

# The Independent Scholar Quarterly

Vol. 26, No. 4 (November 2013)



An international organization dedicated to advancing scholarship by providing access to research facilities, grants, and professional support since 1989.

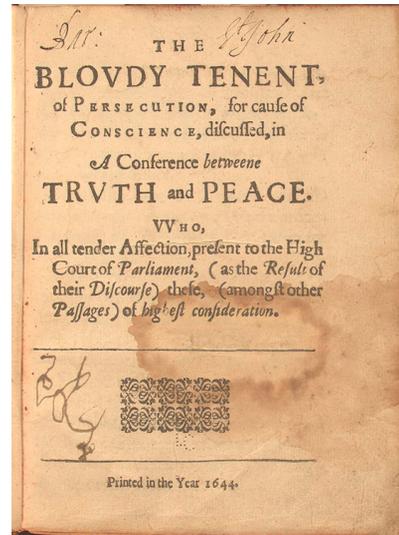
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Roger Williams's Famous Work on Freedom of  
Conscience

## Was Massachusetts Bay a Theocracy?

Alan E. Johnson

The following is an excerpt from NCIS member Alan E. Johnson's forthcoming book *The First American Founder: Roger Williams and Freedom of Conscience*. Mr. Johnson holds an A.B. (Political Science) and A.M. (Humanities) from the University of Chicago and a J.D. from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, Cleveland State University. He retired in 2012 from a long career as an attorney in which he focused mostly on constitutional and public law litigation. His previous publications include *First Philosophy and Human Ethics: A Rational Inquiry* (Cleveland: Philosophia Publications, 2000). He is currently a full-time independent scholar in the fields of history, constitutional law, and philosophy. For additional information see his web bio on the NCIS website.

The history of Roger Williams in America is the story of two opposed types of political orders: the seventeenth-century theocracy of Massachusetts Bay, which was dominated and controlled by orthodox Puritan religious and political figures, and

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the polity founded by Roger Williams in Providence (later extended to Rhode Island generally), which was based on complete liberty of conscience and a total separation of church and state. Historians have long recognized this dichotomy, including the characterization of Massachusetts Bay as a theocracy.[1]

The Massachusetts Bay regime persecuted those who manifested religious views and practices different from its officially established religion. Four Quakers were hanged; Baptists were fined, imprisoned, and, in one case, whipped; Anne Hutchinson and others who expressed disagreement with the established religion were banished.[2] Roger Williams was banished for communicating opposition to the government's promulgation and enforcement of religious laws and for expressing other views related to his religious beliefs.[3]

Notwithstanding these brutal historical facts, many commentators have denied that Massachusetts Bay was a theocracy. They have argued that a theocracy exists only when the clergy are the official rulers. Thus, Charles M. Andrews stated that "Massachusetts was not a theocracy, as it has far too often been called, for the influence of the clergy was entirely unofficial and without the sanction of law." [4] Among other things, this parsimonious definition ignores the fact, well-known to political scientists, that actual political control of a society may differ from the formal political control set down in the society's written constitution.[5]

For example, the former Soviet Union would have been considered a democratic republic elected by the people with full recognition of individual rights if one consulted only its constitution. Such constitutional protections were, on paper, in effect during and after some of the worst years of Joseph Stalin's tyranny, including Stalin's mass arrests, show trials, and executions of officials, military officers, and peasants. The Communist Party (under the personal dictatorship of Stalin after the consolidation of his power) controlled the Soviet regime in reality, notwithstanding the rights trumpeted in its written constitution.[6]

Similarly, the religious ministers in Massachusetts Bay controlled or substantially influenced the civil magistrates. John Cotton, the most influential cleric in Massachusetts Bay, was "the mouthpiece of the Massachusetts theocracy"[7] and "the principal spokesman for the New England way . . . ."[8] Another minister, Thomas Hooker, was also very influential in the early years of the colony before he left and founded another colony in Connecticut. According to seventeenth-century Puritan historian William Hubbard, "such was the authority they (especially Mr. Cotton) had in the hearts of the people, that whatever he delivered in the pulpit was soon put into an Order of Court, if of a civil, or set up as a practice in the church, if of an ecclesiastical concernment." [9] Massachusetts Bay Governor John Winthrop "relied heavily on the opinions and advice of the Puritan ministers he most respected." [10] The Massachusetts Bay government routinely consulted and normally followed the advice of the colony's religious ministers, especially but not exclusively on the vast range of religious matters that were subject to governmental enforcement and regulation.[11] A nineteenth-century historian accurately concluded:

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By law the civil government was distinct from the ecclesiastical, but in fact it was strictly subordinate to it. Owing to their moral influence, the pastors and elders formed a sort of Council of Ephors; no important decision was arrived at without their consent. They spoke in the name of the Divine Will revealed in the Bible, and their sentence could only be appealed against by calling in question their interpretation.[12]

The General Court was the supreme governmental authority in Massachusetts Bay, holding all ultimate legislative, executive, and judicial powers. A legal code drafted by Nathaniel Ward, who had significant experience both as a minister and as a lawyer, was adopted in 1641. This code incorporated the strong theocratic principles of the Massachusetts Bay experiment.[13] Ward was a fierce enemy of religious freedom.[14]

“Theocracy” was not a dirty word for the Massachusetts Bay Puritans. In fact, John Cotton explicitly advocated theocracy:

It is better that the commonwealth be fashioned to the setting forth of Gods house, which is his church: than to accommodate the church frame to the civill state. Democracy, I do not conceyve that ever God did ordeyne as a fit government eyther for church or commonwealth. If the people be governors, who shall be governed? As for monarchy, and aristocracy, they are both of them clearely approved, and directed in scripture, yet so as referreth the soveraigntie to himself, and setteth up Theocracy in both, as the best forme of government in the commonwealth, as well as in the church.[15]

The influence of the ministers became even more pronounced as a result of the evolution of a theocratic constitution for Massachusetts Bay.

