In this magisterial study, John McWilliams traces the development of New England’s influential cultural identity. Through written responses to historical crises from early New England through the pre-Civil War period, McWilliams argues that the meaning of “New England,” despite claims for its consistency, was continuously reformulated. The significance of past crises was forever being reinterpreted for the purpose of meeting succeeding crises. The crises he examines include starvation, the Indian wars, the Salem witch trials, the revolution of 1775–76, and slavery. Integrating history, literature, politics, and religion, this is one of the most comprehensive studies of the meaning of “New England” to appear in print. McWilliams considers a range of writing including George Bancroft’s History of the United States, the political essays of Samuel Adams, the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne and the poetry of Robert Lowell. This compelling book is essential reading for historians and literary critics of New England.

John McWilliams is Abernethy Professor of American Literature at Middlebury College in Vermont. He is the author of Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper’s America (1972), Hawthorne, Melville and the American Character (Cambridge, 1984), and The American Epic (Cambridge, 1989).
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Editor
Ross Posnock, New York University

Founding Editor
Albert Gelpi, Stanford University

Advisory Board
Sacvan Bercovitch, Harvard University
Ronald Bush, St. John's College, Oxford University
Wai Chee Dimock, Yale University
Albert Gelpi, Stanford University
Gordon Hunter, University of Kentucky
Walter Benn Michaels, University of Illinois, Chicago
Kenneth Warren, University of Chicago

Recent books in this series

142. JOHN MCBILLIAMS
New England’s Crises and Cultural Memory: Literature, Politics, History, Religion, 1620–1860

141. SUSAN M. GRIFFIN
Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction

140. ROBERT E. ABRAMS
Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature

139. JOHN D. KERKERING
The Poetics of National and Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

138. MICHÈLE BIRNBAUM
Race, Work and Desire in American Literature, 1860–1930

137. RICHARD GRUSIN
Culture, Technology and the Creation of America’s National Parks

136. RALPH BAUER
The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity

135. MARY ESTEVE
The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature
For Mireille, Christopher, and Isabel
Calamities are the caustics and cathartics of the body politic. They arouse the soul. They restore original virtues.

John Adams, writing as John Winthrop,
“Governor Winthrop to Governor Bradford,”
*Boston Gazette*, January 1767

The generations of men are not like the leaves on the trees, which fall and renew themselves without melioration or change; individuals disappear like the foliage and the flowers; the existence of our kind is continuous, and its ages are reciprocally dependent. Were it not so, there would be no great truths inspiring action, no laws regulating human achievements; the movement of the living world would be as the ebb and flow of the ocean; and the mind would no more be touched by the visible agency of Providence in human affairs.

George Bancroft, *History of the United States*, iv (1852)
## Contents

**Acknowledgments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction: Crisis rhetoric: exclusion in New England history</th>
<th>page xi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PART ONE: PLANTATION AND SETTLEMENT</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Of corn, no corn, and Christian courage</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thomas Morton: phoenix of New England memory</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Trying Anne</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART TWO: TIME OF TROUBLES</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headnote</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A cloud of blood: King Philip's War</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The axe at the root of the tree: Scarlet Governors and Gray Champions</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Race, war, and white magic: the neglected legacy of Salem</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART THREE: REVOLUTION</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headnote</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Shots heard round the world</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

9. Abolition, “white slavery,” and regional pride 258
   Epilogue: “bodiless echoes” 293

Notes 309
Index 361
Acknowledgments

The press readers for this book, the late Sargent Bush and Paul Downes, provided informed and insightful criticism of a long manuscript. The range of their knowledge and their acute questioning of my argument have been invaluable. Colleagues and friends have given the great gift of their reading time in assessing one or more chapters: Joyce Appleby, Lawrence Buell, James Calvin Davis, Murray Dry, Robert Ferguson, Robert Ferm, William Hart, and Will Nash. I am grateful to the National Endowment of the Humanities for a Research Fellowship and to the staff of the Boston Public Library, the Houghton Library, the Middlebury College Library (especially Robert Buckeye and Joanne Schneider), the New York Public Library, and the Widener Library. During research trips, lifelong friends Gordon and Susan Weir, David Breakstone, and Sharon Bauer have provided a home away from home, lightening the skies of even a Cambridge March. Renée Brown and Cynthia Slater provided competence and comfort during my crises of computer anxiety. For help in securing funding and time, as well as for good counsel, I am grateful to George Dekker, Stephen Donadio, Robert Gross, Brett Millier, Robert Schine, and Thomas Wortham. The opportunity to serve on the editorial board of Early American Literature under the editorships of Philip Gura and David Shields proved to be a tonic as well as a learning experience. A project of this extent has special need of longtime encouragement. I have been blessed to have received sustained support for many years from the late Alan Heimert and, more recently, from Albert Gelpi.


The incorporating of parts of these essays into a much larger argument has demanded a broadening of historical and literary contexts in order to reflect new critical approaches and recent scholarship. But it would be disingenuous not to say that, in revising my earlier forays into the Matter of New England, I have discovered a need to write with greater tolerance and less smarty definitiveness. This tradition is complex, interwoven, self-reflexive, and deserving of more than one lifetime of study. Despite many an exclusionary sin and consequent affliction, New England historical writing has given us a profound and enduring cultural legacy. It would be folly not to respect it, especially because it stands so self-accused.