

Anne Hutchinson

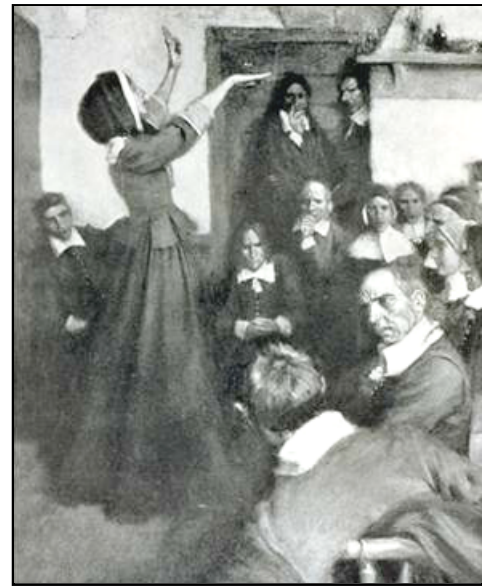
Women were an important part of the workforce in the English colonies. However, they rarely helped bring about political change. One exception was a woman named Anne Hutchinson.

Anne Hutchinson and her husband, William, settled in Boston in 1634. She worked as a midwife helping to deliver babies. Hutchinson was both intelligent and religious. John Winthrop, the governor of Massachusetts called her “a woman of ready wit and bold spirit”. It would be her bold spirit, however, which would bring her trouble with the Puritan officials.

Hutchinson was well known around Boston because she held Bible readings on Sundays in her home. After church, she and her friends would gather to discuss the minister’s sermon. Sometimes as many as 50 or 60 people would pack into her small house in order to listen to the discussions.

At first, Hutchinson only repeated what the minister had said. As time went on, however, she began to express her own ideas and interpretations. Sometimes she would even criticize the minister’s teachings.

Hutchinson’s actions angered the Puritan leaders. They believed that Hutchinson’s opinions were full of religious errors. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, Hutchinson was a woman and women were not allowed to interpret the Bible. That job was reserved for ministers. In November of 1637, Hutchinson was put on trial by the government.



At her trial, Hutchinson stood behind her beliefs. She answered all of the questions that were put to her by Governor Winthrop and other government officials and she repeatedly exposed weaknesses in their arguments. The court was not able to prove that she had broken any laws or challenged any church beliefs. Then after two days of questioning, Hutchinson made a serious mistake. She told the court that God spoke directly to her.

Members of the court were shocked. The Puritans believed that God spoke only through the Bible and not directly to individuals. The court ruled that Hutchinson must be “deluded by the Devil” and banished her from the colony.

Hutchinson, along with her family and many of her friends, moved to Rhode Island. Although the Puritan leaders had won their victory over Hutchinson, she became an important symbol in the struggle for religious freedom.

