the goods and not the souls of men, and religious uniformity was not necessary for the existence of a peaceful polity. Although he did not mention previous writers on toleration, Williams supported many of the arguments made by writers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, such as Menno Simons, Sebastian Castellio, Jacob Acontius, John Smyth, Leonard Busher, and Thomas Helwys.

Like many Puritan writers, Williams cited only the Bible, making it hard to ascertain his wider intellectual influences. But the similarity of his published writings on toleration and his observations and arguments that unfolded in his Pequot War letters suggests that Williams, who was an ocean away from the post-1640 emerging dialogue, arrived at these convictions and devised solutions by looking through the lens of the Pequot War. The Thirty Years’ War was, for Williams, a distant atrocity; but he could begin understanding and preventing the “bloody, irreligious, and inhuman oppressions and destructions under the mask or veil of the name of Christ, &c” by analyzing the dynamics of the Pequot War. This starting point is reflected in the fact that Williams roots many of his specific arguments for toleration in the dangers posed by foreign judgment.

The remaining portion of this article uncovers the arguments of *A Key* and *The Bloudy Tenent* that stemmed from Williams’s Pequot War experiences. It argues that as a mediator Williams saw firsthand that humans were limited in their ability to grasp truths beyond what they already believed: the Native Americans did not accept Christianity, and the English did not accept that non-Christians could be trustworthy neighbors. But he also saw


106. The one exception is his inclusion of a quote by Francis Bacon; *The Bloudy Tenent*, 6.

107. Ibid., 8.
that when people concentrated on their similarities, they were able to discuss, and ultimately tolerate, their differences. The similarity common to all peoples was their desire to form moral societies and to act justly, regardless of religion. To obtain peace, he constructed a model that combined this hopefulness and this realization of human limitations. In *A Key* Williams argued that Native Americans shared the same moral commitments as Europeans, despite the fact that the articulation of these moral commitments appeared foreign. In *The Bloudy Tenent* he argued that peaceful societies should be based on these universal moral commitments, and therefore enforced religious uniformity was unnecessary, as well as harmful to individuals. These were both lessons he learned as a mediator during and after the Pequot War.

The Pequot War was still fresh in Williams’s mind in 1643 when he constructed *A Key*. As he wrote about Narragansett culture in that work, he walked a fine line between presenting an unmediated Native voice and translating this voice into English. Incorporating modes of mediation he devised during and after the Pequot War, Williams began each of his thirty-two chapters of *A Key* with the transcription method, which he called an “implicit dialogue” and which recorded Narragansett phrases across from their English translations (figure 2). Many scholars argue that by placing a column of Algonquian words across from their English equivalents, and separating the words with a solid line, Williams perpetuated the distance the English saw between themselves and the Native Americans. David Murray points out, “If we try to read across the page from Narragansett to English, we are bounced back off the Indian word increasingly quickly, so that we end up reading vertically down the English side, rather than operating in any linguistic middle ground.” Instead of being a failure of mediation, however, Williams deliberately used the “implicit dialogue” sections to acknowledge the gap that existed between the English and the Native Americans. He proceeded to mediate these cultural differences in each

108. Though the goal of this article is to locate the place of the Pequot War in Williams’s developing discourse about toleration, I encourage readers who are interested in the accuracy of Williams’s claims about Narragansett culture and history to see Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 96–114.


chapter’s other sections.111 Below the “implicit dialogues” Williams bridged the cultural chasms with explanatory notes and the identification of shared emotions and motives.

As you can see from the following illustration, Williams broke the solid line and spanned the two columns with a translation of Native American actions into English terms, enacting the role of cultural mediator that he perfected in his later Pequot War letters, in which he interspersed transcriptions of dialogue with explications. His attention to war methods was particularly important, for, as Andrea Robertson Cremer has argued, New Englanders staked their claim to superiority on the argument that they embodied a more legitimate version of wartime manhood than Native American combatants. They described Native American warfare methods as chaotic and complained that in battle their Mohegan and Narragansett allies cowardly fell to the rear of the line or retreated.112 Williams directly countered this argument by highlighting parallels in Native American and European warfare. He likened the startling war cries of the Native Americans to drums and trumpets, rendering the initially alien sounds familiar to the English. Elsewhere in the chapter he stressed that the Native Americans and the English began wars for similar reasons: anger, retribution, pride, and passion. They differed not in impulse, but in actions: the Native Americans used words, sounds, and gestures to carry out a war, whereas the English ultimately used weapons and violence. Williams explained that Native Americans “fight with leaping and dancing, that seldome an Arrow hits, and when a man is wounded . . . they soone retire and save the wounded.”113 Unlike other Puritan writers who deemed the English mode of war superior, Williams contended that because Native American wars stood on words and postures of power, they were executed, if at all, with more restraint: “Their Warres are farre lesse bloudy, and devouring then the cruell Warres of Europe.”114 He continued to underline the peacefulness of Native Americans in *The Bloody Tenent* when he wrote that “the very Americans and wildest pagans keep the peace of their towns or cities, though neither

