

# First Amendment

## Constitution of the United States of America

Adopted: AD 1791



## First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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## Colonial Concepts of Religious Liberty

Rhode Island granted more religious liberty than other New England colonies. Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, was expelled from Massachusetts Bay for criticizing the Puritan government and arguing for a stronger separation between church and state.<sup>2</sup> Williams was himself a Puritan minister who sought to propagate the true church—but he believed this could be achieved only by maintaining a wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes[s] of the world.<sup>3</sup> In a pamphlet published in England, Williams argued against civil persecution for matters of conscience, writing that civil states should not be the judges of spiritual matters.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* 88–89 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), reprinted in *The Sacred Rights of Conscience* 147 (Daniel L. Dreisbach & Mark David Hall eds., 2009); see also Curry, *supra* note 1, at 15, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* (1644), reprinted in *5 The Founder's Constitution* 48–49 (Philip B. Kurland & Ralph Lerner eds., 1987).

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