They Are Men, and Not Beasts: Religion and Slavery in Colonial New England

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THEY ARE MEN, AND NOT BEASTS:
RELIGION AND SLAVERY IN COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND

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In loving memory of my grandparents,

John and Eugenia Reed and Charles and Grace Skoog.
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This dissertation investigates the relationship between religion, slavery, and evolving notions of personhood in eighteenth-century colonial New England. During the seventeenth-century, New Englanders largely conceived of slavery in terms of their communal notion of society, which was characterized by a high degree of collective solidarity, and within this context the humanity of slaves went largely unquestioned. This communalist view of New England was gradually displaced by a more commercial ethos, expedited and then reinforced by commerce, the law, and travel narratives, in which slaves became dehumanized. Religion played a key role in this process as it mediated the shift toward a more individualistic view of Christianity, in which moral virtue and the treatment of slaves became something more associated with the lives of individual Christians rather than the larger society.

This project discusses how many eighteenth-century New Englanders came to think about the humanity of African slaves in order to understand the influence that this thought had on their embrace of the institution of slavery. In order to do this, this dissertation investigates how New Englanders’ original religious understanding of Africans as human beings who should be converted and integrating into the society, albeit at a much lower status, conflicted with social traditions that described them as animal-like, a legal system that came to define the majority of blacks in the region as property, and an economic system that encouraged thinking about African slaves as just another form of chattel. Rather than assuming that Christianity and slavery were inherently incompatible, this dissertation looks at how the religious convictions of many colonists changed to allow for the dehumanization of slaves, while others came to reject the institution of slavery instead.
The first chapter of this project aims to situate its contribution by discussing works on slavery in the colonial period, religion in the colonial Northeast, and studies that focus on the evolution of slavery in the early Republic. Chapter two begins a discussion of eighteenth-century change by investigating how debates about slavery in colonial New England evolved. Both published supporters and opponents of slavery during the colonial period largely agreed that slaves were fully human, but by the time of the American Revolution, claims of their natural inferiority had gained support as people began to print tracts that explicitly questioned Africans’ humanity. Chapter three begins a three-part discussion of how colonial culture functioned to distinguish blacks from whites and how this gradually led many colonists to accept the view that Africans were innately different than Europeans. The third chapter focuses on how Africans were portrayed as animal-like in many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travel narratives, and chapter four goes on to discuss Massachusetts’ legal codes to explain how the law there changed the status of slaves in New England over time, dehumanizing them by categorized them primarily as property. Chapter five adds to this discussion by explaining the relationship between the changing religious and economic cultures in New England and how these changes led colonists to embrace the dehumanization of slaves and the slave trade. The final chapter investigates how the above-mentioned changes influenced arguments about the validity of slavery in the early Republic. By the time of the Revolution, debates about the right to own slaves focused much more on whether Africans were best understood as humans or as lesser beings.
INTRODUCTION

Slavery was present in New England from the earliest years of colonial settlement. Although some scholars have argued that Africans were enslaved in Massachusetts as early as 1624, it is certain that by 1638 there were black slaves held in the region.\(^1\) Within this seventeenth-century context, New Englanders largely conceived of slavery in terms of their communal notion of society, which was characterized by a high degree of collective solidarity. This view of society was supported by the colonial government as well as by religious principles, and within this context the humanity of slaves went largely unquestioned, even if the practice of slavery created some problems. This communalist view of New England was gradually displaced by a more commercial ethos, expedited and then reinforced by commerce, the law, and travel narratives, in which slaves became dehumanized. Religion played a key role in this process as it mediated the shift toward a more individualistic view of Christianity, in which moral virtue and the treatment of slaves became something more associated with the lives of individual Christians rather than the larger society.

This dissertation will discuss how many eighteenth-century New Englanders came to think about the humanity of African slaves in order to understand the influence that this thought had on their embrace of the institution. Religious thought and practice were essential aspects of life and vital to the organization of New England society. As a result, in order to understand slavery during this time and in this region, one must first understand the religious perspectives that supported the institution. In order to do this, this dissertation investigates how New Englanders’ original religious understanding of Africans as human beings who should be converted and integrating into the society, albeit at a much lower status, conflicted with social

traditions that described them as animal-like, a legal system that changed over time to distinguish blacks from whites and defined the majority of blacks in the region as property, and an economic system that encouraged thinking about African slaves as just another form of chattel. Though many scholars have described the ways in which economic differences caused Northern and Southern slavery to develop in different ways, few have paid adequate attention to how Northerners’ religious convictions complicated the institution. Rather than assuming that Christianity and slavery were inherently incompatible, this dissertation will look at how the religious convictions of many colonists changed to allow for the dehumanization of slaves. This is important not only for painting a more accurate picture of slavery in the North, but also for understanding how changes to religious thought influenced evolving notions of personhood among colonial Christians, which became increasingly important by the time of the American Revolution. In his book, *A Slaveholders Union*, William Van Cleve described Northerners’ willingness to accept national laws that strengthened and spread slavery and supported the dehumanization of African Americans. The contribution of this dissertation is to help explain the shifts in perspective that allowed New Englanders to embrace these laws, when in generations past they had insisted on Africans’ spiritual equality and shared humanity. In addition to explaining this shift, this work also discusses those colonists who were concerned about the dehumanizing effects of slavery and what that dehumanization meant religiously. Although many New England Christians came to accept that Africans were sub-human, there were always members of the culture who had a difficult time resolving this view with their religious principles, and their perspectives are also important to consider. By dehumanizing

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3 This is not to say that all people who were concerned about these dehumanizing effects were necessarily worried about what this meant for slaves. It seems quite possible that for many their primary concern was what it meant for their religious tradition, not how it affected slaves’ lives.
blacks, slavery presented challenges to their traditional religious perspective that stressed the common heritage of all people. Some New Englanders dealt with this challenge by shifting their focus away from religious communalism towards a focus on individual virtue, which allowed them to alter their understanding of personhood to exclude slaves and people of African descent, while others felt forced to reject the institution instead.

The first chapter of this project aims to situate its contribution by discussing works on slavery in the colonial period, religion in the colonial Northeast, and studies that focus on the evolution of slavery in the early Republic. In order to understand why Northerners were willing to accept a constitution that permitted the spread of slavery and the dehumanization of African Americans, one must first recognize how they came to accept the view that people of African descent were fundamentally different than whites and were therefore no longer best understood as part of the larger society. Works on religion in colonial New England have often focused on the seventeenth century and have emphasized that religious communalism allowed for Christians in the region to simultaneously view slaves as property and dependent members of the puritan family. Although this perspective was relevant for a time, it did not last. Even so, many works that describe slavery throughout the colonial period seem to take for granted that this perspective remained incredibly influential in the Northeast and have therefore focused on instances where slaves appear to have been given equal consideration under the law and on how Northern slavery was relatively mild when compared to the Southern institution. As a result, these works fail to explain how New Englanders came to accept a view of Africans that allowed them to embrace national laws that protected slavery and categorized most African Americans as property rather than human beings. The goal of this dissertation is to bridge this gap by showing how changes to
New England culture contributed to a shift away from religious communalism and how that shift, in turn, supported the dehumanization of African slaves.

Chapter two begins a discussion of eighteenth-century change by investigating how debates about slavery in colonial New England evolved. At the turn of the century, both published supporters of slavery and those opposed largely agreed that Africans were human beings and Europeans’ spiritual equals. As a result, those who supported slavery emphasized that it was a divinely sanctioned way to order their colonial society. They maintained that God had intended for civilizations to include hierarchies and that slavery was just one of the many divisions necessary for a well-ordered community, while those who opposed the institution maintained that it was an unchristian practice. Abolitionist authors focused on showing that because God did not distinguish between people based on race, slavery was sinful, and they outlined the cruelties of the institution and showed how it dehumanized Africans. Although these vocal colonists agreed about slaves’ humanity, there appeared to already be some debate about whether Africans were best understood as people or beasts, and by the time of the American Revolution, that perspective had gained support as people began to print tracts that explicitly questioned Africans’ humanity. The communalism that characterized the first years of settlement in New England required that slaves be understood as members of the larger society, but this perspective gave way to a view of religious virtue that was centered in the individual rather than the community. This shift in religious thought allowed colonists to embrace the idea that slaves were primarily inhuman property, rather than members of society, which had long lasting implications.

Chapter three begins a three-part discussion of how colonial culture functioned to distinguish blacks from whites and how this gradually led many colonists to accept the view that
Africans were innately different than Europeans. This acceptance contributed to a shift in religious thought away from communalism, which then in turn reinforced the view that slaves were less-than human. The third chapter focuses on how Africans were portrayed as animal-like in many seventeenth and eighteenth century travel narratives. The idea that Africans closely resembled animals was common in these texts, and they certainly affected how colonial New Englanders thought about African slaves and the slave trade. These reports did not simply present Africans as uncivilized human beings, but instead focused on the dramatic ways in which they appeared to differ from Europeans and resemble lesser beings. They painted a monolithic picture of sub-Saharan African cultures and paid particular attention to African women’s bodies and their sexual behavior in order to show how they differed from the European ideal. They also drew on European assumptions about the importance of the family to call into question the stability of African cultures and described African eating habits in ways that made them seem physiologically and morally distinct.

Chapter 4 goes on to discuss Massachusetts’ legal codes and explain how the law there changed the status of slaves in New England over time. Whereas the first laws there treated slaves like children, keeping with the religious tradition of the time, they came to distinguish slaves in significant ways and categorized them primarily as property. Over the course of the colonial period, as the number of Africans in North American increased and traditional forms of social control began to falter, settlers sought out ways to reaffirm their unwritten social hierarchy through the law. They first restricted the rights of slaves and then racialized these codes, limiting the rights of “negroes” regardless of their legal status. By the time of the American Revolution, African slaves were considered property in Massachusetts and blacks of all statuses were legally distinguished from the white population. These changes to the law not only expedited a shift
toward a more individualist form of Christianity, but also affected how whites viewed African slaves, which set the stage for their acceptance of national laws that characterized them as property rather than human beings.

Chapter 5 adds to this discussion by explaining the relationship between the changing religious and economic cultures in New England and how these changes led colonists to embrace the dehumanization of slaves and the slave trade. Rather than assuming that the region’s shift towards commercialism was indicative of a move away from Christian values, this chapter shows that religion remained an important lens through which colonists viewed their economic activities. Christians in the region came to accept a religious worldview that emphasized the importance of individual rather than collective virtue, and they began to view the accumulation of wealth in a positive light. As a result, they were more willing to embrace the slave system as a way to add to the general well being of the region. During this time, New Englanders also came to view property as a natural right, which again simultaneously advanced religious individualism and encouraged colonists to conceive of slaves as property rather than human beings. Although slavery was never as important to the economy in New England as it was in the South, it is clear that as Northern markets changed, so did Christians’ understanding of their religious obligations and the morality of the slave trade.

The final chapter investigates how the above-mentioned changes influenced arguments about the validity of slavery in the early Republic. Whereas the first New England settlers focused on the religious importance of creating a communal society, by the time of the Revolution they had come to embrace a more individualistic, commercial ethos. This shift in perspective was advanced by the presence of slavery in the region and then came to support the institution there by encouraging white colonialists to view African Americans as fundamentally
different. As a result, by the time of the Revolution, debates about the right to own slaves focused much more on whether Africans were best understood as humans or as lesser beings. Although this seems to have been an issue as early as the turn of the eighteenth century, by the Revolutionary period there was a dramatic increase in the number of publications that explicitly questioned the humanity of people of African descent, and although most abolitionists remained firm in their insistence that African Americans were fully human, their writings nonetheless illustrate how contentious this issue had become. Rather than simply arguing that slavery was cruel and immoral, like they had in the past, by this time they were forced to confront the popular view that Africans were created as fundamentally lesser than whites.

It should be noted that although race and slavery are central themes in this work, it does not include African American perspectives. This project looks closely at published documents, most of which were authored by white men. There were simply not many colonial publications that were written by African American authors, and even those that were printed present problems. For instance, it can be difficult to know for certain if accounts attributed to authors of African descent were actually penned by black writers. Supporters of slavery were interested in presenting Africans and their experiences of slavery in a particular light, and some attempted to do this by publishing false accounts, which can make it difficult for scholars to determine if slaves in fact authored certain documents. Additionally, even in cases where historians can be certain that people of African descent wrote the published accounts that they are reading, scholars are left wondering how honest or representative these documents were. White publishers in the colonies and the early Republic controlled what kinds of information were printed and distributed. Even publishers who were sympathetic to the abolitionists cause likely
limited what kinds of accounts they printed, and in a hostile culture, slaves would have had many reasons not to write or speak openly and honestly about their experiences and perspectives.

It is also important to mention that this project focuses on the enslavement of people of African descent. Although a significant portion of the enslaved population in New England was Native American, the institution became associated with Africans very quickly, which is clear in colonial publications about slavery. Debates about the morality of slavery often focused on black slaves and debated specifically whether or not it was permissible to enslave people of African descent. Because debates about slavery focused so much on African people and the goal of this dissertation is to explain how arguments about the humanity of African slaves contributed to the emergence of religiously based abolitionism as well the embrace of race essentialism among many American Christians, this project focuses on one segment of the enslaved population. This focus is not meant to suggest that the presence of Native American slaves was inconsequential, or that colonial distinctions made between Africans and Native Americans were always clear or accurate. Attempts by colonists to distinguish between Native American and African people were complicated by the enslavement of both groups and the mixing of these populations. Nonetheless, many colonists and early Americans attempted to draw clear lines between these groups and in so doing, generally discussed slavery in terms of the African trade.

In 1788 Thomas Jefferson described African Americans saying, “their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life… It is not their conditions then, but nature, which had produced the distinction.” Jefferson, who famously wrote that the equality of all men was self-evident, was expressing a common view in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, that people of African descent were innately inferior to Europeans. By the time of the American Revolution, this view had gained widespread support among North Americans, and many had gone as far as

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to accept the claim that Africans were not lesser human beings, but were instead a different species all together. This was a far cry from Cotton Mather’s 1706 affirmation that slaves were human beings with “rational souls” who should be converted to Christianity and treated with relative kindness.\footnote{Cotton Mather, \textit{The Negro Christianized} (Boston: B. Green, 1706).} The goal of this dissertation is to explain how changes to the religious, social, legal, and economic systems of the colonial Northeast led to the acceptance of these views of Africans, even though the religious culture of the region had traditionally emphasized the shared origins and humanity of all people, regardless of race.
CHAPTER ONE
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on slavery in colonial America has overwhelmingly focused on the nineteenth century South, and this emphasis on plantation life and the Southern economy has led to a distorted picture of the institution.\(^6\) There has been a general lack in literature that describes the complexity of slavery in the colonies, and Americans have come to associate the institution almost exclusively with Southern plantation life. Although Southern slavery was certainly an important part of American history, Donald R. Wright points out that historians’ focus has “skewed the presentation of American slavery,” and by focusing on the deep South in the nineteenth century, scholarship has not reflected the “lives of African Americans during the two hundred years before the rise of the Cotton Kingdom”\(^7\) or the influence of slavery outside of this region. Slavery was not a static institution and there has been a push among scholars to emphasize how the institution changed over time and varied regionally.

Although studies of New England slavery are less common than those focusing on the antebellum South, there has been an increase in attention to slavery outside of the “Cotton Kingdom.” When Donald Wright published the first edition of *African Americans in the Colonial Era* in 1990 he called for historians to consider the entire history of slavery in the colonies. Historians answered this call, and by the second edition, which was published ten years later, over 120 new books and articles focusing on the complexity of American slavery had been

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Although only a small portion of those works looked at colonial New England, it is clear that scholars have become interested in painting a more complex picture of slavery in North America, and this includes looking at the northeast. Though scholars have expanded their treatment of slavery and African American colonial history, this chapter will outline a number of trends in the historiography in order to situate this dissertations’ contribution within the larger body of literature. With books and articles written about Africans and the New England law, family structures, witchcraft practices, and popular media, scholars have covered a wide variety of topics. One topic of discussion that is notably lacking in this burgeoning field, however, is religion. Although much of the scholarship on colonial New England deals explicitly with puritan Calvinism, histories of slavery in the region tend to downplay the influence of religion in supporting the institution. Furthermore, when religion is discussed, it is almost universally portrayed as having a positive influence on the lives of Africans or as working to undermine slavery. Although the slave system persisted in colonial New England for over 100 years and many ministers owned slaves, historians tend to focus on puritan abolitionists and theologies that called for manumission or improved the lives of slaves rather than attempting to explain how many New Englanders’ worldviews actually supported the institution.

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One of the most prevalent debates in the historiography of African American colonial history, which works to complicate the picture of slavery in America, engages the question of which came first, slavery or racism.\textsuperscript{10} There has been quite a bit of scholarly debate over the origins of race prejudice in America, and although much of this discussion has focused on the South and plantation culture, it is nonetheless important for understanding the complexity of slavery in northern colonies as well. Though scholars disagree about whether slavery or racism came first, their arguments tend to share two features. First, their discussions always show that the status of African Americans changed over time and that slavery was not static. Second, they consistently downplay the role that religion played in forming and maintaining ideas about slavery and race. Oscar and Mary Handlin’s 1950 article, “Origins of the Southern Labor System,” was one of the first articles to engage in debate over whether slavery or racism came first. In this article the authors argued that slavery predated racism and that racism was an unexpected result. Slavery was instituted in the colonies for economic reasons and plantation owners only resorted to importing slaves because white labor was in short supply. Africans were not brought to the colonies as part of a racist system, but rather to meet the demand for labor. According to the Handlins, it was not until the 1660s that racism began to emerge. This occurred because of the inherent degradation that came along with slavery and because European colonists felt compelled to make stark distinctions between whites and blacks. Although it was originally assumed that all servants would be treated the same regardless of race, the conditions of colonial life did not allow for this. According to the authors, the “strangeness” of the New World forced colonists to distinguish themselves from people unlike them, and the Handlins described the

\textsuperscript{10} Although the authors mentioned here did not always make explicitly clear what they mean by the term “racism,” unless otherwise noted, in this dissertation when I use the term I am relying on George Fredrickson’s definition. He described racism by saying, “It either directly sustains or proposes to establish a racial order, a permanent group hierarchy that is believed to reflect the laws of nature or the decrees of God.” (George M. Fredrikson, Racism: A Short History (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 6.)
colonists’ psychology by saying, “Like the millions who would follow, these immigrants longed in the strangeness for the company of familiar men and singled out to be welcomed those who were most like themselves.”  

Africans appeared different and were therefore singled out, and this eventually developed into a belief that they were inferior. What these authors failed to mention was how changes to religious thought supported the institution of slavery in New England by allowing colonists to accept this “otherness” of Africans’ even though their religious tradition had previously insisted on the unity of mankind.  

Although the Handlins believed that slavery predated racism, other historians adamantly rejected this conclusion. Carl Degler’s 1959 essay, “Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice,” maintained that persons of African descent, slave or free, were never treated as equals to European Americans. He maintained that racism was evident in the colonies before the legal institution of slavery developed and that although labor demands may have been the reason why so many Africans were brought to the colonies, this does not explain their inhumane treatment. To make this claim Degler pointed to New England, where the number of slaves was relatively small and where their labor was not necessary. Although the Handlins were quick to defend their interpretation, Degler maintained that blacks were consistently maltreated and that racism predated institutionalize slavery. He argued that because African slavery in the North occurred only on a small scale, it would not have led to racism. There was no need for cheap, imported labor in the North, and Africans were never a large enough percentage of the population to insight fear in New Englanders. Therefore, according to Degler, racism “seems

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12 Kathryn Siu-Sau Koo picked up on this idea of “strangeness” in her dissertation “Among Savages and Strangers,” and related it back to a religious argument. She maintained that biblical justifications for slavery often discussed one’s right to enslave “strangers” and that because Africans were depicted as unlike Europeans they were understood as “strangers,” which provided colonial Christians with a justification for enslaving them. For more on how these debates played out, see chapters 2 and 6. (Kathryn Siu-Sau Koo, “Among Savages and Strangers: Race and the Crisis of Contact in Puritan New England” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 36-75.)
clearly to be the consequence of the general social discrimination against the Negro,”¹³ and “instead of slavery being the root of discrimination visited upon the Negro in America, slavery was itself molded by the early colonists’ discrimination against the outlander.”¹⁴

Though these were some of the first scholars to weigh in on this debate, their opinions were not final. Winthrop D. Jordan also pondered the relationship between racism and slavery in colonial America, in his essay, “Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery” (1962), and in his 1968 book, White over Black. In “Modern Tensions” Jordan attempted to make sense of both the Handlins’ and Degler’s perspectives. He argued that when discussing prejudice and slavery there was no reason to believe that one necessarily predated the other. In fact, he maintained that slavery and prejudice may have fed on each other, with each being both cause and effect. According to Jordan, there simply was not enough evidence to support that either racism or slavery came first, and rather, it seemed that they developed concurrently.¹⁵ Although this was Jordan’s original analysis, he changed his argument by 1968 when he published White over Black. In this work Jordan explained that he had an insufficient understanding of the history of slavery in colonial American when he wrote “Modern Tensions.” He then went on to explain the ways in which European racism carried over into colonial America and predated slavery. In this later work, Jordan argued that prior to arriving in the “New World,” Europeans were already prejudiced against people of African descent and already believed them to be inferior. This fed into the slave system and made the status of slaves lesser than it would have been otherwise. Therefore, although prejudice and slavery influenced each other, Jordan no longer believed that

it was impossible to claim that one predated the other. In 1971, George M. Fredrickson’s essay, “Toward a Social Interpretation of the Development of American Racism,” however, he argued against Jordan’s view and, much like the Handlins, maintained that the first colonists were not concerned with race. He asserted that racism was not present until large numbers of slaves were brought to the colonies and this was because their numbers threatened the status of Europeans. Though Frederickson argued that there were varying levels of “implicit” and “explicit” racism in colonial America, he believed these forms only surfaced in the late 1600s, when the percentage of Africans increased to a level that colonists found threatening.