111. Even in his later letters, Williams was careful to keep his observations separate from those of his Native informants: “I shall humbly and faythfully submit to Consideracion: I, from them, 2, from my selfe.” Williams, “To John Winthrop, ca. October 1638,” *CRW* 1:192.
114. Ibid., 188–89.
Of their Warre, &c. 175

Cummusquauanamuck | He is angry with you.
Matwaúog. | Soulders.
Matwàgonck. | A Battle.
Cummulquànumish | I am angry with you.
Cummulquànumee | Are you angry with me?
Miskiáuwall | A quarrelsome fellow.
Tawahitch niskükean | Why are you so fierce?
Ntatakcommuck quinewò | He struck me.
Nummokókunitch | I am robbed.
Ncheckéquunitch.
Mecaútea. | A fighter.
Mecaúnteita. | Let us fight.
Mecaúnteaffs. | Fight with him.
Wepé cummécautch. | You are a quarreler.
Jühetéita. | Let us fight.
Jühetteke. | Fight, Which is the word of encouragement which they use when they animate each other in warre; for they use their tongues in stead of drummes and trumpets.

Figure 2. Page 175 from Roger Williams, A Key into the Language of America (London, 1643). Courtesy of the Clements Library, University of Michigan.
in one nor the other can any man prove a true church of God in those places.”115

His realization that non-Christian Native American communities main-
tained peace when Christian communities could not led Williams to unravel
Christianity from a functioning civil government, a necessary step in his
path toward arguing for the viability of societies that permitted liberty of
conscience. Williams, like most Englishmen, believed that “a civil govern-
ment is an ordinance of God, to conserve the civil peace of people so far as
concerns their bodies and goods.”116 But unlike Williams, most Englishmen
and New Englanders believed that, as Cotton wrote, “Civil peace cannot
stand entire, where religion is corrupted,” and thus orderly societies could
not exist independently of Christianity.117 As the historian Christopher Hill
explains, “The function of a state church was not merely to guide men to
heaven; it was also to keep them in subordination here on earth. Different
societies, different churches: but to want no state church at all seemed to
traditionalists a denial of all good order.”118 Secular and ecclesiastical au-
thorities were responsible for protecting civil society from individuals who
strayed from religious orthodoxy, for they could either spark divine retribu-
tion against the entire polity or engage in harmful immoral acts.119 Thus,
support for religious toleration was associated with a wide variety of social
and political transgressions such as communism, sodomy, sedition, and
murder.120

Williams vehemently disagreed with the supposition that civil peace de-
pended on religious uniformity. He responded to the claim that “Civil peace
cannot stand entire, where religion is corrupted” by retorting that the civil

115. Williams, The Bloudy Tenent, 46.
116. Ibid., 214.
117. Cotton, “A Model of Church and Civil Power,” quoted ibid., 213; William
Haller, Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, 1638–1647 (New York: Colum-
118. Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the
119. Walshram, Charitable Hatred, 1–2, 4–5, 39–40, 46–49, 235–36; Coffey,
Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 33–34, 38–41; Avihu Zakai, “Reli-
gious Toleration and Its Enemies: The Independent Divines and the Issue of Toler-
atation during the English Civil War,” Albion 21, no. 1 (1989): 1–33. See also Avihu
Zakai, “Orthodoxy in England and New England: Puritans and the Issue of Reli-
gious Toleration, 1640–1650,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 135,
120. Marshall, John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture, 7, 281–
311, 325, 332.
governments of the “wildest Indians in America” were “as lawful and true as any governments in the world,” for they most effectively kept the peace by establishing “a uniformity of civil obedience” that protected the bodies and goods of individuals.121 In The Bloudy Tenent Williams was insistent that although “a civil government is an ordinance of God, to conserve the civil peace,” the form of this government stemmed from man, and that “a people,” including Native Americans, could “erect and establish what form of government seems to them most meet for their civil condition.”122 One could use the civil dictates of Old Testament when establishing a code of law, Williams argued, “yet who can question the lawfulness of other forms of government, laws, and punishments which differ, since civil constitutions are men’s ordinances (or creation, 2 Pet. ii. 13)?”123

