



Accounts of Anne Hutchinson (Events described: 1637-1643)

Anne Hutchinson was a white Puritan who emigrated from England to the fledgling Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay. There she attracted controversy, but also followers, as an unauthorized religious teacher. Colonial authorities placed her on trial in 1637, after she alleged that most of the colony's Puritan ministers did not truly preach "the new covenant" (meaning salvation by grace alone, not by works). When she refused to submit to the authorities' reproof, she was banished. With some of her family and followers, she made her way, via Rhode Island, to present-day New York; she was killed there in 1643 by indigenous Wappingers at war with Dutch colonists.

While Hutchinson's story centers on internal Puritan disputes over theology and gender, the selections below place her story in wider imperial contexts. An excerpt from Hutchinson's defiant testimony before the court reminds us that she inhabited a mental world in which Catholicism and Islam—the latter represented by the Ottoman empire—loomed large as enemies to Protestant Christianity. Selections from 17th- and 19th-century accounts of Hutchinson's violent death reveal the place that indigenous Americans held in those white authors' colonialist Christian worldviews.

1. An excerpt of Hutchinson's testimony (1637)

From the court record

If you please to give me leave, I shall give you the ground of what I know to be true. Being much troubled to see the falseness of the constitution of the church of England, I had like to have turned separatist, whereupon I kept a day of solemn humiliation and pondering of the thing. This scripture was brought unto me: *He that denies Jesus Christ to be come in the flesh is antichrist.* This I considered of and, in considering, found that the papists did not deny him to be come in the flesh, nor we did not deny him—who then was antichrist? Was the Turk antichrist only?

The Lord knows that I could not open scripture; he must, by his prophetic office, open it unto me. So after that, being unsatisfied in the thing, the Lord was pleased to bring this scripture out of the Hebrews: *He that denies the testament denies the testator*—and in this did open unto me and give me to see that those which did not teach the new covenant had the spirit of antichrist. And upon this, he did discover the ministry unto me; and ever since (I bless the Lord) he hath let me see which was the clear ministry and which the wrong.

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2. A contemporary report of Hutchinson's death (1644)

By Puritan minister Thomas Welde, then living in England

These persons cast out, and the rest of the ringleaders that had received sentence of banishment, with many others infected by them that were neither censured in court nor in churches, went all together out of our jurisdiction and precinct into an island called Rhode Island (surnamed by some the Island of Errors); and there they live to this day, most of them, but in great strife and contention in the civil estate and otherwise, hatching and multiplying new opinions, and cannot agree but are miserably divided into sundry sects and factions.

But Mistress Hutchinson, being weary of the island—or rather, the island weary of her—departed from thence with all her family, her daughter and her children, to live under the Dutch near a place called by seamen, and in the map, Hell Gate. (And now I am come to the last act of her tragedy, a most heavy stroke upon herself and hers, as I received it very lately from a godly hand in New England.) There the Indians set upon them and slew her and all her family: her daughter, and her daughter's husband, and all their children, save one that escaped (her own husband being dead before)—a dreadful blow. Some write that the Indians did burn her to death with fire, her house and all the rest named that belonged to her; but I am not able to affirm by what kind of death they slew her, but slain it seems she is, according to all reports. I never heard that the Indians in those parts did ever, before this, commit the like outrage upon any one family or families; and therefore God's hand is the more apparently seen herein, to pick out this woeful woman to make her, and those belonging to her, an unheard-of heavy example of their cruelty above all others.

Thus the Lord heard our groans to heaven and freed us from this great and sore affliction, which first was small, like Elijah's cloud, but after spread the heavens; and hath (through great mercy) given the churches rest from this disturbance ever since, that we know none that lifts up his head to disturb our sweet peace in any of the churches of Christ among us—blessed forever be his name. I bow my knees to the God of truth and peace, to grant these churches as full a riddance from the same or like opinions, which do destroy his truth and disturb their peace.

