Episode 417: Linford Fisher, Sheila McIntyre, and Julie Fisher, "Roger Williams, Rogue Puritan"

[00:00:00] Announcer: You're listening to an Airwave Media podcast.

[00:00:04] Linford Fisher: So it's not truly a theocracy, but you have to be a church member to be a voting citizen of the body politic. And Williams just doesn't think that that is appropriate. He doesn't think that the state should be imposing ideas about people's religious lives and their personal lives as well. And so, but that's why I think Williams is so interesting because he does create something very, very different in Rhode Island.

[00:00:38] Liz Covart: Hello and welcome to episode 417 of *Ben Franklin's World*, the podcast dedicated to helping you learn more about how the people and events of our early American past have shaped the present-day world we live in. And I'm your host Liz Covart. When we think of early American champions of religious liberty, one name often rises above the rest, Roger Williams.

Williams is remembered as the founder of Rhode Island and a strong advocate for the separation of church and state. But what kind of man turns down a prestigious ministerial position in Boston only to be banished, and then builds an entirely new colony grounded in radical ideas? Today we attempt to answer that question by investigating the life and legacy of Roger Williams, a nonconformist among religious nonconformists.

Williams was a prolific writer, a critic of colonial land grabs, and an early advocate for religious freedom. But he was also something else, a linguist and cultural intermediary who learned the language of the Narragansett people and acted as a translator and go-between during a period of intense colonial expansion.

Now, to help guide us on our investigation of Williams's life, we're joined by three co-editors of the documentary collection *Reading Roger Williams: Rogue Puritans, Indigenous Nations, and the Founding of America*. These three guides are Linford Fisher, an associate professor of history at Brown University, Sheila McIntyre, a professor of history at the State University of New York Potsdam, and Julie Fisher, a scholar of Native American history.

Together, Lin, Sheila and Julie reveal the religious convictions that drove Roger Williams to migrate to and then break away from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams's collaborations and relationships with Indigenous leaders, and details about the founding of Rhode Island, a colony where church and state were formally separated and religious liberty was extended farther than anywhere else in early North America.

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at *Ben Franklin's World*. We really couldn't do this without you. Okay. Are you ready to investigate the world and ideas of Roger Williams? Let's go meet our guest historians.

Joining us, we have three guests. Linford Fisher is an associate professor of history at Brown University. His research and teaching relate to the cultural and religious history of colonial America and the Atlantic world. He's the author of the *Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America*. And he has a second book in progress, tentatively titled, *Stealing America: Indigenous Slavery and Dispossession in the English Atlantic and the United States*.

Sheila McIntyre is a professor of history at the State University of New York at Potsdam. She teaches classes about early America, revolutionary America, medical history, and Indigenous history. She's the editor of *The Correspondence of John Cotton Junior, 1640 to 1699*, and she's working on a book tentatively titled *The Culture of Correspondence: Letter Writing in Early New England*.

And Julie Fisher is a scholar of early America and Native American history. She has worked with the Yale Indian Papers Project and with the American Philosophical Society Library and Museum. She's the co-author of *Ninigret: Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts*, and she's currently working at the US National Archives.

Together, Lin, Sheila and Julie are the co-editors of *Reading Roger Williams: Rogue, Puritans, Indigenous Nations, and the Founding of America A Documentary History*. Welcome to *Ben Franklin's World*, Lin, Sheila and Julie.

[00:04:54] Sheila McIntyre: Thank you, hi.

[00:04:56] Linford Fisher: Thank you.

[00:04:57] Julie Fisher: Thank you.

[00:04:58] Liz Covart: Well, we should probably start our conversation with Roger Williams. Who was Roger Williams and why do we remember his name? Sheila, would you like to start?

[00:05:07] Sheila McIntyre: Williams is remembered most for two things. He's most remembered for publishing and establishing a colony that's based on the separation of church and state. So there was no state sponsored religion in the colony that will later be known as Rhode Island.

He's also known for publishing widely on Indigenous cultures that were mainly the result of interactions with his neighbors and his trade with his neighbors, the Narragansett. So those are probably the two things that he's most known for.

And I can tell you a little bit about his background in England. He was born in England and sort of accentuated his religious beliefs pretty early on. He was what we call Puritans, he

would've probably called himself a nonconformist, and questioned the extent of the Reformation in England and wished that it would go further.

Like a lot of nonconformist ministers, he had a hard time finding a position because there was increasing persecution of nonconformist ministers. So he ended up being a private chaplain to a very wealthy and well-connected nonconformist family. And then he decides to immigrate to Massachusetts Bay Colony. Like a lot of nonconformist ministers, he seeks refuge in the colonies.

So when he lands in Boston, he's a highly educated, well trained young minister who speaks many languages, knows all sorts of crazy new shorthand techniques, has worked for a leading jurist, Sir Edward Coke, and came with a big, long list of recommendations. So the Boston ministers would've been really delighted to have him, except he doesn't exactly turn out to be what they imagine him to be.

[00:06:051 Liz Covart: So Williams was a nonconformist, Nonconformist.

[00:06:54] Sheila McIntyre: Yes. Yes.

[00:06:571 Liz Covart: Now, why did you choose to write and edit a one volume book of Williams's writings? And I admit, I hadn't realized until I read your book *Reading Roger Williams*, just how prolific Williams had been. So you had a lot of writings to choose from as you curated this one volume book. So why Williams and why a one volume reader? Yes, Julie.

[00:07:19] Julie Fisher: Part of it is Roger Williams wrote so much, so much. And even if you look at something like his correspondence, there's years that they don't even survive. So his total correspondence and writings could be even bigger if everything still existed.

But bringing everything together to us felt a more manageable way to invite people in. So if they want to read more you can go off, there's tons to read, but with one volume, it will give you a really good sense of elements about his life and his beliefs, early New England. And so I think the one volume is a great way to kind of meet people where they are if they're interested in Williams.

[00:07:58] Liz Covart: I also thought it was interesting that one of your goals for *Reading Roger Williams* was to ensure the inclusion and expertise of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous experts in your essays, which you wrote to introduce each piece of Williams's work in your book. Lin, would you tell us about your inclusion of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous perspectives in *Reading Roger Williams*?

[00:08:21] Linford Fisher: Yeah, it felt important to us to somehow find a way to acknowledge that there's information and knowledge out there beyond the archive. So as historians, but also people in the general public who think about the past or read about the past, most of what we glean is drawn from the archive. And the archive is great in this case. There's a lot of information about New England, about Roger Williams, about Rhode Island.

But often missing from the archive from these documents in the past are perspectives of Indigenous people who were everywhere in this time period. We forget that English colonists and other people who came to other parts of North America were in a clear minority. Instead, there's these really dominant, powerful, tens of thousands strong Indigenous nations that these English colonists are coming amongst.

