American religious freedom, that ambiguous mix of tolerance, pluralism, and religious liberty (all terms with multiple interpretations and meanings) is widely deemed not only an essential characteristic of American nationhood, but also one of the treasures the United States of America offer the world. Traditionally praised as a benefit for immigrants, it has more recently become a factor in American foreign policy.¹ Crucial as it is, scholars have yet to develop a good explanation for how it was possible in the first place. Indeed, religious freedom has been so closely identified with the creation of the United States that American historians have difficulty seeing it as anything other than our national destiny. The two have been explicitly linked since 1776, when Thomas Paine announced that the “reformation was preceded by the discovery of America, as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety.”² These words, and others like them, have echoed down the centuries, as anyone who has ever taught early American history can confirm. Such ideas have not encouraged a critical exploration of early America's


unusual religious situation, which remains (with few exceptions) more celebrated than interrogated.

Scholars have used religious diversity -- rather than religious unity, the actual goal of most of the original colonists -- as the standard for evaluating early American religion. Thus, the tendency has been not to ask “why” toleration and pluralism ever came to colonial America. Instead, the questions are “when,” “where,” and “how much” religious diversity existed, emphasizing how it inevitably grew over time.\(^3\) Cases where it was denounced, combatted, and reduced are mostly treated as vain struggles against the flow of American history. Efforts at imposing religious unity seem like an unwelcome, imperial legacy: something European, not American.

Nonetheless, as “Accidental Pluralism” argues, it is to Europe, not America, that we must look for the beginnings of American religious pluralism. The few American historians who have looked for a causal explanation of American religious diversity have favored local explanations. They invoke a variety of factors: the North American environment; the (ostensibly) logical imperatives of colonizing a new land; the influence of a particular ethnic group (such as the Dutch); the brilliance of a particular advocate of toleration, be he (it is always a he) Roger Williams, Cecil Calvert, or William Penn; the influence of a particular denomination (usually Baptists or Quakers); the compelling example of a particular colony, be it Maryland, South Carolina, or, Pennsylvania. Each of

\(^3\) For example, Chris Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) argues that the full acceptance of religious diversity came in the revolutionary years of the eighteenth century, while the seventeenth century was an era of grudging toleration at best.
these factors may account for part of the story of how religious pluralism emerged in
colonial America, but none of them encompasses the whole.4

The most fundamental question of American religious history is how and why so
many different colonies with such different religious complexions came into existence in
the first place. Looking at American conditions cannot answer that. We must turn back to
England for the key actors, influences, motivations and causes that made those colonies
possible. However, once there, it quickly becomes apparent that the endeavors in North
America where part of a wider spectrum of religious ideas, policies, encounters, and
possibilities that comprehended Europe and Asia as well. Colonial America emerged
from a globalized English context. England set the terms for colonial American religious
life, for it was there that the colonies were imagined, authorized, and undertaken.

If American religious pluralism were somehow intrinsic to the process of
colonizing America, then the French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and Swedes who also
created American colonies would have produced similar results. They did not. Far from

being the natural or obvious outgrowth of the American experience, colonial America's distinctive religious diversity was an English creation, albeit a largely unintended one, for, with a few key exceptions, the aspiration of virtually everyone involved was religious unity. The problem was, they could not agree on the religion in which they would be united.

Once sent within its proper, globalized, English context, the emergence of American religious pluralism appears as an accident, not a national destiny. It was the unintentional by-product of England's long, drawn out, and fiercely contested Reformation. That process began before the first permanent colonies were established, but it did not come to a resolution until 1662, decades after they had taken root. Thus, unlike the other European powers, which embarked on their American colonies after they largely had settled their religious system at home, the English found themselves fighting over their religious order at home even as they established colonies overseas. Between England's first direct contact with America in 1497, at which point its church was still a Roman Catholic Church, and 1662, when the Protestant Church of England took on its modern form, England founded colonies in New England, the Chesapeake, the Caribbean, and India while undergoing a series of dramatic religious and political changes: changes in national religion from Protestant to Catholic and back again; changes in dynasty, incorporating Scotland into kingdom; a revolution, complete with regicide and radical republic during which the national church was dissolved; the restoration of the monarchy and with it the episcopal Church of England.

In the meantime, a mix of Protestant dissidents from the national church, along with Protestant radicals and Roman Catholics managed to gain a foothold in the colonies
to different degrees in different places. Sometimes they gained access to the colonies with official permission, other times in spite of it. How this was possible varied significantly depending on the political circumstances within England. Roman Catholics took an active and fairly open role in English colonization efforts before 1585 and again in the 1630s. In between, and after 1640, English religious politics surrounding restricted Catholics place in the colonies, although they could never completely exclude them. Radical puritans were involved – again to different degrees at different times and places – in many of the colonies, although their influence was ultimately strongest in New England.

