



## From Theocracy to Pluralism

Curriculum Unit 80.ch.01  
by Peter Hanson

From the items which follow you may select however many you wish to stimulate the students' thinking. Choose according to your interest and the amount of time you have available. It should be stressed that the use of any item presupposes the teacher's having read all the material in the unit which relates to it.

Before beginning on the "items," it will be best to give the students a well-structured outside or library assignment concerning what a Puritan is and what he is likely to believe. In this way the important information does not have to be expounded by you to the students; rather, the students will be contributing on their part. By "well-structured" I mean that the students will know quite specifically what sort of information to look for and places to find it; in addition, it will be clear in what form their information should be turned in: a list of words or a set of sentences or a number of quotations with inferences drawn. If the assignment is "a report on the Puritans," I believe the teacher misses an opportunity to channel their efforts towards the use of basic reading, writing, and thinking skills.

*Item #1* . The example rules (near the beginning of the unit) which were in effect in 17th century Connecticut. It should not be hard to get a discussion going on questions such as the following:

Are these good laws?

If not, why not?

Are there laws today which are like these?

Can you think of any laws which today might make America better?

What purposes did these laws serve?

What kind of people were these who made these rules?

What more do we need to know about these people if we are even to understand why these laws were passed?

It might be valuable to collect a list of America's five most pressing domestic problems, then send the students home, each to return with an idea for a law which might aid in solving each problem.

*Item #2* . The letter to Bishop Laud about Thomas Hooker.

What kind of a person was Thomas Hooker?

What sorts of ideas do you think he was preaching?

If you knew that Hooker was a "Puritan," would that give you an idea about what he might have been saying?

What kind of ideas would excite you, if you heard someone proclaim them in public?

What sorts of people might be upset, like the writer of the letter, by his success?

At this point I would not feed them much specific information about Puritan beliefs but listen to their impressions of what a Puritan was. Remind them that they were like the Pilgrims and were among the first settlers of America, which implies there were ways in which these people were "different" which somehow must have caused their trans-Atlantic journey. Better not to give the whole Puritan concept away just not.

*Item #3* . The description of St. Stephen's Parish, London. Using their knowledge of their own town, have the students consider what would be thought to be appropriate concerns for a church in Connecticut today, especially compared with St. Stephen's concerns in 1630.

What is the main difference?

Why the difference?

Which system is better?

In the discussion introduce the idea of separation of church and state and ask them if it is a good idea. What did these people not worry about it?

*Item #4* . Thomas Hooker's "three points."

Are these ideas things that you could accept?

Is there anything particularly "Puritan" about them?

Do you think Thomas Hooker would have approved the laws in Item #1?

The point is, of course, to emphasize that, for that time, Connecticut Puritans had reasonably radical ideas of government in which were the seeds of our concept of "democracy." I am going to introduce, at the same time, the paragraph on rights which introduced the Code of 1650.

Preamble (my translation): if the kind of liberty that humanity and christianity calls for flourishes, then there will be tranquility and stability in our churches and Commonwealth; but if men are deprived of, or denied, their liberties, then both will be disturbed, if not ruined:

It is therefore ordered by this Court and authority thereof, that no man's life shall be taken away; no man's honor or good name shall be stained; no man's person shall be arrested, restrained, banished, dismembered, nor in any way

punished; no man shall be deprived of his wife or children; no man's goods or estate shall be taken away from him nor any way damaged . . . unless it be by the virtue or equity of some express law of the country warranting the same, established by a General Court and sufficiently published, or in case of the defect of a law, in any particular case, by the word of God. (Smucker, 53f.)

Here is a beginning of our requirement for "due process." Puritan government was not modern democracy and civil rights, but it was not all benighted tyrannical intolerance of free expression. Discuss with the students the loopholes in the words: *which* people will choose the leaders? In what areas will be leaders be able to control? What kinds of laws are going to be made? What sorts of punishments will be possible—all those in the above paragraph? This will serve as an introduction to the next two items.

*Item #5* . Chart A: the Fundamental Orders. After giving the students a chance to look it over, a. spend some time discussing difficult words and asking questions about unclear portions; b. ask, How do you like this government? What would you change in it? Try to get at some of the problems described in the text.

*Item #6* . Three examples of Capital Laws and Four sections of the Code of 1650.

- a. What are the basic values and beliefs of these people?
- b. under what conditions could a society with such laws exist?
- c. Would anyone be unhappy if such a society existed?
- d. which rules would be easiest to enforce? hardest?