The March 4, 1629, royal Charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company provided that the members of that company, called “freemen” (the stockholders), had the right to make laws for the company and colony in four quarterly “General Court” sessions. The freemen would also annually elect a governor, deputy governor, and eighteen assistants, which would meet monthly to administer the government of the company and colony.[16]

During the year after the June 1630 arrival of Massachusetts Bay Governor Winthrop and the first massive wave of Puritan immigrants, certain changes were made in the colony’s governmental structure. To reflect and implement the religious “covenant” with God at the heart of the regime, the term “freemen” was now defined to mean those male settlers who were also church members. Although everyone was required to attend church services, only a minority of the population were church members who were entitled to take communion and now, if male, to vote and hold public office. The newly defined freemen were initially empowered only to elect the assistants (the assistants would elect the governor and deputy governor). In 1632, however, the freeman acquired the right to elect the governor and deputy governor. By mid-1634, the freemen (male church

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members) were authorized to elect “deputies” to represent and vote for them in the General Court, which had sole legislative powers.[17]

In the meantime, a critical requirement was being added for church membership (and thus for freemanship). Calvinism in general, and Puritanism in particular, adhered to a theological doctrine of double predestination: God preordained, before each person’s birth, whether that person was going to go to heaven or to hell. The “invisible church”—known only to God—was the church composed only of the “saints” who were predestined for salvation. The Massachusetts Bay Puritans, under the leadership of John Cotton, now required any applicant for church membership to prove that he or she was one of the elect—one of the persons chosen by God for salvation. An elaborate test was designed to ensure, as much as humanly possible, that the “visible saints” who were to be approved for church membership were identical to the “invisible saints” predestined by God for salvation. The decision as to who was a “visible saint” eligible for church membership was made by the pre-existing membership of each church, as guided and influenced by their ministers. This new system was in place by 1636.[18]

The result of these constitutional changes was the transformation of “the republican government of the charter into a sort of religious soviet.”[19] “The question before the churches was no longer one of approximating the make-up of the invisible Church; it was one of controlling the Massachusetts electorate.”[20] In the event, the freemen composed of the “visible saints” proved to be even stricter than Governor Winthrop (who could hardly be called indulgent) on the issue of religious conformity. They were easily influenced by the ministers, who, of course, had a religious agenda. The freemen voted Governor Winthrop out of office at crucial times and replaced him with men, for example Thomas Dudley and John Haynes, who had attacked Winthrop for being too lenient in dealing with religious nonconformity.[21]

Thus, one of the central questions of political science—who ultimately controls the political order—is answered in the case of Massachusetts Bay by the observation that the ultimate power of the regime came to rest in the male “visible saints,” as guided and instructed by the religious ministers. These male church members, probably about one-fifth of the total population of the colony,[22] were the only persons allowed to vote and to hold political office. It is accordingly no wonder that the preeminent historian of seventeenth-century New England Puritanism did not hesitate to refer to Massachusetts Bay as a “theocracy.”[23]

At the end of the nineteenth century the great European historian Charles Borgeaud pronounced an eloquent epitaph on seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay: “Thus was founded the theocratic Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with none like it to be found in history, except the Republic of Calvin; like it, brave, austere, but intolerant of inquiry, persecuting heresy without pity, and without mercy.”[24] The Massachusetts Bay theocracy was to live on, in somewhat attenuated form, throughout the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. It finally expired, “not with a bang, but a whimper,”[25] in 1833.[26]

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## Notes

[1] E.g., Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, vol. 1 (New York, 1859), 24, 498, 514; Oscar S. Straus, *Roger Williams: The Pioneer of Religious Liberty* (New York, 1894), 15-16, 65-68, 115, 117, 125, 155-56, 199, 234; Emily Easton, *Roger Williams: Prophet and Pioneer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 163. More recently, John M. Barry has referred to “the conflict . . . between two visions: the one embodied in [John] Winthrop’s city on a hill [Massachusetts Bay] with its authoritative and theocentric state, the other in Williams’s call for utter separation of church and state and individual rights.” John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Viking, 2012), 388.

[2] Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 144-45; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 181; Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., ca. early August 1651 and ca. late August 1651, in *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, ed. Glenn W. LaFantasie, 2 vols. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England / Brown University Press, 1988), 1:332-36 (hereafter cited as RW Correspondence); John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England: A Narrative of New Englands Persecution . . .* (1652; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, n.d.); Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel: The Uncommon Life of Anne Hutchinson, the Woman Who Defied the Puritans* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), chaps. 1, 3-5, 7-9, 11-14.

