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From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765 Richard L. Bushman

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RICHARD L. BUSHMAN. *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. 343 pp. \$8.95.

Too frequently authors and teachers consider the history of early America by discussing the original settlements of the thirteen colonies and then turn abruptly to the end of the colonial era to consider the prelude to the Revolution. The period from 1690 to 1765 is undoubtedly the most neglected era of American history. This neglect is especially evident when historians refer to these years as the waiting period before the Revolution.

While some historians overlook this period as one of important developments, Dr. Richard L. Bushman of the History Department of Brigham Young University has advanced the thesis that between the Glorious Revolution and the conclusion of the French and Indian War Connecticut society was transformed significantly. "By the eve of the Revolution," Professor Bushman writes, "Connecticut was moving toward a new social order, toward the republican pluralism of the nineteenth century. With the death of old institutions had come the birth of a new freedom." (p. ix) Law and authority, he averred, embodied in government institutions transformed first because of economic ambitions and later as a consequence of the Great Awakening.

By considering factors advancing toleration in Connecticut, Bushman investigated one of the more significant developments of the colonial period. In all of the American mainland colonies planted before 1633, political leaders established religious solidarity as a paramount political objective, refusing dissenters for decades the right to organize and conduct public services. This policy of maintaining religious uniformity was transplanted from Massachusetts to Connecticut by orthodox Puritan immigrants, and for over a half a century in these two Puritan colonies political leaders succeeded in preventing the emergence of nonconformist societies. After 1690 a few non-Congregational societies (primarily Anglican) secured the right to organize in Connecticut, but (with the exception of the growth of the Church of England) the first significant increase in dissident groups did not occur in that area until after the Great Awakening.

Immediately prior to the revival of the early 1740's, everyone in Connecticut, with the exception of those exempted for supporting the Anglican, Baptist, or Quaker faith, was required by law to attend a Congregational society and contribute to the minister's salary. During the revival, the Connecticut assembly forbade itinerants to preach unless they secured permission from a resident minister. Although this law limited the rights of dissenters, Dr. Bushman emphasized that the Great Awakening advanced toleration and altered the social order in Connecticut by contributing to the numerical increase of Baptists, Anglicans, and Separates (an offshoot of the Congregational society). Because of the growth of dissent, the privileges enjoyed by members of the established church were seriously challenged and the problems of enforcing old ecclesiastical laws multiplied. A new sense of injustice was popularized effectively by converts saturated with religious zeal.

Another subject considered in this well-written book was the plausible causes of the Great Awakening. While discussing this controversial subject, Bushman speculated that peculiarities of the Puritan personality partly accounted for the tensions which lead to conversion. Plagued by an increasing desire for material wealth, many settlers were highly susceptible to the preaching of enthusiastic revivalists who "excoriated the spreading worldliness." (p. 189)

Another consequence of the awakening, according to Dr. Bushman, was the transformation of politics, for new disputes emerged during this religious upheaval which precipitated political divisions. New Lights, friends of the awakening, denounced the legislation forbidding itinerant preaching. Leaders of this political faction proclaimed that forbidding such preaching was in reality fighting against God. Meanwhile, Old Lights removed their political opponents from office, insisting that their critics were opposed to order and government and supported the development of a lawless society. Five years after the flames of the revival had subsided, however, the New Lights emerged as a powerful faction, and for many decades thereafter the struggle between the friends and enemies of the awakening continued. Since before the awakening "no one of importance had dared assert that the civil authorities had actually overstepped their bounds," Bushman concluded that the religious upheaval prepared Americans for a political revolt by

igniting a new form of conflict. (p. 265-66) On the eve of the Revolution, he asserted, the New Light party that was accustomed to contending against Old Lights quite naturally openly reacted against "British tyranny." (p. 266)

From Puritan to Yankee is a work based on exhaustive research into innumerable sources and contains many thought-provoking interpretations. Moreover, it is rich in details that are often overlooked by writers of early American history, for Dr. Bushman not only discusses the political and social changes which occurred in Connecticut during the first half of the eighteenth century but also considers economic developments, land policies, and local government in colonial Connecticut.

Recognizing Dr. Bushman's contribution, Oscar Handlin referred to this publication as "one of the most important works of American history in recent years."

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