Between the significant shifts in England’s politics and religion, and the variety of religious preferences held by those involved with the colonies, a range of different religious climates had emerged in the colonies by the time the English civil war and revolution broke out in 1640. New England was dominated by puritans – Reformed protestants who feared the Church of England retained too many traces of Roman Catholicism, or popery. United in their criticisms of the Church of England, by 1640 puritans had pushed England to the brink of civil. Meanwhile, in America puritans were having trouble coming up with a clear alternative form of church. Bermuda had adopted a more-or-less Presbyterian system, but then its ministers and a group of followers embraced the new Congregational order that had been developed in Massachusetts in the early 1630s. Congregationalism became the church of choice in Plymouth and Connecticut colonies while others pushed for it in Maine, Virginia, and the Caribbean. Yet there were distinct limits to its appeal. Most of those struggles failed, while even in New England a number of colonists – Roger Williams most famous among them –
dissented even further. Expelled from Massachusetts, Williams set up the new colony of Rhode Island, which refused to endorse any specific church. It became a have for Baptists and others of intense protestant mystical convictions who, like Williams, could not find a home in any existing church.

The political and religious revolution that took off after 1640 had few direct repercussions in the colonies, which were largely shielded from the conflict. However, it fundamentally altered the religious world in which they existed. If there is a source of American exceptionalism, it lies in the English civil war and revolution. Precipitated by the 1637 Scottish revolt against the religious reforms of the Caroline regime, the dramatic collapse of royal religious and political authority in all three kingdoms by 1642 set the history of Anglo-America apart from its French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese colonial neighbors, where a stable church system served as one of the pillars of imperial power. The civil war ended any chance of a centralized religious policy for the empire, allowing the religious life of the colonies to diverge from metropolitan religious norms at the formative stage of their development. The revolution that accompanied it reconfigured the religious and political life of all the territories under English authority, altering matters at the core of the empire while the colonies were largely left alone.

By 1652, after years of warfare which saw the defeat of the English royalists, the execution of the king, and the conquests of first Ireland and then Scotland, the revolutionaries ruled supreme in Britain and the colonies. The revolutionaries had puritan origins, but that no longer meant much. By this point puritanism had dissolved into a range of religious positions – Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, and a small but vigorous group of new sects, the most potent of which was the Quakers. Surging down
from the north of England in the mid-1650s, Quaker missionaries quickly took their message out across Europe and overseas to the colonies. Wherever they went, the challenged the new religious norms established by the revolutionary regime dominated by Oliver Cromwell.

Leavened with a good deal of tolerance, the Cromwellian regime had distinct limits: Catholics and Episcopalians had no official place under its rule. Nonetheless, its loose parameters offered the promise of assimilating most of the religious diversity that had grown out of puritanism’s experience of the revolutionary upheavals of the previous decade. It was not a religious order that expected clear signs of conformity, as the Church of England had insisted upon before the civil war broke out (and would again once the monarchy was back in power). Instead, it sought out a significant consensus on religious matters without expecting complete ecclesiastical agreement. The nature of that consensus looked different depending on where one was in the English world. In the colonies, local approaches to religious diversity varied, from the severe repression in New England (outside of Rhode Island), to the benign tolerance in Barbados, where a church existed but the governor protected religious dissidents – as long as they kept within certain bounds.

The significance of the Cromwellian period of the 1650s is not in its profound impact on the religious life of the English world. Outside of New England (including Rhode Island), none of its arrangements persisted after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Of course, the survival of New England alone would be an important legacy, preventing the England from ever uniting its North American colonies within one church. However, that is only the most extreme example of the Cromwellian legacy, which was
to preserve and encourage a range of radical Protestant religions that never could be completely reconciled with the restored church after 1660. Thus, when England embarked on a renewed phase of colonization after 1660, it had a national church, but it no longer had a completely conforming Protestant population. Never again could the English world exist even in theory within a shared church.

Here, I will just give a brief tour of the Cromwellian colonies to demonstrate the range of religious experiences that existed. It is difficult to encompass them all under a single term like toleration, although that word could be applied in one degree or another to most any of these situations. The tension between the existing religious diversity and efforts to tame it is fundamental to any explanation of how and why colonial American religion came to rest on a foundation of pluralism, despite the best efforts of many colonists to prevent that.