[3] Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England (1628-86)*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-54), 1:160-61 (hereafter cited as *Mass. Records*); *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, ed. Richard S. Dunn, James, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 149-50, 153, 158, 163-64 (hereafter cited as *Winthrop Journal*); Roger Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered in The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 7 vols. (1963; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005), 1:324-25 (hereafter cited as *RW Complete Writings*); Roger Williams to John Endicott, ca. August-September, 1651, in *RW Correspondence*, 1:339. My forthcoming book on Roger Williams will discuss in detail the causes of his banishment.

[4] Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History: The Settlements*, 3 vols. (1934; repr., Safety Harbor, FL: Simon Publications, 2001), 1:448. See also James Calvin Davis, introduction, *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams*, ed. James Calvin Davis (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 14. Cf. Richard Middleton, *Colonial America: A History, 1565-1776*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 78 (“most writers today dispute [the] charge [that Massachusetts Bay was a theocracy], since the clergy . . . were not granted temporal authority,” but noting further, after reviewing certain historical facts, that “[c]hurch and state were thus inextricably intertwined” in the colony); Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State*, new ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 84 (“The [Massachusetts Bay] colony was not a theocracy in the usual sense of a rule by priests. But in the sense of a rule by God, through agents who steadily searched His Word and sought to apply it to every situation, Massachusetts aspired to be a theocracy.”). Ancient Egypt was a classic theocracy in that the pharaoh was considered to be divine. Alan E. Johnson, *First Philosophy and Human Ethics: A Rational Inquiry* (Cleveland: Philosophia Publications, 2000), 125-31. Most European governments in the medieval and early modern periods were theocratic in the sense that it was regarded as the duty of the state to enforce religious uniformity and to punish what was perceived to be heresy; most Puritans, both in Old and New England, agreed with this fundamental political theory. Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 144.

[5] A classic work, first published in 1961, is Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[6] 1936 Constitution of the U.S.S.R., accessed December 11, 2012, <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1936toc.html>. Cf. Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*,

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ed. Sergei Khrushchev, trans. George Shriver, vol. 1, *Commissar (1918-1945)* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 78-196, 216; *ibid.*, vol. 2, *Reformer (1945-64)* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 82-91, 98-170; Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 319-22 (adoption of 1936 Constitution and its aftermath), 336-56 (Stalin's "Great Terror").

[7] Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts: 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1933, with 1959 Preface), Kindle ed., chap.7, Kindle loc. 4361-62.

[8] Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell Paperbacks, 1963), 122-23.

[9] William Hubbard, *A General History of New England from the Discovery to 1680*, 2nd ed., collated with the original manuscript, ed. William T. Harris (Boston, 1848), 182. Morgan quotes this passage in *Visible Saints*, 95.

[10] Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 35. "The fact that so many of the ministers approved of the New England enterprise [Winthrop] felt to be a reliable sign of its acceptability to God, for surely God would not 'seduce his people by his owne prophetts' to follow a course contrary to His will." *Ibid.*, 36.

[11] *Ibid.*, 74-75, 87-88, 126-28, 140, 152-56; Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, Kindle loc. 3498-538, 4546-52, 4629-722. The journal of Massachusetts Bay leader John Winthrop abounds with examples of such consultation and influence. E.g., *Winthrop Journal*, 109, 116, 136-37, 140, 149-50, 158.

[12] Charles Borgeaud, *The Rise of Modern Democracy in Old and New England*, trans. A. Birkbeck Hill (London, 1894), 148.

[13] Morgan, *Puritan Dilemma*, 158-62.

[14] Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobbler of Aggawam . . .*, in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings* (1938; repr., New York: Dover, 2001), 226-32.

[15] John Cotton to Lord Saye and Sele, 1636, in Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans: A Sourcebook*, 209-10.

[16] *The Charter of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, in *The Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay . . .* (Boston, 1814), 8-11, 14.

[17] *Mass. Records*, 1:79 (October 19, 1630, General Court), 87 (May 18, 1631, General Court), 95 (May 9, 1632, General Court), 117-18 (May 14, 1634, General Court); *Winthrop Journal*, 34-35, 52n8, 113-34 (April 1, 1634), 116 (May 14, 1634); Andrews, *Colonial Period*, 1:432-44; Morgan, *Puritan Dilemma*, chaps. 7-8; Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, chap. 7, esp. Kindle loc. 4595-613. On September 2, 1635, the General Court ordered that the deputies be elected by paper ballot. *Mass. Records*, 1:157. Women could be church members (Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 6), but no woman was a "freeman" with political rights to vote and hold public office ("Index of Freeman, 1631-1641," in *Mass. Records*, 1:471-79).

[18] Morgan, *Visible Saints*, chap. 3. "Outside the church in New England stood not only the mixed multitude of wicked Englishmen and heathen natives, but also the visibly good, who understood and believed the doctrines of Christianity and lived accordingly but who lacked the final experience of grace." *Ibid.*, 120. "The majority of the populace were expected to live quietly under a church system which not only held them without the pale, but insinuated that they were in all probability damned." Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, Kindle loc. 3731-32.

[19] Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, Kindle loc. 4605-6; see also Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 150.

[20] Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, Kindle loc. 4611-12

[21] Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 101-5; Morgan, *Puritan Dilemma*, 74-75, 77-123, 152-56.