Though all of these works contribute to the discussion of racism and slavery in colonial America, they focus primarily on the South and, with the exception of Degler, they do not adequately take into account regional differences. For example, Fredickson’s argument, that racism became a force only because of the fear induced by a dramatic increase in the African American population, needs further explanation when used to discuss New England. As Degler pointed out, the number of slaves in New England remained relatively small during the colonial period, and yet racist views developed and slavery remained legal for generations.

In order to understand the rise and acceptance of racist views, then, we must appreciate how this fear spread to New England even as the number of slaves remained comparatively small. Other arguments that ignore regionally differences may not be as clearly problematic but they are nonetheless insufficient. For example, colonists throughout North American may have been familiar with

similar racist views of Africans, but the influence that religious thought had among New England
puritans makes the centrality of religion in defending and supporting the institution of slavery
particularly clear there. Studying slavery in the colonial Northeast can therefore help illuminate
the influence of religion in other areas of the Atlantic world. Puritan religious views were not
unique to New England, and the boundaries between them and other forms of British religious
expression cannot be clearly fixed. As a result, using writings from colonial New England in
order to understand how religion affected slavery there allows us to see the role that religion
played throughout the British Empire, something that has been missing from accounts that focus
on Southern life.

Considering the abundance of literature on slavery in the South, it is not surprising that
most of the discussion about the origins of racism and slavery in the colonies has focused on
Southern plantation culture. This having been said, there have been scholars since Degler who
have engaged in this debate by drawing on the experience of New England slaves. In “The Image
of the Negro in Colonial Literature” (1963), Milton Cantor looked at literature from colonial
New England and came to the conclusion that racism and prejudice were always deeply
embedded in colonial culture. He wrote, “it should not be assumed that the stigma followed only
in the wake of slavery. Rather the slave status of the Negro was worked out within a framework
of discrimination.”20 According to Cantor, the seeds of both New England’s pro- and anti-slavery
movements were planted in the colonial context and predated the spread and development of
slavery. What Cantor does not tell us is how New Englanders’ religion affected their attitudes
toward slavery. Because histories focusing on the antebellum South have largely ignored religion
and religious influences, it is not surprising that authors focusing on the South did not mention

the role that religion played in the development of slavery and racism. This having been said, religion has been the focus of much of the literature on colonial New England, so the omission of religion in Cantor’s article is striking. Four years after the publication of “The Image of the Negro,” Louis Ruchames presented a slightly different argument in his article “The Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial America” (1967). In this work, Ruchames was responding to many of the authors already cited. He wrote, “while Handlin is in error in attributing prejudice to the growth of slavery in the 1660’s – for the former did exist from the very beginning of colonial settlement – Degler errs in assuming that prejudice did not result from slavery. True, it did not result from the American slavery of the 1660’s, but it did arise with the slavery of the slave trade.”21 Ruchames maintained that slavery predated racial prejudice, but agreed with Cantor that New England colonists were prejudice against dark skinned people before arriving in the New World. He maintained that this prejudice came from the European slave trade and not only resulted in prejudice against African slaves, but also added to the racism that New England colonists felt toward the American Indians they encountered. Again, although the author is discussing racism in puritan New England, he provides no discussion of the role that New Englanders’ religion played in forming their attitudes towards African slaves or Native Americans.

Ira Berlin’s Many Thousands Gone (1998) also confronted the issue of racism in colonial America. Although Berlin’s book is an expansive work that describes over 200 years and all of North America, he did pay particular attention the New England. Berlin explained that his goal in writing this book was to add weight to the claim that race is a social construct. He maintained that the reason that we have a difficult time understanding the constructedness of race is because

it seems static and unchanging. By describing the complexity of race and showing how it was redefined in colonial America, Berlin hoped to clarify that conceptions of race are and always have been historically contingent and changing. According to Berlin, in the early years of slavery “the respectable class in the northern colonies widely shared the perception that the social cleavage ran between free and unfree – not white and black.” Berlin wanted to illustrate how slavery throughout North America became increasingly racialized and inhumane as time went on. He showed that in the second half of the eighteenth century slavery became a more important part of the Northern economy and that legal systems there began to tighten restrictions on manumission. As the number of free Africans decreased, slavery became increasingly associated with blackness, which in turn associated blackness with negative stereotypes that were at the heart of American race prejudice.

As has already been mentioned, discussion of religion is noticeably absent from these histories. Although other authors show that colonists, especially in New England, came to use religion and the bible to debate the validity of slavery and the status of African Americans, the above mentioned authors rarely if ever mentioned religious thought. Though this may be in part because so many of these works focused on the South and research on religion in the antebellum South is less developed than that on colonial New England, this does not explain why it was absent when slavery and race in puritan New England were discussed. Whether this omission

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Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis also briefly confronted this debate in the preface to their edited volume, *To Make our World Anew*. Rather than speculating that slavery or racism came first, they simply maintained that “By the end of the 18th century, African slaves came to be property, pure and simple, and the color of their skin had everything to do with their unique status.” Regardless of which came first, according to Kelley and Lewis, slavery and racism were inextricably tied by 1800. (Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), x.)
was intentional or not, by not engaging in a debate about the role of religion in the development of racism and slavery, scholars protect the popular view that Christianity was inherently incompatible with slavery and racism. This was not the case, however, and by not confronting religion, historians not only provide an incomplete discussion of the development of racial prejudice and slavery, but they also indirectly support an unfinished and skewed picture of colonial Christianity. One of the contributions of this dissertation is to add to these discussions of the emergence of racism in North American by showing that religion provided the conceptual frameworks through which New Englanders both justified and rejected slavery. By untangling how social, legal, and economic transformations contributed to a shift away from religious communalism, towards a more individualistic form of Christianity, this project helps to explain how religious ideas allowed many New Englanders to conceive of Africans as fundamentally different and inferior. Although this is an important part of the story, it is also important to note that while many colonists came to embrace race essentialism, others saw a conflict between their religious convictions and the dehumanization of Africans and therefore felt forced to reaffirm the shared humanity of people of African and European descent and reject slavery.

In addition to the above-mentioned works, which focus on the connection between racism and slavery, there have also been a number of important publications that have concentrated on comparing slavery in different regions of North America, and with such a large corpus of work focusing on slavery in the South, it is no surprise that much of the literature discussing slavery in the North is comparative. For example, many authors focus on how slavery and the social status of Africans in Northern colonies differed from those in the South, and one topic that historians have picked up on is the legal status of Africans in colonial New England. Although these discussions are certainly different than debates about the origins of slavery and racism, they are
related. Authors who have argued that in colonial New England blacks and whites who occupied the same status were treated as equals under the law support the view that racial distinctions were not significant in the North, while those who claim that blacks were treated differently regardless of their legal status suggest that there was a racial divide and that Africans, not just slaves, faced prejudice. Although his book, *Coming to America* (1990), focused on the immigration of a number of groups over a long period of time, Roger Daniels did briefly touch on the legal status of people of African descent in puritan New England. In this work, Daniels maintained that the status of blacks in colonial Massachusetts was ambiguous. They were subject to curfews and there were laws regulating their behavior, but according to Daniels, in other ways free blacks were equal to whites in the eyes of the law. For example, free blacks could testify in court and own and transfer property. Daniels also discussed how non-English Europeans were discriminated against in the colonies, which supported his claim that race was not central to colonists’ status. Though his discussion is brief, Daniels clearly maintained that the legal standing of colonial Americans in New England was based on their status as free, servant, or slave and not on the color of their skin, but in order to do so he emphasized the legal “rights” that blacks had while downplaying how the law evolved to control people of African descent in the region. He also downplayed the influence that religious thought had on the development of laws in New England, and in so doing failed to recognize the significance of the legal changes that developed and distinguished blacks from whites.

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25 Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 107. I placed the word “rights” in quotation marks here because in chapter 4 I discuss why it is problematic to assume that Massachusetts’ laws were written primarily to protect African slaves’ rights. Once we consider how puritans’ religious thought influenced their understanding of the law, it seems likely that they were more interested in protecting the law than they were in protecting African Americans.
Robert C. Twombly and Robert M. Moore made a similar claim in their 1967 article “Black Puritan: The Negro in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts,” where they maintained that the “real test of the colony’s race relations must be based not on what whites thought and said but on what they did.” With this in mind, Twombly and Moore argued that because puritans held the law in such high regard, they were able to faithfully enforce it, regardless of the attitudes they may have held towards Africans and that this behavior was what was truly important.

According to the authors, regardless of race, all men of the same status were considered equal in the eyes of the law, and to make this point they outlined a number of instances where African and Europeans of similar social status were treated equally. For example, they too stressed that both whites and blacks were able to testify in court and were provided with legal counsel. Similarly, whites and blacks consistently received comparable punishments for equivalent crimes, and the authors also discussed the right of free black men to own property and businesses. Although the authors did not claim that people of African descent were in all ways equal to whites, they did maintain that in the early years of slavery in New England, blacks were treated like whites when it came to matters of law. They then went on to claim that Africans may have remained equal to whites of the same status had it not been for social changes in the area. They argued that racially based restrictions were placed on Africans and Native Americans beginning in the 1680s because New Englanders were anxious and governments were worried about social order. The authors explained that, “as generations passed, as trade increased, as the frontier receded, and as the complexities of a growing colony burgeoned, the Commonwealth’s problems shifted,” and it was within this context that New England’s government began

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instituting laws limiting the rights of people of African descent.\textsuperscript{27} Although this takes into account changes to the law that other authors overlooked, religion is only briefly mentioned here. They said that ministers were warning colonists that God was angry with them and that family and religious structures were being reevaluated, all points that are reminiscent of the debates that began on fifteen years earlier over the Half-Way Covenant, but they did not explain why this fear allowed colonists who emphasized the importance of the law to change their legal codes to categorize blacks as fundamentally different than whites even in the face of a religious tradition that had previously emphasized their spiritual equality.

Discussions of legal differences were only one point of comparison, and historians have focused on other aspects of colonial culture as well, going to great lengths describing differences in the slave trade, as well as how slave labor differed in the North and the South. Although authors who discussed the legal status of Africans in New England often touched on these topics, others have gone into more detail comparing the lives of northern and southern slaves.\textsuperscript{28} Lorenzo Johnston Greene’s, \textit{The Negro in Colonial New England} (1942), was the first comprehensive look at slavery in New England, and in order to describe northern slavery, Greene drew on studies of the South and compared the regions. Some of the main differences that Greene pointed to in his work were that the slave population in New England was dramatically smaller than in the South and that slaves in the North tended to live and work along side whites. According to Greene, this significantly affected the formation of African American culture. Whereas Southern blacks often interacted with other people of African descent and were able to maintain some traditional ways of life, Africans in the early colonial North rarely interacted with other blacks

and were consequently more quickly and thoroughly assimilated into the European culture.\textsuperscript{29} Greene also went into a detailed discussion of the labor differences and the relative autonomy that northern Africans, both slave and free, experienced.\textsuperscript{30} Greene maintained that his research showed that African slaves held an ambiguous position in New England, and that they consistently occupied a space between slave and servant. In \textit{African Americans in the Colonial Era} (2000), Daniel Wright also laid out many of the ways in which the institution of slavery differed between regions and how it changed over time. He described the variety of jobs that northern slaves held as well as the liminal social position that New England slaves occupied. According to Wright, they “walked a fine line between being persons with certain rights on the one hand, and being pieces of property on the other.”\textsuperscript{31} This was dramatically different than the experience of slaves in the South who were generally assigned limited tasks, were almost never trained as skilled laborers, and were not permitted to work apart from their owners. By comparing the duties of northern and southern slaves, Wright, like Greene before him, not only described how slavery functioned in New England, but also simultaneously provided a more complex picture of colonial slavery than a Southern view could alone. Ira Berlin also spent a significant amount of time detailing the differences between northern and southern slave life in \textit{Many Thousands Gone} (2000). He described differences in the slave trade, the status of Africans, and the labor that they performed in order to show how diverse the institution of slavery was. Although Berlin ultimately hoped to show how the concept of race was constructed and changed over time, in order to accomplish this goal he went into great detail comparing slavery in the

\textsuperscript{30} Lorenzo Johnston Greene, \textit{The Negro in Colonial New England} (New York: Atheneum, 1942), 100-123
\textsuperscript{31} Donald R. Wright, \textit{African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution}, The American History Series (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2000), 94.
North and South.\textsuperscript{32} In most of these comparative studies there was little discussion of how slavery changed in the Northeast and consequently they give the impression that slaves’ ambiguous status remained consistent throughout the colonial period. They also included relatively little discussion of the influence of religious thought in the Northeast and how religious perspectives about universal humanity lost ground over time. In \textit{Black Bondage in the North} (1973), Edgar J. McManus confronted the issue of Northern slavery in a slightly different way. Rather than comparing Northern and Southern slavery, McManus let his discussion of Northern slavery stand on its own, which perhaps intentionally led to a much darker picture. He provided the reader with information about the economics of the Northern slave trade, described how racial hierarchies developed in the North, and depicted Northern laws as being dehumanizing and at times brutal. Although McManus’ perspective is a useful corrective to works that stressed that when compared to Southern plantation life Northern slavery did not appear as harsh, he also did not pay much attention to religion in this work. He briefly mentioned that puritan rhetoric called for slaves to be treated as members of the family but then quickly moved on to argue that whites’ fears of miscegenation led to the strict legal and social separation of whites and blacks.\textsuperscript{33} McManus also mentioned that many Christian denominations supported attempts to convert slaves and that ministers had a difficult time convincing slave owners that if their slaves converted they would not be legally free, but this was the extent of his discussion of religion.\textsuperscript{34}

Though economic differences were routinely described and cited as important for understanding the status of slaves in colonial New England, most historians have ignored the influence that religion had on changing ideas about race and slavery. Although, as I have


\textsuperscript{34} Edgar J. McManus, \textit{Black Bondage in the North} (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 100-107.
mention, Lorenzo Greene downplayed the role that religion played in the slave system, he did mention a few important points upon which later authors expanded. He explained that puritans maintained that slavery was “established by the law of God in Israel and, regarding themselves as the Elect of God, New Englanders looked upon the enslavement of Indians and Negroes as a sacred privilege Divine Providence was pleased to grant His chosen people.”

Greene’s work also pointed out the connection between the puritan family and the status of African slaves. He maintained that in early colonial New England slaves were considered members of the family, and that the family structure came directly out puritan theology and their reading of the bible. According to his view, the patriarchal role of the father was extended to the slave, and slaves were consequently treated much like children. Again, Greene only touched on these issues, and they were not the focus of his work, but he did contribute to the discussion of religion and slavery in New England by suggesting connections upon which later historians expanded.

Edmund Morgan’s *The Puritan Family* (1944), for example, was an early contribution to the discussion of slavery in New England. Unlike Greene’s book, which focused on the institution of slavery, Morgan’s work focused on the influence of religion by describing how the ideal puritan family was ordered and explained the important role that the family had in New England society. Although their focuses differed, both authors portrayed Northern slavery as mild when compared to the institution in the South largely because of how puritans viewed the family. In his chapter “Masters and Servants,” Morgan argued that all those who served, whether they did so voluntarily, because they were indentured, or as slaves, were required to obey their masters, no matter how unkind or harsh they may have been. He also argued that in puritan society all servants, including slaves, were entitled to “decent treatment,” which included a right

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to spiritual guidance. Morgan wrote, “These facts help to brighten the picture of New England servitude. The non-Puritan servant might chafe under the restrictions imposed upon him by the godly rulers of New England, but he had as companions in his condition the children of men who were equal in rank to his master.”\(^{38}\) In *The Puritan Family*, Morgan expanded on Greene’s point, arguing that slaves, as well as all servants, were understood as dependent members of the New England family, and in so doing, both authors claimed that slaves in the North maintained an ambiguous position somewhere between servant and slave. It is important to note that Morgan was making an argument about how slavery worked during the seventeenth century and did not attempting to use this to make claims about how slavery developed later in the colonial period. Nevertheless, he painted a similar picture of how slavery functioned in the North, at least for a time.

Lawrence Towner similarly expanded on the importance of the puritan family in his article, “A Fondness of Freedom” (1962). In this essay, Towner also argued that slaves were understood as part of the puritan family, and that the closeness of this relationship affected the status of slaves. As members of the family, they were expected to conform to the will of the patriarch, and refusal to do so reflected poorly on the group. This made proper behavior essential because misbehavior resulted in suspicion of the family.\(^{39}\) Towner went on to explain that while the family was meant to integrate servants into society, by the end of the seventeenth century the family was no longer able to perform this function. “The Puritans in Massachusetts had placed heavy social burdens on the family at the very time that…it was stripped of some of its most


important sources of authority over the individual."\textsuperscript{40} The influence of the family was suffering and the Half-Way Covenant was seen as proof of its floundering. Parents were no longer passing on their religious zeal, and they were also not properly integrating slaves into the family or society. According to Towner, this increased tensions between slaves and masters. Masters were maltreating their slaves, and in response slaves “violated their duties as servants, weakening family government, and threatened to reduce society to a rout.”\textsuperscript{41} In this article, Towner connected the role of the family to puritan religious ideals, showed how this related to the status of slaves, and began to explain how this original perspective altered. He argued that as these relationships changed and faltered the slave system also changed and became harsher. This argument suggested that had puritanism been able to maintain itself, African slaves would have remained relatively autonomous and racial prejudice would not have developed the way it did. Towner did not, however, expand much on how factors beyond the apparent breakdown of the family contributed to the changes that took place or how these changes contributed to the development of race essentialism in the North.

While Greene, Morgan, and Towner connected religion and slavery through the puritan family, scholars who focused on New Divinity directly connected puritan theology to the problems of slavery. In “Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery, and the Revolution” (1967), for example, David Lovejoy described how Jonathan Edwards’ theology influenced Hopkins, and he attempted to directly connect Edwardsean thought to Hopkins’ abolitionism. According to Lovejoy,

\begin{quote}
disinterested benevolence, which demanded that man serve his “fellow creatures” and administer “to their greatest good,” meant to Hopkins an unselfish goodness … primarily
\end{quote}


to those who needed benevolence most, that is, the oppressed of mankind. And who, of all beings, asked Hopkins, were most oppressed and most needed universal good will but Negroes whose slavery was an offense to Christian benevolence? Out of the very core of his New Light theology, then, came the basis of Hopkins’ protest against slavery and the slave trade.42

Hopkins believed that Edwards’ New Divinity, which had disinterested benevolence at its center, should logically lead Christians to oppose slavery. According to Lovejoy, Hopkins’ religion and his abolitionism were inextricably tied, as he believed that Edwards’ puritanism called for manumission. Bernard Rosenthal made a similar claim in his article, “Puritan Conscience and New England Slavery” (1973). He wrote, “the theology of Jonathan Edwards contained inherent assumptions about God and man that, taken to their logical conclusion, would lead to the position Hopkins took in opposing slavery…”43 Again, the author argued that New Divinity inevitably led Hopkins to an abolitionist stance. Lovejoy and Rosenthal were sure to point out that puritanism and abolitionism were not synonymous, but these articles nonetheless focus on how puritan theology was understood by some as supporting abolition without adequately discussing how it had previously supported slavery. In his chapter, “All Things Were New and Astonishing” (2003), Charles Hambrick-Stowe took his discussion of New Divinity a step further than Lovejoy and Rosenthal by looking at the theologies of Sarah Osborn and Lemuel Haynes as well as Samuel Hopkins. Hambrick-Stowe maintained that at the heart of Jonathan Edwards’ piety, as conceived of by these three theologians, was “the identification of true holiness as radical disinterested benevolence.”44 Furthermore, their understanding of this disinterested benevolence “connected the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ with the single most

crucial – and in their day neglected – issue of American history, the status of African Americans in this society."

Hambrick-Stowe, like Lovejoy and Rosenthal, drew a direct line between Jonathan Edwards’ theology and the inter-racial ideologies of these three and showed that, although Hopkins was important, he was not the only theologian to interpret Edwards in this way, and he was not the only critic of slavery using New Divinity theology as the basis of his politics. John Saillant also discussed Lemuel Haynes and his interpretation of New Divinity in Black Puritan, Black Republican (2003). According to Saillant, Haynes believed that God used sin to further benevolence, so he maintained that the sin of slavery must, in the end, further a compassionate goal. As a result, he understood slavery and the slave trade as “designed by God to further the appreciation felt by black and white alike of liberty, education, and social harmony.”

That is to say, God used his ultimate knowledge and benevolence to turn the human evil of slavery into something good. According to Saillant, New Divinity was not only at the center of Hayes’ religion, but it was also central to his political stance on slavery, and in fact, his religion and politics were one in the same. All of these works emphasized how important religious thought was to evolving antislavery arguments, and they described an important shift towards Christian abolitionism, but they did not fully explain how and why many colonial Christians changed from viewing slavery as a divinely sanctioned right to a moral evil. These text explain that figures like Lemuel Haynes used Edwards’ thought to condemn slavery, but Edwards, a slave owner himself, did not see it that way. These accounts also fail to recognize the impact of emerging debates about whether or not slaves were human beings who even deserved Christian benevolence in the development of New England abolitionism.

