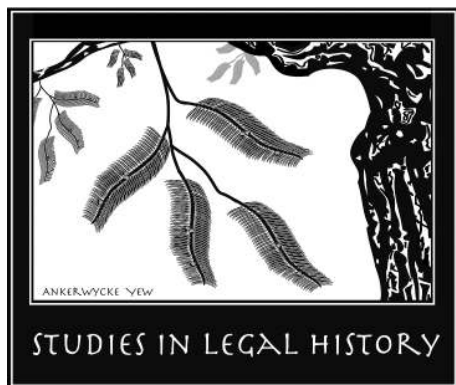


## The Dreadful Word

This book, the first comprehensive study of criminal speech in eighteenth-century New England, traces how the criminalization, prosecution, and punishment of speech offenses in Massachusetts helped to establish and legitimate a social and cultural regime of politeness. Analyzing provincial statutes and hundreds of criminal prosecutions, Kristin A. Olbertson argues that colonists transformed their understanding of speech offenses, from fundamentally ungodly to primarily impolite. As white male gentility emerged as the pre-eminent model of authority, records of criminal prosecution and punishment show a distinct cadre of politely pious men defining themselves largely in contrast to the vulgar, the impious, and the unmanly. “Law,” as manifested in statutes as well as in local courts and communities, promoted and legitimized a particular, polite vision of the king’s peace and helped effectuate the British Empire. In this unique and fascinating work, Olbertson reveals how ordinary people interacted with and shaped legal institutions.

Kristin A. Olbertson is Associate Professor in the Department of History at Alma College. She was previously a fellow at the Hurst Summer Institute.

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## *Speech Crime and Polite Gentlemen in Massachusetts, 1690–1776*

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*To Sharon Hull Olbertson,  
who also has seen the other side of the mountain*

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## *Acknowledgments*

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