[22] "[T]he provable elect were a minority, probably no more than one-fifth of the total population." Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 150.

[23] "New England theocracy was taking its stand [against Roger Williams] on grounds no different from those on which

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the Vatican was built.” Perry Miller, “Roger Williams: An Essay in Interpretation,” in *RW Complete Writings*, 7:19. “It is his writings that reveal the true issue between Williams and the spokesmen for the New England theocracy; between him and Winthrop; between him and John Calvin.” *Ibid.*, 10. See also Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, chap. 7, Kindle loc. 4361-62. One historian aptly called the Massachusetts Bay system a “theocratic oligarchy . . . .” Roger Lockyer, *Tudor and Stuart Britain, 1485-1714*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2005), 505.

[24] Borgeaud, *Rise of Modern Democracy*, 149.

[25] T. S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men” (numerous editions).

[26] For excellent accounts of the protracted, tortuous demise of governmental entanglement with religion in Massachusetts, see Jacob C. Meyer, *Church and State in Massachusetts: From 1740 to 1833* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1930), chaps. 8-9, and John D. Cushing, “Notes on Disestablishment in Massachusetts, 1780-1833,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 26, no. 2 (April 1969): 169-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1918674>.

## Letter from the Secretary

Dear Member,

Having been appointed to fill the vacancy of Secretary earlier this year, it is my pleasure to share with you some of my experiences and outlook. First, I want to thank the NCIS members who responded to our 2013 Member Survey. We received the phenomenal response of 80%, with many useful comments, proof that the NCIS membership sees a future in our organization and all are proud to call themselves Independent Scholars. That response portends good things for NCIS, and they all involve you.

Since I joined the Board I have seen a dynamism and commitment from our new officers and Board members, a feeling that we, all members of NCIS, will move forward together. As an organization run by its members, we are happy to find those among us willing to take on the responsibilities of serving on the Board, running for NCIS office, joining a committee, and writing for *The Independent Scholar Quarterly*. It is a rewarding experience in which we develop close collegial ties with our fellow members. We work together in the process of growing this organization and increasing its capacity to undertake a larger role in that nonprofit sector of associations dedicated to scholarship. We see independent scholars blossoming all over the US and Canada and, more and more, in Europe. Independent scholarship is a far lesser known phenomenon elsewhere with the exception of large groups in India and Australia, both formed some years ago.

As we ready ourselves to grow here in the USA, NCIS is prepared to tackle the task of expanding our American Affiliate network and enlisting individuals and groups abroad who have come to value the identity of independent scholar and the advantages of membership and affiliation. We are on the threshold of a new era for NCIS. We ask you to continue your commitment by serving on committees and on the Board, running for office, contributing to TISQ, speaking about NCIS at the meetings and conferences you attend in your disciplines, writing about NCIS on your blogs—together we are NCIS.

Being the Secretary means time dedicated to NCIS but I can tell you that I’ve found no greater reward

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than making whatever contribution I can to NCIS. Please continue in participating as we move NCIS forward. For those of you who have expressed an interest in volunteering your time, you will soon be contacted by our President, Mona Berman, with her thanks and a description of how specifically you can help.

With warm regards,  
Janet Wasserman, Secretary  
Mae08ben02x@aol.com

## Interview with Janet Wasserman and David Sonenschein

Klara Seddon

January 2014 will mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of NCIS. As we approach this commemoration, I asked NCIS Secretary and former President, Janet Wasserman, and Treasurer and current Membership Chair, David Sonenschein, to reflect on the development of the independent scholarship movement from its beginnings in the 1970s to the present.

### **At what stage in your career did you become an independent scholar?**

JW: I began thinking about it in 1998 when I had an epiphany that led me to the composer Franz Schubert. I was still working - I didn't retire under social security until 2000 but worked even after that (I mean paid employment) - and felt compelled to join any group I could find of Schubertians with whom I could learn more about his life and work. I began years of independent study of classical music (I had piano lessons as a kid and still am dedicated to classical music), 19th century romanticism in music and art, the life of Schubert, and the history of Austria and especially Vienna. I joined the UK-based Schubert Institute (SIUK) in 1998. I wrote my first print article for *The Schubertian*, the journal of the SIUK, in 2001. I had already published a compendium of the Faust legend in music for a classical music website. The owner of that site, now sadly gone, was the first Webmaster of The Schubert Society of the USA, which I founded in 2003. Once I started to do research and to write, I knew I was in my milieu. I had had enough of academics and academia (although I am grateful to have since had the opportunity to publish two major composer portrait iconographies in an academic journal).

DS: I left academia in 1973, and a couple of years later realized I didn't want to do much else than read, research, and write. I was looking for a way back into study and publication without having to go back and slug through the academic swamp.

### **When did you join NCIS? What prompted you to join?**

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JW: “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Indy Scholar”—to paraphrase that wonderful movie title The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner. While I love being alone in research libraries and archives—I love the intensity and immersion in the research material—and I love to sit and write at my computer, I had no one to talk to, bounce ideas around with, get leads on sources. I wanted to just have someone read my writings and give me some feedback. I found NCIS online around 2003 and it was “bingo”—that’s what I am and that’s the group I have to be with. Maybe, I thought, the loneliness will end and I’ll meet people like me who’ll understand what this indy life is all about. So I joined and became active the following year.