In these discussions of religion and Africans in colonial New England, we see how puritans originally accepted slaves as members of their family and how New Divinity provided a religious basis for some forms of abolitionism, but only rarely do the above-mentioned authors describe how changes to New England’s culture worked to rationalize and maintain slavery and forward race essentialism. In Black Yankees (1988), William Piersen touched on this topic, although his goal was not to investigate slavery in puritan New England, but to provide a picture of black culture there. Because of this difference in perspective, he brought to the fore issues that other historians overlooked. Piersen wanted to “examine the process of cultural change and creation from the black bondsman’s point of view,” and in so doing, dedicated three chapters to religion, each of which provided the reader with a different view of African American religious life in colonial New England.\(^47\) Although Piersen’s focus was on the development of black culture and the not the development of slavery or ideas about race, his first chapter dealing explicitly with religion, “A Christianity for Slaves,” provided insights that are conspicuously missing from other narratives. For example, Piersen wrote, “The general failure of New England to produce a black Christian community in the eighteenth century resulted from a blind and overbearing ethnocentrism.”\(^48\) Here Pierson showed that we must look beyond the first years of settlement in order to understand how colonial Christians came to view Africans. In this chapter, Piersen also discussed how Christianity was used to rationalize slavery, and he took his analysis a step further by explaining the negative affect that this had on black conversion. According to the author, “It was not so much that Yankee masters did not tell their servants about Christianity,


but that the Christianity they offered was self-serving and neither emotionally nor intellectually satisfying to most Africans and Afro-Americans. "49 Rather than simply looking at how white New Englanders understood the relationship between Christianity and slavery, Piersen included black perspectives, which illustrated racial tensions, while other accounts tended to focus on ambiguity, which downplayed those pressures. Piersen also discussed how puritans’ Calvinism affected their understanding of slavery, suggesting that one reason that New Englanders were not particularly concerned about converting their slaves was because “New Englanders never expected all men to be regenerate; they only required all citizens to be members in a Christian commonwealth, open to the possibility of conversion, and bound by a code of Christian conduct.” 50 This meant that slaves did not have to be Christians but simply had to behave properly, explaining why relegating slaves to a different, unconverted status did not pose a problem for many puritans’ religious worldviews. 51

Although Piersen’s book focused on a different topic than this dissertation and as a result many of the most important contributions of his work are not directly relevant to this study, by taking a different perspective on New England history, Piersen illuminated racial dynamics and tensions that scholars of puritan history have largely overlooked. He described how puritans’ messages often alienated people of African descent in North America and how certain religious perspectives allowed New Englanders to feel comfortable with the lack of conversion among slaves, but the focus of his work did not allow him to investigate how changes to New England life affected religious thought nor how those changes allowed New Englanders to embrace the

51 Because Piersen was primarily concerned with presenting a picture of African American religious life in New England, he devoted most of his book to discussions of how African Americans’ understood and lived their religious lives. These are undoubtedly important contributions to the study of race and religion in the colonial Northeast, but they fall outside the scope of this study.

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institutionalization of slavery and the dehumanization of Africans. Similarly, because Piersen described the development of black culture, he also did not discuss how religion was used by some colonial Christians to condemn slavery. In other words, religion was simply more influential in colonial debates about slavery than Piersen’s work suggests.

John Wood Sweet also paid quite a bit of attention to the conflict between emerging views of race and religious tradition in his work *Bodies Politic* (2003). Sweet argued that Northerners had ideas about how slavery should ideally function that differed in important ways from the reality. He said that New Englanders were forced to develop a “split self-image” because although they wanted to conceive of themselves as a strictly white society, they were in fact part of a complex social network of free and enslaved Africans and Native Americans. In order to see their society as homogenous, even in the face of clear diversity, Sweet argued that Northerners constructed slavery as a “kind of social death.” He maintained that the relationships between slaves and their owners were described as being, “private, absolute, and permanent. But daily experience confronted individuals with the fact that slavery was public, negotiated, and fragile.” Sweet based his argument on the premise that Northerners wanted to define their culture first and foremost as white and that as a result they were forced to negotiate and deny an interracial society. Sweet then went on to argue that religious conversion posed a political problem for New Englanders because “they had made Christian fellowship a powerful symbol of membership in the body politic.” He argued that Christianity was a threat because it seemed to allow non-whites to become members in what was supposed to be an exclusively white society. In order to deal with this problem, Sweet argued that Northerners scoffed at the idea that blacks

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or Indians could become true Christians, which reinforced racialized identities and worked to further alienate non-whites from society. What Sweet did not explain fully was how Northerners dealt with the fact that their religious tradition had previously described non-whites as humans who could and should be converted. He showed that they rejected the conversion of non-whites as invalid in order to avoid accepting them, but said little about the religious conflict that this may have caused or the Christians who called on slave owners to educate and convert their slaves. Although Sweet attempted to discuss the role that religion played in Northern slavery, by arguing that white supremacy was the driving force behind Northern thought and actions, he oversimplified the religious conflict that slavery posed for Northern Christians.

Other important contributions to the literature on slavery in the North that have emphasized racial conflict in New England are works focusing on the early Republic. Books like George William Van Cleve’s *A Slaveholders’ Union* (2011) have attempted to describe how Northern slavery came to be seen as a political and social problem. Rather than assuming that Christianity and slavery were naturally at odds, or that Revolutionary ideas about freedom and liberty forced Northerners to accept abolitionism, Van Cleve attempted to complicate our understanding of slavery by suggesting other, less progressive reasons why many Northerners wanted to end slavery in North America. For example, he argued that most Northern abolitionists were not driven by moral or religious concerns, but were instead motivated to resist slavery for economic and racial reasons. He argued that Northerners were concerned about the cost of having to care for manumitted slaves and were worried about the number of non-whites in the region. Unlike Southerners, who were willing to accept the presence of African slaves because they provided much needed labor, according to Van Cleve, Northerners’ primary goal in outlawing slavery was to encourage European indentured servitude. He also maintained that
Northerners were primarily concerned about how slavery would be written into the Constitution because they wanted to assure that Southerners would not be unfairly represented in the federal government, not because they were concerned about freeing Southern slaves.\(^{54}\) Although Van Cleve was right that economics and racism were issues to Northerners, he too did not pay adequate attention to the role that religion played in the history of slavery in the region. He did not discuss how religious arguments were used to support slavery or how religious convictions complicated the institution, and he did not take religious abolitionist arguments seriously either. By looking past the colonial period, Van Cleve was able to see more clearly how Northerners’ views of Africans and slavery were influenced by racism and that the consequence of these views was that the early Republic was a “slaveholders union,” where the institution was strengthened and allowed to spread, but this periodization did not allow him to clearly outline how New Englanders’ perspectives shifted from seeing Africans as spiritual equals to nothing more than property.

One recent contribution to this field, which has attempted to integrate many of the issues mentioned above into one cohesive narrative is Richard Bailey’s *Race and Redemption in Puritan New England* (2011). In this work, Bailey argued that, “race was created, at least in part, out of the spiritual freedoms offered by New England puritans.”\(^{55}\) He argued that colonists were forced to reimagine slavery as part of God’s redemptive plan in order to deal with the unease that the institution caused them and that in so doing they unintentionally “created raced identities that denigrated and racialized the very persons they hoped to redeem.”\(^{56}\) Bailey argued that slavery diverged from puritan beliefs about universal redemption and that this conflict led New


Englanders to create racial hierarchies in order to deal with this clash. This dissertation adds to Bailey’s contribution by outlining many of the social, economic, and legal changes that dehumanized slaves in colonial New England and by focusing primarily on how colonists thought about African slaves in the eighteenth century in order to explain why early Americans were so willing to accept a legal system that considered most African Americans to be property rather than human beings.

In 1999 Philip D. Morgan wrote a chapter entitled, “Rethinking Early American Slavery.” In it he maintained that although understanding the institution of slavery is key to American history, it is often glossed over or ignored by broad histories of America. He said, “the study of early American slavery has placed itself in the margins through loss of definition and coherence.”57 According to Morgan, Donald Wright’s 1990 call to move the focus away from Southern plantation slavery was answered, and as a result, the picture of slavery in America has become so complex that historians no longer know how to integrate it into larger histories. Not all is lost, however, and Morgan believed that “If slavery can be represented fully, its story will be synonymous with that of America.”58 Rather than moving the complex narrative of slavery to the margins of history, Morgan called for scholars to make it, in all its complexities, the center. This dissertation attempts to place slavery squarely in the center of New England history in order to show how it affected the religious culture there and how religious culture, in turn, affected slavery. Furthermore, Morgan reminded his reader how important context is for understanding history and for describing the complexity that rich histories entail. He wrote,

Only context can show that slavery was no static or monolithic institution, but was rather astonishingly diverse and complicated, ever unfolding and dynamic… Only context can

show that there was no fixed racial divide but rather a penumbra of negotiability and permeability between masters and slaves, whites and blacks,… [that] all people had a measure of latitude to maneuver in accord with their capacities, opportunities, and interests. Only context can reveal the real evil of slavery.  

Scholars have certainly uncovered a great deal of diversity in the history of slavery in colonial New England, but when historians fail to acknowledge the religious context of this slavery they are missing an essential part of the story. Scholarly attention to New England has shown us that Christianity was an important influence within the colonial context, but religion has not been adequately taken into account in discussions of slavery, the slave trade, and the emergence of race essentialism in America. Historians of colonial New England would be well advised to take Morgan seriously. It is becoming increasingly clear that slavery was an important part of colonial New England and that historians cannot ignore it. Similarly, religion was an essential part of the colonial context and that also cannot be ignored. In order to provide a more accurate picture of puritan New England, historians need to investigate how religion, slavery, and racism interacted and influenced each other. Considering religion without taking slavery into account is inadequate, as is confronting slavery without engaging religion. This dissertation attempts to consider religion and slavery in order to provide a deeper and more accurate account of both.

The following chapter will begin this investigation by examining colonial texts that discussed slavery in order to show how religious perspectives influenced arguments that favored and opposed the institution and to illustrate that traditional Christian views about universal humanity began to lose favor. Throughout much of the colonial period, authors used their understanding of the bible and Christian tradition in order to argue about whether colonists could justify enslaving human beings. Early supporters of the institution maintained that slavery was

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part of God’s plan for ordering society, while those who opposed it claimed that the horrors associated with the trade made it unchristian. Although they disagreed about the morality of slavery, most colonial authors continued to maintain that Africans were human beings who were spiritually, if not temporally, equal to whites. This meant that abolitionist arguments largely focused on whether or not Christianity allowed for slavery, not on whether Africans were human beings. This began to change in the years leading up to the Revolution, however, as Christians began to view their religion in more individualistic terms. Changes to the Northern population, economy, and law contributed to a shift in religious perspective that moved morality away from a focus on communalism towards a more individual focus. This shift in turn allowed supporters of the slave trade to draw more heavily on whites’ prejudices to call into question the humanity of Africans in order to justify enslaving them.
CHAPTER TWO

“THE BLACK-SKIN’D AND THE WHITE SKIN’D
BELONGING ALL OF THE SAME SPECIES:”
THE CENTRALITY OF HUMANITY IN COLONIAL DEBATES ABOUT SLAVERY

The institution of slavery in early colonial New England was complicated by the widespread religious belief that slaves were human beings who could and should be converted. Slaves were simultaneously considered possessions and human beings, which distinguished them from the rest of the New England population. Unlike other forms of property, over which New Englanders were certain that God had given them dominion, slaves walked a fine line between human being, whom God created in his image, and property, that colonial Christians could dominate. Slaves were undoubtedly understood as personal property, but they were more than that because of the religious tradition in New England that maintained that all people, regardless of color or legal status, were children of the same God. During the first years of colonial settlement, most prominent Christians agreed that all people, irrespective of complexion, were descendants of Adam and Eve, who were created at the beginning of time in God’s image. This meant that slaves were ideally seen as different only in their legal status, and consequently, those who engaged in debates about the morality of slavery often did so by reaffirming Africans’ humanity and downplaying their status as property in order to argue that slavery was unchristian and went against God’s will. In the course of the eighteenth century, European colonists began to view slaves more and more as animal-like property, but an influential segment of the New England population remained firm in their assertion that slaves and Africans were fully human, and many

60 It should be noted that many of the abolitionist authors during this time were Quakers, but there were also many influential puritans who held similar views. Furthermore, the fact that Quakers’ abolitionist works were being printed and distributed during a time when Quakerism was controversial suggests that there was significant support for their views on this topic.
used this position to argue for abolition, while those who supported slavery came to dehumanize Africans in order to support the trade. During the colonial period, slaves were degraded and treated inhumanely, but the assumption of most early authors remained that they were nonetheless human. This meant that colonial abolitionists focused on proving that although most Christians believed that God intended for society to be ordered into hierarchies, slavery was nonetheless an immoral practice.

This chapter will look at colonial texts that explicitly discussed slavery to show how those who supported the institution and those who opposed it used their understandings of Christianity in order to make their claims. Early colonists who argued that slavery was permissible maintained that the bible clearly showed that God allowed his people to enslave other human beings and that it provided a way for Europeans to integrate Africans into New England society. Abolitionists, on the other hand, argued that Christianity did not allow for the cruelty of slavery and that because Africans were human beings, they could not be treated like chattel. These initial debates were about the morality of slavery, not about the humanity of slaves, but this would change. During the seventeenth century, New Englanders viewed slaves as part of their communal society, which was characterized by a high degree of collective solidarity, and within this context, their humanity was generally not questioned. This communal view of society was gradually displaced by a more commercial ethos, however, and New Englanders came to embrace a more individualistic view of Christianity. Moral virtue became associated with the actions of individuals, rather than the society as a whole, and this shift in religious

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62 Although this chapter is meant to discuss debates about slavery in colonial New England, it nonetheless includes texts that were published in London as well as many that were published in North America. The English texts are meant to further illustrate issues that were important to colonial Christians in the American Northeast. New England puritanism cannot be clearly distinguished from other forms of British religious life, so including text that were written by Englishmen and published in Europe are useful for understanding the larger religious context of the time. Additionally, although American puritans were dealing with different communal and economic changes than Europeans, the issues discussed in British publications were also present in North American texts, suggesting that colonial authors often understood their circumstances in much the same way as their English counterparts.
perspective allowed colonists to embrace the idea that slaves were primarily property, rather than members of society, and that their treatment was therefore largely a private issue.

Although seventeenth-century slaves were ideally viewed as human beings, it is important to note that this did not mean that they were ever considered equal to their owners. From the very beginning, colonial Northerners were divided into social hierarchies. In John Winthrop’s famous speech, “A Model of Christian Charity,” the governor described how members of his Christian commonwealth would be knit together as one body in love. He said, “All the parts of this body being thus united are made so contiguous in a special relation as they must needs partake of each other's strength and infirmity; joy and sorrow, weal and woe. If one member suffers, all suffer with it, if one be in honor, all rejoice with it.”63 Ideally, colonial New Englanders would serve different functions, but they would all unite for the success and well being of the community. The Plymouth colonists had a similar vision when they entered into a compact in 1620 in which they “promised to ‘covenant and combine our selves together into a civill body politick, for our better ordering and preservation’ and to frame just and equal laws which all would obey.”64 Expressions like these can be easily misunderstood and can leave a modern reader with the false impression that colonial New Englanders largely rejected social distinctions. Although members of the ideal society would unite for the common good, for these bodies to survive, the community needed people to serve as the hands and feet as well as the head. In other words, unity did not imply equality, and the presence of slaves and servants clearly illustrated this point. As John Demos explained in *A Little Commonwealth*, “most servants lived on quite intimate terms with the families of their masters; but intimacy did not in

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this case imply equality.” 65 Both contracted servants and slaves held an inferior status within the family and the larger society, and this distinction was considered necessary and divinely sanctioned. As Cotton Mather explained in his famous work A Good Master Well Served, “tis’ come to pass, that in such a [domestic] Society there must be a Superiority, and an Inferiority; there must be some who are to Command, and there must be some who are to Obey…” 66 Benjamin Wadsworth similarly described masters as their slaves’ “Superiors” and explained, “If those Servants who pretend and profess to be Christians, are rude and unmannerly to their Masters, carry it as tho’ they were their equals… I say if they do thus, then they expose the Christian Religion (which they profess) to be blaspem’d and ill spoken of. Those who dont honour their Masters, they dishonour God by breaking his plain commands.” 67 Part of accepting one’s status as inferior was performing whatever duties one’s master required. Assuming they were not being told to break any of God’s or man’s laws, servants were to obey their masters and, according to William Ames, were commanded to, “not onely owe this subjection and obedience to good and mild Masters, but also the bad and harsh, 1 Pet. 2. 18. And the reason is, because the primary ground of this duty is not the merit of the Masters, but the ordinance of God, Rom 13. 30.” 68 Colonial New Englaners saw a clear and God given distinction between themselves and their servants, but initially this distinction was also ideally understood as a

During this time, the term “servant” was used to refer to African and Native American slaves, who were considered part of one’s estate, as well as those servants who were contracted for a certain amount of time. (John Demos, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 110)
66 Cotton Mather, A Good Master Well Served (Boston: B. Green, 1696), 5.
John Saffin also declared that social hierarchies were divinely designed in his 1701 proslavery pamphlet, A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet, Entitled, The Selling of Joseph, in which he claimed that there was no evidence to support the claim that “all men have equal right to Liberty, and all outward comforts of his life” and maintained that any such claim “seems to invert the Order that God hath set in the World, who hath Ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be High and Honourable, some to be Low and Despicable…” (George Henry Moore, Notes of the History of Slavery in Massachusetts (New York: D. Appleton, 1866), 251-2).
temporal one. When describing this relationship, Wadsworth said, “Tho’ we are now their Superiors, yet they and we shall soon stand on a level before the Throne of our Judge; who will give to every one according to his ways.” Slaves were socially different from their masters, but many of the most influential Christians of the colonial period clearly maintained that they were nonetheless human beings, sons of Adam, and bore “the Image of God,” a view that was supported by their early status as family members.

Seventeenth-century puritans described slaves as dependent members of the family, and ideally the patriarchal role of the father was to be extended to slaves so that they would to be treated much like children and integrated into the larger society. This made proper behavior by slaves essential because misbehavior resulted in suspicion of the family and concern about the larger social order. According to Lawrence Towner, misconduct caused the family to “suffer materially and [the] family government would come under the suspicion of the authorities, who saw in the family the nursery for good Puritans and in family government the first line of defense against the unregenerate.” Slave owners were expected to integrate their slaves into society, and in order for this process to be successful, the servant had to be treated first and foremost like a member of the family, not primarily like property. While the family was meant to integrate the servant into culture, as early as the end of the seventeenth century, slave owners were no longer succeeding in this task, and according to Towner, this led to increased tensions between slaves and owners. This continued to be a problem in New England, and well into the eighteenth century Nathaniel Appleton expressed his concern about the integration of slaves. He wrote,

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When a slave is introduced into a family, at once commences an amazing distinction: they are indeed among us allowed to be of the human species; yet so very inferior, as scarcely to be intitled to any of its privileges...for as to eating, drinking and sleeping, they are allowed them for the same reason that the beasts are, to support life and vigour, to do out labor; but as to choice or property, it is certain they can have none...they are allowed by us to be of our species, yet so very low that they first idea which children have of slaves is, that they are not intitled to the same tenderness, nor even justice, that whites are.  

George Berkeley was similarly concerned with how colonists were treating their slaves and their refusal to integrate them into the larger culture, concerns that he expressed in a 1731 sermon that he preached to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. He spoke to members of the Society shortly after moving to Rhode Island and told them that most slaves there were not baptized and that in addition to treating Native American servants poorly, colonists also had an “irrational contempt for the blacks, as creatures of another species, who had no right to be instructed or admitted to the sacraments...” Although the goal of integrating slaves into the larger society through their connection to the family was never as successful as early New Englanders had hoped it would be, the idea that slaves were members of the family was nonetheless significant because it reinforced their humanity and their human potential in important ways. The fact that slaves were originally understood as members of the household who influenced how outsiders viewed the family and the stability of the larger culture meant that they were more than just personal property. The focus on community that was essential to early New England religious thought and life supported the view that slaves had the potential to be molded by their owners into valuable members of society, which reinforced their humanity and distinguished them from other forms of personal property. Although this was the perspective and

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goal of the first settlers in Massachusetts Bay, this assumption did not last, and as New
England’s religious culture moved away from a focus on communalism towards a more
individual focus on morality, there was less importance placed on integrating slaves into the
family structure and the larger social body, which allowed colonists to think of them primarily as
property rather than fellow human beings.

Although Africans’ humanity was obvious to many Christians, regardless of whether they
supported slavery or abolition, by the turn of the eighteenth-century this view was obviously
debated by some colonists, as religious men had already felt the need to clarify the issue. In a
number of tracts from the turn of the seventeenth century, authors clearly stated that slaves were
fully human, which suggests that there were already people debating this point. In 1680, for
example, Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican minister, published The Negro’s and Indians Advocate
in which he discussed the need for British colonists to provide African slaves and Native
Americans with a Christian education. In this text he said that some North American colonists
had come to view Africans as inhuman and that this perspective led them to deny slaves their
God-given right to religion. He wrote,

[a] position hath been formed; and privately (and as it were in the dark) handed to and
again, which is this, That the Negro’s, though in their Figure they carry some
resemblances of Manhood, yet are indeed no Men… But for this here, I may say, that if
Atheism and Irreligion were the true Parents who gave it Life… it hath acquired
sufficient strength and reputation to support it self; being now able not only to maintain
its ground, but to bid defiance to all its Opposers …

According to Godwyn, the unchristian view that Africans were less than human was already
gaining support by the year 1680, and this perspective was making it difficult to convince
colonists to provide their slaves with a Christian education. As early as 1693 the Society of
Friends also published a tract in which they emphasized that Africans were human beings in

need of salvation. This publication unequivocally stated that, “it is freely to be preached unto all, without Exception, and that *Negroes, Blacks* and *Tawnies* are a real part of Mankind, for whom Christ hath shed his precious blood, and are capable of Salvation, as well as *White Men*…”

Clearly some colonists were already questioning the humanity of non-European slaves. Godwyn unambiguously expressed his concern about this issue, and there would have been no need for such an explicit statement of personhood from the Society of Friends unless there had been debate about it. In his famous work *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial*, Samuel Sewall similarly emphasized the humanity of dark-skinned people. In this text he argued against the common claim that slavery was permissible because God allowed ancient Israelites to enslave others. He maintained that Christianity had changed this because unlike Judaism, which was a religion intended for a specific group, Christianity was intended for all people. The universality of Christianity made it so that enslaving any person was equivalent to ancient Israelites enslaving one of their own, which God clearly forbade. Sewall wrote, “These *Ethiopians*, as black as they are; seeing they are the Sons and Daughters of the First *Adam*, the Brethren and Sisters of the Last *ADAM*, and the Offspring of *GOD*; They ought to be treated with a Respect agreeable.”

Like the Quakers before him, Sewall emphasized the humanity of Africans with this pamphlet. His primary concern was showing that the advent of Christianity had changed the religious legality of slavery, but in order to do this he first stated without a doubt that Africans were human beings and deserved to be treated as such.