And so the question is, if the archive silences them or doesn't give those perspectives, how could we then think through what their experiences might have been like and how that would help us to interpret these one-sided set of documents a little better? So it's not completed. It's not as robust as it could be perhaps, I guess, in a way. But at least it is a meaningful gesture to encourage our readers to think about the way in which the past comes to us in one vein, but there's always other voices that we should be thinking about as well.

[00:09:44] Liz Covart: Okay. Now that we know a bit about the background of this volume and a bit about Roger Williams, I'm curious if we could talk about why Roger Williams migrated to English North America in 1631.

Would you set the scene for us? What was the Great Puritan migration? What did it mean to be a Puritan in the 1630s? And how did Puritanism fit within the English landscape of Protestant religion in the 1630s?

[00:10:10] Sheila McIntyre: Sure. We actually included in the book a few documents to try to actually help readers understand that. So one of them, for example, is called "Directions to Preachers," and this document lays out what the English government expects Nonconformist ministers to do. And they have to do a lot of things that they don't want to do. They have to follow a book of common prayer, for example.

So there's lots of things that Williams is asked to do at various times in his young career that he chooses not to do. And so he kind of finds himself without a job, and he doesn't come from money. So he only succeeded in his early days because he had a series of wealthy benefactors. So he finds himself in more of a pickle than some. That said, for a lot of nonconformists, that's a big question. You know, do you migrate across an ocean to sort of the great unknown? For Williams I don't think he had much of a choice.

He does a couple of other things before he leaves, though, that are worth noting, and I think readers would find really interesting. He really wants to marry a particular woman, and he asks permission of her aunt. And her aunt basically explains that that's just never going to happen; she's too wealthy, she's too well known. And Williams is quite hilarious in his begging to try to make that happen. And so we cover things like that. I mean, Williams strikes you in that first couple of chapters as a pretty awkward guy. I don't think he settles in particularly easily.

And so for the Great Migration, there's economic imperatives as well. Like I would never suggest that it's solely seeking religious goals. But for Williams, he's just never going to really find a space in the England of his time. So coming to New England is probably his best bet to find a happy landing space.

[00:11:57] Liz Covart: Sheila, in what ways did the Puritans not conform to the faith and practices of the Anglican Church? And where did Roger Williams and his religious beliefs sit in relation to these more mainstream Puritan nonconformities?

[00:12:12] Sheila McIntyre: Yeah, so I'll try to do this quickly, I mean, it's a big topic. But they of course would call themselves "the Godly," which is an even better name. So the nonconformists just don't think that the English Reformation has gone far enough and they don't like a return to Catholicism that they're seeing under the Stuarts.

And so they get nervous when they see Charles introduce things back into their faith traditions. They don't like the Book of Common Prayer. They don't like alter rails. They don't like stained glass windows. They don't like any of that.

They really just want a faith of the word, and a direct conversation with the word as the revealed word of God. So anytime that the church tries to make them do things, rituals and what have you practice, they get upset.

So nonconformist typically want the ability to practice a truly reformed faith, and they want to push that Reformation further. And they're running up against a government that doesn't want that. So coming to the colonies makes a lot of sense for them.

I mean, most religious scholars would tell you that Williams, especially in England, is really just a good old fashioned Calvinist. He really is a pretty standard Puritan. But there's little hints of his radicalism almost as soon as he lands in Boston.

[00:13:26] Liz Covart: Roger Williams arrived in Boston in 1631, but the town of Boston had only been founded in 1630. So would you tell us what Boston looked like a year after its founding and about the different Native spaces that the Puritan or Godly colonists were moving into?

[00:13:44] Linford Fisher: So when he comes to Boston, I mean, as you just indicated, Boston has only recently been founded. Of course, there's other English presence in the region, at least for ten years, and before that, explorers and adventures on the coast for another thirty years before that.

But Boston itself is perched on this little peninsula of land that jets down to what we now call the Boston Harbor. It is clearly Indigenous base. The Massachusett Nation is in that region and off to the west a little bit. You have the powerful Wampanoag Confederacy to the southeast, that sprawls southward from there out onto Cape Cod. And so they're kind of positioned in between these two Indigenous presences and nations, and they have to find a way to navigate that.

There's also early settlement up on what now is sort of the Cape Ann region and just south of that. So Salem for example. But this is all space, an area that is Indigenous land, that there'd be interaction with Indigenous people quite frequently as well. So what we think of as Boston is really just a little collection of buildings perched on this peninsula. So very fragile in a

way. And they're trying to figure out how to build something durable and permanent in the middle of Indian territory.

But Williams comes in and even only after a year, of course, the Puritans, they've established a church, right? And so they offer him a teaching position at this church, the first church of Boston, which is—relative to that time and in that position—is the prestigious offer. And he absolutely snubs it and declares that they have not separated enough from the Church of England and hightails it out of there to Salem. It's really this moment where they must have been quite agitated and irritated, but also just disappointed because he was someone who came with a little bit of connection and clout.

[00:15:34] Liz Covart: It did seem a bit funny to me that, as Sheila mentioned, Williams is a guy who needs a job. He couldn't get a job in England, so he migrated to North America. And then when he arrives in Boston, he's offered this really plum job at the Boston Church, and he refused to take it. Would you tell us more about why Williams snubbed the Boston Church and decided to practice his faith and serve as a minister in Salem?

[00:15:58] Linford Fisher: It comes back to the idea that he is reforming the reformers in a way. That he has even more puritan than the Puritans in Boston. He so firmly believes in the propriety of certain kinds of rituals and religious actions over others that he will throw away and risk an incredibly good job offer for the theology, for the principles behind the theology.

So for him, I'm sure he agonized, I imagine anyway, he agonized. But to know that he's making the right decision and remaining pure and not being tainted by practices that are unbiblical, I think meant a lot to him in a way that it's hard for us to understand. For most of us in our modern age, most of us be like, "well, I'll just take the job and like hold my nose and do it."

But this is a guy, and this is an age in which these things matter quite a lot. And so it comes down to theology. It comes down to degrees of separation for the purpose of religious purity. And Roger Williams didn't think that the Boston Puritans had separated fully enough from the Church of England and that they were still too Catholic.

[00:17:09] Liz Covart: What kind of reforms was Roger Williams looking for? And where did he see a lack of reform in the Boston Church?

Because Governor John Winthrop proclaimed that Boston was a city upon a hill, a beacon, and a shining example of how reformism or nonconformist ideas could work in the Anglican Church. So why wasn't Williams satisfied with the strides that had already been made? Yes, Sheila.

[00:17:35] Sheila McIntyre: I mean, he goes so far as to say that even if you are back in England visiting friends, you can't visit friends who attend English churches. So when Lin talks about the extreme position that he takes, I mean very quickly after 1635 when he's banished, he will actually decide for himself that there is no established church that he can attend. That he can't even pray with his wife because that predicts a church.

Because to him the apostolic succession was broken. So until Christ comes back to reestablish a church, there's not going to be a church for him. So it's an extreme kind of radicalism.