DS: I really don’t remember when I joined NCIS, except it was pretty much in pre-computer days. NCIS had a paid Office Manager who handled all the dues and membership matters by hand, typewriter, and snail-mail. I had noted a couple of local, small, short-lived IS groups in the late 1970s but they didn’t hold together long. The main attraction and promise of NCIS was that (1) there were others, many others, like myself in the same situation, and (2) we all seemed pretty disgruntled about that and wanted to do something about it on a national level. And have a good time doing it.

**The independent scholarship movement gained momentum in the late 1970s and 1980s with the formation of several regional groups devoted to representing this growing community. What factors motivated this movement?**

JW: I recall that the Institute for Research in History (IRH) was founded [in 1976] by a group of women doctoral students and faculty and was located at the City University of New York Graduate Center for a time. I was at the CUNY Graduate Center in the 1970s as a doctoral student and I went to a few meetings of the IRH but never went beyond that— I had too much academic work to do and family responsibilities with my aged parents. I vividly recall Marjorie Lightman, one of the IRH core founders, I believe, and I felt that this was a group that would make its mark. It did for a long time. The group was progressive and sought to gather together similar groups of scholars in and out of academia across the United States. That the IRH’s founders were all women was indicative of the challenges and barriers thrown up at women who sought to enter academia. That was the central concern of many women doctoral students of my generation. Would we find a place in academia knowing as we did the intense sexism that the ivy couldn’t hide? I have no real recollection of the IRH’s later history and ultimate closing but the IRH did make a huge impression on me, and the lesson I took away was that simple one known to labor unions—“organize.” The other groups of independent scholars (mostly women) across the U.S. faced similar battles—they were being denied access to jobs in academia. Their partners and husbands were the preferred candidates for hire. I think the independent scholarship movement as we know it began with the simmering desire among women, first of all, to break down those barriers. After that came the “generation of lost scholars” as we in graduate school in the 1970s were known. No, we weren’t lost, said some of the male doctoral students, you can find us at the wheel of many a taxi. For the women, it was “stay home with the babies” or maybe find some kind of commercial employment that allowed for the exercise of our gray matter. In short, the factors were the pervasive sexism in academia (as well as everywhere else in society), the loss of status among highly educated women, their need for meaningful employment that

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utilized their advanced degrees, and the reduced financial circumstances among women married to salaried male academics at a time when they wanted to start families. All of these (and surely there were other factors) contributed heavily to the start of the independent scholarship movement as we know it.

DS: There were both socioeconomic and political factors. Almost all of the early agitators around the issue of what was to be called Independent Scholarship were women. The main route here I saw at the time was by academically trained and professionally qualified women who had married men also from the academia but who had to follow their husbands' career lines because it was the male who was taken seriously and hired in higher education. With luck they could get a staff job at the university. It was the same, only worse, for women who weren't married.

Though of course it's silly to divide history into the neatness of decades; much of the 1970s was an attempt to carry on the liberal political forces of the 1960s. Second wave feminism was still quite strong, and a significant motivator and sensitizer. The newly emerged Gay Liberation efforts added spirit and hope to that sense of politics. The early 1980s was also a time political resurgence, this time from the right. Political reaction and a more constrictive sense of economics did not particularly help.

The 1980s was also a time in which earlier university grads were finding themselves floating in frustration, even if employed, by not being in the field that they had chosen to study in college. There has always been a self-help culture in high production in America, but in 1983, Ronald Gross published a small book entitled Independent Scholarship. Gross figured significantly in making the phrase and status a part of public culture. He continued in this line for a while, publishing The Independent Scholar's Handbook in 1993. He was a member of NCIS for a short while.

### **Have the concerns of independent scholars changed since then?**

JW: They've changed some, I would say. Whereas the need to engage with fellow independent scholars has been met to a degree by technology - Skype, blogs, personal websites, online publishing, e-mail, meeting with others in our disciplines, and so on - the access to research material online has been constricted, to an alarming degree, by the privatization and resulting commercialization of scholarly journals by their often new owners. Getting into brick-and-mortar research libraries and archives—academic and otherwise—is still a tough call for some independent scholars whose need for access goes beyond any casual use by outsiders. The materials that we need access to are the red corpuscles of our research. Take away that access and we become anemic and fearful that our research product will be less than worthy. The online paywall to scholarly journal access is a major concern for those of us without an academic or institutional affiliation. What technology giveth, technology taketh away. I do like using the Internet despite the utter garbage often found there. I've done really valuable research for publication on the Internet. But when it comes to looking at an important scholarly article, it's pay up or go away. I find this commercialization to have detrimental effects on university and public libraries—who are unhappy with the cost of subscriptions

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(even if they receive an institutional discount)—and independent scholars who simply cannot afford to be squeezed financially, and are thus denied access. This paywall structure is really a stranglehold on scholarship and we have to fight it, or else.

DS: From a long-term view, the basic concerns of independent scholars do not appear to have changed much in 25 years. The membership of NCIS is now more technologically sophisticated than before, there are more men as members (though women are still in the majority), and the presence of NCIS is now more global than before, but I really see the same desires and complaints I heard in the early 1980s coming forth now.