The problem with arguments like those mentioned above was that most New Englanders believed that God intended for societies to be hierarchical and allowed for human beings to be enslaved. Asserting their humanity could be used to argue for better treatment, but for most

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colonists, it did not require manumission. Even early supporters of the slave trade described Africans as human beings in need of salvation. Godwyn, for instance, was concerned about the conversion of slaves, but he did not call for their freedom. Richard Baxter had made similar points in his *Christian Directory* in which he maintained that, “A certain degree of servitude or slavery is lawful” and that it was acceptable to enslave people taken in just wars, as long as their salvation was not hindered by their servitude. Although he believed that slavery was permissible in some circumstances, he nonetheless insisted that the current slave trade was problematic because not all Africans were being taken justly. He wrote,

> To go as pirates and catch up poor negroes or people of another land, that never forfeited life or liberty, and to make them slaves, and sell them, is one of the worst kinds of thievery in the world; and such persons are to be taken for the common enemies of mankind; and they that buy them and use them as beasts, for their mere commodity, and betray, or destroy, or neglect their souls, are fitter to be called incarnate devils than christians, though they be no christians whom they so abuse.

Baxter agreed with Godwyn that enslaving human beings was not inherently immoral and that slaves’ need for salvation could not be ignored. His concern was not that Europeans were enslaving human beings, but that they were trading *innocent* people and failing to convert them.

Cotton Mather made a similar argument in his famous pamphlet, *The Negro Christianized*, which he published in 1706. Mather, who was also not opposed to slavery, nonetheless clarified that slaves were people regardless of their legal status. Although Mather never called for the

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Mather apparently agreed with Baxter on many issues and included this quote in, Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana* (Boston: B. Green, 1710), 21-23.
80 Baxter went on to explain that because innocent people could not be enslaved, those who owned Africans who they suspected were taken unjustly were committing a grave sin and had a Christian obligation to free them. (Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory, or, A sum of practical theologie and cases of conscience* (London: Robert White, 1673), 559-560.)
abolition of slavery, and in fact owned slaves himself, he was still concerned about how owners were behaving toward their slaves and implored them to educate their slaves in Christianity and treat them with relative kindness. Mather wrote, “Show yourselves Men, and let Rational arguments have their Force upon you, to make you treat, not as Bruits but as Men, those Rational Creatures whom God has made your Servants.”81 Mather’s point was clear, although servants could be held in perpetual bondage, they were nonetheless rational beings, not animals, and should be treated accordingly.82 He also clarified that slavery was permissible under God’s law, writing, “What Law is it, that Sets the Baptised Slave at Liberty? Not the Law of Christianity: that allows of Slavery… Christianity directs a Slave, upon his embracing the Law of the Redeemer, to satisfy himself That he is the Lords Free-man, tho’ he continues a Slaves.”83 Though Mather was clear throughout his essay that slavery was permissible, he nonetheless expressed his belief that slaves were human. He did this implicitly by emphasizing that they could and should be converted, but he was also at times more explicit. At one point he unambiguously stated that slaves had souls and criticizes those who claimed otherwise writing, “It has been caviled, by some, that it is questionable Whether the Negroes have Rational Souls, or no. But let that Bruitish insinuation be never Whispered any more.”84 He then went on to say that slaves were capable of benefiting from a Christian education because they had “reasonable” souls. Mather also wrote about how Christian masters should treat their slaves, writing, “They are Men, and not Beasts that you have bought, and they must be used accordingly. ‘Tis true; They are Barbarous. But so were our own Ancestors… Christianity will be the best cure for this

81 Cotton Mather, The Negro Christianized (Boston: B. Green, 1706), 4.
82 This is not to say that Cotton Mather viewed Africans as complete equals to Europeans. He was certainly not able to step entirely outside of the larger culture, but his insistence their humanity was nonetheless significant. For more on how Mather’s writings objectified and disparaged Africans, see Dana D. Nelson, “Economics of Morality and Power: Reading ‘Race’ in Two Colonial Contexts,” in A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America, Frank Shuffelton, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19-38.
84 Cotton Mather, The Negro Christianized (Boston: B. Green, 1706), 14.
Barbarity.” Mather was clear that slaves were not animals and that any difference between Europeans and Africans was cultural and not innate. Although they were property under the law, Mather insisted that this was the primary difference between slaves and free persons. Slaves could and should be educated and converted to Christianity because they were fully human, a point that Mather did not want to be lost on his audience.

In 1701, John Saffin wrote a tract entitled *A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet, Entitled, The Selling of Joseph,* and in it he also did not deny the humanity of African slaves. He was writing in response to Samuel Sewall’s tract and agreed with him that Africans were descendants of Adam and Eve, but Saffin denied that this meant that they had to be treated as equals. He wrote, “We grant it for a certain and undeniable verity, That all Mankind are the Sons and Daughters of Adam, and the Creatures of God: But it doth not therefore follow that we are bound to love and respect all men alike; this under favour we must take leave to deny…” While Saffin agreed that African slaves were fully human, he denied that this meant that they could not be enslaved and maintained that attempting to treat all people as equals would, “invert the Order that God hath set in the World,” because God “Ordained different degrees and order of men.” Saffin was in line with other Christians who had emphasized that temporal differences were part of God’s plan and that these differences permitted colonists to own and trade slaves. He did differ from them a bit, however, in his conclusion of this tract. Although he admitted the humanity of Africans throughout the text, he nonetheless finished by describing “The Negroes Character.” There he quoted a poem that described people of African descent, saying “Cowardly and cruel are those Blacks Innate,/ Prone to Revenge, Imp of inveterate hate./ He that exasperates

them, soon spies/ Mischief and Murder in their very eyes./ Libidinous, Deceitful, False and Rude,/ The spume Issue of Ingratitude./ The Premises consider’d, all may tell,/ How near good Joseph they are parallel."\footnote{88}Sewall differed from authors like Godwyn, Baxter, and Mather when he finished his tract by emphasizing that it was invalid to compare African slaves to Joseph because their character was so beneath his. Although he insisted on their humanity, by describing people of African descent as a monolithic group with no redeeming qualities, Saffin concluded his refutation of Sewall in a way that reaffirmed the sense that blacks were naturally inferior, even though he never explicitly stated that position.

In addition to reaffirming Africans’ humanity, many of the above-mentioned publications also illustrated the importance that European colonists had begun to place on skin tone. Godwyn, for example, explained that he would be “spending Time in this Discourse to prove the Negro’s Humanity, and to shew that neither their Complexion nor Bondage, Descent nor Country, can be any impediment...” to their conversion.\footnote{89} The Quaker pamphlet mentioned above also clearly stated that non-whites were just as capable of salvation as white men; Sewall explained that although Africans were dark, they were without a doubt born of the same original parents as lighter skinned people; and Mather also went on to dispute the claim that slaves were not entitled to any consideration because of their skin tone. He explained,

Their \emph{Complexion} sometimes is made an Argument, why nothing should be done for them. A \emph{Gay} sort of argument! As if the great God went by the \emph{Complexion} of Men, in His Favours to them? As if none but \emph{Whites} might hope to be Favoured and Accepted with God!... As if, because a people, from the long force of the African \emph{Sun & Soyl} upon them,... are come at length to have the small \emph{Fibres} of their \emph{Veins}, and the Blood in them, a little more Interspersed thro’ their Skin than other People, this must render them

By the turn of the eighteenth-century, the humanity of African slaves was already becoming a contentious issue and it was already closely associated with their complexion. Even so, many influential New England Christians remained resolved in their religiously based belief that slaves were fully human, and publications that argued explicitly for their inhumanity were largely absent. Slavery had already become so closely associated with Africans that their skin tone was being used as a rationale for enslaving them, but this connection between color and social status did not seem to be a religious problem in and of itself for men like Godwyn, Baxter, and Mather. Rather, it became a problem when Africans’ complexion was being used to suggest that God did not favor them, that they were not able to benefit from a Christian education, or that they were subhuman. The early publications cited above were obviously not the end of the debate, however, and Christian abolitionists continued to confront these issues in their writings, though they added that because complexion had no effect on Africans’ status as human beings, it made enslaving them based on their color unacceptable.

Nearly sixty years after Mather first published *The Negro Christianized*, many abolitionist authors continued to confront the issue of skin tone when arguing that the humanity of slaves required that they be freed. For instance, John Woolman began his discussion of complexion by saying, “Through the Force of long Custom, it appears needful to spek in Relation to Colour.”  


when he argued that the reason why it was considered acceptable to enslave black but not white people was “owing chiefly to the Idea of Slavery being connected with the Black Colour, and Liberty with the White: - And where false Ideas are twisted into our Minds, it is with Difficulty we get fairly disentangled.”  

Decades after Cotton Mather reminded his fellow Christians that God did not favor people based on skin tone, Woolman was forced to confront this issue again in order to argue against the slave trade. He felt that he had to dispel the increasingly common belief that Africans were intellectually inferior to whites, that this was connected to their color, and that it allowed whites to enslave them. 

Anthony Benezet similarly emphasized that Africans and Europeans were inherently equal. In his *A Short Account of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes*, he included portions of a British publication written by J. Philmore entitled *Two Dialogues on the Man-Trade*. The quotation explained that,  

The *African* Blacks are as properly and truly Men, as the *European* Whites; they are both of the same Species, and are originally descended from the same Parents; – they have the same rational Powers as we have; they are free moral Agents, as we are, and many of them have as good natural Genius, as good and as brave a Spirit, as any of those to whom they are made Slaves. To trade in *Blacks*, then, is to trade in Men; the black-skin’d and the white-skin’d belonging all of the same Species, all of the human Race, are by Nature upon an Equality; one Man in a State of Nature, as we are with Respect to the Inhabitants of *Guiney*, and they with respect to us, is not superior to another Man, nor has any Authority or Dominion over him …God gave to Man Dominion over the *Fish of the Sea*, and over the *Fowl of the Air*, and over the *Cattle*, and over all the *Earth*…but not to any one Man over another…  

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Benezet continued to emphasize this point and made a very similar claim in his 1766 publication, *A Caution and Warning* (Philadelphia: Miller).
It had become clear to Philmore and Benezet that the primary reason that men were able and willing to engage in the slave trade was because they had altered their view of slaves and had begun to think of Africans as being “Creatures of a Kind somewhat inferior” to whites.\textsuperscript{95} Not only was skin color being used to explain why Africans, rather than Europeans, were being enslaved, but abolitionists were also working against the view that Africans were significantly different than Europeans. They were not simply seen as culturally or temporally inferior to whites anymore, but were believed to be inherently different from them and even a different sort of being, a view that would only gain support.

Although this view of Africans as subhuman was certainly a problem for abolitionists, many Christians believed that God had ordained slavery as a way to order society, so recognizing their humanity was not enough to convince people of the abolitionist position. The most vocal Christians at this time, whether slave owners or abolitionists, agreed that Africans were human beings, even if this view was losing ground among less prominent members of the society. These figures obviously disagreed on what this shared humanity meant for the institution of slavery, however. As a result, colonial abolitionists often focused on showing that it was wrong to enslave people, rather than focusing primarily on proving Africans’ humanity. Colonial abolitionists never questioned that slaves were persons, which was evident in their anti-slavery writings. They focused on showing that God’s mandated order did not allow for slavery and typically took the humanity of slaves for granted when making this claim.

Whereas the examples above illustrate how some authors explicitly stated that slaves were humans and therefore could not be viewed as fundamentally different in order to justify their enslavement, others focused on how their personhood required abolition in more subtle

\textsuperscript{95} Anthony Benezet, \textit{A Short Account of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negores} (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1762), 31.
ways. For instance, some authors used language that suggested slaves’ humanity to create a connection between them and the reader even when they were not clearly confronting their humanity. James Swan, for example, wrote,

> If you have not lost all sense of benevolence and compassion towards those of your brethren who have capacities, understanding and souls, and who were born to inherit the same salvation with you; I say if you are not destitute of every christian, humane and manly sensibility, you certainly must feel for those oppressed people, when you consider what miseries, devastations and massacred among them you have be the authors of.\(^96\)

Here, in addition to stating that slaves had souls and the same “capacities” as whites, Swan also referred to them as “brethren” and “oppressed people.” Rather than unequivocally stating that slaves were human beings, he took this point for granted and simply reminded his reader of this fact while imploring them to sympathize with slaves accordingly. Although he did not explicitly state that whites were unjustly viewing or treating slaves as animals, his language nonetheless emphasized humanity. Discussing the sin of “man stealing” was another way in which authors affirmed slaves’ humanity in order to illustrate the immorality of the slave trade.\(^97\) By arguing that the law of Exodus, which stated that “He that Stealeth a Man and Selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to Death,”\(^98\) applied to African slaves, authors were not just using the Bible to condemn slave owners and slave traders, but they were also making an implicit claim about slaves’ humanity. In order for this divine edict to apply to slaves, they first had to be considered human beings. Consequently, by using this Biblical verse to condemn

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\(^96\) James Swan, *A Dissuasion from the Slave-Trade* (Boston: Greenleaf, 1773), 41.


According to Lawrence W. Towner, William Ames also used the Golden Rule to call the validity of slavery into question. Ames’ book “*De conscientia, et eius iure, vel casibus*, did not flatly prohibit slavery, but, like Sewall’s work, it made of slavery an extremely doubtful insitution, particularly for the slaveholder…on the part of the master,…it is unlawful because his actions violate the Golden Rule.” (Lawrence W. Towner, “The Sewall-Saffin Dialogue on Slavery,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 21:1 (1964): 45).

slavery, authors who clearly believed in the humanity of Africans were relying on others to share this view in order to make their arguments convincing.

Many abolitionists also based their anti-slavery arguments on the idea that the “Golden Rule,” “To do to all men as we would they should do to us,” applied to slaves.99 This was certainly understood to be a rule to direct interactions between people, and was not meant to govern how Christians treated their non-human property. According to this anti-slavery argument, because Europeans would certainly not want to be held in bondage, they could not in good conscience enslave Africans. Elihu Coleman was one of many authors who made this argument, and he did so in 1733. He used the idea of the Golden Rule in order to counter the argument that slavery was divinely sanctioned because ancient Israelites, although not allowed to enslave each other, were permitted to enslave “infidels and strangers.” In response to this claim Coleman wrote, “Now I do not find that it is any more allowable to make a Slave of an Unbeliever, than a Believer, seeing we are commanded, Mat. 7.12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”100 According to Coleman, Jesus’ command took precedence over Old Testament regulations about slavery, and by placing the Golden Rule at the fore of his Christian understanding, he was able to counter every argument that supporters of slavery presented. If, at its base, Christianity was about following the Golden Rule, then Coleman maintained that it was impossible for slave owners to rationalize their behavior.101 Examples of slavery in the Hebrew

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101 A similar argument was presented by Anthony Benezet, who wrote, “That our blessed Redeemer has enjoined us to do unto others as we would they should do unto us; and that it will be those who have been righteous and merciful to their Fellow Creatures, that will be intitled [sic] to the Mercy of the Great Judge of Heaven and Earth, before
Bible, arguments about the economic advantages of the institution, claiming that slaves were better off being Christianized in North America than remaining heathens in Africa, none of these arguments were convincing if the reader accepted that he would not want to be enslaved and that Christianity forbid anyone to do unto others what they would not have done unto them. This is another example of an argument that took for granted slaves’ humanity rather than making an explicit argument in favor of this view. Authors hoped that by using this argument they would be able to invalidate the claim that enslaving human beings was acceptable by arguing that Christianity did not allow people to treat each other this way, which of course required the belief that slaves were in fact human.

Similar arguments also focused on slaves being forced to sin and therefore expressed concern about their souls and free will. Some authors stated outright that African slaves had souls, which meant that they were people, as this was a religious concept reserved for human beings. For example, as mentioned above, James Swan described slaves as, “brethren who have capacities, understanding and souls, and who were born to inherit the same salvation…” Other arguments also assumed that slaves had souls, even if they did not state it overtly. For instance, many abolitionists claimed that when Africans were enslaved they were forced to sin, something of which only human beings were capable. Similarly, because they were left with no choice in the matter, some argued that slaves were stripped of their free will, which was an affront to God because free will was a gift from him to all humanity. According to one author, “when we force whom we must all appear, to give an Account of the Deeds done in the Body.” (Anthony Benezet, A Short Account of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1762), 26). He also used this Golden Rule argument in Observations on the inslaving, importing, and purchasing on Negroes…” (Germantown, [Pa.]: Christopher Sower, 1760), 4). James Swan also wrote, “And who is that man that will do unto any person, either white or black, Christian or Savage, contrary to what he would that he should do to him?” (James Swan, A Dissuasion from the Slave-Trade (Boston: Greenleaf, 1773), 34).

103 James Swan, A Dissuasion from the Slave-Trade (Boston: Greenleaf, 1773), 41.
their [slaves] will, this is a manifest Robbery of that noble Gift their bountiful Creator hath given them, and is a right down Contradiction to the...Attributes of God, and consequently an Anti-Christian Practice.”

The argument was that enslaving human beings was wrong and that it went against God’s will, and although it certainly implied that Africans were human, that was not the primary focus of this claim.

Many of these arguments also went on to discuss the fact that slaves would be held accountable for their actions, even if their hands were forced, which presented a threat to their salvation. Because Africans were equal to whites in God’s eyes, these authors argued that they were responsible for their actions and held to the same moral standards. This was a problem because the institution of slavery made it impossible for slaves to live according to the gospel. One example was of slaves killing themselves during their passage to North America or once they arrived. They were driven to this by the conditions in which they were kept, and they were unaware of the gravity of this sin because they were not Christians. Even so, they were responsible for this behavior and would be condemned for it.

Similarly, some authors argued that slaves were unjustly forced to sin in order to survive. One author described how slaves were forced to,

work on the First Day of the Week...And to get rid of their miserable Tortures, may kill themselves and others...To maintain Self-preservation, they unavoidably must steal...

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104 John Hepburn, *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule, or An Essay to Prove the Unlawfulness of Making Slaves of Men* (New York: n. p., 1715), 1. Coleman made a similar point writing, “we may observe, when God had created Man, that he gave him a free Will, and would not compel the Will of Man, no not to that which was Gods, much less to that which was Evil; therefore we ought not to compel our Fellow Creatures.” (Elihu Coleman, *A Testimony Against the Antichristian Practice of Making Slaves of Men* (Boston: n. p., 1733), 14.)


when they are catcht their Master will ask them, *Do you not deserve to be hung up and Beaten* and here they must bear False witness against themselves,… [and] in great necessity of Good and Payment, and have it not of their own, they unavoidably must covet it of their Neighbours.\(^{107}\)

Again, these authors were concerned that slaves had no choice but to sin, which was putting their souls at risk. Not only were they forced to live in wretched conditions in this life, but because they had to sin, they would be punished in the next life as well. Another author took this argument a step further stating that, “All the vices which are charged upon the Negroes… such as Idleness, Treachery, Theft, and the like, are the genuine offspring of slavery, and serve as an argument to prove that they were not intended, by Providence for it.”\(^{108}\) Here Benjamin Rush claimed not only that slavery was the cause of slaves’ sinfulness, but he also went on to argue that this was evidence that Africans were not meant to be enslaved.

In addition to being concerned over the salvation of slaves who were forced to sin, it was also clear to these authors that God would not sanction slavery because it caused Africans to go against his will. According to Nathaniel Appleton, “Africans, which are carry’d to our West-India islands, are carried from a land of ignorance and innocence to a land of glaring wickedness, where they are likely to become seven-fold more the children of satan, than when in their native country.”\(^{109}\) Although slaves were not exposed to Christianity while in Africa, Appleton argued that the sins they were forced to commit once they were enslaved were more serious stumbling block towards their salvation than their ignorance of the Christian gospel. Similarly, there were those who focused on how the slave trade hindered conversion among African people. Although it seems that many advocates of slavery argued that the institution brought about a greater good

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\(^{109}\) Nathaniel Appleton, *Considerations on Slavery* (Boston: Edes & Gill, 1767), 9.
because it brought Africans to Christianity, one abolitionist maintained that by owning and selling slaves colonists were in fact creating the, “greatest and most deep-rooted prejudice against the Christian religion” among Africans and African Americans, which was hindering conversion and salvation among blacks. According to these arguments, rather than bringing Africans to the Christian message, the slave trade was in fact turning African people against God. As another author wrote, the evils of slavery were “enough to make them [slaves] believe, there is no God at all, and harden them in Idolatrous Worship, and make them blaspheme against the holy God…” These authors did not state directly that slaves were human beings with souls and free will. Instead, they expressed concern over their salvation, making their arguments primarily about the right to enslave people, not about who was considered human. These arguments took the concerns of men like Godwyn, Mather and Baxter a step further than they had. Though they had also reaffirmed the humanity of slaves and were concerned about their conversion, they did not believe that slavery was necessarily a stumbling block to their salvation. These abolitionists, on the other hand, maintained that the institution of slavery made it impossible for Africans to live good, Christian lives, and therefore argued that it had to stop.

There was also a great deal of concern among many early abolitionists about the sanctity of slaves’ marriages and families. The family was an essential part of New England religious life, and Northern Christians believed that the family structure mirrored the relationship between

110 Many abolitionists mentioned this argument and attempted to counter it in their writings, which suggests that it was a common justification for slavery. For an example of a pro-slavery document that used this justification, see: Malachy Postlethwayt, The National and Private Advantages of the African Trade Considered: Being an Enquiry, How far it concerns the Trading Interest of Great Britain... (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1746.)
God and his followers. As a result, having a proper family hierarchy was a religious as well as a social duty. This meant that breaking up slave families was particularly problematic. It complicated how New Englanders would integrate slaves into the society since they were not able to mirror the social order in their own lives, but it also went against God’s plan. Because slaves were property that could be freely sold and traded and were originally expected to take on the role of children in their owners’ households, this made it impossible for them to fulfill their duties as parents, husbands, and wives, and the very act of taking or selling slaves destroyed the sacred familial bond that they had established. Samuel Sewall explained, “It is…most lamentable to think, how in taking Negros out of Africa, and Selling of them here, That which GOD has joined together men do bodily rend asunder; Men from their Country, Husbands from their Wives, Parents from their Children.” Slavery destroyed the very thing that New Englanders held in such esteem, and Sewell hoped that pointing this out would help to convince colonists of the evil of the trade. Elijah Coleman similarly wrote, “For this Practice of making Slaves tends to many Evils, as parting Man and Wife, and Children from them both, and thereby causing them to commit Adultery with others, and so their Children cannot come to honour them.” Breaking up families was not only a problem because it forced slaves to break God’s commandments, but it also made it impossible for slaves to create proper family structures and model a divine relationship in this life.

