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### Anne Hutchinson

*Born in England to a Puritan minister, Anne Hutchinson migrated to the new British colonies in 1634 with her husband and fourteen children. Having been educated and raised in a minister's home, Anne decided to hold Sunday meetings where she discussed the minister's sermon and Bible readings. These meetings quickly attracted attention, not all of it positive. After finding herself caught up in a political fight, Anne was excommunicated and banished from the colony.*

*Although frequently overlooked in history textbooks, the story of Anne Hutchinson has been cited by some as the founding moment of religious freedom in the New World, or by others as an instance of early feminism. It is most often held up as a classic example of the American spirit of independence.*

1860

Benson J. Lossing, *A Primary History of the United States*

A smart woman, named Anne Hutchinson, offended the ministers greatly, and the rulers first put her and her family into prison, and then drove them into the wilderness among the Indians. They wandered through the woods, almost to Manhattan Island, and lived in a hut. There all but one of them were murdered by the Indians, who hated the white people.<sup>1</sup>

## 1885

Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Young Folks' History of the United States*

Many such persons came to him [Roger Williams], and settled in different parts of the colony he founded. Among these were Anne Hutchinson, a famous woman-preacher of those days, whom the Massachusetts magistrates had exiled; and Samuel Gorton, another independent religious teacher. Another was William Coddington, who bought the island of Rhode Island, then called Aquidneck, from the Indians. Indeed, so many people of various opinions went there, that it used to be said that any man who had lost his religion would be sure to find it again at some village in Rhode Island.<sup>2</sup>

## 1930

William Backus Guitteau, *Our United States: A History for Upper Grammar Grades and Junior High School*

Williams had spent much time among the Indians, teaching them the Word of God. He said that the soil of the New World belonged to them, and that the settlers could obtain a valid title to it only by purchase, instead of by a grant from the king. A serious dispute at once arose. The Puritan leaders feared that the king, who was already inclined to take away their charter, might hear of this bold denial of his authority. Williams was ordered to return to England in 1636; but instead of obeying, he fled to the woods and took refuge with his Indian friends. Another dissenter, Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, was likewise teaching new religious doctrines and boldly criticizing the magistrates. She, too, was banished.<sup>3</sup>

## 1946

George Earl Freeland and James Truslow Adams, *America's Progress in Civilization*

In 1638 Williams' colony became a refuge for Anne Hutchinson and a group of followers. Mrs. Hutchinson preached doctrines contrary to Puritanism and was convicted of heresy and banished from Massachusetts.<sup>4</sup>

1977

JoAnne Buggey, *America! America!*

Anne Hutchinson was another person who spoke out against official Puritan beliefs in Massachusetts. Hutchinson held small meetings in her home, at which she analyzed and commented on sermons of the local ministers. Hutchinson was able to attract a large number of followers, including many well-known men.

The Puritan officials could not accept Hutchinson's religious views. In addition, some of the men in the colony objected that no woman should "meddle" with religious affairs. As a result, the General Court banished Hutchinson from the colony for being "a woman not fit for our society."

Hutchinson, her husband, and her family, along with a band of followers, traveled southeast and founded a settlement which they named Portsmouth in an area which became part of Rhode Island.<sup>5</sup>

1986

James West Davidson and John E. Batchelor, *The American Nation*

Among those who fled to Rhode Island was Anne Hutchinson. Hutchinson and her husband, William, arrived in Boston in 1634. She worked as a midwife, helping to deliver babies. She was herself the mother of 14 children.

Hutchinson was an intelligent and devout churchgoer. Often, she met with friends at her home after church to discuss the minister's sermon. These meetings worried Puritan officials. They believed that only clergymen were qualified to explain God's law. When Hutchinson claimed that many ministers were teaching incorrect beliefs, she was put on trial.

At her trial, Hutchinson answered the questions put to her by Governor Winthrop and other Puritan officials. Winthrop found that she had "a nimble wit and active spirit." Time after time, she showed up the weakness in his arguments. And he could not prove that she had broken any Puritan laws or religious teachings. Finally, after two days of questioning, Hutchinson made a mistake. She said that God had spoken directly to her. To

Puritans, this was a terrible error. They believed that God spoke only through the Bible, not to individuals.

In 1638, the General Court sent Hutchinson away from the colony. With her family and supporters, she went to Rhode Island. Later, she moved to the Dutch colony of New Netherland, where she and most of her family were killed by Indians.<sup>6</sup>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There are a number of different stories of what actually happened to Anne Hutchinson and her followers after she was banished from the Massachusetts colony. Conduct your own research on the Hutchinson story and try to find out what you think happened to her after she was banished from the Massachusetts Colony.
2. According to the textbooks in this section, is questioning an established religion a good or bad thing?
3. Do you think Anne Hutchinson is considered a hero or villain in these textbooks? Explain.
4. Research and explain what happened at her trial. Why exactly was she put on trial? How did her beliefs contradict those of the other Puritans? Were the Puritan leaders tolerant of others' ideas? What of other people such as the Native Americans?
5. Some argue that feminist movements influenced how this story is told to students. Find out when these feminist movements happened and explain whether or not they did have an effect on the story of Anne Hutchinson found in history textbooks.

*Today, one can find a statue of Anne Hutchinson outside the Massachusetts State House on the base of which she is referred to as a "courageous exponent of civil liberty and religious toleration."*