And I think one of the things that would be helpful for your listeners to remember is that, you know, we in American history kind of see the founding of Massachusetts Bay Colony as this iconic moment. And here's Williams being kind of iconoclast from the beginning. And so it's one of the things I think that makes him so interesting and draws, we hope, readers to want to spend a little time with him.

[00:18:34] Julie Fisher: I just want to add to emphasize Sheila, I think it's worth repeating by the end of his life, he won't pray with his wife. I mean, there's a real human side to everything that we're just talking about.

So, you know, when he comes over he's married. And it's not just him moving between these places, he's taking his wife. And I just wonder what conversations he had with her to explain why they're moving again. She's an educated woman. She absolutely is keeping up, leading these conversations too.

But I think it's just worth emphasizing this is pretty extreme even for nonconforming Nonconformists.

[00:19:08] Linford Fisher: It's also helpful to realize that he is not creating this out of nothing. I mean, sixty miles or forty miles to the southeast is this other colony that is already separating in a way that he thinks they should be separating.

And so when he comes and he gets to know Boston a little bit and he is like, "oh no, this isn't who I am." And so he's radical, but he is also like somewhat in line with other forms of separation from the Church of England. That so-called Pilgrims in Plymouth Colony are the separating Puritans right, were the ones in Boston are the non-separating Puritans.

It's a really confusing distinction, but it meant something then. And Williams clearly aligned himself with the separating Puritans.

[00:19:48] Liz Covart: I wonder if we could talk a bit more about the non-separating Puritans versus the separating Puritans, because as you say, Williams' unhappiness with the reforms of the non-separating Puritans in Boston caused him to journey throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony for the first several years of his life in New England.

So would you tell us more about Williams's decision to move to Salem after he declined the job from the Boston Church?

[00:20:13] Sheila McIntyre: Well he's invited by the Salem Church, and the chapter in the book actually, that we talk a little bit about his bouncing around, right, because he goes from Boston to Salem to Plymouth, to Salem to Boston.

So I guess the best way to think about it is that he is always asked to do things by churches and governments that he doesn't want to do. And so in Salem, one of those things has to do with land acquisition. So he actually speaks out in Salem against Massachusetts Bay Colony assuming Indigenous land. He claims that the king is not really the king, you know, he doesn't want to take oaths.

There's just a million kind of interactions between churches and governments, and between Williams and governments that he doesn't want to do. And so you get the sense in those two chapters of the book that he just can't settle.

He will run afoul of almost everybody very quickly, and it has to do with an inability to embody deference. The documents that we include in the book include what the governors write about him, so we thought it was important. He writes very little about this period of his life actually, it's almost a hole in the correspondence and in the publications. But instead, we let Winthrop and Bradford tell you what they think about him.

And so you get a sense from both governors of Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts Bay Colony, that they're trying really hard. They keep inviting him to testify and explain himself. And then they ask him very simple things like, "please don't say that, please stop talking." And he doesn't seem to be able to manage it.

So, yeah, and I think that's probably the best way to summarize it, is that they have pretty basic expectations that most English citizens would've been fine to go along with, but Williams isn't.

[00:22:05] Liz Covart: We should probably take a moment here to discuss how the government of Massachusetts Bay operated. Because there is this popular idea that early Massachusetts was all for religious freedom and freedom of conscious. That Massachusetts was a place that people who wanted to worship freely came and settled. Yet we're talking about how Roger Williams could not find a place to settle and comfortably preach his beliefs.

So that's why he bounced around from Boston to Salem to Plymouth, back to Salem, and then back to Boston for four years before the government of Massachusetts Bay banished him from the colony. So Sheila, Julie, Lin, what did Massachusetts' religious state look like in the early- to mid-1630s?

[00:22:48] Linford Fisher: Well, everyone likes to think of themselves as being permissive and accepting and creating space for religious liberty. I mean, not everyone in this time period, but I think that's our narrative about Massachusetts and New England more generally, as the Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded by religious dissidents who came and they built something that then allowed people to sort of be who they needed to be religiously.

But very quickly we realized that people in Massachusetts Bay start protecting the right to worship in a certain way themselves. And they become the prosecutors in certain kinds of ways too. And so when you start policing the kinds of religious activities—then what people can do, what they can say, not say, but where they can worship, who they can worship, or how they can worship more precisely—that gets really fraught really quickly.

So the Massachusetts Bay Puritans are in a way revealed to have their own limitations pretty early on. And how they deal with Williams and someone like Williams and other people who tried to migrate or did migrate to the Massachusetts Bay Colony reveals there are limitations in that way. But that's why I think Williams is so interesting because he does create something very, very different in Rhode Island.

But I do think there's this other part of Massachusetts Bay that really bothered Williams too. Which is that there was, not an actual merging, but kind of a bleeding together of what the government was doing in the colony and what the churches thought people should be doing. So it's not truly a theocracy. There is separation, but you have to be a church member to be a voting citizen of the body politic, and that is telling.

And Williams just doesn't think that that is appropriate. He doesn't think that the state should be imposing ideas about people's religious lives and their personal lives as well. And so there is a way in which even though this narrative of religious freedom and religious migrants coming over to do their own thing falls apart very quickly when you have them running into other people who have different ideas about religion.

[00:24:48] Julie Fisher: I just want to highlight too, you can still see some evidence of this in Boston. So you go to the Boston Commons, you will see a statue to Mary Dyer and her hanging on the Boston Commons, right. And she's hung because she's a Quaker. So you can still see this there, but you have to kind of draw that out.

[00:25:08] Liz Covart: Yes. Thank you for that reminder, Julie. In fact, I just passed the statue of Mary Dyer yesterday, which sits in front of the Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill. But if you were to cross the street into Boston Common, right along Beacon Street you'll find a gate to the Common. It's a stone gate, and there's the depiction of John Winthrop's establishment of the city upon a hill. So, like you said, Boston has made sure that there are reminders of its early histories pretty much everywhere if you look for them.

However, what we won't find are any plaques or statues to remind us of Roger Williams and his banishment from Massachusetts. So could we talk more about Williams's banishment? Why did the government of Massachusetts Bay Colony decide to banish Williams from its borders? And what did the process of banishment look like for Williams?

[00:25:57] Linford Fisher: I think at the core of it was a series of issues that Williams wouldn't let go of. And some of them have to do with things like whether or not the civil government should be imposing themselves on people's personal beliefs and worship. Some of it had to do with the question of land and whether or not Indigenous people had the right to it, and if it had been taken appropriately or purchased appropriately. I think that was really important as well.

But there's a whole cluster of things relating to sort of civil authorities and what their sort of ability is and what their proper ability is to sort of police people's lives. And when Williams ends up running afoul of the Boston ministers and magistrates repeatedly. He gets warned, this is in 1635 the summer, and then the fall of 1635, gets warned repeatedly. So it's not like they're all of a sudden kicking him out. There is a whole buildup of them saying, "you've got

to tone it down, we can't accept that." And they bring him down and question him in Boston and stuff like that.