Cromwell's comparatively liberal approach to the growing religious diversity of the English world had no place for Roman Catholicism. However, his regime officially permitted a rather wide range of religious practice in the 1653 “Instrument of Government.” The Instrument endorsed “the Christian religion” but only “as contained in the Scriptures.” In other words it was Protestant. In an important break with prior laws, it forbade punishing those who did not attend the “Public Profession.” Nevertheless it insisted those of the official church “endeavour” to win over those who refused to attend church “by sound doctrine and the example of a good conversation.” This arrangement was not an established national church that included all English subjects as its members,
offering them the sacraments along with religious instruction. On the contrary, its liberty of conscience allowed local church systems to vary from place to place. As these usually tended towards either a Congregational or Presbyterian arrangement, there was no guarantee that the local church order would accept an individual as a member worthy of receiving the sacraments. Every locality was expected to have a church building (or meeting house as in New England) staffed by someone approved by the so-called Triers to preach acceptable doctrine. However, by accommodating the diversity into which puritanism had dissolved, the regime also gave up on the traditional obligation to offer the full range of religious services to all English subjects, for only some of those subjects counted as church members -- and they did so in different ways in different places.5

In the long-standing debate of whether persuasion or persecution was the best method for expanding the faith, the Cromwellian Commonwealth came down on the side of persuasion, with important qualifications. Those tolerated were not to abuse “this liberty to the civil injury of others, and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their parts.”6 This proviso eventually justified action against Levellers, Diggers, Fifth Monarchists and, most famously, the Quaker James Naylor. The concern for order would


6 Kenyon, ed. Stuart Constitution, p. 313.
be preserved in all future acts of toleration. In this way, the new sects were tolerated (to
different degrees in different places), but a single official church remained. Its privileges
prevented the full, public exercise of all possible forms of Christianity and retained the
aspiration for national unity in religion. Consequently, the majority of pre-revolutionary
clergy (about three-fourths) found themselves able to conform and coexist with the new
church. Only a small group of die-hard Episcopalian royalists refused to cooperate.7

Though vague on what the national religion was, the Instrument was clear on
what it was not. It explicitly forbade the extension of toleration to “popery” or “Prelacy,”
that is Roman Catholics and Episcopalians (formerly members of the Church of
England).8 And while more religious opinions were tolerated than ever before, there were
clear limits. By allowing freedom and protection to “such as profess faith in God by Jesus
Christ (though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly
held forth)” the revolutionary government implicitly left certain faiths out of the mix:
Jews, of course, and Socinians, who were explicitly excluded in 1657. Cromwell
defended this Erastian mix of evangelical Protestantism against those (mostly
Presbyterians9) who wanted more independence for the church and less tolerance for
sectarians. Quakers, on the other hand, who came to be excluded from the Cromwellian
toleration under the terms of the Humble Petition and Advice of 1657, accused the

7 Kenneth Fincham and Stephen Taylor, “Episcopalian conformity and nonconformity,
1646-60,” in Jason McElligott and David L. Smith, eds. Royalists and Royalism during the
Interregnum (Manchester, 2010), pp. 18-43. For a case study of religious diversity at
the county level, see Jacqueline Eales, ”So many sects and schisms': religious diversity in
Revolutionary Kent, 1640-60," in Durston and Maltby, eds. Religion in Revolutionary
8 Kenyon, ed. Stuart Constitution, p. 313.
9 For an assessment of what English Presbyterians were able to accomplish, see Elliot
Vernon, "A ministry of the gospel: the Presbyterians during the English Revolution," in
Puritans of abandoning their former principles and embracing “the spirit of popery” in allowing themselves to “be drawn to persecute.”\textsuperscript{10}

Cromwell's ideas about what was religiously unacceptable, and how to treat it, were not quite coterminous with those of everyone within his regime on either side of the Atlantic. Two famous cases of persecution illustrate how these differences could emerge when confronted by strong Protestant dissent. Cromwell and his Parliament both agreed on the Socinian John Biddle's conviction for heresy for denying the Trinity in 1655. However, while some hoped Cromwell would pardon Biddle, others expected him to let Parliament execute him. Instead of doing either, Cromwell cut a middle course, banishing Biddle to the isolated Scilly Isles. In 1656, Cromwell's effort to find a middle course with regard to the Quaker James Nayler, who rode into Bristol on the back of a donkey while his followers (many of them women) praised him in the words that Jesus had been praised when he entered Jerusalem, produced a more brutal result. While some in Parliament wanted him to be spared, many wanted to execute him. In the end, Cromwell permitted a harsh sentence: Nayler's tongue was bored through with a hot iron and he was subjected to a harsh imprisonment that included severe whippings through London and Bristol.\textsuperscript{11}

