

NEH Landmarks/ St. Mary's City Individual Project: 17th Century Religious Freedom, or lack thereof, in the Chesapeake

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Grade: 10th Grade US History—probably geared more towards AP US students

Overview of Lesson Plan: Students will assess the levels of religious freedom in Virginia and Maryland by examining legislation from the mid-17th century in both colonies. Students will compare and contrast the types of freedoms and restrictions put into place in Virginia and Maryland, and discuss the purposes behind the different policies in the colonies. Students will also put the levels of religious freedom in the Chesapeake into context compared to other regions of British North America. Lastly, students will attempt to establish connections between the church-state issues of the 17th century and today's world.

Suggested time: 1 class period.

Activities:

1. For homework, one day prior to the lesson, students are assigned 5 pages of religious legislation (see enclosed) from the assemblies of colonial Virginia and Maryland. Four separate Virginia bills from 1643 to 1660 are included, concerning the outlawing of the Catholic Church, the establishment of the Anglican Church, the state-sponsored recruitment of ministers and procedures for turning Quakers out of the colony. Also assigned is the 1649 Act Concerning Religion adopted by the Maryland Assembly.

As part of their homework assignment, students are encouraged to highlight or underline passages from the readings that reflect an encouragement or discouragement of religious freedom. To process their understanding of the documents, students will be asked to write a paragraph answering the following prompt: **“Compare and contrast the types of religious freedom that existed in colonial Virginia and Maryland during the mid-17th century.”**

Armed with at least a paragraph coming into class, the students should have some good grist for discussion.

2. Clarify any language that may be new to students, such as “popish,” the “booke of common prayer” (Minnesota does not have a large Episcopal population) and “blaspheme.”

Another option is to briefly discuss the differences between 17th and 21st century English--*this may have already been done with a previous document from the 17th century.*

3. Discuss the similarities between the two colonies' legislation.

Fundamentally, both promoted or favored at least some form of Christianity at the expense of other religions. Both outlined punishments and/or procedures for dealing with various forms of religious dissent.

4. The differences between the colonies are more numerous and nuanced.

4a. As James Morone claims in *Hellfire Nation*, various American communities across time have obsessed about who's in and who's out in their particular society. One group of people, given a certain situation, deems itself more worthy of having social, political or economic influence within a particular society than another group, thus creating an us/them dynamic. In the case of Virginia, what group is in and what groups are out? How does the language of inclusion differ in the Maryland Bill from the various Virginia bills? What religions or other groups, according to the language of both colonies' bills, might have a difficult time settling in the Chesapeake?

Students will need to identify Virginia as a supporter of the Church of England (explain alternate names Anglican and Episcopal). Members and leaders of other Christian denominations are discouraged from living in Virginia. Maryland's Act Concerning Religion promotes Christianity in general—both Catholic and Protestant. Jewish people or atheists/agnostics could potentially face difficulties living in both areas.

4b. The Virginia bills specifically target the exclusion of two Christian religions—"Papists" (Catholics) and Quakers. Why would Virginia want to exclude these two religions?

Students will need to link the contempt of Catholics by many Protestant members of the Church of England—both in Europe and in America—dating back to the 16th century Reformation. Political, economic, and to a lesser extent, theological differences between the Anglican and Catholic faiths could be cited. The Quakers were perceived as a radical Protestant threat to the more moderate Church of England. Among the Quaker beliefs that challenged the position of the Church of England included a general egalitarian philosophy challenging the established hierarchical norms of the day, such as the elevated status of women, the deemphasized importance on church leadership, and the refusal to take oaths, which was perceived as a threat to an ordered society.

4c. What evidence is there that Virginia not only bans religions other than the Church of England, but also financially supports the Church of England?

The 1656 bill gives a financial reward for helping bring Anglican priests into the colony.

Why would a place like Virginia be short on clergy?

By mid-17th century, the tobacco plantation economy had thinly fanned out the population along the many creeks and rivers of the Tidewater. Anglican priests often traveled week to week from one relatively isolated community to the next.

4d. In the Maryland Act, what does the specific language concerning disrespectful speech towards the Virgin Mary imply about the religious nature of the colony?

Students will hopefully identify Maryland as a proprietary colony established and led by the Catholic Calvert family. This will be a good opportunity to discuss the different types of colonies in British North America, such as Royal, Proprietary and Self-Governing.