And they finally come to a place where they can't tolerate it anymore because. They see him as dangerous. He's really a cancer in this colony. It's a small colony. It's still pretty fragile in a way. And if you allow people who really challenge your authority publicly to persist and to remain, it's going to destabilize the whole colony itself.

And so they actually banish him in October of 1635. He ends up petitioning for a little delay because he's ill at the time, and even as he's ill, even as he's recovering, he just can't stop and keeps on preaching the same thing against the Massachusetts Bay government. And so there's this moment, the winter January of 1636, where the Massachusetts Bay government decides "we've got to take really, really strong action."

So they send up a really seasoned military veteran, John Underhill. And they sent a contingent of armed men to Salem to grab him and take him back to England, which was probably a death sentence, honestly. He was arrested and put on trial and found guilty and placed in prison might have died because prisons were horrible back then.

So he gets word this via John Winthrop, the governor of Massachusetts, and escapes off into a snowstorm. And it's this iconic moment where he kind of finds his way through the snow over the course of several months down to the head of the Narragansett Bay.

But one of the things I think that's really important to know, which we mentioned in the book, is that there had already been a plan in place to try this out, to try to relocate to what becomes Providence or that region anyway, the head of the Narragansett Bay.

So when he slips off into the snowy storm, which he talks about later in life, it's not just that he is really going out into nothingness. He has a bit of a plan. He goes to where they had decided and people follow him later on as well. So a little bit of a wrinkle in the unusual story, but it's kind of interesting.

[00:28:49] Liz Covart: Before we talk about the establishment of Rhode Island, it seems really key that we talk about the idea that Roger Williams was seen as quote, "a friend" of Indigenous people, and that Native peoples helped him establish Rhode Island. So when did Roger Williams first start interacting with Native peoples, and how did he come to be seen as a friend to Native Americans?

Julie, I can see you're eager to answer, but first, let's think about that while we take a moment to thank our episode sponsor.

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[00:30:03] Liz Covart: Julie, would you tell us when Roger Williams first started interacting with Native peoples and how he came to be seen as a friend to Native Americans?

[00:30:13] Julie Fisher: It's a long story with him and Native people and when it exactly begins is not entirely clear. But we know by the time he leaves, like by the time Massachusetts Bay has banished him, he's already had years of conversation with both Wampanoag and Narragansett communities.

And this is really important to understand for a number of reasons. So in some ways, right, as Lin's saying, he's headed to places. He's not like wandering in the snowstorm, but he is not going to Rhode Island because Rhode Island doesn't exist, right. He is going to Narragansett country. He knows that Narragansett leaders know this. And I say this to say, when English men and women are headed out into Indian country, this is not a secret to Native communities all over the area, and nor is it without permission at this time.

So there's no way that Williams can settle without an invitation from Narragansett leaders. It's impossible. Initially, when he shelters, he's going out to Seaconke. He's actually going out to Wampanoag country. So he's actually going out to Ousamequin, who's allowing him some time and space. He's going to settle there. And then because it's actually still under Plymouth, he gets pushed out again.

But the point is, again, he's able to go out because he's already been in communication, much communication, with these Wampanoag and Narragansett entities. We know just from his language work that it was pretty robust. We know he was trading as in, he's selling goods. He's working with these different communities. The full extent, we just don't have the records.

If you want to talk about, what I would love to discover in some attic, it would be Williams account book, because accounting can tell you so much about values and activities. We could learn so much. But it's not there.

But what we do know is that from everything we see and his few references and correspondence, he's headed out to Wampanoag, Narragansett areas to learn the language to help with this trading business. Because as plum as this minister job was, you're not making that much money. So this is how, if you want to talk about how he really starts to bring in income, it's this trading business that equally he's building up. So when Lin talks about this larger plan, it has to be, you don't form that overnight.

[00:32:43] Liz Covart: Now, normally when we talk about ministers or priests going out into Indian country, we hear stories of Catholic priests and Protestant ministers going out to convert Native peoples to their religion. Did you get a sense from the records that you read and Williams's writings that perhaps this was why Williams started trading and meeting with Indigenous peoples? That he was really out there testing the waters as to whether he might be able to convert them to Christianity?

[00:33:11] Julie Fisher: Those two things are not mutually exclusive. There are people that think about missionizing and making money. Those two things can go together, and he very explicitly has a couple phrases that we see where he says, "I initially went out to learn the language to missionize," like he has that exact language early on. How long he keeps that desire is a matter for debate.

I feel strongly that he abandons those missionary efforts pretty quickly because the sachems in Narragansett country will not have it, and he's vastly over numbered. So I think he drops up pretty quickly, but I think actually Lin can talk about theological reasons where he came to that conclusion as well.

[00:33:54] Linford Fisher: It's rather complicated in a way. On the one hand, Williams is like other Puritans. Which is, in the background there's this justification, I think, that they need to evangelize Indigenous people. And it's in the Massachusetts Bay Colony charter, this line of winning and inciting Indigenous people to Christianity. So it's on everyone's mind in a way. Williams takes a more active interest, I think, and does learn the language.

But there's a deeper theological challenge that I think also is related to his church-lessness throughout his life as well. He doesn't think that there's an apostolic commission or mandate for gathering churches or for evangelizing people.

And if you look at Rhode Island and compare Roger Williams to John Elliot, who's the minister from Roxbury, Massachusetts, who does spend decades of his life trying to evangelize Indigenous people, it's starkly different. There are no so-called praying towns, for example, in Rhode Island. There's no attempt to gather them at all. What sort of defines, what Williams, I think, believes theologically.

And so Williams cares about people, but doesn't grid them through this salvation lens exclusively, which I think is kind of powerful in a way as well. But he also morphs over time in his own views and beliefs. You do have these early moments, especially in the Plymouth Colony when he's there in the early 1630s where he says, "I was there in their smoky huts" and stuff like this, "and learning the language and trying to convert them."

And then you also have in 1643, this really incredible *A Key Into the Language of America*, which is this beautiful phrase book. And he has sort of references to conversations about religion and in the introduction he says, "I could have gotten them all be baptized, no problem." Right? Kind of insane because that was not true, obviously, but that at least was how he was positioning himself.

And then a year or two later, he publishes this book, *Christenings Make Not Christians*, where he basically says all baptisms, all attempts to convert Indigenous people are false because of a lack of apostolic commission. So he does sort of shift over time. I think he positions himself politically at times to sort of have people think that he is well positioned to do this work of evangelization. But in the end, there's nothing that indicates there was any kind of long-term sustained attempt to make that happen.

[00:36:15] Liz Covart: What kind of agreement was Williams able to negotiate with the Narragansett people to settle at the head of Narragansett Bay, which is where he would establish Providence?

[00:36:23] Julie Fisher: I think it's really helpful as we focus, or zoom out, whatever we're thinking about how to view that spot. But it's really important to keep in mind about the longer history of what becomes Providence and that is there was a moving, millennia-old story going on before Williams came.