Williams laid the groundwork for the argument that non-Christian peoples could establish effective civil governments in A Key. He underlined his conclusion that Native Americans’ moral values and sense of justice were commensurate with those of the English, a point he continually made in his post–Pequot War mediations. In fact, England’s Christian communities fell far short of enacting many of these shared values, as Williams forcefully argued in his closing remarks about Narragansett government (figure 3). Williams was not the first thinker to argue that nature, and not just the Bible, could lead people to moral actions. But for Calvin and other Christians of the Reformed tradition, who espoused a belief in natural law, sin could obscure one’s ability to correctly identify and institute this universal law.124 For Williams, moral rules were universally visible, even to pagans, despite the fact that their manifestations varied cross-culturally.125 Take, for example, his general observation about marriage: “God hath planted in the Hearts of the Wildest of the sons of Men, an High and Honourable esteeme of the Mariage bed, insomuch that they universally submit unto it, and hold the Violation of that Bed, Abominable, and accordingly reape the Fruit thereof in the abundant increase of posterity.”126 God equipped every person with the knowledge of how to form the building blocks of societies. Though there were different ways of enacting the specificities of these unions (Native women, for example, performed different tasks from those

121. Williams, The Bloudy Tenent, 213, 215; Williams, A Key, 7.
122. Williams, The Bloudy Tenent, 214.
123. Ibid., 313.
124. Davis, Moral Theology of Roger Williams, 61.
125. Morgan, Roger Williams, 128; Hall, Separating Church and State, 82, 110.
126. Williams, A Key, 151.
undertaken by European women), respect for a social institution that ensured this sacred bond was universal.

This point must have seemed as obvious to Williams, who had spent close to a decade witnessing non-Christian Native Americans abide by a social system that was akin to that of the English, as it seemed ridiculous to his contemporaries. Williams pushed the point a step further, arguing that not only was religious uniformity unnecessary for civil uniformity but that state-enforced religious orthodoxy often unraveled civil peace and led to war, just as it did on the New England frontier. “[S]uppressing, preventing, and extinguishing such doctrines or practices by weapons of wrath and blood, whips, stocks, imprisonment, banishment, death, & such,” caused chaos, as such “alarum” hurled towns into “an uproar.”127 In contrast, the most peaceful societies permitted a range of religious beliefs and practices. “The permission of other consciences and worship than a state professeth, only can, according to God, procure a firm and lasting peace,” Williams explained in his introduction to *The Bloudy Tenent.*128 He used the example of the Native Americans to argue that peace sprung from the toleration of religious plurality. He depicted the Narragansetts as tolerant of all religions: “They have a modest Religious perswasion not to disturb any man, either themselves English, Dutch, or any in their Conscience, and worship, and therefore say: Aquiewopwauwash., Aquiewopwauwock., Peace, hold your peace.”129

Williams’s conviction that governments that permitted religious variability gave rise to peaceful societies was only one strand of his defense of freedom of conscience. His second argument, which grew out of the Pequot War, was based in his belief that individuals lacked the ability to accurately judge ideas that were foreign to them. Because of this fallibility of judgment, civil authorities should not be given the power to judge, and then punish, someone on the basis of his religious beliefs. This position stood contrary to the majority stance in England and Massachusetts Bay, where civil authorities were invested with enough disciplinary power to ensure the purity of the godly communities that were emerging with more regularity.

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128. Ibid., B1.
129. Williams, *A Key*, 129. Scott Pratt’s recent work, mentioned at the beginning of this article as the first analysis of Native American influence on *The Bloudy Tenent*, focuses on explaining how Williams adopted his theory of accepting potentially dangerous outsiders from Native American treatment of cannibals; Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 78–106.
Of their Government.

Observation generall, of their Government.

The wildest of the sonnes of Men have ever found a necessity, (for preservation of themselves, their Families and Properties) to cast themselves into some Mould or forme of Government.

More particular:

Adulteries, Murthers, Robberies, Thefts,

1 Wild Indians punish these!
And hold the Scales of Justice so,
That no man fartthing leese.

When Indians heare the horrid filths,

2 Of Irish, English Men,
The horrid Oaths and Murthers late,
Thus say these Indians then.

We weare no Cloaths, have many Gods,
And yet our sinnes are lesse:
You are Barbarians, Pagans wild,
Your Land's the Wildernesse.

