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Roger Williams and Rhode Island's Contribution to Democracy

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. JOHN E. FOGARTY

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 9, 1957

Mr. FOGARTY. Mr. Speaker, under leave to extend my remarks, I include a speech delivered by Dr. Carl R. Woodward, president of the University of Rhode Island on May 2, 1957. The occasion for this speech was a celebration commemorating the anniversary of Rhode Island Independence Day which was jointly sponsored by the Washington alumni of Brown University, Providence College, and the University of Rhode Island. The commemorative exercises were held before the statue of Roger Williams in Statuary Hall here in the Nation's Capitol.

Rhode Islanders living in the Washington area were deeply honored by having such an illustrious educator as Dr. Woodward deliver the principal address.

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The subject of his talk, Roger Williams and Rhode Island's Contribution to Democracy, was particularly appropriate and I personally found his remarks to be both pointed and interesting. As all my colleagues must know, we Rhode Islanders take justifiable pride in the fact that our State declared its complete independence of England and the Crown on May 4, 1776—2 months before similar action was taken by the United States of America.

Dr. Woodward in his talk ties this world-shattering declaration of political freedom to the earlier establishment of religious freedom by Roger Williams over a century before. I know that many of my colleagues here in the House of Representatives will find Dr. Woodward's remarks very informative, particularly his comparative analysis between Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson. He has used a somewhat different approach in paying tribute to the memory of the founder of the State of Rhode Island and one which I thought to be very effective:

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(Remarks of President Carl R. Woodward, University of Rhode Island, at the ceremony in Statuary Hall, Washington, D. C., May 2, 1957, in recognition of Rhode Island Independence Day)

This is an occasion of unique significance. The alumni of our Rhode Island colleges and universities are gathered with the representatives of our State in the National Congress to pay tribute to the memory of the founder of our State and to commemorate an event in the life of our State which marks a milestone in American history.

It is altogether appropriate that the alumni of Brown University, Providence College, and the University of Rhode Island who live and work in this vicinity should join in this observance. The State of Rhode Island has been described as "a body of water surrounded by educational institutions." Even as the campuses of our colleges at home fringe the shores of Narragansett Bay, here their sons and daughters surround the National Capitol, and an occasion like this makes us conscious of the role they are playing in the Nation's business. I think we can agree that the alumni of no group of institutions have a more notable cause for such an assembly. For it was no less an authority than the historian George Bancroft who wrote: "More ideas which have become national have emanated from the little colony of Rhode Island than from any other." In the formulation and development of these ideas, Roger Williams played a more vital part than any other of Rhode Island's heroes of peace or of war.

In the light of such a record and such a tribute, you will understand why I consider it a high privilege to be invited to participate in these ceremonies. I associate this gathering in my mind with a somewhat similar experience when, 13 years ago this month, I was asked to be spokesman for a group of scientists and educators at the grave of another pioneer of liberty—Thomas Jefferson, at Monticello. And I am reminded that Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson, who lived in different centuries, and were so widely different in background and temperament, nevertheless, had many points in common.

Roger Williams was born in England of Puritan parents about 1603. Soon after his graduation from Cambridge University in 1627, he took orders in the Church of England and went as chaplain to the house of an English nobleman. In that turbulent period of English history, it is not surprising that a young man reared in a Puritan atmosphere should have fretted under the discipline of the established order and protested the formality and the restrictions of the Anglican church. Soon after his marriage in 1629, he decided to separate from the Church of England, and 2 years later he came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The crossing of the Atlantic didn't change his nonconformist nature. His revolt against the Anglican Church abroad was followed by his revolt against the discipline of the

church-state he found in the new land, and in 1635 he was ordered by the Massachusetts general court to depart from the colony. With courageous adherence to principle, he accepted banishment into the wintry wilderness rather than submit to authority that denied freedom to the individual. A refugee from the very haven of liberty he had hopefully sought, he turned to the shores of Narragansett Bay. And in this accident of history (or was it the hand of Providence?), Rhode Island was born. And the name of Roger Williams, more than any other in the American tradition, has become the lasting symbol of religious and political liberty—twin freedoms given expression in two priceless documents—Rhode Island's Royal Charter of 1664 and Rhode Island's Declaration of Independence of May 4, 1776.

There are numerous things about our State House in Providence that intrigue me—its magnificent architectural design, its massive marble dome, the statue of the independent man, and Gilbert Stuart's portrait of Washington. But to me the feature which stands out above all others is the inscription carved in marble on the facade—the burning words from the royal charter secured through the joint efforts of Roger Williams and his friend, Dr. John Clarke:

"To hold forth a lively experiment—that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained with full liberty in religious concerns!"

Here was the declaration of religious liberty which found expression in the founding of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Hand in hand with religious liberty is political liberty. In this instance the seeds of religious liberty a century later yielded, as their fruits, political liberty. On May 4, 1776, the General Assembly of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations meeting in Newport adopted an act of separation from the British Government, declaring in part:

"Whereas in all States existing by compact protection and allegiance are reciprocal, the latter being only due in consequence of the former; And, whereas George the Third, King of Britain, forgetting his dignity, * * * and entirely departing from the duties and character of a good king—instead of protecting is endeavoring to destroy the good people of this colony, and of all the united colonies by sending fleets and armies to America to confiscate our property and spread fire, sword, and desolation throughout our country—in order to compel us to submit to the most debasing and detestable tyranny whereby we are obliged by necessity and it becomes our highest duty to use every means, with which God and nature have furnished us, in support of our inval-

uable rights, and privileges; to oppose that power which is exerted only for our destruction."

It is of special interest to us, here assembled today, that the person who drafted this great document and moved its adoption, was Jonathan Arnold, the great-great-grandfather of the senior United States Senator from our State, the Honorable THEODORE FRANCIS GREEN.