In addition to these anti-slavery arguments, Richard Nisbet, a supporter of the institution also confronted the issue of slave marriages. In his pamphlet, *Slavery not Forbidden by Scripture*, he attempted to discredit many of the arguments presented by abolitionists and one of

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those arguments was that it was ethically wrong to tear apart slaves’ families.\footnote{This pamphlet seemed to be largely a response to Benjamin Rush’s abolitionist texts.} He did this by suggesting that Africans were different than Europeans because they were simply not upset when they were separated by sale. He wrote, “Great pains are taken to give high colouring to the affecting scenes between relations when parted at a sale; but I appeal to every one who has ever been present, at the disposal of a cargo, if he has not seen these creatures, separated from their nearest relations without looking after them, or wishing them farewell.”\footnote{Richard Nisbet, \textit{Slavery not forbidden by Scripture, or A defence of the West-India planter} (Philadelphia: n. p., 1773), 22-23.} This issue was important enough that even supporters of the trade felt the need to confront it in their writings. When discussing slaves’ families, abolitionist authors wanted their readers to sympathize with slaves as human beings and described a familiar institution in order to do so. Rather than arguing that it would be acceptable to break up of slaves’ families or that this simply was not occurring, supporters of the trade, like Nisbet, maintained that because Africans did not develop familial bonds in the same way that Europeans did, there was no need to worry about splitting up their families. Not only does this example illustrate the importance placed of families within the colonial Northeast, but it also illustrates a larger issue. By arguing that Africans did not establishing emotional bonds with one another, Nisbet was no longer working within a traditional framework. By denying that Africans experiences what was thought to be an essential part of human nature, he made a pro-slavery argument that also reinforced a view that Africans were fundamentally different than Europeans. While abolitionists were arguing against the institution by assuming the shared humanity of slaves, many supporters would come to reject that premise. This, in turn, invalidated many abolitionists’ arguments, and made explicit arguments about humanity more central to later abolitionists’ texts.
Although early colonial authors were clear about slaves’ humanity, later authors wrote with less certainty, as maintaining a view of slaves as simultaneously human beings and property was simply too difficult in the increasingly commercial, individualistic culture. For example, in an address to the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, William Knox made an argument that was similar in many ways to the one outlined about sixty years earlier by Cotton Mather in *The Negro Christinized*. In 1768, He argued that the law needed to be clear that conversion did not free slaves so that owners would be willing to provide their slaves with a Christian education. He maintained that until this point was well defined under the law, colonists could not be expected to educate or convert their slaves because they reasonably feared that doing so would free property that was rightfully theirs.\(^\text{119}\) In addition to his concern over the conversion of slaves, Knox also explicitly stated that slaves should not be treated like “beasts for our use.”\(^\text{120}\) He agreed with many earlier pro-slavery authors on this point, but Knox was less generous in his depiction of Africans. For example, he suggested that they may have been inherently different than whites, and by the end of his address explained that owners may have had little choice but to treat their slaves like animals. Knox stated, “The dull stupidity of the Negro leaves him without any desire for instruction. Whether the Creator originally formed these black people a littler lower than other men, or that they have lost their intellectual powers through disuse, I will not assume the province of determining; but certain it is, that a new Negroe, (as those lately imported from Africa are called), is a complete definition of indolent


In 1731 George Berkeley also preached a sermon to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in which he mentioned the issue of baptizing slaves. After listing a number of misconceptions that New Englanders had about slaves and slavery, he wrote, “To this [list] may be added, an erroneous notion, that the being baptized is inconsistent with a state of slavery.” \(^\text{\text{120}}\) (George Berkeley, “A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts… on February 18, 1731,” in *The Works of George Berkeley, Volume III* (London: J. F. Dove, 1820), 247.)

stupidity.” Unlike Mather, who believed that Africans could benefit from a Christian 
education because of their “rational souls,” Knox described them first and foremost as senseless 
and even went as far as to suggest that God may have created them as slightly lesser beings. 
Although he went on to say that their stupidity did not permit whites to use them like animals or 
deny them, “knowledge of the common salvation,” he nonetheless emphasized their inferiority 
and suggested that they were perhaps naturally different than whites, perspectives that Mather 
and other earlier pro-slavery Christians wrote against explicitly. Knox also went on to compare 
Africans’ mental capacities to animals, writing that they had, “hardly more knowledge of their 
duty, than is common to them with domestic animals, it is no wonder that they are treated like 
brute beasts, or that it should be almost necessary to treat them as such.” Though Knox’s 
message at first glance appeared quite similar authors like Mather, Godwyn, and Baxter, we can 
see that it in fact clashed with theirs in significant ways. Knox emphasized how different 
Africans were from Europeans, suggested that God may have created them that way, and 
considered the possibility that this difference was what pushed owners to treat their slaves as 
chattel. These differences in perspective were substantial and would have presented a problem 
for abolitionists because so many anti-slavery arguments required the reader to first accept the 
premise that Africans were human beings and spiritual equals to Europeans.

Similarly, Richard Nisbet published Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture about seventy 
years after Mather’s The Negro Christianized, and he also described Africans as naturally 
inferior to Europeans. He hesitated to go as far as to claim that they were non-human, but his 
explicit claims that they were innately different were a significant change from those who came

121 William Knox, Three Tracts Respecting the Conversion and Instruction of the Free Indians and Negroe Slaves in the Colonies (London: J. Debrett, 1789), 14.
before him. Whereas earlier authors emphasized that perceived differences between Africans and Europeans resulted from cultural and environmental disparities and that differences in status were temporal, Nisbet took a different approach and suggested that these differences were inherent. He attempted to discredit claims that slavery was unchristian and dismissed arguments that centered on the cruelty of the institution. He did so first by comparing the suffering of slaves to hunted hares and exhausted horses.\textsuperscript{123} He explained that many of the sports that men enjoyed most, like hunting, fishing, and horse racing, require animals to suffer and suggested that the suffering of slaves was a similarly permissible evil. Comparing slaves’ suffering to “torturing the worm and trout, for hours on the sharp-pointed hook,”\textsuperscript{124} would have caused men like Mather concern in and of itself, but Nisbet went on. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
It is impossible to determine, with accuracy, whether their [Africans] intellects or ours are superior, as individuals, no doubt, have not the same opportunities of improving as we have: However, on the whole, it seems probable, that they are a much inferior race of men to the whites in every respect…. I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general, all the other species of man (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor ever any individual, eminent either in action or speculation.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

Although Nisbet described “negroes” as a “race of men,” and refused to state with absolute certainty that they were naturally inferior to whites, he nonetheless represented a significant shift, as he was walking a fine line. He plainly compared slaves to animals, and although he presented a caveat, he clearly believed that people of African descent were naturally different

\textsuperscript{123} Richard Nisbet, \textit{Slavery not forbidden by Scripture, or A defence of the West-India planter} (Philadelphia: n. p., 1773), 2-3.
\textsuperscript{124} John Dunlap made a similar comparison in the same year. Although he did not write directly about sport animals, he wrote, “there are faults in every human institution…He might as well have pondered forth his eloquence against…the continued scene of bloodshed and cruelty exhibited by most of our favourite sports…” (John Dunlap, \textit{Personal Slavery Established, by the Suffrages of Custom and Right Reason} (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773), 10).
\textsuperscript{125} Richard Nisbet, \textit{Slavery not forbidden by Scripture, or A defence of the West-India planter} (Philadelphia: n. p., 1773), 21.
than and inferior to Europeans. Both Mather and Nisbet believed that slavery was permissible, but they had significantly different views about the natural abilities of enslaved people. Whereas Mather believed that differences between slaves and non-slaves were primarily related to education and flatly denied that complexion had any bearing on one’s natural abilities, Nisbet clearly stated his belief that non-whites were naturally inferior. Also, while earlier supporters of slavery like Mather were often concerned about the treatment of slaves and their salvation, Nisbet was intent on downplaying the suffering that slaves endured.

In the same year, 1773, John Dunlap similarly called into question the natural abilities of Africans in his pamphlet, *Personal Slavery Established, by the Suffrages of Custom and Right Reason*. After briefly dismissing a number of anti-slavery tracks with which he was familiar, Dunlap went on to describe Africans as “the most stupid, beastly race of animals in human shape, of any in the whole world,” and stately plainly that they lacked reason. He also did more than simply compare Africans or their suffering to animals, but actually distinguished them from other races of people and grouped them with lesser primates. He claimed that there were four “species of men,” Europeans, Asians, Native Americans, and Africans. Although distinguishing groups by race would not have been problematic in and of itself, he went on to say that he would “subdivide the Africans into five classes, arranging them in the order as they approach nearest to reason, as 1st, Negroes, 2d, Ourang Outangs, 3d, Apes, 4th, Baboons, and

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126 It should be noted that in 1789 Nisbet published a book entitled, *The capacity of negroes for religious and moral improvement considered*. In this work he wrote, “When I mention religion, I hold it needless to appeal to the real follower of the Christian faith, who must necessarily conclude, from the tenets of that doctrine, that a negro has a soul to be saved as well as himself, and of course a capacity for salvation.” Although Nisbet remained sure that people of African descent were innately different from and inferior to whites, he made clear again in 1789 that this did not mean that they were non-human. For more on how abolitionists and supporters of slavery struggled to remain consistent in their arguments, see chapter 6. (Richard Nisbet, *The capacity of negroes for religious and moral improvement considered* (London: James Phillips, 1789), 3.)


It is clear, then, that Dunlap was not simply describing different groups of people based on skin tone, but was making a distinction between human beings and non-human animals and was including Africans with the latter, as he would certainly not have considered Orangutans and Apes to be human.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, colonists began defending slavery by publishing materials that explicitly described Africans and African slaves in non-human terms. At the turn of the seventeenth-century many colonial ministers and abolitionists were concerned that their fellow settlers were treating slaves as animals, and so they attempted to reinforce their Christian view that all people were spiritually equal in order to show that their treatment was wrong. Over time, however, it became increasingly difficult for colonists to simultaneously view slaves as human beings and property. African slaves became dehumanized within colonial culture, which led the way for authors like Nisbet and Dunlap to claim that buying and selling slaves was fundamentally no different than trading livestock, a claim that even some authors who maintained the humanity of slaves came to support. In the early 1770s Thomas Thompson, for example, argued that the African slave trade was, “consistent with principles of humanity and with the laws of revealed religion.” He maintained that buying and selling slaves was not devaluing them or dehumanizing them. According to his argument, “every person is treated as a human being, who is treated according to his lawful state and condition. The buying a slave is taking him as what he is… Here there is no violation of humanity; and the property in such individual is transferable, like all other property.”

Here Thompson maintained that slaves were being treated as human beings precisely because they are being treated like property. He

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130 Thomas Thompson, The African trade for Negro slaves, shewn to be consistent with principles of humanity and with the laws of revealed religion (Canterbury: Simmons and Kirkby, 1772), 28-9.
suggested that acknowledging one’s status and treating him accordingly was humanizing, even if that status was one of property.

Early pro-slavery tracts consistently described Africans as human beings, while simultaneously stressing that this shared origin did not make enslaved and free men equal. This view was in keeping with Christian traditions of the time, which generally took for granted a single creation while also stressing that social distinctions and hierarchies were divinely ordained. Although both pro- and anti-slavery writings in the colonial period tended to assert slaves’ humanity, this view of Africans lost ground in the years leading up to the American Revolution, and recognizing this is important for understanding why abolitionists failed to make much headway before the war. Their arguments relied on a traditional view, which was becoming increasingly outmoded. By the time Nisbet and Dunlap were writing, their claims that Africans were inherently different and inferior to Europeans resonated with many colonists and would have made more sense to many readers than arguments that revolved around the salvation of slaves or concern about their suffering. Stressing slaves’ humanity while simultaneously relegating them to an inferior status opened the door for later authors who would reject their humanity all together, and the following chapters will explain more fully how and why this shift in perspective took place.
CHAPTER THREE

“THEY LIVED, SAITH LEO, LIKE BEASTS:”
POPULAR DEPICTIONS OF AFRICANS IN TRAVEL NARRATIVES

Nearly all colonial New Englanders’ personal encounters with people of African descent came through their interactions with the slave population in North America. Few would have traveled to Africa, but many owned slaves and others would have intermingled with slaves in their work and trade. These intimate interactions, which characterized Northern life, certainly affected how Northerners viewed Africans and people of African descent.¹³¹ As discussed in chapter one, because of New England’s religious culture and the fact that slaves often lived and worked closely with Northern whites, scholars have maintained that they were viewed more as members of the family than as personal property. Historians have argued that in the North, Africans were primarily considered human beings who could and should be converted to Christianity and assimilated into society. Although the previous chapter showed that there were those who strove to integrate slaves into their family structure and who forcefully insisted on the humanity of Africans and slaves, colonial Northerners’ ideas about and perceptions of African people were not only being formed by their personal interactions with slaves or the opinions of those who argued for abolition or wrote about their humanity. Their views were also being molded by popular depictions of Africans, which often emphasized perceived differences between them and Europeans, and these depictions surely influenced Northerners’ views as well. Although Europeans had access to representations of Africa and Africans prior to the slave trade, the amount of information that was available to whites about Africa increased dramatically when

¹³¹ It should be noted that many slave owners in the colonial and American South also lived and worked in close proximity to their slaves, and although plantations with large slave populations were much more common in the South, many Southern slave owners, like their Northern counterparts, owned only a few slaves and worked along side them.
slave traders began writing accounts of their travels. In addition to recounting where they went and what goods they acquired, many of these travelers also took the opportunity to describe what they saw and experienced, and these narratives were replete with cultural prejudice. They were describing distant places that most whites, and many slaves, would never see for themselves and people who seemed strange and exotic and whose cultures were largely unknown. Though the Africans that many North American whites encountered on a daily basis surely seemed very different than those described in these narratives, Europeans and colonists nonetheless relied on these accounts to describe the abstract people whom they were buying and selling, rather than the ones they knew personally. For those New Englanders who did not often encounter black slaves first hand, these portrayals also helped to shape, not only what they thought about Africa and its inhabitants, but also about the slaves in their midst.

The emphasis on the differences between Africans and Europeans that was presented in these accounts was significant because it created important distinctions between slave and non-slaves, which contributed to the gradual move away from a communalist view of New England society towards a more commercial ethos, in which slaves became dehumanized. Religion played a key role in this process as it mediated the shift toward a more individualistic view of Christianity, in which moral virtue and the treatment of slaves became something more centered in individual Christians than in the corporate structures of society. Whereas seventeenth-century Christians attempted to develop a communal society in which slaves played a role, by the eighteenth century that communalism was being replaced by a focus on individual morality. The

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133 It is hard to know for certain how widely disseminated these travel narratives were in New England. Most of them were published in London, but many of the typical descriptions in these accounts were similar to descriptions in abolitionist and pro-slavery tracks, which suggests that many of the ideas presented in these narratives were familiar to colonial Americans.
integration of slaves into the larger culture was therefore not as important as it had previously been, and slave owners were less inclined to view their slaves as dependent members of the family. New Englanders were then able to embrace a different view of slaves, one that described them as fundamentally different than Europeans, because it was no longer a religious requirement that they be incorporated into the community.

Although scientific forms of racism that claimed that Africans were less evolved than Europeans obviously did not develop until well into the nineteenth century, the idea that Africans closely resembled animals was common much earlier. Many have assumed that because colonists had not yet developed scientific forms of racism, they must have believed that the differences they perceived between Africans and Europeans were a result of environment and not inherent, but as early as 1706 Cotton Mather was already chastising his fellow Christians for suggesting that blacks lacked reason or “rational souls.” He also felt the need to remind them that slaves were “Men, and not Beasts” and that their complexion had nothing to do with their “barbarity.”¹³⁴ It seems, then, that in North America there was debate about the nature of African people long before evolutionary theories developed to provide support for claims of their inferiority. By looking at accounts written by Europeans who traveled to Africa we can pinpoint some of the most common ways in which African people were dehumanized and better understand the religious problem that this caused for men like Mather, who were concerned that slaves were being viewed and treated more like property than people. By dehumanizing Africans, the authors of these travel narratives placed them outside of the Adam and Eve paradigm that had historically characterized Christians’ thinking about humanity. Rather than describing them as uncivilized people who were victims of circumstance and could be colded into useful members of a Christian society, these popular depictions described Africans as

fundamentally different than Europeans. They were no longer unfortunate human beings, but were something else entirely. This not only presented a problem for religious people of the time who held fast to their belief in one creation, but it also set the stage for later thinkers who would more explicitly question the humanity of Africans. When natural philosophers like Thomas Jefferson began to focus on the question of whether Africans descended from the same parentage as Europeans, these earlier traveler narratives had already implicitly posed and answered this question.

Though few Europeans or American colonists ever traveled to Africa, they were nonetheless able to learn about the continent second-hand by reading travel narratives that described the people, landscape, religion, and culture found throughout Africa, and these narratives provided North American colonists with a very different picture of people of African descent. Rather than human beings who should be treated with a level of dignity and respect, these narratives described Africans as fundamentally different than Europeans and depicted them as animal-like in implicit as well as explicit ways. When developing their views of Africans, Northerners were not limited by their personal interactions with slaves. Popular writings, like travel narratives, gave whites the impression that they were becoming familiar with African people and culture, and they provided them with a view of Africans that was dramatically different than what they would have encountered in their daily lives. Whereas Africans living in the colonial Northeast would have lived recognizable lives, dressing, eating, and working much like the Europeans who owned them, those living on the content of African were described as living unnaturally barbaric, animalistic, and lazy lives. To say that African slaves lived recognizable lives in North America is not to say that they lived as equals, as their lives were dramatically different than their owners. Even so, the Europeans who owned them would have
expected these differences. Slaves held a different status, and this difference surely influenced things like their dress, diet, and work, but these distinctions would have been accepted and often prescribed by whites. These differences distinguished colonial Europeans from colonial Africans, but slaves were nonetheless expected to live within the confines of a European society and therefore would have been required to dress modestly, eat certain foods, and work certain jobs. These aspects of their lives may have been different, but they were nonetheless socially acceptable based on their inferior legal and social status. This was not the case, however, among Africans on the continent. Their lives, as described by travelers, were not just different, but also unnatural and unacceptable. They were not living within the confines of what was socially acceptable among Europeans, and so their lives were deemed unfit for human beings. These portrayals surely affected how Europeans viewed Africans, and consequently the North American slave population, and it is therefore important to understand the picture that these narratives painted.

One might expect these narratives to be full of blatantly stereotyped depictions of Africans as godless, monstrous savages who needed European intervention in order to become civilized, but these stories were less straightforward than that and require a deeper analysis. These kinds of depictions were certainly present, but they were typically embedded within a larger, more complicated narrative. The general message of these accounts was that Africans were inherently different than Europeans, and they functioned to dehumanize them, but these goals were often accomplished in subtle ways. For example these narratives were generally divided regionally and the authors made a point to describe the physical and cultural characteristics that they perceived among different African populations. They also described regional differences in landscape, wildlife, and climate. Rather than presenting a single picture of
all of Africa, travelers seemed to be describing the diversity they found there. For example, in Samuel Purchas’ *The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present*, which was first published in London in 1617, the author discussed Africa in two books. One was entitled “Relations of the Regions and Religions in Africa: Of Egypt, Barbary, Numidia Libya, and the Land of Negros, and of their Religions,” and the other “Relations of the Regions and Religions in Africa: Of Æthiopia, and the African Islands; And of their Religions.” These titles suggested that Purchas recognized regional differences in Africa, and that he considered these differences to be important enough to warrant independent sections for different areas. This having been said, his discussion of “the Land of Negros,” is extremely short, only about 16 pages of the 189 devoted to Africa. Though this area was expansive and certainly varied, the author failed to focus on the diversity of this region and instead paid much more attention to the “tawny” Africans of the North and the black Africans in Ethiopia than he did to the people and places found along the western coast. Other authors did spend more time describing this region, though their accounts also lacked diversity. For instance, a 1745 publication entitled *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, which attempted to compile the best-regarded travel accounts of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, included descriptions of French settlements along the west coast of Africa, expeditions on the Gambia River, narratives from Guinea and Benin, and mentions of some countries farther

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The area that Purchas referred to as “the Land of the Negros” seems to refer to the area of African from which most colonial slaves would have come. Whereas the term “Negroland” was commonly used to refer to the western coastal region of Africa north of Guinea, Purchas apparently preferred to combine both of these regions under the category “Land of the Negros.”