In late 2004, I undertook a survey of the membership, published as *Independent Together*. The last chapter was on “Why are you an independent scholar,” and I’ll beg your indulgence by quoting the Summary of that chapter:

Most Members wanted the maximum control over their research. Many felt they were different from or in different situations than those in the academia. Others were retired or felt too old to have an academic career. Many Independent Scholars work under conditions of restricted finances. While most felt they had adequate academic library access, interlibrary loan and access to electronic databases remained problematic. Most did not feel they had trouble in grant submissions, book publication, or obtaining interviews. Many had to explain to others what an ‘Independent Scholar’ was, but generally did not have trouble establishing such an identity. As to why they were independent rather than academic scholars, most Members said they didn’t want an academic position and that they wanted more freedom for research than the academy allowed. Others pointed to severe competition for jobs, and women pointed out restricting duties of raising a family and being unable to get jobs for both themselves and their spouses. Others felt dissatisfaction with the culture of the academia.

The Report was the first descriptive study of independent scholars, and a copy was sent to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, but they never reviewed it or mentioned it. *The Chronicle* continued to treat independent scholars as a side issue, almost a curiosity and exotic. Later, the [NCIS] Board conducted another study but I was not involved and have not seen its results.

### **How has NCIS advocated for independent scholars? Are there any milestones you can recall?**

JW: Absolutely we have been staunch advocates for independent scholars. But it’s tough to administer a membership organization run exclusively by volunteers and to also be the victims, individually and collectively, of an economy digging itself out of recession while trying to get the message out. We were affiliated with the American Council of Learned Societies until very recently and now we are affiliated with the American Historical Association—both venues in which we have addressed the conditions of independent scholars. I consider those affiliations to be milestones for NCIS. We have requested inclusion of independent scholars as reviewers in federal grant making; we

## Interview

qualify for fiscal sponsorship under U.S. 501(c)(3) status and have done so; we have a new version of our publication—*The Independent Scholar Quarterly* (formerly *TIS*)—where we publish the work of our members; we take strong positions where we find what we believe to be the deliberate downplaying of the status of Independent Scholar, and we are in the process of revamping our website, both for the membership and also to create a more visible presence on the Internet. We are often contacted by unaffiliated independent scholars who were surfing the Internet looking for our kind of group. I believe that the critical stance in advocating for independent scholars derives simply from our being. We are really proud that there are successful NCIS regional affiliates, which are independent organizations in their own right. We need to remain a strong and effective advocate. We want to create more milestones—that's a big order but we have a dynamic new leadership that is determined to fashion a NCIS for the 21st century.

DS: The presence and existence of NCIS is in itself a crucial form of advocacy; the same is true of the Affiliates. Just by being there constitutes a reassurance and even comfort that the possibility of a social and professional focal point has been accomplished. The further development and fulfillment of this advocacy then becomes incumbent upon the membership by showing themselves publicly as practicing professional scholars, and by sharing themselves through efforts in support of their colleagues. The membership is NCIS and their conduct, individually and collectively, will give independent scholarship its reputation.

## New Members

**Linda Johnson** recently completed her position as an exhibition curatorial coordinator on an upcoming exhibition *Art and American Dance* at the Detroit Institute of Arts. She was also the co-curator in the re-installation of the Colonial American Silver collection in the American galleries. Dr. Johnson recently completed her PhD in American Studies from Michigan State University (2011). Her dissertation "Spiritual Autobiography in Puritan Portraiture" encompassed the interdisciplinary fields of American Art, Religion, and Material Culture. She has held a fellowship at Historic Deerfield and internships at Michigan State's Graduate Museum Program where she has published essays for MSGC Michigan Stained Glass Census, a statewide survey of architectural stained glass. Interested in New England Puritanism and how Puritan doctrine may take visual form in the arts she has written several essays on the renowned Puritan ministers Increase Mather and John Lowell. Her article "The Divine Sarah" recently published in the *Stained Glass Quarterly* was a material culture study in understanding the visual arts in relation to religious history and culture. As an Independent Scholar she is presently at work on an upcoming publication for the DIA's exhibition catalogue that explores how early divergent faith traditions such as the Puritans and the Shakers, influenced visual artists' responses to social dancing.

**Paulette Nonfodji** is an independent researcher in the field of social sciences. She has done research on Chinese state-run enterprises' investments in bio-fuel in West Africa and on Chinese foreign direct investments in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently her research focuses on economic relations between China and African countries in a comparative perspective. In addition to research, her

## New Members

interests stretch to poetry, which she blogs about at <http://simplyanotherwayofexpression.wordpress.com/>.

Currently an Associate Faculty member at SIM University, **Dr. Tad Wellman** has over 15 years' experience teaching writing and literature in the United States and Singapore. Publications include "The Story of the She-devil Takahashi Oden and the Reorientation of Interpretive Authority" in *Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, 2012 and "Critiquing Misogynistic Discourse: The Trope of the 'Poison Woman,'" in *The Evil Body*, 2011. Current research and writing projects involve revising "Snow Country and Snow Country Tales: A Fictional Construct of Artistic Inspiration" for publication and work on the novel *The Story of the She-devil Takahashi Oden*.

