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The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America

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and Judith Randolph, St. George Tucker, George Wythe, Syphax Brown, and Hercules White: white and black—and slave and free—Virginians involved in the complicated manumission of slaves in that state. Eric Foner concludes with a section summarizing the broader significance of these life stories.

This collection of biographies from below has the power to change the way American history is taught and will be an invaluable resource for anyone interested in expanding on the traditional view of the American Revolution and the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. In one concise volume, readers will find a wealth of information on the ways in which ordinary, as well as extraordinary, men and women shaped the contours of a new nation. One factor that may hinder the book's potential is the questionable degree to which iconic figures reflected popular sentiments and widespread trends. The editors' assertion that the book's individual biographies are "representative of larger historical currents" (p. 5) may not hold water, for certain experiences may have applied only to exceptional individuals. One wonders how many Thomas Paines or Abigail Adamses there were. How many eighteenth-century writers called for an end to all organized religions? How many women openly challenged patriarchal property laws? Representative or not, these are powerful stories that need to be told. I will go back to this book over and over again to enrich my teaching and writing.

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The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America. Edited by Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp. vi, 402. $45.00.)

The First Prejudice draws our attention to the compromises and ad hoc negotiations undergirding the status of religious minorities in the British colonies of North America. In essays divided into four sections—covering ideologies, practices, boundaries, and persistence—the authors address both legal and cultural aspects of

tolerance and intolerance. The contributions overall emphasize the significance of the revolutionary era, when Catholics and Jews (though not freethinkers, atheists, natives, or slaves) attained a significant level of cultural acceptance and legal equality. While colonial developments in practice and ideology may have paved the way, it was the liminal revolutionary years that codified religious liberty rather than mere toleration (which presumes an established center). In contrast to recent scholarship highlighting the long history of practical forms of tolerance and coexistence in Europe, *The First Prejudice* offers a narrative of progress in both legislation and civility over time, although the rich details and frequent acknowledgment of contingency in these pages do not, on the whole, support the idea of a whiggish movement toward modern liberal democracy. If concerns over purity and corruption in the body politic waned in the eighteenth century, they were only to reappear in the vitriolic 1830s. Even so, the religious violence and discrimination that reached new levels with the arrival of poor European immigrants could not topple the legal structures of the revolutionary period or the enshrinement of "nonsectarian civility" as an American virtue.

Several essays foreground the ways in which rhetorical bigotry could exist side by side with practical forms of acceptance, and vice versa, so that there was, as Owen Stanwood puts it, "no necessary line between rhetorical vitriol, legal discrimination, and bad treatment" (p. 221). Joyce Goodfriend, for example, explores the contrast between official policy in New Netherlands—which was discriminatory toward Jews during Peter Stuyvesant's governorship—and individual interactions, which give little evidence of "overt prejudice" (p. 110). The story of religious tolerance in this area emerges not as a contest of ideologies but rather as a series of ongoing negotiations between merchants, the Dutch West India Company's directors, reformed ministers, religious minorities, and their European sympathizers—negotiations that influenced the colonial magistrates' willingness and ability to fully impose conformity. Looking more broadly at anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism across the colonies, William Pencak argues that legal toleration actually led to more vicious cultural intolerance. Changes in the law coincided with an expanded print market and more widespread political participation—so Jews, even when legally accepted, were more likely than Gentiles to be targeted in anti-elite political rhetoric.

Catholics, similarly, did not experience simple regional tolerance or intolerance. Fears of conspiracies and suspicion of the ambitions

of Spain and France played a role in the rhetoric of colonial politics, but anti-Catholic tropes were a versatile language that could be used against other Protestants, natives, and Africans. Diabolical conspiracies—whether they involved Catholics or "Catholic-like" natives, Africans, or Jews—held traction even as neighbors treated each other civilly in public. Stanwood's careful reading of anti-Catholic language helps to illuminate the ease with which the vocabulary of "popish tyranny" was transferred to the British monarchy itself after 1774. Christopher Beneke also draws attention to the importance of American Catholic bishops John Carroll and John England in lobbying for the place of Catholics on the post-revolutionary American landscape and in parsing the difference between civil and theological intolerance.

Natives were largely excluded from the debates over toleration under the law. Yet legal structures that made no place for Native religion and rhetorical structures that relied on the genocide of Amalek (the topic of John Corrigan's essay) did not translate into unmitigated intolerance toward Native populations. As Richard Pointer demonstrates, those who had most personal contact with Native tribes—missionaries, traders, and captives—were generally more willing to "incorporate and fuse . . . elements of Indian spirituality" in ways that legitimated Native religions. Native peoples' ability to worship freely depended primarily on their proximity to English authority, as those living in English towns were most likely to feel the "potentially dizzying blends of white racism, Christian evangelism, religious neglect, and spiritual reciprocity" (pp. 176, 191).

If the narrative that emerges is one of ongoing renegotiation, an important aspect of that negotiation is the role played by religious and ethnic minorities themselves. African Americans were generally ignored in legislation granting religious toleration, for example, yet they actively pushed for access to religious education and full participation in religious life. While not directly contesting Jon Butler's narrative of an "African spiritual holocaust," Jon Sensbach emphasizes Africans' own fight to gain access to Christianity—"a painful calculus of spiritual loss and perceived gain" (p. 211). Ironically, planters' fears that access to Christian teaching and baptism would incite rebellion led to greater toleration for African tribal religions.

Some of the most important contributions in this volume address understudied moments in the history of Protestantism: the Anglican effort to obtain a colonial bishop, the Keithian schism in Pennsylvania Quakerism, and the prosecution of religious crime across the

colonies. Both the Anglican and Quaker controversies demonstrate that intradenominational tensions played a major role in debates over the limits of legal toleration. These disputes were not just about theology or ecclesiology but about the relationships between dominant religious groups and imperial authority.

Ned Landsman astutely points to the significance of the 1707 Act of Union for the politics of religious toleration throughout the British Atlantic. The Church of England's abandonment of its primacy in Scotland disrupted a singular model of authority streaming from London to the colonies and heightened the legitimacy of Presbyterianism across the empire. Strident Anglican claims for privileged status after 1707 not only consolidated other Protestants into a front of ecumenical resistance but also made the idea of a singular establishment less palatable throughout the periphery. Susan Juster's contribution likewise helps us to understand the perspective of religious majorities. She finds that religious crimes such as sacrilegious speech and Sabbath breaking were most often prosecuted when accompanied by offensive or nondeferential behavior, revealing "the symbiotic relationship between religious and political order on the margins of empire" (p. 125).

As Juster's essay indicates, it is vital to take seriously colonial leaders' deeply held beliefs in the close relationship between "heresy" and political unrest. There is opportunity for more research here, analyzing (as Alexandra Walsham and John Coffey do for early modern England) the suppression of dissent not just in terms of "bigotry" but within the framework of providential theologies and the assumed social and material perils of heterodoxy. Further clarification of the definition of "tolerance" is also needed—is it personal warmth and admiration, or the practical decision to deal equitably with people whose beliefs you find spiritually or morally dangerous? While not ignoring enlightenment or secular thought, these essays as a whole argue compellingly for the significance of religious ideas for frameworks of both tolerance and intolerance. Attentive to theological and intellectual issues along with social and legal contexts, *The First Prejudice* is a valuable contribution to the history of religious difference in the early modern period.

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