Summary: these might be appropriate discussion questions to conclude this section, before moving on to Massachusetts Bay in 1760.

How can you reconcile the political openness and regard for rights with the attempt to exert so much control over people's lives?

How free were the people of early Connecticut in politics? in religion? from the colony government? from the King? from God?

If you were the leader of a settlement in the wilderness, what kinds of controls would you want to establish?

### **Second Section (3 weeks)**

There is more material that would be needed to do what I want to do with this section, but here are at least some ideas:

1. McLoughlin and Larned supply quantities of material useful for what could be very interesting case studies of Baptist and Separate societies, illustrative of community splits and problems of

religious freedom.

2. Using Purcell as a resource and as a guide to piles of more material in newspapers and pamphlets, Federalist arguments can be found which can be used by the students to balance the twelve criticisms of the government of that time. You might arm one half of the class against the other half so that Republicans and Federalists can have a go at each other in a modern remake of an election campaign just before 1818, with one suggesting the creation of a State Constitution, the other supporting the existing government.

3. The following four pages contain expressions of Federalist and Republican opinion from Pircell's book, and that book is supplied with many more on both sides. I am going to cut them out and pass them around to see if the students can begin to spot typical arguments of each party, thus familiarizing themselves with the main issues from both points of view.

4. Without additional material, students can a. study Chart B and see what criticisms they might raise against it; then b. compare their list with the twelve criticisms, the c. in groups write a new plan of government to remedy the situation.

### **Republican Views**

(We are friends of liberty and the Constitution.)

(The State should be divided into districts, so that each part of Connecticut may be represented in Congress and on the local level, each part might elect an assistant in the Council.)

(The State has no constitution.) 1

Those states which are most under the *hierarchical yoke* will be last . . . The favorite theme of uniting church and state, has been more cherished in New England than in any other part of the United States, and more in Connecticut than any other state. The numerous advocates of this system will not yield, 'till the influence of truth, and the voice of the people become too powerful for further resistance. 2

(We are against the stand-up law and in favor of secrecy in elections and an extension of the suffrage.)

(Church constitutions should be abolished; religious support should not be compulsory. The people of Connecticut are politically ignorant, for) they have been trained too much in the habit of trusting the concerns of religion and policy to their rulers. (We should have a constitutional convention, which will cost the people about five cents each. The printed result could be made available to every freeman for another five cents; then the state would have a constitution, and every freeman would know whether a law was constitutional or not. What a saving in lawyers' fees!) 3

(It is hoped that if there is a constitution, religious liberty will be given to all,) despite the deep rooted modes and habits. (I am not too hopeful, though, because of) the long accustomed habits of Connecticut, the prejudices of the people, and the present connection that exists between religion and property—religion and honor—religion and education. 4

(There is no constitution in this state.) The people of Connecticut have never been asked, by those in

authority, what form of government they would choose; nor in fact, whether they would have any form at all. For want of a specific constitution, the rulers run without bridle or bit, or anything to draw them up to the ring-bolt. Should the legislature make a law, to perpetuate themselves in office for life, the law would immediately become part of their constitution: and who would call them to account therefor? 5

You exhibit to the world the rare and perhaps unprecedented example of a people peaceably and quietly consenting to be governed without any compact which secures rights to yourselves, or delegates powers to your rulers . . . I am ready to admit that you have been influenced by a sacred regard for order and government, otherwise you would not, ever since the American Revolution, have consented to be governed by a charter given your ancestors by a British King and which, ever since your independence has separated you from Britain, has been imposed on you by an act of a legislature not authorized to make the imposition. 6

(Your legislators have been honest in the past, but sometimes men become intoxicated with power. You have re-elected them from force of habit, not because of their proven worth, for there is no way to judge that. Little by little your rulers may increase their power and declare that anyone who asks questions is guilty of disturbing the peace or of infidelity.) It is as if a majority of judges and justices has by law provided that the poor man, who trudged on foot his weary pilgrimage through life, should do the same quantity of labor in the public roads as the rich man, while the Justice or Judge, the Clergyman and Physician who encumbered the highways with his wagon's six-cattle team and pleasure carriage, should bear no part of the burden. (Why shouldn't the officials serve in the militia and defend the state, of whose wealth they are the chief holders? They have deprived you of an independent judiciary and a free vote.) 7