Cromwell exported his unusual religious settlement to new territory through military conquest. Shortly after taking power, he appointed the New England puritan Robert Sedgwick to head an expedition to conquer New Netherland. It made it to Boston and had begun recruiting troops when word of the peace arrived. Determine to put his

\textsuperscript{11} Worden, "Toleration and the Protectorate."
expedition to some good use. Sedgwick turned north. The French colony of Acadia had supplanted the British claims to Nova Scotia decades earlier, but New Englanders did not object to this opportunity to reclaim what had once been claimed by the British monarchy. With the support of Massachusetts, Sedgwick's forces captured the small French outposts in Acadia. The initial surrender treaty permitted the Catholic French the right to worship, but the arrangement did not last. In 1656, Nova Scotia became yet another proprietary colony under the auspices of Sir Thomas Temple, a relative of the revolutionary peer Lord Saye and Seele. By November 1658 the French ambassador was complaining that the new government had "pulled down the church and fort at Port Royal," and forbade the French from engaging in the fur trade. Temple "has no power to do this," the ambassador complained, "nor to deprive the French of the exercise of their religion; the civil and spiritual liberties having been confirmed by an order of the late Protector." Unfortunately, by the time he lodged the complaint, Cromwell was dead.

Temple continued to preside over an officially Protestant Acadia until the province was returned to France in the 1667 Treaty of Breda.12

Cromwell then secretly organized a massive amphibious expedition to capture the island of Santo Domingo. Without announcing its intentions through a declaration of war, the Western Design, commanded by Admiral William Penn (father of the famous Quaker), arrived in the Caribbean in the spring of 1655. Although it failed to capture the original target of the island of Santo Domingo, the Western Design did capture Jamaica. In Europe, the war against Spain (1654-1660) also brought Dunkirk into the English

12 CSP, America and West Indies, 1574-1660, 470; CSPC, 1661-1668, 285; Reid, Acadia, Maine, and New Scotland.
world, presenting the Cromwellian regime with the challenge of digesting two very
different pieces of the Spanish Empire.13

There does not seem to have been a clear plan for what to do with Spanish
Catholics who might fall under English authority. Fortunately, both the failure of the
Western Design to capture the populous and prosperous island of Santo Domingo, and
the peculiar nature of its conquest of Jamaica, spared the English of any need to openly
tolerate Catholicism in the Caribbean. A Spanish account claimed that only "some
negroes and Portuguese . . . submitted to the English" at the surrender of Jamaica in May
1655. Rather than surrender, a number of the remaining Spanish retreated into the interior
and fought a drawn out guerilla war. Without the need to negotiate with a resident
Spanish Catholic population, the English banned Catholic worship, much as Cromwell's
army had in Ireland a few years earlier: “No priest nor book might remain in the island,”
recorded the Spanish account.14

On Jamaica, the English drove out the Spanish Catholics and never tolerated their
religion. Instead, a Caribbean version of the Cromwellian settlement was put in place.
Little is known about religious life in the early years of the colony, but it doubtlessly
reflected the preferences of the members of the expedition: a mix of Presbyterians,

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13 Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, 168-91; On Cromwell's pro-Protestant and anti-
Catholic vision, see also Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Errand to the Indies: Puritan
Colonization from Providence Island through the Western Design," *WMQ*, 45, 1988, 70-
Venning argues for Cromwell's "pragmatism" in his relations with France and Spain in
the aftermath of the Dutch war by downplaying Cromwell's obvious pro-Protestant and
anti-Catholic sympathies as "prejudices" which colored but did not upset the ultimate
pragmatism of his policies.

the Island of Jamaica, from May 20 of the Year 1655, when the English laid Siege to it,
up to July 3 of the year 1656*, trans. Irene A. Wright, Camden Miscellany, XIII (London,
1924), 3rd ser., XXIV, p. 12.
Baptists, Congregationalists, and other sorts of Independents. Reflecting puritan priorities (and its unsettled, military situation), no parishes were established (as was the case in New England and Eleutheria). Jamaica was never a purely Protestant colony. Some "Portuguese" stayed behind when the Spanish fled. They were most likely Jews, or people of Jewish ancestry, for whom the Cromwellian conquest was both a liberation from the obligation to conform to Catholicism and a new trade opportunity.

