

A War of Religion

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Dissenters, Anglicans and the American Revolution

James B. Bell



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A War of Religion examines the impact of the establishment of the first Anglican Church in Boston in 1686 and the strident objections to its presence from leading Congregational ministers. The men decried that the province had an established church, objected to the Book of Common Prayer, and challenged the historic nature of the Episcopal Office. Their complaints were anchored in the rhetoric of the Puritan party in the Church of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. James Bell argues that in particular Increase Mather's criticisms of the English church shaped the debates that persisted between Dissenters and Anglicans until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. He shows how after the Stamp Act in 1765 the radical political leaders John Adams and Samuel Adams in Boston and John Wilkes in London transformed the controversies from the realm of abstract ecclesiastical argument to the domain of fundamental political issues. The men exploited the disputes for a decade as political dynamite in concert with the contentious subjects of taxation, trade, and the quartering of troops; topics which John Adams later recalled as causes of the American Revolution.

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