You cannot be insensible that the work of a Connecticut Legislator is an arduous, a weighty task. He has not only to guard the people against *them-* selves, but has also the more difficult . . . task of guarding the people against *himself* . Having no Constitution to limit him, he finds it necessary to be constantly on his guard against the delusions of power and Ambition. He has to contend against his most favorite wishes, his fondest hopes. When he finds it in his power to gratify these hopes—when he finds no check but in the elective voice of the people; and then, when he finds this elective voice practically confined by law to those who have similar interests with himself, prudence deserts her helm—ambition seizes it—and the rights of the people are lost in the usurpation of the statesman. 8

Toast: The State of Connecticut—May its civil rights soon have constitutional bounds—its professional men be confined within their limits, and its courts be reduced from annual dependence on Suitors and Advocates. 9

(Taxation is in no way based on a valuation of a person's wealth, because it does not include the newer forms of wealth; it is unfair to the poor man. All attempts to make it more fair have been defeated by the special interests. This is all we can expect as long as the only constitution we have is "an unauthorized farce," which perfect beings could live under but not ordinary people of the normal, work-a-day world.) 10

In Connecticut truth and reason are pervading the mass of the people. A hallowed jealousy is shaking their bigoted assemblies and the pontifical chair of the clergy totters beneath them. 11

### **Federalist Views**

The very principle of admitting everybody to the right of suffrage prostrates the wealth of individuals to the rapaciousness of a merciless gang, who have nothing to lose and will delight in plundering their neighbors. 1

(It is absurd to believe that) that universal enjoyment of the right of suffrage is the best security for free

elections and a pure administration. The reverse is proved by all experience to be the fact: that a liberal extension of the right of suffrage accelerates the growth of corruption, by multiplying the number of corruptible electors, and reducing the price of venal suffrages. 2

(all men should have equal protection before the law, whether they possess a single cow or a thousand acres, but not equal power to make that law. Just as not every man can be a judge or a college professor, so not every man is capable of sharing in government through voting.) 3

(Rome fell only when she extended her suffrage.) 4

(It is not true that sovereignty is derived from the people, or that officers are servants of the people, or that legislators are responsible to those who elect them. These ideas downgrade state officials, would make people sneer at law and government, and would cause big fights and arguments between parties seeking to elect the officers.) 5

(Good government means nothing to the penniless man who spends all his money in a tavern, or to the person who moves from place to place, or to the merchant whose wealth is in movable goods. But to the landed man stability and good government are everything.) 6

(Life and liberty are safe under ordinary circumstances, but property demands more protection. The making of laws should be left to property owners, since nine-tenths of the work of the Legislature and the courts deals with protecting property. Universal suffrage which produces an ignorant electorate which could easily be controlled by demagogues.) 7

(The property requirement for voting is no hardship, because only a small amount is required.) 8

The loss of this happy influence of the clergy . . . is deeply to be regretted, and is to be ascribed to two causes—the increase of knowledge, and the growth of opposition to religion. Knowledge has induced the laity to think and to act for themselves, and an opposition to religion has curtailed the power of its supporters. 9

When we see the restless pursuit of the world; good order disregarded; laws, human and divine, trampled on; religion derided; and its professors made the scoff of the profane—When vice of every kind is rampant, its votaries applauded, and advantaged to lucrative and honorable station, *then* we justly fear for the safety of our civil and religious liberty.. 10

(The ministers do have influence, but that's because of their divinely instituted office and their own inherent worth, for they have no power, only) an influence, which every sober man must regard as desirable in any community. 11

(The ministers) hold no offices, they are poor, they are not active political intriguers or electioneers. They only exert a quiet suffrage. They have preached against dangerous philosophy and infectious infidelity, and if, as the opposition maintains, this is hostile to republican principles, the clergy are not to be blamed. 12

The democratic newspapers abound with attacks upon the clergy—they, it seems, are to be driven from the exercise of a right not denied to any other citizen . . . Their characters entitle them to different treatment,—good men will not fail to resist this spirit of persecution, against a body of men so justly respectable for their learning, their love of genuine liberty, their virtue and their extensive influence in the promotion of the best interests of society. 13

(The country will be ruined by party struggles.)

(Those who are trying to overthrow the institutions of the State know that they must first destroy religion and undermine the popular reverence for the ministers before they can attain their purposes.)

(Republicans are new men, of little character and no family, but with definite political aspirations.)

The leaders of Democracy have for a long time railed at our rulers, our clergy, & our college, but we did not suppose they would venture *publicly* to denounce an institution whose object it is to suppress vice and immorality, or a society whose only object it is, without regard to sect, or nation, to place the pure work of truth and light into every hand within reach. Yet such is the deadly hostility of these professed friends of toleration to the religion of their fathers that they cannot even tolerate a society who would endeavor to discountenance vice and immorality much less an institution which would disseminate the mild principles of the Gospel of peace; and these seem to be the principal benefits they expect will result from a change of rulers in Connecticut. 14

(Republicans are immoral, irreligious, and lowly.)