Narragansett leaders are sending him there for very particular reason. And part of that is because Narragansett Bay is actually a borderlands of such. It's actually right in between Narragansett country and Wampanoag jurisdiction. So in some ways, sachems decide we're going to put him on the borderlands. We're going to put him like right up there against Wampanoag country.

So in some ways, because that was a contested land, that was a space he could move into. But with that being said, there was two spots that the Narragansett sachems are highlighting that he can use, right. One is Providence for part of his community. But the other spot that's important to remember is Cocumscussoc. And that's going to be the side of his trading post, which is just a little south. It's near what is Warwick, Rhode Island today. And that trading post is really important and it's part of these negotiations.

So the idea is, if Narragansett Country is going to host Williams, he needs to return favors. He needs to be a good guest, and part of that guesting is going to be access to trade goods; really important at this time. So that's one part of it, what sachems are expecting, but they're expecting other activities and favors too.

They're going to be expecting, if they want some translation work done, if they want interpreting done, they want him to be an advocate for them. Whether he was, how effective he was, that's a larger conversation.

But I think the point is when Williams himself—if you look at his language and he describes him coming to Rhode Island in the terms—he will say like, "I didn't buy this area, it wasn't for sale, this was an understanding I came to, and I call it a sale because that's what," when he is talking to English leaders, "that's what you would understand." But that isn't exactly what it was.

[00:38:29] Liz Covart: So to return now to Roger Williams's banishment from Massachusetts. The Massachusetts authorities were after Williams, but Williams escaped

imprisonment because he and his followers in Salem had planned a route out of Massachusetts Bay.

And Williams followed this route, and he entered into the Narragansetts' territory where he made an agreement with the Narragansett people that he would settle in their borderland region between the Narragansetts and the Wampanoag at what is now Providence, Rhode Island, which is at the head of the Narragansett Bay.

How did Williams build and establish what would become the colony of Rhode Island? How does he turn his settlement to Providence into the hub of a new colony?

[00:39:07] Linford Fisher: What we think of as Rhode Island is a little bit messier and looser in a way. So it's actually several different towns that get founded within a couple years of each other. So it is Providence at the head of the Narragansett Bay. Down in the Bay, there's a big island, which is the original Rhode Island, Bat Island is what they called Rhode Island, Aquidneck Islands. And on there are two settlements.

So Portsmouth at the northern tip of that, and then Newport at the bottom. So those three towns are sort of semi-independent, but they band together in the early 1640s and get a sort of recognition from the government in England that they have the right to be there. A patent is what they call it. And that gives them some legitimacy.

So when we think about Rhode Island, it's something that emerges actually over time. Providence's just one piece of that. And then there's another town of fourth town that eventually comes into play, which is Warwick. But initially that land that was Warwick was sort of a challenge to Roger Williams and what becomes Rhode Island because it was actually sort of a spinoff, a break off.

This guy Samuel Gorton goes down and buys land separately from the Shawomet Native group and claims it, gets the rights for it, and then tries to hand it off to Massachusetts Bay as a way of sticking it to Roger Williams and Rhode Island, which is really interesting.

So it's a highly contentious process in a way. It's not a smooth founding. It's not a smooth start. There's not even unity. So what I think is amazing then is that Williams, then other leaders like John Clark down in Newport, find a way to bring a sense of purpose and collectivity to these disparate talents and ideas.

And Williams tries to get Province off the ground by very orderly carving out these plots, these individual plots that he sells off to people. Which there's this illustration of this in the book as well that is really remarkable in a way because they're so equally spaced. And so again, this idea that everyone has the ability to purchase the same amount of land in this place called Providence seems really important.

[00:41:13] Liz Covart: So two follow up questions. First, it sounds like Roger Williams, who is known in our history books as the founder of Rhode Island, was really a cofounder of Rhode Island because leaders from other towns helped him create the colony. Do we understand that right, is that correct that he's a cofounder of Rhode Island?

And second, when we think of the colonies in general in the seventeenth century, we know that the English established Virginia because England wanted to establish a foothold in North America. We also know that it became a very lucrative tobacco colony.

When we think of New York, New Jersey, and the Hudson and Delaware River Valleys, we know that that's where the Dutch established a trading colony called New Netherland. And that colony's purpose was really just a trade with Indigenous peoples.

Then we think of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut, colonies where separatists and nonconformists to the Anglican Church were able to settle to escape persecution from the worship laws in England.

And perhaps also think of the Carolinas settled for their lucrative plantations and Pennsylvania as a colony settled with the idea that anyone could live there and worship freely.

But let's be honest, we the American people rarely talk about Rhode Island. So what was the purpose behind Roger Williams's cocreation of the colony of Rhode Island? Was Rhode Island meant to be similar to Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and even Maryland as a place where England could send religious nonconformists? Julie, would you like to start?

[00:42:40] Julie Fisher: I at least want to start with a framing question, Liz, and something you brought up I think is worth highlighting. So, when Williams is banished, right, he has options on places to go, and he could have gone to New Netherland.

Other people from New England did when they had a falling out. Anne Hutchinson would be a great example. They leave and they go to New Netherland.

And Roger Williams spoke Dutch. He could have done it, and he chose not to. He wants to create this other colony. So I just think it's important to highlight it is a very purposeful action on his part where he wants to make somewhere different.

[00:43:12] Linford Fisher: I think one of the things that we come to associate with Rhode Island is what made it special, and I think maybe was a part of the original vision, which is that Roger Williams had grown up seeing persecution back in England. He saw people, you know, at the tail end of a more mercenary phase of English imposed conformity, people dying for not believing and saying the right things.

And then he experiences this in Massachusetts Bay. And so I think that comes with him to what becomes Rhode Island. And the two main features that we associate with Rhode Island today, least historically, is this idea of separating church and state. Which is what, as we heard before was really essential to what was missing in Massachusetts that he was critiquing.

And the second thing is full religious liberty. It does become a radical place that is unlike Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania doesn't get established for another thirty, forty years, of course, but it's really kind of a trinitarian Christian freedom. South Carolina, even later is maybe

slightly more permissive in terms of Jews. But Rhode Island, Williams says at one point, he says that Catholics, Jews, Muslims, even atheists, or non-believers, should have the rights to be protected from the civil government and to worship or not worship as they believe, which is kind of astonishing.

And so if you think about the way in which Rhode Island develops and its purpose and mission, I think there's two phases. The first one is when he goes to England in 1643 for a patent, which he gets in 1644. The real core of how he's pitching this to them, it was different government, but to parliament essentially, is to say that this is going to fulfill the mission of converting Native Americans. That's why *A Key Into the Language* is so important in this moment.

In 1660 it's a very different context. So Charles is on the throne. The monarchy had been restored, and Charles is essentially really interested in creating spaces around the English empire where religious liberty can flourish. And so he embraces this idea of a place that is for religious dissidents and for people who can practice their religion freely.