137 Although the term “Ethiopian” was occasionally used during this time as a blanket term to refer to all black Africans, the authors of these travel narratives distinguished between Ethiopia and Western Africa, and often mentioned that slaves were taken from the West Coast. Although Purchas also described Ethiopians as “Negros,” this region was understood to be different than the “Land of Negros” from where most North American slaves were taken.
inland and islands off the western coast.\footnote{\textit{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels}, Vol. II (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), Books I-IV.} Because this collection included the names and brief descriptions of many different groups, it gave the impression that the authors were presenting a diverse picture of Africans and African cultures, but a closer look at these narratives shows that this was not in fact the case. First, this collection included a book entitled, “The Western Coast of Africa,” with a chapter, “The Customs and Rites common to the Inhabitants of this Part of Africa. Particularly the Jalofs, Fûli, and Mandingos.” In the introduction to this chapter the author wrote, “the Customs prevailing among the natives of this part of Africa are nearly the same, so that the account, which an author gives of one nation, may serve indifferently for the rest…”\footnote{\textit{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels}, Vol. II (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 269.} From the very beginning, the reader is told that Africans along the west coast were so similar that reading about one group would provide a sufficient picture of the rest. Even though the text went on to make distinctions between different regions and groups, in the end these distinctions were explicitly deemed meaningless. Second, the people who lived in these regions were only one of many topics discussed by these authors. This was not just the case in \textit{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels}, but in nearly all travel accounts of Africa.\footnote{\textit{An introduction to the history of the kingdoms and states of Asia, Africa and America} (London: Printed by R.J. for T. Newborough, 1705).; \textit{Anthony Benezet, Some Historical Account of Guinea} (Philadelphia: Crukshank, 1771).; \textit{François Froger, A Relation of a Voyage Made in the Years 1695, 1696, 1697} (London: M. Gillyflower, 1698).; \textit{Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation Volume 06 Madiera, the Canaries, Ancient Asia, Africa, etc,} (Amazon Digital Services, 2005), Kindle edition.; \textit{Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume 11 Africa} (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition.; \textit{Jean Mocquet, Travels and Voyages into Africa, Asia, and America, the East and West-Indies; Syria, Jerusalem, and the Holy-Land}, Nathaniel Pullen, trans. (London: William Newton, 1696).; \textit{Pierre Poivre, Travels of a philosopher; or, Observations on the manners and arts of various nations in Africa and Asia} (Glasgow: Robert Urie, 1770).; \textit{The Present State of the British Empire in Europe, America, Africa and Asia} (London: W. Griffin, J. Johnson, W. Nicoll, and Richardson and Urquhart, 1768).; \textit{William Snelgrave, A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea...}(London: James, John, and Pail Knapton, 1734).; \textit{Nicholas Villault, A Relation of the Coasts of Afrik Called Guinee} (London: John Starkey, 1670).} In addition to describing the inhabitants and their culture, these narratives also typically included a description of the landscape, climate, plant and animal life, as well anecdotes about the authors’ travel and trade. Since only a portion of these accounts were about the inhabitants themselves, it
meant that discussion of the people was often quite short and rarely included much detail. Additionally, these short descriptions were often very similar, and many of the same topics were brought up again and again. For example, these brief accounts typically described the inhabitants’ physical appearances, the sexual behavior of women and their role in the family, what they ate, and their religious practices. This was not just the case in discussions of the west coast, but these themes were also brought up repeatedly in discussions about Africans who inhabited other regions of the continent as well. Although the specifics changed a bit, the pictures painted by these accounts were generally more similar than different, and this functioned not only to differentiate Africans, especially black Africans, from Europeans, but also to make different African groups appear very similar. By describing different groups in the same ways, these authors managed to downplay, if not erase, differences while they were claiming to be describing them. Furthermore, even when these authors actually described one group as being significantly different from others, they frequently used this difference in order to reinforce their stereotyped vision of other Africans. For example, one author wrote, “The Bagnons inhabit the South Side of Gambra, and are a civilized, brave, industrious People. Their Women seem wholly take-up with their domestic Economy, and the Care of their Families, in a Manner not usual to the Negros.” Here the author described this group of Africans in a way that Europeans and American colonists would have found quite familiar, but the primary message was not about how similar Europeans and Africans were. While showing that the Bagnons were like Europeans, the author also stressed that they were different from the rest of the African population, and in turn suggested that the larger African population was essentially homogenous. By emphasizing the

similarity between this group and Europeans the author affirmed that a “usual Negro” existed while simultaneously showing just how different this “usual Negro” was.\textsuperscript{142}

Although these texts portrayed Africans as homogeneous, these depictions nonetheless appeared complicated on the surface, and they were often contradictory. Africans were at the same time described as similar to and yet dramatically different than Europeans. They were described as capable and civilized, then inferior and barbarous. Although this may suggest a level of cognitive dissonance or an attempt at nuance, Jennifer Morgan has shown that this was not the case. Morgan confronted the presence of these contradictory depictions in her work on African women’s bodies and the “gendering of racial ideology.”\textsuperscript{143} She used the work of Richard Ligon to illustrate how contradictory depictions of African women did not function to provide a nuanced or complex picture, but rather provided an engaging way for authors to present their stereotyped representation of them. According to Morgan, Ligon, for example, “allowed his readers to dally with him among beautiful black women, only seductively to disclose their monstrosity over the course of the narrative.”\textsuperscript{144} Ligon was not appreciating the beauty of African women nor was he conflicted about their true nature. Rather, he described them as familiar in order to engage his reader as he slowly pulled back the curtain to show that they were in fact dramatically different. Morgan used Ligon to illustrate this point, but other authors who wrote about Africans and African cultures followed a similar pattern. They may have seemed to be presenting a complicated picture of African life that was in some ways very similar to the

\textsuperscript{142} The inhabitants of Cape Monte were similarly described as being different than the “usual” African. The author wrote, “The Women here, in general, are more chaste and reserved than the Negros usually are…, and the men more jealous.” \textit{(A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II} (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 523.) Samuel Purchas also described in-land Africans as “more ingenious then other Negros…” (Samuel Purchas, \textit{The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present} (London: William Stansby, 1617), 820).

\textsuperscript{143} Jennifer L. Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle over their Shoulder:’ Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} (54:1), 1997.

\textsuperscript{144} Jennifer L. Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle over their Shoulder:’ Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} (54:1), 169.
lives of the European reader, but in reality they were attempting to illustrate just how different and inferior Africans were.

As Morgan has shown, portrayals of African women and their bodies were one common way that travel writers othered and dehumanized African people. Europeans and American colonists had clear ideas about how women should look and behave, and African women were often described as being polar opposites of that ideal. There was an assumption that women were inherently different than men, and travelers’ descriptions of African women regularly depicted them as unwomanly, which in effect called their humanity into question. Suggesting that they were not properly “women,” opened up the question of what they were, and the most obvious way that authors accomplished this was through depictions of women’s physical characteristics and their sexual activity. For example, African women’s breasts were typically described as exceptionally long and unattractive.\(^{145}\) One author wrote that the only way to distinguish African men from women was their breasts, which “in the most part be very foule and long, hanging downe like the vdder of a goate.”\(^ {146}\) In addition to portraying African women’s bodies as unattractive and unfamiliar, claiming that this is the only way to distinguish between men and women also functioned to break down the gender distinctions that Europeans held so firmly,


\(^{146}\) Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume 11 Africa (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition locations 1695-1696.

This description is followed by a side note that reads, “Diuers of the women haue such excessing long breasts, that some of them wil lay the same vpon the ground and lie downe by them, but all the women haue not such breasts.” (Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume 11 Africa (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition, locations 1734-1736.)
while the comparison to a goat’s udders also clearly dehumanized these women.\textsuperscript{147} This was not the only way in which this was done, however. Another was through descriptions of childbirth.

According to Linda Pollock, “expecting a child in early-modern society was an uncomfortable condition, bringing pain and anxiety to the prospective mother.”\textsuperscript{148} English men and women viewed childbirth as a dangerous and trying experience that required a long period of recovery. Part of the birthing ritual for British mothers was a “lying-in” period, which typically lasted for between three weeks and a month, during which time her body “could recover from the trauma of delivery.”\textsuperscript{149} During this time, the woman would remain in bed for three to fourteen days after giving birth, before being free to move about her room, to which she would remained confined for an addition seven to ten days. This stage was followed by another seven to ten days during which time the mother would not leave her home.\textsuperscript{150} Birth was considered an extremely painful and risky experience for European women that required a significant recuperation period, but African women were described as being able to birth their children and return to their work and everyday lives almost immediately.\textsuperscript{151} There was no trauma and no laying-in period.

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\textsuperscript{147} It is noteworthy that a later author writing about the shared humanity of all people discussed how African women’s bodies were misrepresented in order to make them seem distinct and mentioned how descriptions of Irish women’s breasts had been used in the same way. In a footnote, Samuel Stanhope Smith wrote, “Even in Ireland not two centuries ago, when, however, it was rarely visited by English travellers, and was regarded with contemptuous pride by its more powerful and wealthy neighbours, was sometimes subject to similar misrepresentations. Bithgow, in his rare adventures and painful peregrinations, says he saw women in the ‘North parts’ of that island, I presume with traveller’s eyes, who could lay their breasts or ‘dugs,’ as he calls them, over their shoulders, and suckle their children behind their backs. He adds, that they were more than half a hard in length, and disdainfully compares them to the money-bags of an East-Indian merchant, made of well tanned leather. It is not wonderful then that more distant and savage countries should be more grossly misrepresented.” (Samuel Stanhope Smith, \textit{An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species} (New-Brunswick: J. Simpson and Co., 1810), 133-4.)


\textsuperscript{149} Adrian Wilson, “The ceremony of childbirth and its interpretation,” in \textit{Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England}, Valerie Filds, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 75.

\textsuperscript{150} Adrian Wilson, “The ceremony of childbirth and its interpretation,” in \textit{Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England}, Valerie Filds, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 75.

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II} (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 275, 641.
According to one account, a European traveler named Bosman witnessed a woman who “was delivered without Pain of two Children in a Quarter of an Hour.” Another account explained that, “The women are so robust, that as soon as they are delivered, they go wash themselves and their Children in the River, or the Sea; and some immediately after lie with their Husbands.”

Not only did they not need to recover, but according to one account, the birthing process was also so easy that most African women labored without any assistance, with only very young mothers receiving help. Unlike white women, who were typically assisted by a midwife and cared for by a group of her female family and friends, African women needed no help. These differences made African women seem very different than Europeans. Africans were not described as risking their health during pregnancy, and they needed no time at all to recover from the birthing process. By describing childbirth in these ways, African women were shown to be physically different than Europeans. They were not delicate and vulnerable, like woman were supposed to be, but were tough and virile. Describing them in this way did more than just make them seem different, though, it also called their humanity into question. This was not just because they did not appear womanly, but also because Europeans viewed the pain of childbirth as a mark of their humanity. This pain was thought to be the result of Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, and experiencing it was a reminder to both men and women of their connection to the original man and woman. In 1679 Thomas Comber explained that, every woman “still feels the bruises of our first Parents most deplorable fall, and smarts severely for the first Sin which

For more on how English culture emphasized the physical suffering that women experienced during childbirth, see: Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson, *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2007).

gave beginning to all our miseries; so that now she cannot give life to others, without the
extreme hazard of her own."\textsuperscript{156} The pain of childbirth was understood as a divine punishment
bestowed on women by God, and yet based on these narratives, African women did not appear to
suffer from this curse. As Morgan explained, "sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English
women and men anticipated pregnancy and childbirth with extreme uneasiness and fear of death,
but at least they knew that the experience of pain in childbirth marked women as members of the
Christian community."\textsuperscript{157} Claiming that African women did not experience this pain or danger
when giving birth not only showed that they were different and more resilient than white women,
but also suggested that they were not descendants of Eve. By arguing that African women
experienced childbirth in a dramatically different way, these authors used the thing most
associated with womanhood to show just how unwomanly and inhuman African women were.
The pain of childbirth was understood as clear evidence that human beings had a tie to their
original parents and their fall from grace, and yet somehow African women did not experience
this pain, suggesting they had different origins.

In addition to their reproductive differences, African women were also often described as
being completely shameless and promiscuous. For instance, nearly every mention of African
clothing focused on how little African people wore, and almost all included the fact that women
did not cover their chests.\textsuperscript{158} One account explained, "Going naked gives them no Shame or

\textsuperscript{156} Thomas Comber, \textit{The Occasional Offices of Matrimony} (London: M. C. Henry Brome, and Robert Clavel, 1679),
505-506.
\textsuperscript{157} Jennifer L. Morgan, \textit{Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery}, (Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004),186.
\textsuperscript{158} \textit{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II} (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 97, 492, 523, 555,
632, 634.; \textit{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. III} (London: Thomas Astley, 1746), 17, 95, 220,
248.; François Froger. \textit{A Relation of a Voyage: Made in the Years 1695, 1696, 1697} (London: M. Gillyflower,
1698), 11.; Richard Hakluyt, \textit{The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Trafficques and Discoveries of the English Nation,
Volume 11 Africa} (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition, locations 1540-1541, 5161-5162, 1032.; Samuel
Purchas, \textit{The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this
Present} (London: William Stansby, 1617), 812, 813, 815, 821, 859.; William Snelgrave, \textit{A New account of Some
Trouble.”\footnote{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 32, 436, 523, 535.; A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. III (London: Thomas Astley, 1746), 120.; Richard Hakluyt, \textit{The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume 11 Africa} (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition, locations 1474-1475.; Samuel Purchas, \textit{The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present} (London: William Stansby, 1617), 815.} Whereas it would have been completely unacceptable for a white woman to appear topless in public, narratives show that this was the norm in Africa and that inhabitants there lacked a natural sense that this was wrong. In addition to dressing immodestly, African women were also described as being hypersexual.\footnote{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 435.} Accounts explained that both men and women were not concerned about female chastity or virginity and that in some areas having children before marriage was viewed positively because it indicated that the women was fertile and would bear many children for her future husband.\footnote{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. III (London: Thomas Astley, 1746), 95, 120. Nicholas Villaut, \textit{A Relation of the Coasts of Afrik Called Guinee} (London: John Starkey, 1670), 141.} Similar narratives also claimed that women regularly offered themselves sexually to men other than their husbands, especially European travelers.\footnote{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. III (London: Thomas Astley, 1746), 20.} One author wrote, “Most of the Women are public Whores to the Europeans, and private ones to the Negros.”\footnote{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II (London: James, John, and Pail Knapton, 1734), 34, 76.; Nicholas Villaut, \textit{A Relation of the Coasts of Afrik Called Guinee} (London: John Starkey, 1670), 134, 141, 144, 152-3.} This same publication also described a group of African women saying, “They are…addicted to Wantonness, which is not thought a Crime here, if they are unmarried, or have not eaten the Fetish, as an Assurance of conjugal Fidelity.”\footnote{A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 634.} European readers would have viewed this licentious behavior as unnatural for women, and yet no one within these African communities was described as finding their behavior distasteful or problematic. Another, similar tale explained, “The girls affect to seem modest, especially in Company: but take them by themselves they are very obliging; and, for a little Coral or a Silk Handkerchief, will gratify you
in what you please.” This kind of behavior was not just viewed as unladylike, but according to Mark Breitenberg, the readers of these narratives would also have viewed female chastity as essential to a properly functioning society. He described early modern England as having an “obsession with female chastity, which is so often described as the linchpin of every other aspect of the social network.” In addition to its importance for economic issues of inheritance, it also “functioned symbolically as a more generalized guarantee of social order and cohesion.” In a culture that stressed the importance of female purity, describing African women as oversexed was significant. It not only suggested that they were different than European women in an important way, but it also called into question the social structures in which they lived. Through depictions of their physical appearance, their experience of childbirth, and their sexuality, African women were regularly described in ways that conflicted with how women were naturally supposed to be, and this implicitly called into question their humanity and the nature of African societies. If they were women, then they should have appeared and behaved like women. Since they did not, perhaps they were actually something quite different.

African women’s bodies and their behavior were certainly not the sole focus of travel narratives, and they were not the only aspects of African life that were described as unnatural. African family structures were also described as unfamiliar and immoral. Colonial New Englanders idealized the family and believed that strong families made for strong societies. Puritan tradition maintained that God had established a social order that consisted of a “network of dual relationships,” and many of the most important of these relationships were found within

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the family. Furthermore, according to John Demos, “No aspect of the Puritan household was more vital than the relationship of husband and wife.” The bond between a married man and woman was considered divinely ordained, natural, and sacred, and although there were certainly complex rules that governed this relationship, one of the most obvious and essential for European Christians was that this union was between one man and one woman. Though this was the European and colonial model, African families, especially the relationship between husbands and wives, were consistently described as far from this ideal. For example, Samuel Purchas, paraphrasing Leo Africanus, wrote “They lived… like beasts, without King, Lord, Common-wealth, or any government, scarce knowing to sow their grounds: clad in skins of beats: not having any particular wife; but lie ten or twelve men and women together, each man chusing which he best liked.” Purchas also recorded a similar assessment when describing the people in Borno who “like Beasts live with their wives and children in common…” These accounts make clear just how important the institution of marriage was for Europeans, as Africans who failed to recognize this institution were labeled “beasts.” Obviously, with this discussion Purchas did not just point out a cultural difference, but dehumanized these people in a very explicit way. By explaining this behavior as being characteristic of “beasts,” rather than human beings, Purchas suggested that they had more in common with animals than people. Although these portrayals suggested that marriage did not exist in any recognizable way in

172 Samuel Purchas, The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present (London: William Stansby, 1617), 820. Richard Hakluyt also claimed that in some African societies women were “common: for they contract no matrimonie…” in his The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume II Africa (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition, location 1474-1475.
Africa, others instead described marriages there as polygamous. According to many accounts, men had as many wives as they could care for, whereas others provided an average number of wives per man. Regardless of which perspective was used, emphasizing polygamy as a defining characteristic of African marriages did more than simply point out a difference. Because Europeans idealized monogamous marriage as a natural, divinely ordained institution that was central to social as well as religious life, emphasizing that Africans did not recognize the importance of these unions was meaningful.

Another significant issue brought up in these writings was how husbands treated their wives, which often connected discussions of African women’s sexuality and marriage. As mentioned in the previous chapter, New England familial relationships were not based on equality, but there was a sense of responsibility between members of a family. Wives were expected to be submissive, but a husband’s control did have its limits. As John Demos wrote, “From the man…two things were particularly required: ‘love… and wisdom.’” What exactly constituted “love and wisdom” is a bit unclear, but Demos did explain that husbands and wives were expected to cohabitate, live in relative accord, and have a “normal and exclusive sexual union.” Polygamy certainly did not fit this ideal, but the problems with African marriages did not end there. According to many accounts, African men not only married multiple women, but

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they also held their wives in a condition “little better than that of Slaves.” African men had an unreasonable level of control over their wives, and this was most clearly illustrated by the claims that they regularly offered their wives sexually to others. One author explained the situation saying, “The men have as many wives as they can keep, whom they prostitute for a small matter, and sometimes offer them for nothing.” Another account claimed that in areas where adultery was punished with a fine, husbands would regularly have their wives seduce single men. The wife would either lie about her marital status or would promise not to tell anyone about their infidelity, but immediately after she would tell her husband about the affair so that he could collect a fine from the fooled man. According to these accounts, African women were not only promiscuous, but their husbands approved of this behavior and often encouraged it. Men would, without hesitation, offer their wives sexually in order to gain something small in return or because they viewed it as an honor to have white men couple with their wives. Although white women were expected to obey their husbands, ordering one’s wife to have sex with another man certainly went beyond the acceptable European limits of male domination, and yet African men were said to do this without a second thought. By emphasizing how different marriage was among Africans, these narratives suggest that they had no respect for this essential and sacred human bond.

The relationship between parents and children was also occasionally called into question. In colonial American society, children, like women, were expected to be subordinate to the head

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of their household, but they too deserved some consideration. African parents, however, were often described as treating their children in unconscionable ways. They were said to let their infants crawl around all day without supervision, “like kittens.”\(^{180}\) Another author described the situation saying, “They quickly learne them [children] to eate, and then leave them about the house like dogs…they teach them no civilities, and beate them sometimes cruelly with staves.”\(^{181}\) In colonial families, children were expected to be obedient, but they were also supposed to be cared for and taught to become useful members of society. Part of God’s plan for the family was to socialize children into the larger religious and political culture, and yet in Africa this was not happening. Instead, children were left to their own devices at a young age, which furthered the idea that African societies were radically different and uncivilized. Even a group that was praised for loving and caring for their children “till they are able to go alone,” was criticized for not raising their children properly. According to the account, once their children were able to care for themselves, these parents took “no further trouble about their education,” and as a result they grew up to be extremely lazy.\(^{182}\) Again, the family was considered a microcosm of society, and because these Africans failed to teach their children the importance of industry, the society valued laziness.\(^{183}\) Furthermore, African fathers were sometimes accused of selling or trading their wives and children.\(^{184}\) Although colonists often sent their children away to live and apprentice with other families, they did not sell them, and these


\(^{183}\) Other examples of Africans’ laziness appeared in these texts, although the authors did not relate this directly back to the family. (A *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II* (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 286, 278.; Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume 11 Africa* (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition, location 1740.)  

apprenticeships were supposed to better the children and make them more productive members of society. African fathers, on the other hand, were said to “forget the laws of nature” and sell their children, and in turn, children would sell their parents if given the opportunity.\textsuperscript{185} Because the family was much more than a series of interpersonal relationships for colonial New Englanders, reading depictions of African families that were so “unnatural” did not just make them appear “uncivilized,” but would have added to the othering and dehumanization of African people in colonists’ minds.

Another issue that received a great deal of attention in these writings was African people’s eating habits. For example, many authors thought it was worth noting that African people did not use tables or table clothes when eating, and instead ate off of simple plates or wooden planks and used their hands.\textsuperscript{186} One author even explicitly described this as animalistic saying, “They… feed as unmannerly as Swine, sitting on the ground and cramming, not staying till the morsel in the bouth bee swallowed, but tearing their meat in pieces, with the three mid-fingers casting it into their mouthes ready gaping to receive it.”\textsuperscript{187} Even more than their manner of eating, these texts described how different the African diet was. First, travelers regularly mentioned the foreign animals that Africans hunted, as well as the familiar animals that were not used as food among Europeans. For example, they ate elephants, which had a “strong and unsavory” flavor; crocodiles; apes; serpents; and cats and dogs, which were not generally used

for meat among Europeans or colonial Americans.\(^{188}\) They did not just eat bizarre animals, though. According to accounts, they also ate this meat raw and preferred it once it had gone rancid. Purchas described small birds that some Africans supposedly ate alive, feathers and all,\(^{189}\) and he also said that Africans would happily eat meat that Europeans had discarded as inedible, and often did so after it had rotted.\(^{190}\) He wrote, “Such was the brutish nature of the Inhabitants, that when the English had cast out of their ship one of those Seales, and the same had lien fourteeene dayes, and now swarmed with crawling Maggots, they would take them up and eat them; as they would also doe the guts, garbage, and panch of the beast.”\(^{191}\) Purchas was not alone in making these claims, though, and other accounts similarly mentioned that Africans only liked meat once it had “putrified” and bred maggots.\(^{192}\) These vivid depictions suggested that Africans had very different tastes than whites, but they also suggested that Africans had a different constitution that allowed them to eat this food. They had “sharp” stomachs that allowed them to


\(^{189}\) Samuel Purchas, The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present (London: William Stansby, 1617), 816.; This was also mentioned in: A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 637.

