

Why rhode island was the most democratic colony

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ American” Essay The original thirteen colonies, from groundbreaking Virginia, first settled in 1612, to the bountiful Carolinas originating in the year of 1670. In 1636, twenty four years after the formation of Virginia, the revolutionary Rhode Island came to be. Though settled three-hundred and seventy-six years ago, Rhode Island at that time, still holds similarities to what it means to be “ American” today. America is synonymous with freedom, tolerance of those different, equality, and democracy.

Rhode Island can be considered the most American of all thirteen original colonies, because it supported separatist government, practiced religious tolerance, and had a democracy from the start. Rhode Island may never have come to be, if not for Roger Williams. After being exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, for endorsement of a separatist movement, It was he who relocated to present day Rhode Island. At that time, Massachusetts, was a colony ruled by Puritans. These people were anti-separatists, which means that they did not believe in the separation of church and state.

Any resident living in Massachusetts, regardless of Religious affiliation was required to pay taxes to the puritan church. The churches only problem was not the requirement of taxes, but also their efforts to control other aspects of the colonist’s lives. Massachusetts had a certain kind of feel to it, and the Puritans wanted to assure that it stay that way. Puritans felt threatened by any kind of act that did not fit perfectly with their view of what life should be like in their colony. For example, If two people were found to be showing any type of affection towards each other in public, they were fined.

Puritans were against the practice of ceremonies, or any type of event containing music. They believed that music was an expression not pure enough for their way of life. Puritans refused to celebrate various holidays, such as Christmas. They also would not allow certain staples of religious practice to be involved in their worship. Candles, or religious images were not permitted in church service. Many forms of entertainment were not allowed in Puritan villages. Gambling or other games of chance were outlawed. Plays of any genre were not allowed.

Laughing in public was forbidden, because it suggested that devilish or demonic spirits inhabited you. The Puritans worked to control every aspect of a person's life. Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, would have none of it. From the start Williams allowed Rhode Islander's many freedoms, as well as creating a separatist government, in some ways, the first of its kind. Williams did not require citizens to attend church, and did not let laws interfere with a someone's personal life. He believed that it was not the churches/governments right to control such things.

Though the people of Rhode island did pay taxes, these taxes went to the government, not a state church. The lack of these laws can be considered very " American" by modern standards. When looking at the country now, one can see that there is an absence of laws restricting Humans actions and rights, aside from cruel and unjust acts. Each individual has freedom of speech, and is allowed to express their ideas openly. The US does not outlaw many types of entertainment, music, holidays, or public displays of humor or affection. Rhode Island shares this in common with the present day US.

The same cannot be said of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Rhode Island was one of only four colonies whose government did not have an official religion. The Carolina's, Maryland, New York, and Virginia all supported the Anglican church, While Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire all chose to support the congregational church. This proves that Rhode Island was uniquely and unconscionably " American" for its time. Rhode Island can again be considered " American" because of it's practice of complete religious tolerance, this was unheard of in most other colonies in these times.

Williams allowed anyone, regardless of religious affiliation to reside in the state. Jews, persecuted by almost every other colony at the time, as well as Catholics were allowed to live in the boundaries of Rhode Island, and not fear punishment or persecution. Even the endlessly persecuted Quakers were allowed in Rhode Island. Quaker views were vastly different than that of leader Roger Williams, but he believed that they should not be persecuted for this difference in opinion. When looking at the views of other colonies, one can see that they did no share the same ideals. Maryland claimed to be religiously tolerant.

Created as a refuge for Catholics, one would assume that a place such as this would be tolerant of other religions, the Act of Toleration was passed in 1649, but was not as welcoming as it sounded. While giving freedom to Christians, it also stated the right to persecute all Jews, or atheists with no religious affiliation. Massachusetts was wildly intolerant of not Christians, torturing and killing the Quakers, whom later fled to Rhode Island. All colonies supporting the Anglican church practiced religious tolerance to their

fellow protestants, and in some cases even Catholics, but none would accept those who denied the divinity of Jesus.

Congregational colonies were even more strict in their tolerance of other religions. Aside from religion, Rhode Island was also tolerant of people that for other reason would not be welcome elsewhere. Those like Williams who had angered the leaders of their previous residence were welcomed there. Anne Hutchinson, whom was also exiled from the Bay Colony is a famous resident of Rhode Island. Her Ideals were far from that of Williams, but still she was welcomed in his colony. Both rich and poor could find a home in Rhode island.

It was unlike the sprawling plantations of South Carolina, or Virginia where the poor were exiled from being “squatters” on the land, or the large and powerful elites of aristocratic New York, controlling not just the government and economy, but the land as well. Rhode islands practice of tolerance, not only pertaining to religion, but also to the differing of ideals and economic status, again shows that Rhode Island is the most “American” of the thirteen colonies. A third reason that Rhode Island can be considered the most “American” colony was it’s voting system.

Rhode Island gave all men, who owned property and payed taxes on said property the right to vote. Regardless of Religion, a man had this right. This was unheard of in many colonies at the time. Anglican colonies such as South Carolina and Georgia, also allowed man holding men to vote, but only if they were of protestant religion. Some colonies were even more strict with their voting rights. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony the government could

not even be considered a democracy. The Freeman held the right to elect the governor annually as well as his cabinet.

The freemen however, were few and far between. Only puritans could be freemen, and they were not even eligible until they were declared “ visible saints”. This is when, at church, god inhabits a person, which causes him to convulse, or perhaps speak in tongues. Because of this rule, only few men were eligible to vote in elections. Rhode Islands suffrage law, allowed a vast number of citizens to vote, which in turn made Rhode Island one of the most democratic of the colonies at the time. This again proves that Rhode Island was the most “ American” of the Thirteen colonies.

There are those that do not believe Rhode Island was the most “ American” colony of our forefathers. Some may say that the most “ American” colony was in fact Georgia. Evidence supports that this was not the case. Though Georgia supported separatist government, and did not affiliate with any one religion, they did however persecute certain religious groups. Catholics, The Jewish, and Atheists were discriminated against and persecuted in Georgia, because of this, these people did not have the right to vote in any election, only practicing protestants could participate in elections.

These shortcomings of the Georgia colony disqualify it from being a truly “ American” colony. Rhode Island can easily be considered the most “ American” colony for many reasons. Rhode Island participated in separatist government, practiced religious toleration towards all religions, and promoted suffrage for a large amount of people at the time. When someone is asked to describe America in three words, one is willing to bet that those three words would be freedom, tolerance, and equality. Rhode island had the

<https://assignbuster.com/why-rhode-island-was-the-most-democratic-colony/>

right idea hundreds of years ago, and our country has been influenced by these simple ideas ever since.