(Republicans are dissenters. Federalists are) godly men, of sober, solid, and steady habits.

(Republicans are lawyers of uncertain practice and doubtful morality, holders of federal patronage, "mushroom candidates" and self-seeking demagogues who are deluding the ignorant voters.)

## Footnotes

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1. *The Blue Laws of Connecticut*, ed. Samuel M. Smucker (Philadelphia, 1861), p. 91.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
3. Mary Jeanne Anderson Jones, *Congregational Commonwealth: Connecticut, 1636-1662* (Middletown, Ct., 1968), p. 84.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 38f.
6. Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston, 1958), p. 7.
7. Jones, p. 4f. *Ecclesia* ("church") means "called out."
8. Albert Edward Van Dusen, *Connecticut* (New York, 1961), p. 14. I have modernized the language.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 15f.; Jones, pp. 6, 11f.
10. Isabel MacBeath Calder, *New Haven Colony* (New Haven, 1962, rep. 1970), p. 2f.
11. William K. Holdsworth, "Law and Society in Colonial Connecticut, 1636-1672" (unpubl. diss. Claremont, 1979), p. 91
12. Jones, ch. 3; Holdsworth, ch. 4.
13. *Blue Laws*, p. 67
14. Jones, pp. 102-105.
15. *Blue Laws*, pp. 89f., 97f., 100f., 111f.
16. Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (New York, 1970), pp. 4ff.

17. Jones, p. 37.
18. Holdsworth, p. 146.
19. Maria Louise Greene, *The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut* (Boston, 1905), pp. 165-170.
20. Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818* (Middletown, Ct., 1918, rep. 1963), p. 61
21. Greene, pp. 151-154.
22. *Ibid.* , pp. 154, 171, 174-180, 186ff., 192-195, 199ff., 216ff.
23. *Ibid.* , p. 284f.
24. *Ibid.* , pp. 372-378.
25. *Ibid.* , ch X, XI, pp. 328-337.
26. *Ibid.* , pp. 338-341.
27. Purcell, pp. 7-17.
28. *Ibid.* , pp. 46-54.
29. *Ibid.* , pp. 54-59.
30. Paul Wakeman Coons, *The Achievement of Religious Liberty in Connecticut* , Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut (New Haven, 1936), p. 27.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Purcell, p. xii.
33. Greene, p. 375n.
34. Purcell, ch. V.
35. *Ibid.* , ch. VI.
36. *Ibid.* , ch. VIII.
37. *Ibid.* , ch. IX.



## A Brief Annotated Bibliography

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++Balleh, Joan, Fairfield, Connecticut, 1661-1691: A Demographic Study of the Economic, Political, and Social Life of a New England Community," unpubl. thesis, U. of Bridgeport, 1970. This is a well-documented glimpse into the Puritan-to Yankee stage of a town whose conservatism tends to be more secular than religious.

\*\* *The Blue Laws of Connecticut* , ed. Samuel M. Smucker, Philadelphia, 1861. This is a useful compendium of seventeenth-century Connecticut documents, including the entire Code of 1650.+Bridenbaugh, Carl, *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1590-1642* , New York, 1976. This makes engrossing reading and presents useful material to show the English religious, economic, social, and legal context of Puritans and Virginians.

+Calder, Isabel MacBeath, *New Haven Colony* , New Haven, 1934, 1970. An excellently complete, readable coverage of New Haven's history as a colony, this book demonstrates how troubled its short existence was.

\*\*Cohen, Sheldon, *Connecticut's Loyalist Gadfly: The Reverend Samuel Andrew Peters* , American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut, 1976. With an easy and flowing narrative, it is helpful in showing how Peters came to take the position he did and why Anglicans were looked upon with suspicion at that time.

++Collier, Christopher, "Steady Habits Considered and Reconsidered," *Connecticut Review* , vol 5:2 (Apr. 1972), pp. 28-37. Within just a few pages, this article manages to summarize handily the range of historians' opinions regarding the extent of consensus in Connecticut, especially during the period that this unit deals with. It is a good starting point from which one may take off in any of the directions he suggests.

\*\*Coons, Paul Wakeman, *The Achievement of Religious Liberty in Connecticut* , Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut, Publication No. 60, New Haven, 1936. A tremendously helpful summary of the religious section of my unit's concern, this pamphlet is a help in seeing the larger picture.