CHAP. XIII.

Figure 3. Page 137 from Roger Williams, A Key into the Language of America (London, 1643). Courtesy of the Clements Library, University of Michigan.
Civil authorities were charged with punishing blatant transgressions against fundamental religious doctrines, so as to protect an individual from doing irreparable harm to his soul. Therefore, liberty was conceived of as the power to do what one ought and not what one willed. But Williams questioned how one would be able to determine which actions were blatant transgressions. Because of his experience in New England, where he saw Massachusetts Bay officials erroneously punish non-Christian Native Americans who he knew were innocent and trustworthy, Williams was adamant that individuals were not capable of making spiritual distinctions, and thus all religious beliefs and practices should be protected in the civil sphere and corrected nonviolently in the church.

Unlike many other tolerationist arguments, which were based largely on historical precedent, much of Williams’s argument was grounded in a determination about human nature: that individuals, including himself, were unable to accept and accurately judge one who was different from himself. This was due to the fact that the judgments one made were always self-validating. He asked his readers early in *The Bloudy Tenent*, “If Paul, if Jesus Christ, were present here at London, and the question were proposed, what religion would they approve of—the papists, prelatists, Presbyterians, Independents, &c., would each say, Of mine, Of mine?” Millions, he contended, were persuaded that their own conscience was truth, and the conscience of another was false. Therefore, people simply could not be


134. Ibid., 7.

135. Ibid., 53–54, 128, 234–35, 241, 248–50, 295–96, 301–2. On this point Williams was similar to Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563), who argued that “heretic” was a term commonly used by religious groups to refer to those who did not agree with them. While Castellio argued, therefore, for the right of Christians to practice their religion as they saw fit, he did believe that the civil magistrate should punish atheists and that those who denied the creation of the world, resurrection, and the immortality of the soul could be punished with fines and banishment; Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture*, 320–23; Perez Zagorin,
trusted as judges of each other’s internal spirituality. Williams and Cotton spent a lifetime disagreeing with each other, but they agreed on most biblical dictates. What they did not agree on was one person’s ability to determine if these dictates were being upheld. As Michael Kaufmann concludes after analyzing the Williams-Cotton debate, Williams’s “lack of trust in interpretation” led him to argue “that ministers have no grounds upon which to base judgments about the state of an individual’s soul.” Williams simply did not have confidence that one’s heart, language, and behavior would always be in alignment, and thus would be discernable to others.

For Williams, who was eagerly awaiting the Second Coming, which would usher in a new religious order, this inability to recognize the validity of something foreign was particularly dangerous. Since “every conscience in the world is fearful, at least shy of the priests and ministers of other gods and worships, and of holding spiritual fellowship in any of their services,” Williams feared that when God did send new messengers the public would not recognize them. Here he stood in unison with other tolerationist

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136. See, for example, Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent*, 44–45, 113–14, 143–44, 168. Alexandra Walshram has identified a handful of others who defended toleration using the uncertainty of knowledge; Walshram, *Charitable Hatred*, 244. For the scholarly debate about the role of skepticism in English toleration, see Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England*, 64–68.


138. Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent*, 250; see also 152, 179, 284, 319–20. Unlike Cotton, who argued that religious time was cyclical and could be predicted and understood by looking at the Bible, Williams, like many other tolerationist writers, employed a historiographic-theological method of typology that distinguished between, rather than noted the similarity of, the Old and New Testaments. One who believed in the continuity between the two Testaments was inclined to believe that God’s dictates were static. Williams, on the other hand, believed that God’s message was active, not frozen. Just as the coming of Christ invalidated the laws of Moses, the next apostles would bring a new order. Sacvan Bercovitch, “Typology in Puritan New England: The Williams-Cotton Controversy Reassessed,” *American Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1967): 166–91; Richard Reinitz, “The Separatist Background of Roger Williams’ Argument for Religious Toleration,” in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *Typology in Early American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 107–38; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 31, 43; Zagorin, *How the Idea*
writers who feared that Jesus’ messengers might be persecuted. Using the parable of the wheat and the tares, these writers claimed that because good and evil were intertwined, it was impossible for men to differentiate the saved from the damned.¹³⁹ For this reason, apostles would not be sent to Earth, Williams claimed, until there was peace and religious toleration.¹⁴⁰