A postscript: I think it fit to add a comfortable passage of news from those parts, written to me very lately by a faithful hand, which as it affected mine own heart, so it may do many others, viz., that two sagamores (or Indian princes), with all their men, women, and children, have voluntarily submitted themselves to the will and law of our God, with expressed desires to be taught the same, and have, for that end, put themselves under our government and protection, even in the same manner as any of the English are—which morning-peep of mercy to them (saith he) is a great means to awaken the spirit of prayer and faith for them in all the churches.

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3. A 19th-century retelling of Hutchinson's death (1847)

By Unitarian minister George E. Ellis

It is [...] doubtful to what precise spot she removed. Some statements affirm that it was on the mainland, between New Haven and New York, that she found a settlement; other accounts represent her as going to Long Island, very near to Hell Gate. The Indians of the main and of the island were then in open hostility with the Dutch, and in the summer of 1643, after a battle between the Mohegans and Narragansetts, fifteen Dutchmen had been slain. It is altogether probable that Mrs. Hutchinson and her family, with some more of the English, were then settled upon the mainland and scattered over a space of a mile in the territory claimed by the Dutch. They might have been supposed to be Dutch by a party of Indians who, thirsting for blood and booty, fell upon their settlement in August 1643. Mrs. Hutchinson, Mr. Collins, and his wife, with all the rest of the family—save one child, who was carried into captivity—perished, as well as such members of two other families as were in their houses at the time of the attack. The whole number of persons thus slaughtered, without provocation or cause, was sixteen. Report indeed affirms that the victims were confined to their dwellings and burned, as were their cattle.

Such, amid an accumulation of horrors, was the close of the career of Mrs. Hutchinson. With the piercing yell of the Indians in her ear, with her children and grandchildren writhing in agonies before her eyes, her troubled, and yet not unhappy, life was ended. Many persons—men, women, and children—suffered, by a like tragic fate, in the perils attending the early settlement of all our colonies. Of the greater part of these, as well as of Mrs. Hutchinson, we must say that they died without any of their kindred or race to soothe their pangs, without any fellow-believer to bear witness to their Christian constancy, and with none but barbarian hands to give them burial, even if this last service, which very seldom was the case, was granted.

Such a fate shocks us when it is encountered by the robust pioneer of the forest; it is dismal and distressing when a family upon a border settlement is sacrificed to it at a time of open and mutual hostilities between the red and the white men. But every feature of horror which such a fate ever wears seems to invest this destruction, in cold blood, of a whole household, no one of which had probably ever wronged an Indian and who were seeking, in a wilderness, peace in their religious faith and the hard comfort of sympathy among themselves when it was denied them everywhere else.

Sources:

1. Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay, from the Charter of King William and Queen Mary, in 1691, until the Year 1750* (Boston: Thomas & John Fleet, 1767), 507-508, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015073767124>. Public domain.
2. Thomas Welde, preface to [John Winthrop,] *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians* [...] (London: Ralph Smith, 1644); as reproduced in Charles Francis Adams, *Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1636-1638* (Boston: John Wilson & Son, 1894), 92-94, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044014615538>. Public domain, Google-digitized.
3. George E. Ellis, *Life of Anne Hutchinson, with a Sketch of the Antinomian Controversy in Massachusetts*, in Jared Sparks, ed., *The Library of American Biography*, series 2, vol. 6 (Boston: Charles C. Little & James Brown, 1847), 351-353 (chap. 11), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.a0005967567>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. A footnote omitted from the Ellis excerpt. Across excerpts, paragraph breaks adjusted and long sentences broken up for readability. Spelling (including names), capitalization, punctuation, and typography (italics) corrected, regularized, modernized, or otherwise emended. Italics added to the court transcript to indicate paraphrases of biblical passages. In the Welde excerpt, a biblical name emended (*Elias* → *Elijah*) to match its usual rendering in English translations of the Hebrew Bible. Also in Welde, the heading *A Postscript* reformatted from the source publication for the sake of a more compact presentation.

The use of lowercase for the religious terms *separatist*, *scripture*, *papists*, and *antichrist*, in Hutchinson's testimony, reproduces the usage of the source publication. The word *churches*, capitalized in the source publication for Welde, has been converted here to lowercase. The use of lowercase for the racial labels *red* and *white*, in Ellis, replicates the source.

These edited excerpts are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publications listed above.



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