I think of the inscription on the front of our statehouse, and this passage from our Declaration of Independence as being in the same category with the words of Thomas Jefferson encircling the statue of that great patriot in the Jefferson Memorial here in Washington, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

We think of both Williams and Jefferson, each in his own peculiar way, as pioneers in carrying the torch of liberty to the frontiers of the New World; each was an architect in building the structure of American democracy. Both were rebels against tyranny—Jefferson against tyranny over the mind of man; Williams against tyranny over man's spirit, his soul, and his conscience. Williams created a sensation when in 1644 he published his *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*; Jefferson became an advocate basically of the same cause when, while serving in the Virginia Assembly during the Revolution, he drafted the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom. Historically, in the popular tradition, Jefferson is identified as the founder of democracy, spell it with or without a capital letter as you will. Williams, on the other hand, though living a century earlier, has been described as "the irrepressible Democrat."

Both were concerned with the welfare of the common man; both worked to raise the status of members of a less privileged race. Williams for months at a stretch chose to live with the Indians, enduring the hardship of the primitive wigwam, better to understand and to aid the red man toward a richer life. Jefferson, though heir to the institution of slavery, despised it, and all his life sought to ameliorate its vicious influence. In 1778 he introduced in the Virginia Assembly and secured the passage of an act to prohibit the importation of Negro slaves into Virginia.

Both Williams and Jefferson, in a sense, were educators. While living with the Indians, Williams made a special effort to learn their language, and his *Key to the Language of America*, printed in London in 1643, 7 years after the founding of Providence, was the first book on the Indian language to be published in English. Williams knew that literature is basically the story of life, and he knew that any education of the Indians would have to be done in terms of the common denominator of language. While ap-

parently the major purpose of this classic work was to provide an avenue for reaching their souls, the book which became widely used as a manual, proved to be an effective instrument for the encouragement of trade. By this means also Williams sought to promote permanent peaceful relations between the Indian and the white man, but in this his hopes were only partly realized. Furthermore, as founder of the Baptist denomination, Roger Williams gave impetus to a religious movement which produced one of America's nine colonial colleges, the College of Rhode Island, now Brown University, chartered in 1764.

A century and a half later, Jefferson's contributions to education reflected some of the same elements but took a different form. His *Notes on the State of Virginia* published in 1785, was a classic which described the resources, both economic and human, of the Old Dominion, comparable in a way with Williams' *Key*. A graduate of the College of William and Mary, America's second oldest colonial college, Jefferson became the father of the University of Virginia, an achievement which he seems to have valued above that of the Presidency of the United States itself.

It is one of the unique coincidences of American history, but not surprising, that the colony founded by Roger Williams should have taken the lead in severing the ties with the crown, and that the Newport Declaration of Independence sponsored by Jonathan Arnold, should have antedated by 2 months the famous Declaration at Philadelphia penned by Thomas Jefferson.

To what extent Jefferson's career was influenced by the life of Roger Williams is not clear. I have been unable to find any record of Jefferson ever having referred specifically to Roger Williams. It is a fair surmise, however, that directly or indirectly the latter's writings and example may have played a major role in shaping Jefferson's philosophy.

Here and there one detects a striking similarity between some of Williams' writings and certain passages in the Declaration of Independence. For example, Williams asserted that "the sovereign, original, and foundation of civil power lies in the people"; "a people may erect and establish what form of government seems to them most meet for their civil condition"; and "such governments as are by them erected and established, have no more power, nor for no longer time, than * * * the people * * * shall betrust them with." Government thus was to Roger Williams the agent of the people, created by them to serve the common weal, and endowed only with such powers as by them granted.

"God requireth not an uniformity of religion," wrote Williams, and throughout his life he defended the right of all men to worship as they might please. Not the power of government, but only "the Sword

of God's Spirit, the Word of God, could be used with any hope of success against error."

The parallel course of the two men's careers extends also into the realm of statesmanship. Williams served as President of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations; Jefferson was Governor of Virginia before becoming President of the United States. Williams, the untiring advocate of democracy and undivided freedom, was also the practical statesman and man of affairs. He it was who, through peaceful negotiations, secured a generous grant of land from the Indians, then sought and obtained from the English Parliament a charter confirming to the inhabitants title to the land and the authority to form a government. During its early years the settlement at Providence managed its affairs on the basis of his proposals for government, and when the four settlements in Rhode Island organized a federal commonwealth in 1647 they did so under his guidance.

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The College of William and Mary... the father of the University of Virginia... the President of the United States... the Declaration of Independence... the Bill of Rights... the Constitution... the Federal Government... the American people... the American Republic... the American Union... the American Empire... the American Nation... the American People... the American Spirit... the American Word... the American Spirit, the Word of God, could be used with any hope of success against error."

In thus bringing the four settlements into one colony, Williams demonstrated the principle that liberty and union go hand in hand—that liberty can be preserved and guaranteed only through the strength of concerted thought and united effort. Hence, in the example of colonial Rhode Island was the seed of the national motto "e pluribus unum." Herein also was demonstrated the great principle of "Liberty and Union" immortalized by Daniel Webster in this very hall, a principle which was put to its most crucial test nearly a century ago. Refined in the crucible of the War Between the States, it remains our surest rule of action in discharging our God-given responsibility of the present day to preserve, protect and defend the institutions of democracy for the sake of freedom-loving people everywhere.

In this mission the courage and the devotion of Roger Williams and of the Rhode Island patriots who followed him will ever be an inspiration to our highest endeavor.

...the American people... the American Republic... the American Union... the American Empire... the American Nation... the American People... the American Spirit... the American Word... the American Spirit, the Word of God, could be used with any hope of success against error."

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