In developing his argument, Williams parted ways with some of the positions espoused by his contemporaries. Tolerationist writers often spoke in terms of light and darkness, claiming that the light of true religion would peacefully dispel the darkness of evil.¹⁴¹ Williams rarely made such a claim about the clarity of truth. For him, “Precious pearls and jewels, and far more precious truth, are found in muddy shells and places. The rich mines of golden truth lie hid under barren hills, and in obscure holes and corners.”¹⁴² Those who were “deluded and captivated . . . against some fundamentals” were acting “not against the light, but according to the light or eye of a deceived conscience,” Williams wrote, arguing against the supposition that truth dispelled all false beliefs.¹⁴³ Much like Montaigne, who also immersed himself in examples of cultural fixity, Williams concluded that belief systems were too deeply rooted to allow for the easy separation of truth from falsity.¹⁴⁴ How else could one explain the Massachusetts Bay officials’ inability to see that although their customs were unfamiliar, neighboring Native Americans respected property rights, had a concept of just war, and abided by a system of morality? How else could one explain the Native Americans’ resistance to Christianity? Watching the repeated foibles on the New England frontier, performed with an abundance of confidence, turned Williams, in many ways, into a skeptic.

There is a sense that what started as a rhetorical strategy of defending

¹³⁹. Leonard Busher, Religions Peace; or, A reconciliation, between princes & peo-
ple, & nations (London, 1614), ii, 31, 32, 36. See also Walshram, Charitable Hatred,
239. For an excellent analysis of how Williams uses the wheat and the tares parable,
see James P. Byrd, The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Perse-

¹⁴⁰. Williams, Christening Make Not Christians, 19.

¹⁴¹. Busher, Religions Peace, 23; Thomas Helwys, A Short Declaration of the
Mystery of Iniquity (1611/1612), ed. Richard Groves (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univer-
sity Press, 1998), 10–11, 14, 76.

¹⁴². Williams, The Bloudy Tenent, 150.

¹⁴³. Ibid., 235.

the rationality of the Native Americans after the Pequot War and in *A Key* spread far beyond that project. Now, everywhere he looked, he recognized that there was an underlying system of belief that was inaccessible to a casual, outside observer, but which, when seriously evaluated, must be classified as rational and moral. Williams went much further than many of his fellow tolerationists: he granted conscience to every individual. Within the first two pages of *The Bloudy Tenent* he claimed that Papists, pagans, Jews, and Turks acted according to conscience. Cotton stated that if an individual persisted in acting erroneously after several admonitions, he was no longer acting out of conscience but against his conscience; Williams denied this distinction, claiming that all individuals “are persuaded in their own belief and conscience, be their conscience paganish, Turkish, or anti-christian.”

Although some historians have placed Williams in the very small group of individuals who argued unequivocally for universal religious toleration, there is evidence that he, like many tolerationist writers, saw toleration as a temporary policy that should be adopted before religious unity could be established. Williams believed that only the apostles could forge this unity. Fearing that people were incapable of peacefully establishing religious unity, he lamented that only after the Second Coming, when all the irreligious people had been consumed by fire, would religious liberty be granted to everyone who was still on Earth. As he had learned from his experience mediating between Native Americans and English colonists, unfiltered heterogeneity led to misunderstanding and intolerance; a bedrock of homogeneous values was a necessary precondition of acceptance. The fellowship of the godly who survived the fire would be homogeneous, Williams insisted, not consisting “of any more sorts or natures of ground [hearts of men] properly but one.”

146. Lamont, “Pamphleteering,” 81–82.
147. Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent*, 83–84; see also Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited,” 980–81. Although some theorists during this time argued that at the Second Coming the reprobate would be removed from Earth, others claimed that there would be a universal peace that included all. Williams sided with the former; see Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 211. Martha Nussbaum disagrees that Williams, in Andrew Delbanco’s words, was “longing for the purifying inferno,” claiming that in his writing he encouraged dialogue between all viewpoints; Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience*, 42. Though I agree with Nussbaum that Williams gave equal voice to differing arguments in this world, he still had his eye on a future world of uniformity.
for the new apostles would institute a uniformity of God’s ordinances and an understanding of his Word. Until the time of uniformity, the most people could achieve was a dedication to peace that would provide a safe sanctuary for God’s next messengers. Peace required people to establish agreement on civil principles, for people’s religious state was too uneven to provide a basis for communication and peace.