\(^{190}\) Samuel Purchas, The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present (London: William Stansby, 1617), 866. In this work Purchas also described how Africans would “scramble…like hungry dogges” for raw meat that was thrown away by European travelers (867) and that they would ask travelers for the innards that they were going to discard and eat them raw without thoroughly cleaning them (866).


eat raw, rotten meat that would have made Europeans sick. According to Nicolas Villault,

“Thereir Stomachs are generally so hot, they do not only digest all kind of meats that are roasted or boyled, but raw likewise…” This information alone would have further distinguished Africans from the European reader, but it is also worth mentioning that when describing an unknown “creature” found in the Congo, Samuel Purchas explained that it had “wings like Dragons, with long tayles and chappes, and divers rows of teeth, and feede upon raw flesh.” This depiction may seem inconsequential, but it is noteworthy that Purchas chose to include that this creature ate “raw flesh” when on the previous page, he said that African people of the region “live[d] upon raw flesh.” Of course this dragon-like animal ate raw flesh, and yet Purchas made a point of mentioning it and used the same language to describe the eating habits of both Africans and this unspecified animal.

Although the idea of eating raw and rotten meat would have been unpleasant to most European readers, this was surely not the most shocking or foreign thing about the African diet. This must have been that according to many accounts, Africans also ate human flesh. Some reports of cannibalism explain that after wars, Africans ate the bodies of those they had killed in battle, while others said that they ate the white men that they encountered. These acts were

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194 Nicholas Villault, A Relation of the Coasts of Afrik Called Guinee (London: John Starkey, 1670), 134.
described as “barbarous” and “beastly,” but the reader would have viewed them in these terms even if the authors had not explained them in these ways. According to Catalin Avramescu, the grave sin of cannibalism forced North American colonists to question the humanity of the Native Americans they encountered, and they certainly would have been faced with the same question when considering Africans’ cannibalism. We can also know that Europeans viewed cannibalism as a horrific practice by looking at certain anti-slavery writings. In order to argue against the slave trade, many authors emphasized how terribly slaves were treated. Some did this by describing the many horrors of the middle passage, and ship crews forcing slaves to engage in cannibalism was one of those horrors. According to some accounts, slave ship crews punished slaves who attempted to starve themselves to death by forcing them to cannibalize other Africans. According to John Atkins, after a group of slaves refused to take food, the captain of the ship “caused his sailors to lay hold on one of the most obstinate, who chopped the poor creature into small pieces, forcing some of the others to eat a part of the mangled body…” Forcing a slave to eat another was such an horrific punishment that abolitionists hoped that exposing this practice would win people to their cause, and yet travel narratives told colonists that Africans engaged in this unthinkable act willingly.

European readers would have found accounts of cannibalism shocking in and of themselves, but many of the men who authored these stories further contributed to this view. For

Other accounts simply mention the practice of cannibalism and say nothing about who was being eaten or why. (Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume II Africa (Amazon Digital Services, 2009), Kindle edition, locations 1502-1503.; Samuel Purchas, The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present (London: William Stansby, 1617), 863.)


200 John Atkins quoted in: James Swan, A Dissuasion from the Slave Trade (Boston: Russell, 1772), 27.
example, William Snelgrave suggested that cannibalism was so unthinkable that he had to address its existence in the first pages of his account. He prefaced his first mentions of cannibalism and human sacrifice by saying, “I am sensible that Objections may be made to the Account I have given of the Dahomes, by such of my Readers as are not acquainted, either by Travelling or Reading, with the Manners and Customs of several barbarous brutish Nations, that have been and are still on the Globe.”

With this caveat Snelgrave did not just reassure his reader that his stories were true, but also confirmed that cannibalism was shocking. By saying that he expected people to doubt his accounts, he reaffirmed that cannibalism was so horrific as to be unbelievable. Similarly, although some accounts stated without a doubt that many Africans were cannibals, others felt the need to qualify their statements. In another of Snelgrave’s reports, he said that his interpreter reluctantly admitted that his people “boiled and feasted on” human flesh as “holy Food.” The king apparently told one of Snelgrave’s travel companions that this was the custom, and the next day the interpreter verified it. Thought Snelgrave clearly indicated that these people had cannibalized others, he nonetheless wrote, “I relate nothing for matter of Fact, but what I was an Eye-witness to, so I shall leave the Reader to give what credit he pleases thereto.”

By leaving open the possibility that these acts did not actually happen, even though he claimed he had good reason to believe they did, he again emphasized just how unthinkable it was. There was nothing in Snelgrave’s account that suggested that cannibalism did not occur, and he provided the reader with no reason to doubt that it did. Even so, he refused to state with certainty that it happened, which reaffirmed the position that these acts were truly awful. If

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201 William Snelgrave, A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea (London: James, John, and Pail Knapton, 1734), A3.
203 William Snelgrave, A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea (London: James, John, and Pail Knapton, 1734), 52-3.
eating raw animal flesh suggested that Africans were grotesque and animalistic, saying that they had a habit of eating humans would have removed any doubt.

In addition to eating their enemies, many of these narratives also maintained that it was common for African communities to offer cruel human sacrifices.\textsuperscript{204} These were typically related to the lives of kings, as sacrifices were said to have been offered when the ruler became sick or after he died. Samuel Purchas, described a sacrifice offered after the death of a Guinean king saying they, “cut off their toes and fingers, and beate their bones as it were in a morter three houres (longer than which they could not out-live this torture) and then in the sight of those which were to undergoe the like fate, thrust them into the necke with a sharpe stake, so finishing their blinde martyrdome.”\textsuperscript{205} William Snelgrave also wrote of human sacrifices in his account of Guinea. He said that in 1704 he heard that a king was sick, so a ten month old was sacrificed on his behalf. Although he did not witness the actual sacrifice, Snelgrave was reportedly told about it and saw the body of the child.\textsuperscript{206} He also recounted an incident in 1713 when he described saving another child from being sacrificed. According to his account, he and his companions saw a small child tied up, and the king told them that the boy was going to be sacrificed later that night, at which point Snelgrave ordered his men to take the child.\textsuperscript{207} After a tense few moments,


Samuel Purchas also maintained that human sacrifices occurred in Africa, although he said they were common among a group of people called the “Blemmyes” who lived between Ethiopia and Egypt, and did not reference them in his section on the “Land of the Negros.” (\textit{The World and the Religion Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation unto this Present} (London: William Stansby, 1617), 825)


\textsuperscript{206} William Snelgrave, \textit{A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea} (London: James, John, and Pail Knapton, 1734), vii.

\textsuperscript{207} William Snelgrave, \textit{A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea} (London: James, John, and Pail Knapton, 1734), iix-xiv.
Snelgrave told the king that such a sacrifice went against the laws of human nature and that “instead of blessings,” such a sacrifice would “certainly bring on his the Wrath of the most high God, whom white men adored.” In addition to these sacrifices, other accounts also explained that after a king died many of his slaves were strangled to death or beheaded and buried with him so that they could attend to him in the afterlife. These examples of human sacrifice would have reinforced the idea that Africans were cruel and barbarous people, and the authors seemed to realize this. As mentioned above, Snelgrave began his narrative saying that he knew that accounts of cannibalism and human sacrifice would be unbelievable, which functioned to reinforce that these acts were horrific. Similarly, when Snelgrave’s stories were recounted in *A New General Collection*, the compiler also explained that Snelgrave knew that describing these acts would be unbelievable to his European reader and so he therefore “prepares the Reader’s Mind for the better Reception of his Narrativions, by obviating the Prejudices that might arise from the Account he gives of human Sacrifices…” Even so, Snelgrave’s accounts, and other like them, were widespread. Africans were often described as having a general disregard for each other, and cannibalism and human sacrifices were used as vivid examples of this larger trend. According to an author in *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Africans “have no Humanity or Affection… they will scarce give a wounded Man a Drop of Water; but will see one another die like Dogs, without Compassion or Relief…” and “Nothing can better show…the Barbarity of these people, than their neglect of their nearest Friends in time of Sickness.”

According to these narratives, not only did Africans war incessantly with their enemies, but they

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also cared little for their closest family and friends. They lacked common decency and humanity, treating each other like animals.

Although many North American Christians participated in a religious tradition that insisted on the humanity of all people, regardless of their color or social status, popular depictions of Africans in travel narratives functioned to dehumanize them. These accounts did more than describe African people as uncivilized; they depicted African women as being more similar to animals than Europeans and described their family structures and eating habits as unnatural. Accounts of their cannibalism and use of human sacrifices were also meant to illustrate a general inhumanity and lack of concern for each other that further distinguished them from the colonial reader. Though supporters of the slave trade may have welcomed these dehumanizing accounts, they presented a religious problem for others. They implicitly called into question the religious view that all people had the same origins and set the stage for later theories that explicitly questioned whether Africans descended from the same parentage as Europeans. The dehumanizing effects of the these accounts also contributed to colonial New Englanders’ move away from a religiously based communalism towards more individual forms of Christianity. Viewing Africans as fundamentally different and subhuman allowed New Englanders to conceive of them as a distinct group who were primarily property, rather than members of the larger society. This lent support to the shift towards commercialism in the region by allowing colonists to engage more freely in the Atlantic slave trade and led them to increasingly conceive of slavery as a private matter. Furthermore, once New Englanders had begun to move away from a focus in communalism, it became less necessary for colonists to

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213 Another account from *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II* said that Africans also had little regard for their own lives. It said, “On the least uneasiness they are as ready to turn their arms and fury against themselves. They make no scruple to hang, drown, or throw themselves down a precipice…” (*A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II* (London: Thomas Astley, 1745), 104.)
understand Africans as human beings who could be integrated into the larger culture, which made it easier for them to embrace the idea that they were essentially dissimilar and inferior.
CHAPTER FOUR

“I ESSAY’D…TO PREVENT INDIANS AND NEGROS BEING RATED WITH HORSES AND HOGS; BUT COULD NOT PREVAIL:”

THE DEHUMANIZATION OF SLAVES THROUGH THE LAW

Travel narratives certainly contributed to New Englanders viewing slaves in inhuman terms, but this was not the only way in which this occurred. Over time, as the culture and economy of New England changed, it became impossible for colonists to simultaneously conceive of slaves as dependent family members and as personal property, and as a result, legal distinctions were made between enslaved and free people. Whereas seventeenth-century laws continued to categorize servants and slaves with children, in keeping with the puritan ideal, by the turn of the century slaves had become a distinct class and were more likely to be categorized with horses and hogs than with children. This chapter will show how laws in Massachusetts began to distinguish between slaves and free persons, breaking the community down into distinct groups, and calling into question the feasibility of integrating Africans into the larger culture. The legal code increasingly relegated slaves to an inferior status and in so doing emphasized their position as property rather than human beings. This presented a challenge to earlier forms of religious communalism, which had described slaves as part of the family and larger society, and contributed to a shift towards commercialism and individualism by encouraging colonist to view Africans as personal property rather than as members of the community. These changes also reduced the responsibility of slave owners by no longer demanding that they mold slaves into useful members of society, which allowed them to see and treat slaves as commodities rather than as fellow human beings. Changes to the law functioned to reaffirm the cultural view that slaves and people of African descent were inherently different than and inferior to Europeans, even though this went against a Christian tradition that said that all people were fundamentally
the same, and it set the stage for Northerners’ acceptance of federal laws that would categorize most African Americans as property.

Many historians have focused on the ambiguous legal status that servants and slaves held in puritan New England. They have emphasized that although slaves were considered property, they were also treated like people in many ways, and they have often supported this claim by highlighting the importance puritans placed on maintaining the integrity of their legal system. As Peter Hoffer wrote, “The courts were effective tools against Puritans in part because the Puritans themselves placed great value on law and legality.”214 In his book Race and Redemption in Puritan New England, Richard Bailey also explained that although puritans tended to “see blacks as commodities,” there were also many instances in which the law “defined Indians and blacks as people and gave them rights and privileges identical, or nearly so, to those claimed by whites.”215 Scholar Robert C. Twombly and Robert M. Moore similarly maintained in their article, “Black Puritan,” that the “real test of the colony’s race relations must be based not on what whites thought and said but on what they did.”216 With this in mind, Twombly and Moore argued that because puritans held the law in such high regard, they were able to faithfully enforce it, regardless of the attitudes they may have held towards people of African descent, and this behavior was what was truly mattered. According to these accounts, regardless of race, all men were basically considered equal in the eyes of the law, and to make this point, works on Northern slavery have often outlined a number of instances where Africans and white of similar social status were treated equally. Although there are certainly examples of seventeenth-century puritans treating blacks and whites equally, by the turn of the century there were laws put into

place that distinguished people of color from whites, especially through laws related to slavery, which by that time had become racialized.

Even when historians have looked at laws specific to slaves, there has still been a tendency to emphasize the rights and protections afforded to them, rather than the restrictions. It is true that there were limits to how owners could treat their slaves. For example, they could not kill or intentionally maim them without the threat of legal repercussions. This having been said, in early versions of the Massachusetts law, there were also restriction on how colonists could treat their domestic animals. One such law stated, “It is ordered by this Court and Authorie thereof; That no man shall exercise any tyranny or cruelty towards any bruit creatures which are usually kept for the use of man.”

Laws against unnecessary cruelty protected animal property as well as human property, which hardly seems like a victory for slaves’ rights. Another common example used to emphasize slaves’ humanity is that both whites and blacks were able to testify in court and were provided with legal counsel. This was certainly not the case for non-human property and at first glance it seems to suggest that slaves were viewed as relative equals under the law. Once we consider the emphasis that New Englanders placed on the legal system, however, this “equality” becomes less noteworthy. As already mentioned, many scholars have pointed out that puritans stressed the importance or upholding their legal system, so permitting people of color to participate in that structure can be understood as more about respecting the system than respecting the slave. The same is true for marriage. Marriage and family were incredibly important to colonial New Englanders. Single people were expected to live with families, and parents were not allowed to unreasonably keep their children from marrying.

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217 The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648), 16.
same was true for slaves. Laws were enacted that made it illegal for a master to “unreasonably deny marriage to his negro with one of the same nation…” Even so, marriage for slaves did not necessarily mean that they could cohabitate, and there was nothing that kept owners from breaking up slave families by selling a spouse or a child away. Again, these laws required that slaves be treated similarly to free persons, but this did not equate to concern or respect for slaves’ lives. Another way to interpret these legal codes is to assume that refusing to allow slaves to testify in court or marry would undermine those systems, which New Englanders held so dear. Perhaps a better way to understand these apparent equalities, then, is to assume these institutions were too important to corrupt, and that was why slaves were allowed to participate in them.

The goal of this chapter is not to claim that slaves had no legal rights or to suggest that they were always treated as nothing more than livestock. Rather, it attempts to look past assumptions that Northern slavery was a relatively harmless system of labor in order to see how the laws of the Massachusetts Bay colony developed over time in order to better understand how slaves’ status changed and influenced religious ideas about the community. Although this research is building off of the work of other scholars who have investigated the legal status of servants and slaves in colonial Massachusetts, by focusing on how the original religious goal of treating servants as persons and part of the larger society was legally compromised over time, this research adds a new perspective. This chapter will show that though there were few distinctions made between servants and slaves at the beginning of the seventeenth century, members of both of these groups were always considered different than free people. More importantly, it shows that by the turn of the eighteenth century slaves became distinct from servants in important ways, as did people of color, regardless of their status, which challenged the New England communal ideal. Whereas early puritans strove to considered slaves as

\[219\] Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, 579.
members of the family, by the time of the Revolution they were property first and foremost, which is important to recognize in order to understand why New Englanders accepted the dehumanization of slaves in Constitutional law. There were certainly ways in which servants, slaves, Indians, and Africans were protected under the law in Massachusetts, but these protections have been overemphasized. By focusing instead on the many ways in which they were treated differently, we are able to understand how slaves came to be viewed primarily as property rather than people by the end of the eighteenth century and how this shift in perspective contributed to a move towards a focus on individual Christian virtue rather than a religiously based communalism.

The puritan intention to treat servants and slaves as persons was gradually compromised in a series of legislative moves, and this chapter will show how this happened through a detailed look at additions and changes to the laws from 1641 though the middle of the eighteenth century. As the social, political, and economic climate of the colony changed, so did the laws. Whereas early legal codes typically categorized slaves with children, in keeping with the puritan ideal, over time there were additional laws enacted that distinguished slaves from dependent family members and reaffirmed their status as property instead. Although other scholars have touched on legal issues and have pointed out that the legal system became more rigid over time, this chapter will go a step further by taking a closer look at the changes that were put in place and identifying some of the reasons why these changes were deemed necessary in order to show how the legal system in Massachusetts dehumanized slaves, which in turn contributed to the breakdown of the tradition puritan view that slaves should be integrated into the society as child-like members.
An important part of establishing the Massachusetts Bay colony was determining the laws that would govern the community. Although the first settlers hoped for an ideal society in which God’s law would be the guide, from the beginning there was a need to establish what exactly God intended for his people. Magistrates wanted to be free to administer God’s law, but colonists were concerned about the level of interpretation that that required. In an attempt to avoid a system in which officials could interpret and enforce God’s law however they personally saw fit, as early as 1635 Massachusetts Bay settlers demanded a clear, written legal code to remove as much ambiguity as possible. In that year, the general court established a committee to “make a draught of such lawes as they shall judge needefull for the well ordering of this plantation, & to present to the same to the court.” This committee was unsuccessful, and the following year another was appointed and similarly ordered to draft a set of laws “agreeable to the word of God,” and in the mean time, magistrates were expressly given the authority to decide cases based on “lawes nowe established” and their best judgment. Although no codes of law were enacted as a result of this meeting, John Cotton did propose a set of laws and provided his biblical justification for many of them. His laws were never approved or enacted, but they were the earliest attempt at a comprehensive legal code in Massachusetts, and they illustrate the influence that biblical interpretation and Christian tradition had on the early colonial legal system. Two additional committees met, one in 1638 and one in 1639, but they also failed to present a code of

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law. It was not until 1641 that the Body of Liberties was enacted. Although it does not appear to have ever been published and distributed, the general court did approve the document and it became the basis for future laws. The foreword of the Hutchinson manuscript of these guidelines briefly explained the need for these regulations and stated that they were agreed upon as law. It read:

We hould it therefore our dutie and safetie whilst we are about the further establishing of this Government to collect and expresse all such freedomes as for present we foresee may concerne us, and our posteritie after us, And to ratify them without sollemne consent. We doe therefore this day religiously and unanimously decree and confirme these following Rites, liberties and priveledges concerning our Churches, and Civill State to be respectively impartiallie and inviolably enjoyed and observed throughout our Jurisdiction for ever.225

Rather than compiling the laws already in place in Massachusetts, the Body of Liberties focused more on outlining the general rights afforded to colonists. Its one hundred sections included rules for judicial proceedings; liberties specific to women, children, servants, foreigners, and domestic animals; a list of capital laws; and the rights of the church and church members.226 Although there were identifiably Christian influences in portions of this document, and section 65 explicitly stated that there were to be no regulations that could be “proved to bee morralie sinfull by the world of god,” it differed from Cotton’s code in that it did not cite scripture throughout in support of the liberties.227 The authors of these codes seemed to have been more concerned with protecting the rights of individual colonists than strictly establishing Mosaic law. The one clear exception was the section on “Capitall Laws,” which listed twelve offenses that were punishable by death. They included worshipping “any other god, but the lord god,” witchcraft, blaspheme,

225 William Henry Whitmore, A Bibliographical Sketch of the Laws of Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1890), 32-3.
226 William Henry Whitmore, A Bibliographical Sketch of the Laws of Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1890), 32-61.
murder, bestiality, sodomy, adultery, man stealing, bearing false witness, and attempting to rebel 
against the commonwealth. With the exception of the last, a note of the biblical passages on 
which they were based accompanied each of these capital offenses. Although the Body of 
Liberties was never published and distributed and was only the law of the land for about seven 
years, it set the stage for later legal codes, making it a significant document. The focus on 
outlining the rights of colonists rather than cataloging illegal acts and punishments remained 
important in later documents and reflected colonists’ concern about the arbitrary nature of the 
legal system up until that point. Although it did not explicitly confront the issue of magistrates’ 
discretion and still left room for personal interpretation, it nonetheless provided an outline of 
protections and guaranteed that colonists would not be left completely at the mercy of their 
officials.

Although colonists in the Massachusetts Bay developed a written code of law by 1641, 
this was only the beginning. Within a generation, puritan New Englanders were already 
struggling to keep their utopian society in tact, and as society changed, so did the law. During 
the 1640s the economic system of the Massachusetts Bay colony changed, as it shifted from a 
largely insular, agrarian economy to one increasingly dependent on foreign exchange, and part of 
this increase included involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. According to legal historian 
George Lee Haskins, “The early social and political structure was to endure for several decades, 
but it gradually crumbled as primitive zeals began to wane and the religious aspects of life were

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subordinated to commercial interests." Although Haskins misrepresented the religious changes that occurred by suggesting that religious ideals were simply overshadowed by commercialism when in fact religion remained an important lens through which colonists understood their economic endeavors, he was correct that by the middle of the seventeenth century puritan colonists were forced to deal with the reality that the religious ideals of their covenanted society were changing. The second generation was not experiencing conversions as readily as their parents had, and fewer conversions caused a problem when young parents wanted to baptize their children. Churches generally maintained that only the children of full, covenanted members of the community could be baptized so many accepted the idea of a Half-Way Covenant, which allowed second generation, unconverted churchgoers to baptize their children. Although scholars have pointed out that this problem of conversation was most likely not indicative of a absence of piety, but instead a result of the second generation’s intense religiosity and desire to only enter fully into the church community when they were certain they were ready, this does not change the fact that from the early years of the colonial period the puritan community was struggling to survive as the founders had intended. Even devout members of the religious community did not always fit nicely into the communal mold, and the original rules of church membership proved insufficient.