Cromwell could not treat his other conquest of Dunkirk as he did Ireland and Jamaica. On the contrary, strategic and diplomatic demands forced him to grant the first official toleration of Roman Catholicism since the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. An important fortress and port in the southwest corner of the Spanish Netherlands, Dunkirk lay near the French border, as Calais had. Just a short trip across the English Channel, Dunkirk was of great strategic interest to several powerful nations. For the Spanish, it was a major privateering base. For this very reason, the Dutch, whose shipping had been Dunkirk's primary victim, resented it. France, on whose expanding northern border it sat, coveted it. Both powers had long schemed to gain control of the port, and they did not give up those ambitions once the English acquired it. After all, the English had relinquished Calais, their last foothold on the continent.

English planners had high hopes for Dunkirk: it could be turned into alternative to Amsterdam. To create a rival to Amsterdam's international appeal, there would have to be religious concessions. Thus, grants of toleration were considered even before the English acquired Dunkirk. It was suggested that if "ther mae bee a tolleration of a sinagoge for the Jewes they will give 60,000 or 80,000 pound for that freedom: it will bring all the Portugal marchants from Amsterdam." Moreover, if "the Catholick shall have freedom of
consciens and liberty to goe to ther naboring plases to church, it will bring many French and Duch marchant dealers," since the majority of the surrounding population in the Spanish Netherlands, France, and the southern provinces of the Dutch Republic were Catholic. French and Dutch merchants would be encouraged, "especially if ther be a prodistant church of those 2 nations ordayneed in the towne." In short, with such religious toleration, Dunkirk would become a "flurrishing commonwealth of it selfe." This optimistic view of the economic benefits that would flow from official pluralism claimed that within five years it would be "nott much inferior to Amsterdam as Amsterdam is nowe."\footnote{15}{Quoted in Samuel R. Gardiner, "Cromwell and Mazarin in 1652," 485.}  

Initially, the English who took over Dunkirk hoped it could be turned into be a fortress of Protestantism: the government immediately resolved to "despatch to Dunkirk of a Bible to each file of soldiers, and to consider of an able minister to be sent thither."\footnote{16}{CSP Domestic, 1658-1659, 78; Clyde L. Grose, "England and Dunkirk," The American Historical Review 39:1 (Oct. 1933), 5-17.} Cromwell imagined it as a Protestant bulwark to aid the cause of Huguenots in France as well as the Protestant Dutch Republic. Chaplains were appointed for the garrison (including, briefly, the New England revolutionary Hugh Peters). At least one minister (Andrew Forbes, possibly a Scot from a family with Dutch trading connections who had thus learned the language) also had an appointment as both regimental chaplain and minister to the Flemish community, a few of whom were Protestants.\footnote{17}{CSP Domestic, 1660-1661, 228; Grose, "England and Dunkirk," 13-17.}  

However, Dunkirk swam in a Catholic sea, and the high diplomatic stakes and intricate international negotiations surrounding England's acquisition of the port city placed limitations on Cromwell's vision. Before capturing the city, Lockhart, a devoted
Scottish presbyterian and military officer who also served as Cromwell's chief ambassador to France, had convinced Cromwell that the French would only concede Dunkirk to the English if they guaranteed its Catholic population the freedom to practice their religion. As a result, Dunkirk's population of roughly 5,000 was allowed to retain its fifty-nine priests and monks and fifty-three nuns. The English reduced Catholicism's public profile, banning public processions and requiring priests as well as magistrates to swear an oath of allegiance (which, like the Engagement, was silent on questions of religion). However, priests could perform their spiritual functions and celebrate the mass publicly. Only one priest who refused to swear the oath of allegiance was banished. Despite some harassment by the militant Protestant soldiery (such as the soldier who lit his pipe with an altar candle), Catholic Dunkirkers enjoyed more religious liberty than their co-religionists anywhere else in the English world.18

English authority within Dunkirk was further limited because the government did not dedicate the money needed to fully support it. The English lacked the funds to harass Catholic liberties even if they had wanted to do so. Moreover, their French allies kept a hand in city life, stationing a Jesuit in town, officially "to see the articles of religion observed," but also to keep the French minister Mazarin informed of developments. On top of this, Louis XIV poked a hole in English pretensions to complete sovereignty over Dunkirk by insisting he had ancient feudal rights to appoint local officials. Finally, there was a constant stream of international intrigue for control of the town. Lockhart remained

loyal to the revolutionary government, fending off bribes from both the French and
Charles II to turn over Dunkirk. For this loyalty he was dismissed from command at the
Restoration in 1660. In short, it took real effort to maintain Protestantism in the Spanish
Low Countries.

