

# The Sikh's arrest and Roger Williams

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ROGER WILLIAMS must be turning in his grave. According to the official Web site of Providence: "Roger Williams made Providence (which he named for God's guidance and care) a haven for persecuted religious dissenters. His town became the 'lively experiment' in religious liberty and church-state separation. This was and is its major claim to fame."

It is unfortunate that Providence did not live up to its reputation and heritage as a bastion of religious liberty when a prosecutor refused to dismiss the case against Sher Singh in Providence District Court.

Sher Singh is the young Sikh-American detained for no reason other than his religious identity. He was arrested because it was alleged that he was carrying a concealed weapon, a knife. What Sher Singh was actually carrying was a kirpan, which is one of the articles of faith that all baptized Sikhs carry.

In an act of supreme irony, Sher Singh was arrested in the city of Roger Williams for nothing more than following his religion.

Surely the last thing Providence wanted was a perception that it had transitioned from the Mecca of religious freedom to a city where religious and ethnic profiling was an acceptable law-enforcement tool.

"To be a Sikh is to wear a kirpan -- it is that simple. It is a religious symbol, and in no way a weapon. As long as the kirpan remains a symbol and is neither designed or adopted for use as a weapon, laws such as R.C.2923.12 are wholly inapplicable."

These are the words that Judge J. Painter of the Court of Appeals, Hamilton County, Ohio, used while dismissing a similar case in 1996 when a Sikh was charged in connection with carrying a kirpan. Judge Painter went on to say: "I cannot understand the purpose for this prosecution."

While, on the surface, the refusal to dismiss the case against Sher Singh may not seem to be as significant as the weighty issues that a nation at war has to deal with, let us not forget that this war is all about preserving the American way of life, which is an ideal for so many. Let us also not forget that freedom of religion is an unalienable part of that way of life.