

Colonial Leaders: Anne Hutchinson

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An undated drawing of Anne Hutchinson.

Synopsis: Anne Hutchinson lived from 1591 to 1643. She was the first female religious leader among North America's early European settlers. Hutchinson was punished by the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for her unusual ideas and for daring to teach men. Hutchinson was exiled to the new colony of Rhode Island. Once there, she helped found the town of Portsmouth.

Early Life

Anne Hutchinson was born in England as Anne Marbury around 1591. Her father was a Puritan priest. Puritans were fed up with the Church of England and the Catholic Church. They wanted to "purify" the church. They didn't just want to listen to what church leaders thought.

They wanted to understand God's will through reading and following the Bible. Hutchinson was better educated than most men of the day, and spent her youth reading the religious books in her father's library.

Coming To America

When she was 21, Anne married William Hutchinson. The Hutchinsons soon became followers of John Cotton, a Puritan minister.

Life in England was difficult for the Puritans. Many were punished for their beliefs.

In 1634, the Hutchinson family moved to America. They settled in Boston, the capital of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. By then, many Puritans had moved to the colony, where they could practice their religion freely.

Beliefs And Teachings

Puritans believed that God gives good Christians the gift of grace. They thought that being in a state of grace means you are saved from going to hell. Salvation was believed to be the path to heaven.

No one could know for sure who had received grace. However, many Massachusetts Bay leaders considered good deeds and Bible study to be strong signs that someone had been saved.

Hutchinson thought differently. She argued that the way a person behaved in public was not proof of grace. What is in a person's heart is what matters. She said that only God could know if a person truly believed.

Hutchinson claimed it was impossible to earn salvation by doing good deeds. For her, a strong belief in Christ was the key.

Once a person received grace they could no longer do wrong, Hutchinson said. They were in a state of inner holiness, and no longer needed to follow human laws.

Some Puritan leaders did not like that last idea at all. They feared that if it spread, people might stop obeying their religious leaders and even the government.

In 1636, Hutchinson began meeting with other women to talk about her ideas. As word of her teachings spread, men also began attending her gatherings.

The leaders of the colony did not like Hutchinson's ideas, and they were also angry that a woman was teaching men. At the time, all religious leaders were male, and women were not allowed to speak or teach in public.

On Trial

The colony's governor, John Winthrop, grew more and more worried about Hutchinson.

In November 1637, Hutchinson was arrested and brought before the colony's General Court. She was charged with heresy, or the spreading of dangerous religious ideas, and with daring to teach men.

For two days Hutchinson skillfully argued her case. Then, she went too far.

Hutchinson claimed that God had spoken to her directly. She declared that he had promised to punish the Puritans if they harmed her.

In addition, Hutchinson claimed to be above the law. She told the court that laws and rules "are for those who have not the light which makes plain the pathway."

The court called her claims outrageous. It found Hutchinson guilty of heresy, and it ordered her to leave the colony.

Exile And Death

In 1638, Hutchinson and her family moved to Roger Williams' new colony of Rhode Island. While there, she helped found the town of Portsmouth.

After her husband died in 1642, Hutchinson moved to an area that is now part of New York City. New York's Hutchinson River Parkway was later named in her honor.

In 1643, Hutchinson and six of her children were killed by Siwanoy Indians. Some believed Puritan leaders were behind the killings.

In any case, Hutchinson's old enemy, Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop, was happy to be rid of her. At last, she has been "cast down," he declared.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following are two main ideas from the article?
- (A) Anne Hutchinson was a Puritan who moved to Massachusetts from England; life in England was not easy for Puritans, so they searched for religious freedom in America.
 - (B) Anne Hutchinson was one of the first female religious leaders in America; she was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for her controversial religious beliefs.
 - (C) Anne Hutchinson left England to follow the Puritan minister, John Cotton; she hoped to find religious freedom, but ended up angering other Puritans.
 - (D) Anne Hutchison believed that God had spoken with her directly; after she left Massachusetts, she went to Rhode Island where she help to found the town of Portsmouth.

- 2 Which detail would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) The Hutchinsons followed a minister named John Cotton to America.
 - (B) Puritans felt good deeds and Bible study were signs someone had been saved.
 - (C) John Winthrop was the governor of Massachusetts during this time.
 - (D) Hutchinson claimed to be above the law and that God had spoken to her.

- 3 Overall, the article is organized around:
- (A) a woman's life and her beliefs
 - (B) a woman's life and her death
 - (C) a colony and its religion
 - (D) a woman's beliefs and a trial

- 4 How does the following selection from the section "Exile And Death" contribute to article?

After her husband died in 1642, Hutchinson moved to an area that is now part of New York City. New York's Hutchinson River Parkway was later named in her honor.

- (A) It proves that she was more popular in New York than other places.
- (B) It shows that she eventually came to be regarded as a leader and a hero.
- (C) It illustrates that Americans feel bad for the way that she had been treated.
- (D) It hints that she was one of the original founders of New York City.