+Greene, Maria Louise, *The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut* , Boston 1905. A lucid narration of the gradual opening of Connecticut to religious pluralism; this book is especially good for examples of anti-Establishment opinion and for the English background.

++Holdsworth, William K., "Law and Society in Colonial Connecticut, 1636-1672," unpubl. diss. Claremont Grad. Sch., 1974 Indispensable for the Puritan period, bit it is slow going. With meticulous scholarship it takes in both Connecticut and New Haven and should be read *after* Jones.

\*Hoyt, Joseph B., *The Connecticut Story* , New Haven, 1961. Well-illustrated, with an emphasis on geography and economics, it is a fine book, but not helpful for political or religious history.

+Jones, Mary Jeanne Anderson, *Congregational Commonwealth: Connecticut* , 1636-1662, Middletown, Ct., 1968. A "must" for anyone interested in the Commonwealth period, this well-documented study reads easily, and its pages seem filled with living people.

\*Johnston, Johanna, *The Connecticut Colony* , London, 1969. An attractively got-up book, with greatest emphasis placed on what might be considered "interesting" or "exciting;" this book will please junior-highs but give them little of substance regarding the dynamics of social change.

+Larned, Ellen D. *History of Windham County* 2 vols., Worcester, 1874-1880. This book could provide the material for an excellent case study or two concerning 18th-century religious dynamics: I chose, for example, to follow the Town of Canterbury straight through

the book, and it is quite a story.

\*\* & \*Lee, W. Storrs, *The Yankees of Connecticut* , New York, 1957. An unusual book, it seeks to tackle various themes and deal with them without much regard for chronology, but it is enjoyable and puts life on history's bones.

\*McLoughlin, William G., *New England Dissent, 1630-1833* 2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1971. This book promises to be the best book I didn't read; its pages are full of descriptions of struggling dissenters and dissenting groups, with large sections on Connecticut.

\*\*Morgan, Edmund, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* , Boston, 1958. This book must be read for an understanding of Puritanism from the inside; it narrows the distance between us and them. The "revisionist" account of the Hutchinson and Williams cases makes good reading.

+ ———. *The Puritan Family* , Harper Torch Books, New York, 1966, rev. A loving portrayal of its subject, the book is filled with many examples. It is not light reading: it is scholarly and comprehensive.

++Parrington, Vernon Louis, *The Colonial Mind, 1600-1800* , Harvest Books, New York, 1956. A probing analysis of personalities who played important roles in both sections of my unit; it seems provocative and will add depth to my understanding, but it is not an easy book.

\*\*Powell, Sumner Chilton, *Puritan Village* , Anchor Books, Garden City, 1965. An almost-incredible study of Sudbury, Massachusetts, this book suggests that tensions existed in seventeenth-century New England towns between the restive young who wanted to get ahead and older leaders who liked things as they were. The struggle cuts across Puritan society and begins almost with the founding of the town. The Dedham study points to exactly the same problem, if you can find the title.

+Purcell, Richard J., *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818* , Middletown, Ct., 1918, 1963. An unusual book, it combines scholarship with a sense of the dramatic so that the reader becomes engrossed in the contest finally won by those who wanted a constitution for the State.

\*\*\*Roth, David & Freeman Meyer, *From Revolution to Constitution: Connecticut, 1763-1818* , Center for Connecticut Studies, Chester, Ct., 1975. Chapter III of this book is a very readable review of the high spots of the events leading to the 1818 Constitution.

\*\*Simpson, Alan, *Puritanism in Old and New England* , Chicago, 1955. A comprehensive and sympathetic look at Puritanism, this book appears to me to be of great potential help for anyone desiring more understanding of the movement.

\*Soderlind, Arthur E., *Colonial Connecticut* , New York, 1976. This book is equally as attractive as Johnston, but it is much more meaty and delves into political and religious questions, managing to describe the Charter Oak incident in only one page.

Taylor, Robert J., *Colonial Connecticut: A History* , Millwood, 1979. The only book on this list I have not seen, it comes very highly recommended.

\*\*Van Dusen, Albert Edward, *Connecticut* , New York, 1961. An attractively-illustrated book, it does well on Hooker and the 1650 code; it is weak on the issues in the second section of my unit.

\*\*Zeichner, Oscar, *Connecticut's Years of Controversy, 1750-1776* . Excellent back background for the second section of this unit, the first two chapters are especially good and present some statistics in regard to the amount of participation in decision-making in the middle of the eighteenth century.

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