In America, it was much easier to maintain Protestant hegemony. The Western
Design clearly inspired some European Protestants to think of the Caribbean as an
opportunity to both get reach and struggle against the Roman Catholic foe. The Huguenot
René Augier, Esq., proposed an anti-Catholic colony in 1657, "either att Jamaica or else
where in the West Indies." His petition echoed the earlier dreams for a Huguenot colony
under English authority in Carolana. For Augier, the colony would challenge "the Jesuits
fondamentall designe," which was "to settle their Empire by their commerce in the one
and in the others Indies." Promising that "all the Strangers whome the Society he
propounds will imploye" in the colony "shall professe the Protestant Reformed Religion,"
which would be confirmed by "attestations and certificats of the ministers or consistorys
of those places where they shall have been inroled," he would also make all prospective
colonists swear to exclude Jesuits, missionaries and monks from the colony.19

Augier's colony did not come to pass, but it is a reminder of the continuing
Huguenot interest in colonizing America under English protection, something that would
finally come to pass after 1685. Elsewhere, the 1650s saw the existing colonies work out
their own local system under the loose umbrella of the Cromwellian church. Outside of
Rhode Island, puritans of some sort or another held the reigns of power throughout New
England and the Chesapeake. Generally, they applied a stricter version of the

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Cromwellian church than in the Caribbean, demonstrating a particular hostility to Baptists and Quakers, who were hard pressed to make inroads outside of Rhode Island. In the Caribbean, on the other hand, authorities tended to be more lenient, even if not all the colonists followed their tolerant lead.

In the Caribbean an remarkable set of informal arrangements were worked out, permitting a degree of pluralism that increased with the arrival of Quakers and other radical Protestants in the 1650s. In the Leewards, ever since the royalist conformist hold had been broken by the Republican fleet in 1651, a puritan-inflected liberty of conscience seems to have been the rule, varying from one island to the next. They absorbed some of the religious diversity floating around the rest of the English Caribbean: Baptists, Jews, and Quakers. It also had its distinctive Catholic element. However, by the 1650s the free population of the Leewards was leaving the island for better opportunities elsewhere. Thus the puritan governor of Nevis took hundreds of colonists to Jamaica. Rather than creating a distinctive approach to Caribbean religious diversity, the Leewards seem to have been largely adapting to influences coming from elsewhere, namely Barbados.

Barbados, caught up in the sugar revolution, with its booming plantations populated by a growing population of enslaved Africans, was the wealthiest of all the English possessions in America. Accompanying this massive transformation of the island's society was a distinctive system of religious toleration developed by Daniel Searle, the governor appointed by the Parliamentary forces in 1652. If Searle had a model to follow, it may well have been the Dutch. He displayed an unprecedented moderation towards the island's religious diversity, refusing to take action against religious dissidents, even the Quakers, unless they disturbed the public peace. Searle's regime
effectively extended toleration further than any other English territory, even Rhode Island. Dutch Reformed residents of Barbados were allowed to worship together openly, while Jews had an implicit right to private worship in their permission to reside on the island. Likewise Catholics could worship within the privacy of their own plantations, as long as they did not make their religious services public, as a French priest who arrived in 1654 discovered. Rhode Island did not have a religious establishment, unlike Barbados, which retained the parish system. However, it had nothing like Barbados's religious diversity, which resembled that of London more than anywhere else in the English world.

Searle's reign of tolerance lasted for the rest of Commonwealth period, until the restored monarchy replaced him as governor in 1660. Subsequent governors proved rather less tolerant, leading to a long list of Quaker sufferings between 1660 and 1690.\footnote{Gragg, \textit{Englishmen Transplanted}, 75-78. On the political character of portrayals of Dutch tolerance, see Evan Haefeli, \textit{New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 10-11.}

Barbados's pluralism made a significant contribution to Anglo-American religious pluralism by allowing a number of religious groups, but primarily Quakers, to gain a foothold in such a wealthy, influential, and well-connected colony, from where they could then spread out across the Anglo-American world. Barbados actually took a lead over the revolutionary metropole's toleration by readmitting Jews to the English world. Cromwell's government famously considered allowing (a few) Jews to (quietly) return for the first time in almost 400 years in 1655. This so-called readmission of the Jews to England was unofficial (there was no formal declaration), small scale, and opposed by a number of Cromwell’s advisors. Effectively Cromwell allowed the handful of Jews living in London as Spanish and Portuguese Catholics to remain, with only some small
recognition that they were not in fact Catholic. No open toleration of Jews in England was made until after the Restoration. Meanwhile, a handful of Jews who were recognized and accepted as such had begun settling in the English Caribbean by at least 1647. At some point in the early 1650s Jews also moved to Surinam and possibly Nevis, and then Jamaica after the English conquest.