4e. Given the fact that Maryland was led by a Catholic family, what conclusions can you draw from the other facts that the majority of Maryland's colonists were Protestant, and that Governor William Stone, who signed the 1649 Act Concerning Religion and was appointed by Cecil Calvert (Lord Baltimore), was also Protestant?

Hopefully some sort of discussion can be centered around the revolving tension between the Church of England, led by the King, an increasingly Puritan Parliament and a struggling Catholic minority in England and the colonies, trying to establish its identity as both English and Catholic in the wake of the Reformation. Students should link the general liberty of conscience for all Christians in Maryland as an attempt by Lord Baltimore to make religion a non-issue in the day-to-day operations of society. Students should realize that Baltimore's policy of religious freedom was visionary and consistent with the Enlightenment Project, which was on the cutting edge of ideas in Europe; Baltimore was not merely taking a defensive posture to secure the position of the Calverts and the minority English Catholic population.

Outside information on the Quakers should be added here. Catholics and Quakers had a common ground in that they were both persecuted minorities and both took religious authority from somewhere other than the King (Catholics, Rome and Quakers, from within). Quakers initially enjoyed religious freedom in Maryland, but as they grew, some were fined, imprisoned or banished for their refusal to take a loyalty oath to Baltimore. These punishments were relatively light, considering Quakers were being executed in Massachusetts.

4ee. Follow-up question—was Maryland violating its mission of liberty of conscience when it punished Quakers for their refusal to take an oath of allegiance to Lord Baltimore?

Answers should vary on this, but it should be made clear that Baltimore expected the Quakers to be loyal to him as a condition of their acceptance into the colony. It was also understood that Maryland would be a haven for Quakers more than a place for them to proselytize.

4f. Discuss the punishments for violating the codes of law.

While both have language dealing with fines and imprisonment, only Maryland has language including the death penalty for blasphemy.

This would be a good time to also offer some outside information about Jacob Lumbrozo, a Jewish doctor accused of heresy in Maryland, but later pardoned by the Maryland governor. Lumbrozo prospered in Maryland and was accepted by his Christian neighbors, even though he was not technically protected by the 1649 Act. Lord Baltimore was also known to have appointed an atheist to a government position.

5. Why would it be desirable for Virginia to limit its religious toleration to one denomination of one religion? What motivated Virginia to narrow its acceptance of other religions?

Uniformity of ideas could lead to social and political harmony; this view prevailed in many 17th century European countries, including England. Virginia was an extension of England in the New World, particularly after it became a royal colony in 1624. The ruling Protestant establishment in Virginia had little interest in sharing power with "any unconfessionalist."

6. Does the Maryland Act limit freedom of speech in regard to its restriction of language that is critical of various Christian themes and sects?

Students will have to struggle with how people in the 17th century reconciled religious liberty with other emerging civil liberties like speech. Are they always compatible?

7. Which policy—limited religious freedom or expanded religious freedom—was more difficult to achieve in the 17th century?

Answers will vary, though evidence can be found to support both sides, based on the experiences in other colonies.

8. Does freedom OF religion also imply freedom FROM religion?

Answers will vary.

9. By the time this lesson is run, students will have read all textbook information on 17th century colonial America. How do Virginia and Maryland's policies on religion compare to those of other colonies?

Students may draw some connections between Virginia's policies and those of New England, New York or the Carolinas, in terms of one Protestant religion gaining favor over and sometimes persecuting others. Pre-1689 Maryland, with the exception of the years at the height of Cromwell's rule, could be more closely compared to Rhode Island, founded shortly after Maryland, and Pennsylvania, founded later in the 17th century.

10. As a closure, try to establish connections to the present either in the US or world regarding the issue of religious freedom and its discontents.

Domestic threads could be drawn to the recent debate about the Ten Commandments and other Judeo-Christian iconography in public places, gay marriage and abortion. Global threads could be drawn with the divisions within Islam between those pushing for a separation of church state and fundamental Islam, which stresses the centrality of its religion to all aspects of life, thus limiting the potential for a liberty of conscience in fundamentalist societies.

Additional Sources

Lecture notes from June 24, 2005 lecture by John Krugler and Jane Calvert at the NEH Landmarks of American History Program at St. Mary's City, MD

Krugler, John. *English and Catholic: The Lords Baltimore in the Seventeenth Century*. Baltimore, 2004: Johns Hopkins University Press.