As you can imagine, this really makes other people upset. So Massachusetts Bay, other New England colonies famously call Rhode Island one of two things. The first is "Rogue Island" and then the second is "the latrine of New Englands." So they really hate Rhode Island because religious liberty, while it might be our values today, was not a Puritan value in the same way and was not shared universally around the English empire as well.

[00:45:53] Sheila McIntyre: Yeah, I just wanted to add, I think we also have to remember, and it's one of the things we try to highlight in the book, is that we tend to want to separate out Williams into these pieces. Like in this case, he was looking at Indigenous issues and he was doing this incredible phrase book, and he was writing these huge tomes on church and state, but he did all those things at the same time. And it's hard to remember that.

But also Williams publishes so widely and he can't publish in Massachusetts Bay colony, and there's no press in Rhode Island. So he has to sail back to England. And he publishes his books in big chunks. Like when he's in London, he leaves all these books for publishers to publish. And so the only book of his whole collection that he gets printed in the colonies is his attack on the Quakers, which is the almost last thing he publishes.

And so, yeah, it's just worth bearing in mind that Williams is a little bit of a self-creator. When he's in London, he's also trying to make a bit of a splash because not only is he doing the work of building a colony of sorts, that's when the *Key Into the Language of America* is published is in the midst of that negotiation.

So he uses all of his many sorts of things at the same time with great effect. In his own definition, he dazzles them. Of course, that's how he describes it. But yeah, I just think it's worth noting that he's a very effective lobbyist and he uses his publications as part of a larger effort at colony building.

[00:47:22] Liz Covart: As you mentioned Sheila, Williams published a track that decried Quakerism and attacked Quakers. So how successful was Roger Williams in establishing a

colony where there was a separation of church and state, and a place where residents, including Quakers, didn't have to conform to any state sponsored religion?

[00:47:40] Sheila McIntyre: I think he's remarkably successful. I mean, at the same time that he's ranting and raving, admittedly 685 pages worth of ranting against the Quakers, in Boston, they're cutting off their tongues and hanging them. So in comparison, listening to Williams' rant for a couple hours is nothing.

And his attack on the Quakers, to me is proof that a political leader, in his case, can have very strong and vociferous disagreements with somebody and they can all still live in the same place. He doesn't force them to leave. He doesn't put them in prison. He doesn't demand conformity to anything. He wants people to pay their taxes. And there's certain civil expectations that he has, like any leader would have.

But in no way is he going to determine the faith that somebody needs to follow. And as Lin explained, that is pretty radical. It's almost unique in the colonial world. That's a through line for Williams. He believes that in 1625, and he believes that until the day he dies; that maintaining your own faith is crucial because if no person can know the true faith, then no person can tell another person what that faith is. So Williams has lots of reasons for not liking Quakers, but he would never disagree with their right to be there.

And one of our favorite moments in this whole collection takes place during this Quaker debate which goes on and on and on, I mean, for days. But he's seventy years old at this time when he does this. And he rows in a rowboat from Providence to Newport, which is remarkable. I mean, that would take the better part of a full day. And he writes about it. He describes the moonlight at one point. So I don't know, I just have to tip my hat to his ability to row that long and that far.

I personally think compared to any other colony that I've read about Rhode Island is pretty successful. And I personally think that preservation of this separation of church state is essential to the American experiment.

[00:49:34] Julie Fisher: And Sheila explain to our listeners why is he rowing? Why is he rowing all day, seventy-year-old Roger Williams on the open water—not really open, it was hugging the coastline—why is he doing that?

[00:49:46] Sheila McIntyre: Well, because he promised the Quakers he would hold some of the days in Providence and some of the days in Newport. So he's going to do that. Yeah. And he can't shut up. So they keep timing him. And he describes all this and they accuse him of being silly and drunk and they just sort of rag him all over the place. And he includes all of that in the book, which is pretty impressive too.

[00:50:08] Liz Covart: One more idea I'd like to ask about, which will take us back to Roger Williams and his interactions with Indigenous peoples, is that in the late-1630s and the mid-1670s, two devastating wars between Native peoples and New England colonists took place. The Pequot War between 1636 and 1638 and King Philip's or Metacom's War between 1675 and 1676.

When we think of these wars, we think of the involvement of Massachusetts and Connecticut, but not Rhode Island. So I was fascinated to read in *Reading Roger Williams* that Williams owned Indigenous slaves who were caught and punished with enslavement after these wars. And I was also surprised to learn that Williams tried to capture Indigenous people who were fleeing these wars and fleeing capture by Massachusetts and Connecticut officials.

And I wonder if you would speak to this contradiction in Williams's life where he was quote, a friend to Native peoples, and yet he was also their enslaver.

[00:51:09] Linford Fisher: It's one of the really challenging things about interpreting Williams, I think. And maybe it helps us understand him as someone who is not unlike the rest of us in a way, who find ourselves in difficult situations. And not that any of us are enslaving Indigenous people, but we have our own compromises we make right, in terms of the modern world.

And so for Williams, I think one of the things we wanted to get across very clearly is that there is sort of the idealized Williams in the ways that you've described; the friend of Indigenous people, but also like the founder of separation of church and state and religious liberty and stuff. And that's not wrong in some ways, but there's this other part of him that has to be contended with. And so when it is a decision for him, when he's faced with a choice, do I side with Indigenous peoples generally or do I side with the English colonial project? He is always going to be on the side of the English colonists, even the ones in Massachusetts who kicked them out. That's kind of the crazy thing, he's that sort of committed.

So the racial divide, the ethnic, the culture divide is really, really stark. And so yeah, in the Pequot War in 1636, 1637, Pequot nation is this huge Indigenous entity in what is now southeastern Connecticut that starts to be uncomfortable with the English colonization on its lands and so they kill a few traders and it sparks a war.

And Williams says that he intervenes to keep the Narragansett nation out it so that the English collectively can try to destroy the Pequots. And it really is a war of genocide that Williams is participating in. It's not only that they try to kill all of the Pequots or seldom into slavery, they hunt the women and children down in the swamplands. But afterward, in the Treaty of Hartford in 1638, they mandate that even the name of the Pequot can't be uttered, which is really astonishing.

And Williams is right there enabling all that. And afterwards, as you reference, he requests a specific Pequot youth, who gets renamed Will, and he's sent down from Boston to Providence. and he serves in Williams's household for years. It's really astonishing.

Williams also serves as a like a slave catcher, functionally. When enslaved Indigenous people from Providence escaped back to the Narragansett and Pequot territory, Williams collaborates with Narragansett leaders to kind of hunt them down and send them back. So this too is part of Williams's legacy.

And we fast forward then to what's called King Philip's War in 1675, 1676 is almost a repeat of this. One of the lesser discussed pieces of King Philip's War, which is this huge war of resistance against English colonization where most of the Indigenous nations in the region are fighting against the English. The English, do have the Pequot and Mohegan with them in this war. But generally speaking, it is again, a war against English colonization.