A rare glimpse of Governor's Searle's toleration at work comes from a report by one of the first Quaker missionaries to the island, Henry Fell. Writing in 1656, Fell described his struggles with the islands "priests" (the Protestant ministers), and "ye people that follow ye preists," who "are for ye most part exceeding rude & brutish." He debated in vain with the Ranter Joseph Salman, also recently arrived from England and also making converts. There were Baptists, of whom "some are convinced of the truth, and have denied their rest," while "others sticke there and are enemyes in their minds ag[ains]t the truth." Finally, there were those who were "high in their wisdomes by reason of w[hi]ch & ye love & hon[o]r of ye world doe not owne truth." Thus, not everyone on

21 Cromwell’s openness to Jews was not without a catch: those who favored readmission hoped that it would facilitate the conversion of the Jews, which would hasten the arrival of the millennium, see David S. Katz, Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603-1655 (Oxford, 1982).

22 The emergence of Jews in the Caribbean between the 1640s and 1660s has not yet been systematically studied. Perhaps the best overview appears in Jonathan I. Israel, “Menassah Ben Israel and the Dutch Sephardic Colonization Movement of the mid-Seventeenth Century (1645-1657), in Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan and Richard H. Popkin, eds. Menasseh Ben Israel and his World (Leiden, 1989), 139-163; Richard Ligon mentions a Jew on Barbados in 1647, A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados (London, 1657), 42; See also Mordechai Arbell, The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean: The Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas (Jerusalem, 2005). The “Privileges granted to the people of the Hebrew Nation that are to goe to the Wilde Cust,” British Library, Egerton Mss. 2395 f. 46-7 (no date) is sometimes interpreted as a draft of Francis Lord Willoughby’s proposal for recruiting Jews to Suriname, but it has been pretty convincingly shown to be a translation of a 1657 offer by Zeeland to draw Jews to Dutch Guyana, Robert Cohen, “The Egerton Manuscript,” American Jewish Quarterly LXII (1973), pp. 333-347.
the island welcomed the Quakers, and indeed the Barbados Assembly passed an act that would have fined Quakers for not doing militia service. When a local Quaker wrote a pamphlet protesting the act, Fell presented it to Governor Searle. Searle not only "read it & sayed it was good counsell, he tooke noe offence att my hatt or thouinge of him," the two most peculiar manifestations of Quaker spirituality that often provoked an angry response from authority figures who saw them as disrespectful. Fell found the governor rather "conceited of himselfe." He spoke with the Quaker for half an hour, discussing religious matter ("perfection and such like"), and telling Fell that he thought the Quakers lived "inoffencive or unblamable" lives, but "this Judging of others, he could not beare." Fell responded by presenting the governor with some more Quaker pamphlets and speaking "some few words to him" before departing.23

Searle clearly had a Cromwellian style. Cromwell too liked to discuss religious matters with the various evangelicals circulating in his kingdom. Fell found Searle to be "pretty moderate" and recognized that, thanks to Searle's influence, "persecution is somethinge restrayned," as he himself experienced a few weeks after first meeting the governor. En route to visit a prominent Quaker plantation owner, Fell was set upon by some colonists and "much abused & beaten." The planter said he would have the assailants brought before the governor, saying, "he was sure would punish them & would not suffer any to abuse me if he knew of it." And indeed, not long afterwards he learned that the men were "bound over to their sessions as they call them." It is not known what happened to those men, but Governor Searle had clearly drawn a line against violence towards religious leaders. Meanwhile, the Massachusetts governor had banished the first

Quaker missionaries to arrive there. Little wonder, then, that Barbados became the Quakers first major outpost in the Americas.\textsuperscript{24}

Fell's experience of Barbados was in stark contrast to Surinam, a colony begun by Barbadians on the South American coast in 1650/1651. Before the Western Design opened up Jamaica to the English, many former servants who had completed their terms of service but could no longer find land on Barbados or the Leewards had been taking up land on the French Caribbean Island. Soon after Willoughby arrived as governor on Barbados, Colonel Thomas Modyford told about the still un-colonized lands in Guayana. Willoughby sent out one hundred and fifty men in two separate expeditions in the year before Parliament's fleet arrived before Barbados. They set up a small colony, and Willoughby went there briefly after being deposed from Barbados, but then returned to England for the next ten years. His investment in the colony was large enough that he was able to persuade the Cromwellian government to grant him a patent for the colony in 1657. As governor, he appointed William Byam, son of a Church of England clergyman and member of a royalist family from Somerset. Two of his uncles had been conformist clergymen. One, Henry, was an outspoken anti-puritan and Laudian. William Byam was not such an outspoken conformist, and may have leaned more towards presbyterianism.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} Swarthmore MS 1/67, Friends House Library, Transcription 2:107-109 Henry Fell to Margaret Fell, Barbados, 19 December, 1656.