## New Board Members

As of this fall, I am pleased to announce the appointment of three members to the NCIS Board of Directors. Following two unexpected vacancies, the Board has voted unanimously in favor of electing, Mary Zimmer, Ruth Feiertag, and Susan Breitzer to the NCIS Board of Directors. We send our warmest welcome to Mary, Ruth, and Susan and look forward to working with them.

Klara Seddon, Chair, Communications Committee  
NCIS Board of Directors

**Susan Roth Breitzer** completed her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 2007, and is currently revising her dissertation, "Jewish Labor's Second City: The Formation of a Jewish Working Class in Chicago, 1886-1928," for publication. She has published essays in *History Compass*, the *Indiana Magazine of History*, and *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*. She has presented papers at meetings of the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association, and has currently helped organize the first NCIS-sponsored AHA panel. As a member of the NCIS Board of Directors, she currently serves on the Member Benefits Committee and as Chair of the Member Affiliates Committee. She has taught United States and world history at Fayetteville State University, and is currently teaching at Campbell University, Fort Bragg Campus.

In grammar school, **Ruth Feiertag's** father started handing her Great Works of English Literature with the admonition, "Here—read this before they ruin it for you in school." After that there was nothing for it but to major in English Literature, and Ms. Feiertag got a B.A. from the University of California Santa Cruz and eventually an M.A. from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She meandered towards a Ph.D. but arrived in the realm of independent scholarship and NCIS instead. She finds Medieval and Renaissance literature (mostly poetry and drama) endlessly fascinating, and anyone who wants to be treated to a long monologue should ask her about bastards from the Middle Ages through the Early Modern period. At the moment, Ms. Feiertag is attempting to make a living as a freelance editor (<http://www.penknife-editing.net>; she is one of the NCIS members participating in the Manuscript Review Service) to support her addiction to writing literary criticism.

## New Board Members

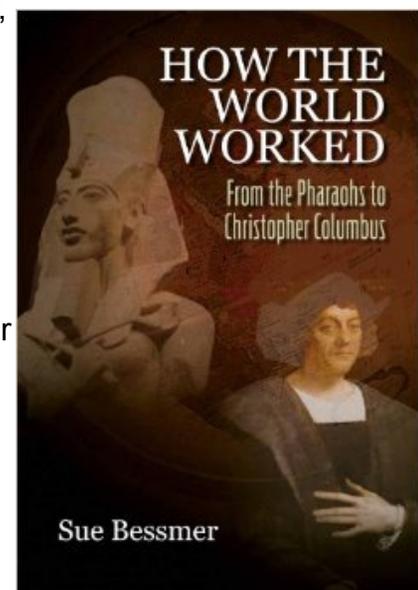
**Mary Zimmer** writes, “I am thrilled to join the Board of NCIS, and to be the chair of its Benefits Committee. Now is an exciting time for independent scholars, and NCIS is the foremost organization advocating for our common interests. Since joining the Board, I have been amazed at how hard my fellow Board Members work on behalf of the organization’s members, and I am honored to be a part of such a focused and dedicated team. As Chair of the Benefits Committee, it is my duty to ensure that NCIS is providing the most, and the most worthwhile, benefits to our members. In order to do so, I need input from you, my fellow member, about how we can improve the benefits we already offer, as well as suggestions for additional benefits. So please drop me a line at [maryezimmer@ncis.org](mailto:maryezimmer@ncis.org) and let me know how I, and NCIS, can serve you better. Thanks!”

## Review

*How the World Worked: From the Pharaohs to Christopher Columbus*, by Sue Bessmer, Pacifica, CA Old Tree Books, 2013, 396 pages, bibliography, index, paperback, ISBN 978-0-9886856-0-4, \$20.

Reviewed by Mary Zimmer

In the prologue, Bessmer contextualizes her work within her own history, including childhood experiences and academic pursuits. And it is clear that her approach to history, including her interweaving of politics, economics, and, to a lesser extent, geography, stems at least in part by the interdisciplinary courses she taught at San Francisco State University. But the aim and tone of the book is determined not by her past so much as by her present. Now retired from San Francisco State, Bessmer lectures on cruise ships about Greek and Roman history; this book was written primarily in response to the passengers’ request for her lecture materials. In other words, her book is targeted to the educated lay reader, which explains the lack of notes and the brevity of the bibliography. It may also explain why the work Bessmer cites most often is itself a general survey for the lay reader: Colin McEvedy’s *The New Penguin Atlas of Ancient History*.



As is evident by the sub-title of this book, “From the Pharaohs to Christopher Columbus,” the book’s scope is almost impossibly broad for a single work of three hundred and seventy-seven pages. But Bessmer is able to cover so much ground because, between her chapters, she skips from one place, time, and topic, to another. In other words, her work is not a continuous narrative, but rather, a collection of interrelated short stories; in Bessmer’s own words, her work is filled with “a marvelous cast of characters, great stories, and quite a few twists” (15). There is, then, no one thesis that focuses the work, and on first read the chapters may seem a little disjointed from one another. However, throughout the work there are recurring themes, reappearing characters, overlapping events, and the weaving together of ostensibly unrelated (to the lay reader at least) phenomena—for example, the domestication of the horse and the building of the great wall of

## Review

China—that provide the book with a subtle unity. Furthermore, there are also recurring leitmotifs that add to the sense of continuity; these include: the relation of language to social structure; the cultural position and political use of women; and religion in the service of politics and economics.