And Rhode Island at first tries to stay out of it. And the Narragansett Nation, they're pressured by Rhode Island, by the Massachusetts Bay colonies, to stay out the war too. Eventually, it's revealed that they are probably harboring refugees from King Philip and other regions. And so Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Plymouth all conspire to invade Narragansett territory. And Roger Williams and Rhode Island enables this.

And so there's this devastating march on a Narragansett stronghold in what is now southern Rhode Island in December of 1675. It leads to the capture of hundreds of Narragansett individuals, many of them women and children. Hundreds of them are sold into slavery, and it disperses a great number of them and then they join against King Philip too.

So Williams plays a role in that as well. He joins a local militia. He hunts downs Narragansetts. He helps to sell them into slavery, which is one of the documents that we include in the book, is this receipt of the sale of Indigenous people into slavery.

So yeah, it's not just a minor part of who he is in his life. These are really important defining regional kinds of conflicts that Williams is at the center of. And it indicates that there's this sort of undercurrent of colonization and the legacy and lore of New England that we maybe haven't talked enough about.

[00:55:21] Julie Fisher: I wanted to add Liz, to this question because we hear this a lot, this phrase, Williams being a friend. And as I sat with that I think it's a really nice moment to highlight what makes so interesting is not saying he's a friend is really problematic, often not true. That question doesn't take us very far. Neither does that characterization.

But if we take Williams, right, if we take his words and his letters and his writings, we see that he took Native peoples seriously. That is really valuable. It's what makes this documentary edition so rich in our opinion, is he was not a good friend. Often an enemy, but he was often very observant and he's paying attention.

So collectively, if you look at Williams's correspondence, you will see that three quarters of them are mentioning Native people, three quarters. Within that, you'll see him name over eighty-five individuals by name. I'm not talking about duplications of names because some leaders are mentioned all the time, but he's paying attention. He's listening.

I'm not saying it's not problematic, I'm not saying he is omniscient. He doesn't know everything. But he does pay attention. And so that's what makes his writing so interesting to us. In some ways, him being a friend or not a friend to us isn't as valuable as just he's on the ground and giving us a glimpse into what is some really difficult spaces otherwise to see into.

[00:56:44] Linford Fisher: I think it's interesting too to think about the way in which the position of Providence, and then Williams own house within Providence, was at the crossroad of Indigenous territory. And there's these great descriptions of Williams talking about how he's constantly hosting regional leaders, individuals in his house and Williams has gone a lot, so it's poor wife Mary has to do a lot of the hosting sometimes too, with raising a whole family.

But that level of daily and weekly and annual intimacy and relationship is really the foundation. It comes through in the correspondence and the letters, as Julie was saying, but like it's almost just a given that is invisible to us today. Sort of the way in which these colonies weren't just like colonies and interaction. They're deeply embedded in Indigenous communities and territories and negotiations.

And one moment that this really stands out to me at least, and we have a description of this in the book, is so during King of those war in 1676, after that raid on the Narragansett strongholds, the Great Swamp, in retaliation, the Narragansett and other regional nations basically burn every single city on the west side of the Narragansett Bay, including Providence.

So they attack Providence, they burn it to the ground, and while the city is burning, Roger Williams comes out, his own house is up in flames, and he addresses some of the Native leaders who are there at the burning of Providence. He says, "what's going on? Like for all these years we've been working together and trading and stuff like that."

And they're like, "what happened to you? Like, why did you do what you did?" And they go through their sort of reasons why they burned Providence and why they're attacking English. But he knows them by name. He knows who's there and they know him. So this sense of a real rupture in sort of a deep bedrock of trading and relationship comes through in this moment.

[00:58:38] Liz Covart: What do you think the legacy of Roger Williams was when he died in 1683? And what is his legacy now? Or perhaps, what do you think his legacy should be?

[00:58:48] Linford Fisher: It's hard to say when he died, what his legacy might have been. He was kind of sidelined, I think, over time. And there's this kind of painful letter that we either include or reference—frankly, I forget if we include the whole thing—where he basically is writing and kind of sounds like he's trying to reconnect and to assemble people around him that recognize his importance.

I mean, it's kind of a sad late in life, "who am I anymore?" right. As a new generation of leaders in Mass Bay who don't know him and respect him, there's people in Connecticut who don't know and respect him. Indigenous leaders who don't really know him and respect him. And so it's kind of a sad end of life moment in a way.

But the bigger question about the legacy up through the American Revolution, for example, which we're recognizing the 250th anniversary of that, so very soon. I think the thing that really stood out to us and we tried to capture in the epilogue is that the ideals that Williams

had, despite all of his issues and all of his problems and the way that he's complicated, they still feel like something that are worth talking about the day.

And they were imperfectly enacted in the seventeenth century. They were imperfectly enacted in Rhode Islands after Williams's passing in the eighteenth century, mid-eighteenth century you have instances where Jewish people are sort of discriminated against and prevented, at least temporarily, from becoming citizens. That's not Roger Williams' vision.

In the American Revolution and the Bill of Rights and sort of the conversation post-American Revolution, there's a huge debate about separation of church and state and about religious liberty, right. Which get ensconced in the Bill of Rights and the amendments, and so these things are alive then. It's not the same context as Williams, but it's a through line in a way.

And I think today we could do a lot better to recognize the power of protecting individuals and denominations and religious groups and their right to exist and worship freely. We can also recognize the importance of keeping church and state separate, which I know is perhaps controversial with some people, but there's a reason why it's appropriate to sort of protect and separate what the government does and what churches do.

I would say finally, there's a unfulfilled aspiration that even Williams couldn't fulfill, which is that of understanding and respecting and elevating Indigenous communities. The Narragansetts are still here. They haven't disappeared despite this really horrific war in the seventeenth century against them. And that's why, again, to bring in Narragansett voices today felt important to us.

So what could we do as present day citizens of the United States to elevate and recognize and respect Indigenous people today? Roger Williams thought he was doing that, probably not so much, so maybe we could do better than him in that way.

[01:01:35] Liz Covart: Well, Lin, thanks for the great segue into our "1776 in Context" segment. Now that we're in the midst of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, in your opinion, what impact do you think that Roger Williams and his work and life have had on shaping the revolution's ideas about religious freedom and its pursuit? Sheila, would you like to start?

[01:01:56] Sheila McIntyre: I think the Williams fans, among your listeners, would love to think that there's some kind of straight line; that we can find an annotated copy of Williams's texts in Jefferson's library. We can't. And most people who've looked into this, you know, other historians have done this more explicitly, trying to figure out how much of the revolutionary founders' thoughts on separation of church and state owed to Williams.

Frankly, I don't think much, but that doesn't mean that we can't look at it, right. So I think the sections that we've included in the book—the "Bloody Tenant" and the "Bloody Tenant More Bloody" and these texts that have hilariously outdated names—we've tried to give you sections in the book that would make the need for the separation church and state then and now clear.

And we may see, this is me talking I guess, but I think some of us want to protect the state from religion. What Williams actually wanted to do was protect religion from the state. Which is a little bit different than what I think most 21st century Americans would do.