Liberty of conscience was the rule of the land in Surinam from the beginning, but Fell's experience in the winter of 1659 demonstrates just how different the experience of liberty of conscience could be depending on the attitudes of the local government. Fell found that Surinam's "inhabitants . . . exceed in wickedness; more than any I have bene among of ye English," but he and his companion were able to make a few converts during the two and a half months in the colony. Given his experience, he doubted whether the small Quaker community would survive, as "the crosse will bee hard for many of them to take up it being great as to ye outward." In "a rage against the Truth," the Governor and council first put them "into the stocks part of that day and all ye night in ye raine and wett, which was much, being about 16 or 17 houres & the next day they tooke our bookes and papers from us to burne them." Two weeks later, after they persisted in organizing Quaker meetings, he arrested and imprisoned them on a warrant "full of lyes and slanders and their own imaginations." Sixteen days later, when a ship was ready to sail for Barbados, the governor insisted that the Quakers depart on it. Fell refused, giving Byam instead his written response to the warrant's accusations. Byam refused to read it. Instead, threatening to whip the Quakers, and uttering "many evill & wicked speeches against us, & the truth with scorne," he had the Quakers carried on board the ship and sent back to Barbados. There, governor Searle was not only "pritty moderate and noble and loveing to Friendes": he had recently released two Quakers imprisoned for refusing to bear arms, after paying their fine himself and then suggested that he would get the act repealed, "soe that the enemyes will not have their wills."  

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26 Caton MS, Vol. 3, 3/82, pp. 228-235 Henry Fell to Margaret Fell, Barbadoes, the 8 of the third mo. [May], 1659, Friends House Library.
Had the Commonwealth survived another generation or so trans-Atlantic English religion could have looked very different. The loose structure but clear boundaries of the church settlement supported by the Rump Parliament and the Cromwellian Instrument of Government had the potential to lay the foundation for a shared imperial religion at a time when English Protestantism was fracturing drastically. Neither government required the full conformity to outward norms as the monarchical church had, nor did they insist on particular ecclesiastical loyalties, be they Presbyterian or Congregational. Nonetheless, both clearly favored Reformed Protestant styles of belief and worship. The hierarchical, parish-based framework of English Christianity before the civil wars had been replaced by a system of more or less independent congregations. The congregations were linked to local geography, but did not have the same claims over the outward behavior and inner souls of the inhabitants that the traditional parish system did.

The revolutionaries' policy of liberty of conscience was flexible enough to have noticeably different effects from place to place and colony to colony. Where religious arrangements were at all uncertain or contested – in Barbados, in Rhode Island – it allowed Reformed Protestant priorities to prevail without quibbling over church forms or particulars of belief. Local control often facilitated this, and the transfer parochial authority into the hands of local vestries in the parishes that existed from Virginia to the Caribbean allowed presbyterian and congregational tendencies to flourish without forcing a colony to choose between the two. In New England outside of Rhode Island, it allowed Congregationalism to consolidate itself as the established religion, with little tolerance for any alternatives. Overall, then, the revolutionary regimes turned the Protestantism of the English-dominated world towards Reformed priorities. There are indications of its
success among many English Protestants. For example, even after the Restoration of the
monarchy, many preferred a compelling sermon to the ritual life of their community
church. Whether or not that sermon was preached by the locally licensed minister was
generally not a major concern.27

The Cromwellian alternative in church and state did not long outlast Cromwell,
who died in 1658. Dissatisfied with Cromwell's son Richard, who succeeded him as
Protector, the Army resumed its political role and reinstated the Rump Parliament. The
Rump, responding to the widespread desire for a stable arrangement of the government of
state and church, authorized the calling of a Convention Parliament to settle the question.
It was a lethal mistake for the revolutionaries. The army was no longer as united as it had
been in 1648. Neither it nor the Rump made a concerted effort to restrict the Convention
to reliable Republicans. Consequently, many men who resented the revolutionary regime
attended the Convention Parliament. Rather than repair the Republic, the Convention
determined to restore the country to monarchical rule. By the spring of 1660, the English
world had a king again.

27 John Spurr, “Religion in Restoration England,” in Lionel K. J. Glassey, ed. The Reigns