Although Bessmer's work reaches from Bronze Age Cyclades to twentieth-century Russia, its primary focus is ancient Greece and Rome, with substantial consideration also given to medieval Europe, especially Vienna. Bessmer actively shapes and analyzes her material, so while the chapters read like stories, they are by no means stories determined by characters and events alone. Perhaps the most important analytic concept to Bessmer's work is Robert Heilbroner's thesis that long-standing societies "emplo[y] one or more of three basic economic strategies: tradition, command, and markets" (14). Using this concept, Bessmer shows, for example, how the Athenian Pestratus mobilized a "command economy" so as to lift Hellenic farmers out of subsistence farming and provide them with "a measure of economic security and military and political power" that was fundamental to the establishment of Athenian democracy (222). Another concept that she applies throughout her work is that alignment of "the three major [types] of power: military, political, and economic" (15)—tends towards social stability, whereas non-alignment tends towards social unrest. As noted above, Bessmer refers to her work as consisting of "a marvelous cast of characters, great stories, and quite a few twists." In these terms that she sets out for it, Bessmer's work succeeds admirably.

## Announcements

**Call for Panelists:** Roundtable—Practicing History Independently: From Surviving to Thriving. The corporatization of the university and the recent economic recession have both made the equation of practicing history and holding a tenured or at least tenure-track position in history increasingly tenuous. Although professional organizations in the field, most notably the American Historical Association, have become increasingly sensitive to this reality, the burden of gaining and maintaining legitimacy has remained largely on the shoulders of independent scholars themselves, who too often have worked in isolation with little support or community. The National Coalition of Independent Scholars, a new affiliate of the AHA, therefore, would like to propose a roundtable that could address at least some of the following issues: 1. By what ways can unaffiliated/marginally affiliated scholars seek equivalent career status with the familiar academic ranks? 2. How can professional organizations, large and small help aid and building this recognition that can in turn lead to more equitable treatment within said organizations? 3. How can independent scholars seeking to return to traditional employment "keep current" and otherwise help themselves? 4. How can the NCIS become a more effective voice and advocate for independent scholars in the history profession? If you would have ideas for a paper/presentation or panel, please contact Susan Breitzer at [Susan.Breitzer@gmail.com](mailto:Susan.Breitzer@gmail.com) or Neil Dukas at [neil@dukas.org](mailto:neil@dukas.org).

**Call for Panelists:** Independent Scholars and Independent Scholarship in History The NCIS would also like to propose a more traditional session that explores and highlights the role of independent scholars in ages prior to when professional intellectual and scholarly activity became the almost exclusive province of universities. Although this panel is fairly broad in scope (and therefore may

# Announcements

become more than one panel), we would especially be seeking papers that focus on European and U.S. History, though proposals from other geographical regions are also welcome.

Chronologically, the focus would be from the Middle Ages to the mid-Twentieth century, though earlier examples

Possible topics could include the following: Sponsorship and Scholarship: The Role of Church and Crown in creating Intellectuals; Beyond Class: Public Intellectuals as Movers and Shakers; Before University Research Labs: Re-examining Independent Scholarship in the Sciences. If you have ideas for a paper/presentation or panel, please contact Susan Breitzer at [Susan.Breitzer@gmail.com](mailto:Susan.Breitzer@gmail.com) or Neil Dukas at [neil@dukas.org](mailto:neil@dukas.org).

## Submit to *TISQ*

*TISQ* welcomes scholarly articles from members on any topic not to exceed 5000 words. Articles should be submitted as a Word doc or compatible file and should be formatted in Chicago (in-text author-date) style. Permissions for quotations, photos, etc., are the responsibility of the author. Articles should not have been previously published; authors retain all rights to their work. Send article proposals and complete articles to the *TISQ* Editor at [tis@ncis.org](mailto:tis@ncis.org) for consideration.

For book review suggestions, or to become a reviewer, contact Book Review editor David Sonenschein at [dsncis@gmail.com](mailto:dsncis@gmail.com). Please include information on your area of expertise for reviewing books. Member authors are encouraged to contact David about their new and upcoming publications for the purposes of review.

*TISQ* also welcomes member news, including recent publications, presentations, honors, and other information. Deadlines for inclusion are February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1 of each year.

**Call for Papers:** *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* XXVI 2014, special thematic volume on: "Interdisciplinary Studies: The Next 25 Years." What are the most promising interdisciplinary methodologies to reinvigorate teaching and research that can inspire the quest for new knowledge, problem-solving, and syntheses across all the arts and sciences, which would enhance our understanding of the human condition in the global village? Which approaches model best an interdisciplinary integration of the liberal arts? Deadline: January 1, 2014. Send 3 2-sided copies of: 15-25 page mss., each with a 150-word abstract, double-spaced, in-text citation format, author identification on a separate sheet to: Dr. O. Gruenwald, JIS Editor, Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, 1065 Pine Bluff Dr., Pasadena, CA 91107, USA. See [www.JIS3.org](http://www.JIS3.org) or email [info@jis3.org](mailto:info@jis3.org).



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