So I'll always tell you that reading seventeenth century texts is worth your time. I'm not the person to dissuade you from doing that, and our book has tried to give you some help. So if you are an American in the midst of the 250th who would like to better understand more complicated ideas about church and state, I think Williams is a great place to start. Whether he was the bedside reading of James Madison, I think that's unlikely.

[01:03:28] Julie Fisher: I would just add too, yeah, we can't make that through line per se, but I think it's also helpful to remember in some ways that the generations that are separating, like Williams and revolutionary founders are so much closer than one may guess.

To me, what's the really interesting example. So if you look at one of these early nonconformist, technically like an emerging Anabaptist to be specific, who was operating in Rhode Island and then was actually out on Martha's Vineyard, and then went to Nantucket, was this early kind of trading, would-be missionary, bilingual, named Peter Folger. Which most people haven't heard about him.

But if you were to read his family tree, you'd see that he had a slew of children, one of them being Abiah Folger, who most people may know, right, is Benjamin Franklin's mother.

So I sometimes think about these connections and I wonder, you know, for someone like the Folger family who is moving around the Rhode Island orbit and thinking about these separations, that was probably still a conversation going on in the Folger than Franklin households. So we can't draw that through line, but it's helpful to remember their proximity.

[01:04:37] Liz Covart: Now in your volume, *Reading Roger Williams*, you offer us a chance to really dive deep into the world and ideas of Roger Williams. Do you have any tips or tricks for us on how we might approach the documents in your book?

And I ask because I was really surprised by how wordy Williams was in his writing. Plus, as you highlight in your book, there are a lot of differences between modern English and the English language of Williams's time, the seventeenth century.

So is there anything that we should know about Williams as a writer or thinker that might help us unlock the texts in your book so that we can really get to know Roger Williams? Sheila?

[01:05:15] Sheila McIntyre: I'll start, but I hope all of us will weigh in a little bit. I always tell students, because I teach the seventeenth century a lot, to read them out loud. And I actually think that reading documents out loud is quite helpful.

We have done our best to both introduce every document and to sometimes give you little guideposts throughout the longer documents. And we use the footnotes not to display our

knowledge, that's not what we're doing, but to try to explain what Williams means by certain things.

So I guess what I'll say is my answer to this question is that we've tried not to leave you alone. We've tried to be the reader's guide to the seventeenth century. And we've edited him dramatically. Just imagine, this could have been more than three thousand pages, I guess I'll put it that way.

[01:06:06] Julie Fisher: And I think I would also add too, something to keep in mind why that effort is worth it, is the reason we like the documentary edition and bringing in these letters is that unfiltered view of Williams, or filtered through sometimes Williams's view, actually will reveal a person that is much more human, much more self-conscious, sometimes unsure than you may guess.

So in some ways just the reward of being able to read him and then read self-doubt. I see this a lot when he is talking about him speaking Indigenous languages, is he has all these small qualifiers: this is as best as I could tell, this is as far as my language could take me. So I think that documentary edition, you think you know Williams, but if you start to slow down and read him, you'll see someone much more human.

[01:06:56] Linford Fisher: I think there's an intensity to Williams that comes through in his writings that I like a lot. And hopefully readers of this will come to appreciate him as an intense human being.

But I don't think there's a wrong way to enter into his work in his corpus. We've tried to, as Shayla was saying, explain things along the way. So if I were approaching this the first time, I'd read in this direction, look at the table contents, and jump in on a topic that interests me, because we do introduce the whole chapter sort of comprehensively, and then each individual reading as well.

I'm a little biased here, but I think that the excerpt of *A Key Into the Language of America* is sometimes the easiest way into Williams because it sort of is just kind of shorter and more interesting culturally in a way. And he has his own biases in it, but it does feel like a gentle sort of entree into him. Maybe save the Quaker reading for a little bit later in your Williams journey.

[01:07:53] Liz Covart: If we have more questions about Roger Williams, where's the best place for us to get in contact with you? Let's go Sheila, Linford, and Julie.

[01:08:01] Sheila McIntyre: Well, I'm at the State University of New York at Potsdam, and my email address is on the Department of History webpage. And I'd be more than happy to chat and email with anybody who'd like more information on Williams. That's probably the best way to reach me.

[01:08:15] Linford Fisher: Yeah, same. I'm at Brown University, just Google "Linford Fisher." I'm sure you'll find a contact pretty quickly, but same. Would be happy to chat and hear some feedback or answer questions.

[01:08:25] Julie Fisher: I think the best way to reach me is actually finding me on LinkedIn.

[01:08:29] Liz Covart: Well, Linford Fisher, Sheila McIntyre and Julie Fisher, thank you for introducing us to Roger Williams, some of his complexities, and for helping us better understand the religious landscape of seventeenth-century New England.

[01:08:41] Julie Fisher: Thank you

[01:08:42] Linford Fisher: Thanks for having us.

[01:08:43] Sheila McIntyre: Thanks for listening, y'all.

[01:08:45] Liz Covart: Roger Williams defied nearly every expectation of his time. In a world where religious conformity was expected, Williams argued for spiritual liberty. In a colony that sought cohesion through religious and civic control, Williams proposed a government that respected individual conscience. And in an age defined by conquest,

Williams chose to learn the Narragansett language and work as a translator and cultural mediator between the Narragansett people and the English.

As Lin, Sheila, and Julie reminded us, Roger Williams wasn't just a rebellious theologian, he was also a restless idealist. His writings and actions challenged the core assumptions of seventeenth-century colonial life. His radicalism led to his banishment from Massachusetts Bay and also to his cofounding of a colony that embodied his conviction that people should be able to live without fear of religious persecution in a place that champion freedom of conscience.

While Roger Williams's writings may not have been part of James Madison's bedside reading, his ideas on liberty of conscience, joined by Enlightenment thought and colonial experience, help shape the values that underpin the Constitution's First Amendment, which guarantees both the separation of church and state and the freedom to worship.

You'll find more information about Linford Fisher, Sheila McIntyre and Julie Fisher and their book, *Reading Roger Williams*, plus notes, links, and a transcript for everything we talked about today on the show notes page, benfranklinsworld.com/417. If you enjoyed this episode, please forward it to a friend. Friends tell friends about their favorite podcasts, so please share this episode with someone who loves history and is curious about the origins of religious freedom in the United States.

Production assistance for this podcast comes from Joseph Adelman, Karin Wulf, and Morgan McCullough. Breakmaster Cylinder composed our custom theme music. This podcast is part of the Airwave Media podcast network. To discover and listen to their other podcasts, visit airwavemedia.com.

Finally, we just used Roger Williams as a window through which we could view the world of seventeenth-century religion and colonial interactions with Indigenous people. But how might Indigenous communities such as Narragansett have viewed Roger Williams and his

efforts to mediate between cultures? I'd love to know what you think, liz@benfranklinsworld.com.

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