In summary, after the Pequot War, Williams concentrated all his energy on revealing the injustices that ensued when an outsider who had only a superficial, and thus flawed, understanding of another group’s motivations judged that group’s spiritual or civil state. Following this train of logic, Williams concluded that a person could fairly judge, and be fairly judged by, only the group of which he was a part.\textsuperscript{149} This group could be expansive; Williams presented a model in \textit{A Key} and \textit{The Bloudy Tenent} in which the English and the Native Americans were part of one group identified by a common moral system. But the criteria for judgment must either originate from, or be adopted by, the group itself.\textsuperscript{150} Until the Second Coming, religious beliefs and practices would be disparate; thus, until that time a solid ground needed to be established through civil morality that Williams felt was universally understood and desired. Williams believed that an accepted moral system would lead, quite naturally, to secular concord if the leader united his people and acted according to their wishes. Once a person gave his consent to be ruled by a particular government, he also consented to be judged by this government in civil matters, for he was now being judged by a system to which he acceded. Only the church he consented to join could judge his spiritual beliefs and religious practices.

This article has suggested a reexamination of Roger Williams that looks throughout his life for transformative experiences. Much fine work has excavated the Calvinist and Baptist dimensions of Williams’s thought. But it is time to consider how his experience after he arrived in Massachusetts Bay refined and altered his religious and social ideas. This article has explained the changes that occurred in Williams’s ideas about religious uniformity.

\textsuperscript{149} Williams insists that a person can judge only the religious group that he is, according to his conscience, a part of; see ibid., 170–71, 175, 183, 197, 215.

\textsuperscript{150} Williams was insistent that conversion must be voluntary and often takes place after the converter has exited; \textit{A Key}, 136–38; \textit{The Bloudy Tenent}, 152, 185, 187, 220, 222–23, 237–38; John Peacock, “Regions of the Soul: Ethnography as Narrative,” \textit{European Contributions to American Studies} 33 (1996): 192.
between his first years in Massachusetts Bay in the mid-1630s, in which he was focused on church purity, and his publication of *The Bloudy Tenent* in 1644, in which he focused on civil peace, as a product of his extensive experience in various roles among the New England Native Americans during and after the Pequot War. As this article has shown, Williams personally evolved from viewing Native Americans as foreigners who were controlled by the devil to seeing them as friends who upheld the moral tenets that he was deeply committed to. He made this transition, but the majority of other colonists did not, and Williams watched with horror as they invoked Christianity to justify executions, enslavements, and other retributions, long past the point at which the Native Americans stopped posing a threat to New England security. Witnessing this process of repeated injustices made Williams skeptical of people’s ability to accurately judge the virtues of, and dangers posed by, foreigners. This fear of people’s capacity to judge others became a cornerstone of Williams’s argument for religious toleration in *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, where he argued that civil magistrates could not be trusted to evaluate the spiritual state of everyone in their jurisdiction, for nations would be, until the Second Coming, composed of people of various religious persuasions.

Williams’s work as a mediator also taught him a strategy by which to establish peace among peoples who, at first glance, appeared to have different morals and customs. Williams experimented with a number of mediation methods before realizing that the transcription of Native American statements, combined with his own translation of these statements into English cultural terms, was most effective in negotiating peace between the English and Native Americans. In practicing this method, Williams began to see clearly that most of the Native American values had English equivalents. Williams explored both this methodology and this universal morality in *A Key into the Language of America*. Developing a reverence for Native American government convinced Williams that just and peaceful civil societies were not dependent on Christianity, a stance that stood counter to the majority opinion in New England and England that the only valid governments were those anchored to a Christian church. This argument provided Williams with a second major cornerstone of *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*: liberty of conscience would facilitate, not deter, the mission of a civil government, which was to establish peace and protect individuals. An obedience to civil morality and justice, which was universal among all people, could provide the uniformity necessary for a coherent form of government.

Although Williams’s *Bloudy Tenent* did not found the call for liberty of conscience, its particular, and largely original, justifications strongly influ-
enced the discourse of the English civil war. In a discussion on the development of liberty of conscience, Nigel Smith writes, “A more durable and far-reaching method was developed by Roger Williams, whose *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644) is one of the greatest and most original statements for religious toleration.”

His argument caused such a stir in England that the House of Commons ordered the public hangman to throw *The Bloudy Tenent* to the pyre on August 9, 1644. Religious radicals, including many individuals who later became part of the Leveller movement, found its message profound. More than forty of the pamphlets recorded in the Thomason collection in 1644 and 1645 quote directly from *The Bloudy Tenent* and from two smaller, complementary works by Williams. Suffice to say, arguments about religious toleration that took place in England owed much to the cultural encounters in America.

154. Ibid., 20.