In addition to concerns about the law among the devout, there were also always outsiders within the puritans’ midst. As Hoffer explained, “From the first, New England’s supposedly orderly commonwealths were hardly that, in part because not all of the emigrants were

covenanted members of dissenting congregations. They were laborers, sailors, and servants.\(^\text{232}\)

Not only was there dissent among early puritans, but there were also always outsiders, as they were a necessary part of New England life, and over time their numbers grew.\(^\text{233}\) As the number of religious outsiders grew, New Englanders were forced to use the law to provide order to their society. Although the legal system was certainly meant to punish deviant behavior, viewing the system as primarily a means of social control may not be the most illuminating perspective. Instead, it is important to recognize that the legal system was not solely, or even primarily, about punishing criminals, but was instead a way for settlers to reassert and mandate their values within a society that was increasingly diverse.\(^\text{234}\) Developing a legal system allowed settlers to negotiate change and maintain a sense of stability, which became more important during the eighteenth century. By this time colonists had created a more mobile community in which “no one’s place in society was assured, nor was anyone’s wealth safe from catastrophe.”\(^\text{235}\) The relatively homogeneous church community that first came to Massachusetts Bay was not as stable as it once was, and many farmers and laborers found their standard of living beginning to decline.\(^\text{236}\)


\(^{233}\) In his book *Race, Class, and Politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society*, Gary Nash cautioned his reader against overstating the change that occurred in colonial New England. Although he admitted that there were certainly social, economic, and legal shifts that occurred in the colonial Northeast, he was critical of other scholars who have overemphasized change, when in fact New England remained relatively homogeneous throughout the colonial period when compared to other regions. (Gary Nash, *Race, Class, and Politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 6-8.)


There was also an increase in the slave population in New England during the first half of the eighteenth-century, which further complicated the social network. Although slaves always made up a relatively small percentage of the total Massachusetts population, as the general population increased, so did the number of Africans. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Lorenzo Greene estimated that the total New England population was around 90,000, with only about 1,000 Africans. By 1755 the number of Africans in Massachusetts alone had risen to 4,500. Although this was only about 2.2 percent of the total population, it was nonetheless a significant increase.\footnote{Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 73, 81.} Furthermore, the African slave population of New England was not dispersed evenly throughout the region and was instead concentrated in certain regions, especially coastal urban areas.\footnote{William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 14.} By 1752, for example, people of African descent made up about 10 percent of the total population of Boston, which was home to nearly one-third of the total slave population of Massachusetts.\footnote{Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 84.} Although this increase in the number of slaves may have had a relatively small effect on the lives of some colonists, it could not have been ignored by those living in Boston, a major center for trade and politics in the Northeast. There was also an increase in New England’s involvement in the slave trade during the first half of the eighteenth century. Although slaveholding may never have been as critical to the economy in the North as it was to the South, slave trading was nonetheless important to the New England economy, and there would have been steady streams of Africans coming through Boston’s ports.

According to James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, the number of Africans in British North America, “rose from 1,600 between 1626 and 1650, to over 50,000 between 1721 and 1740, and to over 100,000 during the peak period between 1741 and 1760.” (James Oliver Horton and Louis E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700 -1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4).


For more detailed statistics about the increase in the African American population of New England, see table 7 of William Piersen’s appendix in: *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), and for information on all of the colonies, see Table 1 of Ira Berlin’s *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1998), 396-70.
During the colonial period, the law gave colonists the impression that their culture and way of life remained stable. It provided them with a sense of control because it offered them a way to reassert and make official the unwritten rules that the community deemed important and that had long organized their society. This attempt at stability led to a significant rise in the number of laws passed in Massachusetts, increasing from about seventeen per session at the beginning of the 1700s to thirty-eight per session by the middle of the century. As the population of New England changed and became more diverse, it was difficult for colonists to maintain the sense of communalism that had characterized the early settlement, and they were forced to enact laws in an attempt to reaffirm their collective identity. The result of many of these laws, however, was to distinguish slaves and people of color from free whites, which challenged rather than supported their religious goal of communalism.

Although the Body of Liberties provided a general outline of the rights of colonists, it was just the first step in developing a code of law that dealt with the changing New England economy and social makeup. From the very beginning, it was not as comprehensive as the people or the General Court wanted, and in 1648 it was revised and printed as The Book of the General Lawes and Liberties Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts, more commonly referred to as the Laws and Liberties. Though there were additions made to the document over the next few

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240 James Oliver Horton and Louis E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5. According to Gavin Wright, “The number of Africans transported to the Americas between 1700 and 1820 was five times larger than the number of free European migrants, and slave-based products dominated the long-distance markets of the era.” (Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 14.)


decades, the creation of the Laws and Liberties was an important step because it became the
foundation of the law in Massachusetts during the seventeenth century. The document began
with an explanation of why it was necessary. It stated,

So soon as God set up Politicall Government among his people Israel hee gave them a
body of lawes for judgement both in civil and criminal causes… For a Common-wealth
without lawes is like a Ship without rigging and steeradge. Nor is it sufficient to have
principles or fundamentalls, but these are to be drawn out into so many of their deductions
as the time and the condition of that people may have use of. And it is very unsafe and
injurious to the body of the people to put them to learn their duty and libertie from general
rules, nor is it enough to have lawes except they be also just.244

Unlike the Body of Liberties, which focused on outlining rights and protections, the Laws and
Liberties included a more comprehensive code of law. There were portions of the Laws and
Liberties that were carried over from the Body of Liberties, but many of the previous statutes
were expanded and about one third were completely new.245 These additions primarily outlined
issues of criminal, or “public” law. According to Haskins, “Not only was it an authoritative
compilation of constitutional provisions and civil administration – justice, courts, trade, taxation,
licensing, agriculture, education, military affairs, and the relation between church and state –
but,…it also included much substantive law relating to such matters as crime, inheritance, and
domestic relations.”246 In 1658, the code was revised and republished by order of the General
Court, and additions were made to that document until 1692 when the colony was granted a new
charter. This charter was signed by King William and Queen Mary on October 7, 1691 and
expanded the Massachusetts colony to include not only the Massachusetts Bay colony, but also
the Plymouth Colony, the Province of Maine, portions of Nova Scotia, and the “tract of land

244 The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge,
Mass.: General Court, 1648), A2.
245 George Lee Haskins, Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: “A Study in Tradition and Design (New York:
246 George Lee Haskins, Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: “A Study in Tradition and Design (New York:
lying between the said Territories of Nova Scotia and the said Province of Main.”

With this new charter came the publication of the Acts and Resolves of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, which was the legal code of the province for the remainder of the colonial period.

Because the Massachusetts Bay colony was part of the British Empire and remained under British rule until the American Revolution, one might assume that British common law heavily influenced the colony’s legal systems, but in fact it did not provide much of a guide at all. According to Peter Charles Hoffer, the earliest colonial lawmakers had a “very imperfect knowledge of English law. Few had studied it, and fewer still remembered all they had learned. Colonial legislators and lawyers recalled the general outlines of English law; time and distance blurred the details.”

In addition to the problems this unfamiliarity would have caused, English laws were also not designed to govern colonies, and were not written to organize frontier communities, mediate relationships with native population, or control a slave population. Men unfamiliar with the laws of their homeland were dealing with new situations and attempting to develop laws that they believed were in accordance with God’s will, even if they were not strictly based on Mosaic law. The result was a distinct legal system that suited their unique needs. William Nelson described the colonial legal system saying, “The English legal heritage of the inhabitants of…New England constituted a set of background norms to which they occasionally turned when convenient, but England’s common law was not the initial foundation.

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The charter was signed in 1691, but did not arrive in North America until 1692.


of their legal system."

One important addition to British common law was that the Massachusetts legal codes had to deal with the presence of slaves in the colony. Chattel slavery was common in many parts of the world, but it had no basis or precedent in English law. There were slaves in the Massachusetts Bay colony as early as 1638, but early on there were relatively few legal distinctions made between people who were enslaved and those who were indentured servants. This does not mean that there were no differences, however. The most obvious were that while servants were made free after a set number of years, slaves were bound for their lifetimes, and the children of servants were not affected by their parents’ status, whereas the children of enslaved women were born into permanent bondage. In addition to these differences, which were unwritten but significant and binding from very early on, there were also many additional distinctions that were eventually written into law. Over time, laws were put into place that redefined slaves as property, restricted their rights, and punished them differently, making them a distinct class within Massachusetts’ society. Although the law initially categorized slaves like servants and children, this was already changing by the turn of the eighteenth century and laws in Massachusetts functioned to dehumanize slaves by distinguishing them from other members of the community. Legal codes and restrictions moved slaves to the periphery of society, rather than integrating them into the larger culture.

In John Cotton’s Judicials, which he drafted in 1636, he mentioned the existence of a servant population when he proposed law that would provide freemen with monetary compensation if they were physically harmed, whereas servants who were injured by their

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masters would be relieved of their service. The Body of Liberties, enacted five years later, included a similar protection against physical harm, but also included additional rights. Sections eighty-five through eighty-eight, entitled “Liberties of Servants,” explained the protocol for dealing with servants who fled from harsh owners. It stated that servants fleeing from tyrannical or cruel masters would be protected as long as they fled to the home of a freeman in the same town, notice was promptly given to their masters, and a local official was notified of the situation. It also stated that servants could not be forced to work for more than one year for anyone other than their masters unless a court agreed to it, and that those who served diligently and faithfully for seven years would be released and would not be “sent away emptie.” These laws clearly indicate that there were distinctions made between servants and free people, and although portions may have served as a general outline for the rights of slaves in later years, these sections of the Body of Liberties were clearly not intended to deal with bond-slavery. This is likely because the slave population in Massachusetts during this time was minimal. There was no need to outline distinct laws for slaves because there were simply not enough of them to warrant it. Even so, differences soon arose between slaves and servants. The most obvious was the idea that faithful servants would be freed after seven years, which certainly did not apply to slaves, who were bound for their entire lives. Similarly, these laws made clear that servants could not be forced to work for anyone other than their master for more than a year, “neither in the life time of their master nor after their death by their Executors or Administrators unlesse it be by consent of Authoritie assembled in some Court or two Assistants.” Whereas a servant’s

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253 John Cotton. *An Abstract of the Lawes of New England as they are now established* (London: F. Coules and W. Ley, 1641), 15. (Chapter information on page 14.)
indenture could not generally be bequeathed, slaves maintained their status for the duration of their lives, not the lives of their original owner. Although the “Liberties of Servants” portion of the Body of Liberties did not discuss bond-slavery, it was mentioned in a later section entitled “Liberties of Forreiners and Strangers.” This portion of the Body of Liberties stated that, “There shall never be any bond slaverie, vallinage or Captivitie amongst us unles it be lawfull Captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of god established in Israell concerning such persons doeth morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be Judged thereto by Authoritie.”  

Although this section was presented as a protection for foreigners and strangers and did not go into detail about regulating slavery in the region, it nonetheless made clear that under certain circumstances bond-slavery was permissible in the Massachusetts Bay colony. This was something that John Cotton had not mentioned in his proposed legal code, and it was an addition that set the stage for an increase in the African slave population in the years to come.

Although the Body of Liberties had mentioned servitude, the Law and Liberties, which became the law in 1648, gave a much more detailed account of servants’ rights and restrictions. This was not surprising since this new legal code was established in large part because colonists remained concerned that the Body of Liberties gave magistrates too much flexibility. It was also during the 1640s that New England culture began to change significantly. As mentioned above, in the second half of the seventeenth century foreign trade became an increasingly important aspect of the Massachusetts economy. During this time a shift began away from small insular communities to a more diverse and interconnected economy, which was illustrated by the fact

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256 William Henry Whitmore, A Bibliographical Sketch of the Laws of Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1890), 53.
that beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century, seaport towns were consistently some of the wealthiest in New England.\textsuperscript{257} It was also during this time that some of the traditional, communal religious zeal associated with New England began to weaken. As Eric Seeman has argued, by the turn of the eighteenth century, ministers had begun to play less of a role in steering many of the beliefs and practices of their congregants. Although this culminated in the eighteenth century, the wheels were set in motion in the seventeenth, as ministers and their congregants began to disagree on religious issues. As Seeman explained, the Half-Way Covenant “foreshadowed a number of eighteenth-century controversies, in that ministers and laypeople were found on both sides of the debate…”\textsuperscript{258} As the economy began shifting more towards foreign trade and traditional religious life beginning to falter, it was understandable that colonists would push to reaffirm their values through a more coherent legal system in 1648. Although the only mention of bond slavery in this document was almost identical to what was included in 1641, there were a number of ways in which servants were legally distinguished from freemen for the first time.\textsuperscript{259} One way in which this was done, while reaffirming traditional puritan values, was by discussing servants alongside children. As has already been established, puritan culture had emphasized that servants and slaves should be treated like dependent family members, and in many ways the codes in the Laws and Liberties made this tradition into law. For example, in the section on “Burglarie & Theft,” the punishment for these crimes was outlined. For a first offense, freemen were branded on the forehead with a “B.” For the second, they were branded again and severely whipped, and after a third transgression the criminal could technically be put

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{258} Erik R. Seeman, \textit{Pious Persuasions: Laity and Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New England} (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{259} \textit{The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts} (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648), 4.
\end{itemize}
to death for “being incorrigible.”260 Children and servants, on the other hand, were at the mercy of their parents or masters. If their keepers agreed to pay a penalty, the offender was free to go, however, if they refused, the offender was openly whipped for their first offense.261 What is noteworthy here is less the severity of the punishment than the fact that children and servants were legally categorized together. The same was true in the requirement that “all masters of families doe once a week (at least) catechize their children and servants in the grounds & principles of Religion…;” in the exemptions that were made for military training; and for the requirement that all, presumably male, colonists help keep watch in times of peace.262 Servants were also designated like children when it came to taxation, as parents and masters were responsible for paying the tax for servants and children who did not earn wages.263 Although these codes certainly helped to reestablish the position of servants as dependent members of the Massachusetts family, there were also addition to the Laws and Liberties that singled out servants as marginal figures. In the section on “Masters, Servants, Labourers,” an addition was included that made it illegal for servants to give, sell, or transport any commodity without permission from their masters. It also gave magistrates and constables permission to use public funds to pursue and return servants who ran away from their maters. A final addition to the Laws and Liberties was the inclusion of a caveat in the section that protected servants from physical harm. Whereas earlier versions of the law simply stated that servants would be set free if they were maimed by their owners, the 1648 version in the Laws and Liberties added that they would

260 The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648), 4.
261 The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648), 5.
262 The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648),11, 42, 51.
263 The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648), 10.
not go free if their injuries were “by meer casualtie.”\textsuperscript{264} Although it is obvious that many of the laws outlined in the Laws and Liberties reasserted the religious position that servants were child-like members of the colonial family, it is also clear that these codes began to distinguish servants from other colonists in a number of significant ways.

In 1658, when Massachusetts law was again revised and republished as the Colonial Law of Massachusetts, much of the code remained the same as it was in 1648. The laws related to taxation, catechizing, burglary, military training, keeping watch, and the section that focused specifically on masters, servants, and laborers remained almost unchanged. There were additions to the section entitled “Children & Youth,” however. Part three of this section expressed concern that servants and youth were being corrupted. It mentioned “diverse loose, vaine and corrupt persons,” both foreigners and locals, who were drawing youth away from their work and studies, which was a dishonor to God, and imposed a fine of forty shillings on anyone convicted of encouraging or permitting such behavior.\textsuperscript{265} There was also an addition made in 1662 that discussed servants along with children and illustrated concern over another corrupting influence in the society. It was “an Addition to the Laws about Apparel,” and imposed a fine on tailors who made apparel for servants or children without their masters’ or parents’ permission. This was deemed necessary because the “Rising Generation” was in danger of being “Corrupted and Effeminated…”\textsuperscript{266} These additions, which supported viewing servants like children, nonetheless distinguished them from the European population by holding them to different legal standards. These laws were noteworthy for this reason, but the most significant change with regard to

\textsuperscript{264} The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusets (Cambridge, Mass.: General Court, 1648), 38-39.
\textsuperscript{265} “The General Laws of the Massachusets Colony, Revised and Published by Order of the General Court in October 1658,” The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts (Boston, 1889; reprt. Littleton, Col.: Rothman, 1995), 137.
\textsuperscript{266} “The General Laws of the Massachusets Colony, Revised and Published by Order of the General Court in October 1658,” The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts (Boston, 1889; reprt. Littleton, Col.: Rothman, 1995), 221.
servitude in the 1658 laws was in the section on bond-slavery. Whereas earlier version of the law stated that bond-slavery was only permissible when the slave was taken as a lawful captive of a just war or a “stranger” who willingly sold himself or was sold to colonists, the 1658 version removed the word “stranger.” At first glance this may seem like a minor change, but in fact it was a dramatic because it made it legal to enslave the children of slaves. Lorenzo Greene has pointed out that the original inclusion of the term “strangers” was most likely an oversight. He argued that because puritans were largely unfamiliar with institutionalized slavery, they did not anticipate that children born into slavery could use the wording of this law to argue for their freedom. Since children born in the colony would not have been considered “strangers” regardless of their parents’ status, “By omitting the word ‘strangers,’ Massachusetts made it possible for the children of slaves to be legally held in bondage.”

This was an important shift because it explicitly made slavery distinct from servitude. In addition to the fact that slaves were held for their lifetimes and could be sold and bequeathed, this change to the law also made it legally possible for the children of slaves to inherit their mother’s status, something that was not the case for servants.

There was also an addition made to the law in 1680 that distinguished “servants” and “negroes” from the rest of the population. Whereas earlier laws typically discussed servitude in general terms with only limited distinctions made between servitude and bond-slavery, there does not appear to be any discussion of race until the 1680 addition. This version of the law

268 Although English common law mandated that children inherited the status of their fathers and there were never official laws enacted to change this in Massachusetts, tradition quickly made it so that childrens’ status was based on their mother’s legal position. This can be clearly seen in a resolve passed in 1716 in which an enslaved man, William Brown, petitioned for his freedom. The resolve stated that although his father was free, Brown was a slaves, as was his mother. He petitioned for his freedom not on the grounds that his father was free, but because his owner had agreed to manumit him. Because of a law passed that required slave owners to pay a fee of fifty pounds before manumitting their slaves, Brown had to prove that he would be able to support himself in order to gain his freedom. (Resolves, Volume IX, pg. 492)
made it illegal for anyone to take a servant or “Negro” as a passenger on a vessel without permission, and it punished offenders with a twenty-pound fine.²⁶⁹ It was around this time that the number of slaves in Massachusetts began to increase and we see the first references to the northern slave trade.²⁷⁰ Earlier language that discussed servants alongside children remained in other sections of the 1680 revision, but this addition marks an important shift. For the first time, Africans were being categorized by their race, rather than their status as free, servant, or slave, and this trend continued in the Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay. For example, chapter twenty, section two of the Acts of 1693-4 was similar to earlier laws that dealt with the corruption of youth and servants, but in this version there was also an explicit prohibition against serving alcohol to “negros.” The law read, “no person who is or shall be licensed to be an inholder, taverner, common victuller, or retailer, shall suffer any apprentice, servant, or negro to sit drinking in his or her house, or to have any manner of drink there, otherwise than by special order or alloweance of their respective masters, on pain of forfeiting the sum of ten shillings for every such offence.”²⁷¹ There was also an addition to section sixteen of the same chapter, which described the punishment for buying goods from any “Indian servant, or negro or molatto servant, or slave.” The person who purchased the goods was expected to make financial restitution, whereas the “Indian, negro or molatto servant, or slave” was openly whipped. In addition to the racial distinctions in this law, the use of whipping as punishment was also noteworthy because it was a way in which servants and slaves were distinguished from the rest of the population. Whereas freepersons were generally punished with fines or imprisonment,

²⁷¹ Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, Volume I, 154. Similar laws were also on the record through the middle of the eighteenth century.
if the fine could not be paid, the legal punishment for servants and slaves was often public whipping.\textsuperscript{272} The main reason given for this distinction was that if servants or slaves were imprisoned, their masters would lose their labor, which was seen as an unfair economic burden.\textsuperscript{273} This was the stated reason why servants and slaves were punished in this way, but this penalty also carried significant social weight. Public whippings were viewed as a particularly shameful punishment in colonial Massachusetts, so much so that there were at times legal prohibitions against punishing certain people this way. The Body of Liberties, for example, required that “No man shall be beaten with above 40 stripes, nor shall any true gentleman, nor any man equall to a gentleman be punished with whipping, unles his crime be very shamefull, and his course of life vitious and profligate.”\textsuperscript{274} By punishing servants and slaves with whipping, the law may have reduced the economic burden on masters, but it also differentiated them as a group from the rest of the colonial population by making it socially acceptable to reprimand them with a very shameful penalty.\textsuperscript{275}

Servants were mentioned throughout the Laws and Liberties and the Colonial Law of Massachusetts, and there were occasional references to race in later versions of these texts, but

\textsuperscript{272} A 1703 law punished slaves who were out after nine o’clock at night with public whipping. (Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, Volume I, 535-6). A 1744 law punished slaves for using profanity with whipping, if they could not pay a fine, whereas soldiers and sailors were punished for their first offense with time in the stocks. (Acts and Resolves 1742-1756, Volume III, 39.; Acts and Resolves 1742-1756, Volume III, 646.) A law enacted in 1752 punished slaves who broke street lamps with fines and whipping, as did a 1752 law that prohibited slaves from assembling and carrying weapons, whereas freemen were fined or imprisoned for these crimes. (Acts and Resolves 1742-1756, Volume III (1752), 646.; Acts and Resolves 1754-1756, Volume III, 648.)

\textsuperscript{273} Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, Volume I, 223-4.

\textsuperscript{274} William Henry Whitmore, A Bibliographical Sketch of the Laws of Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1890), 42-3.

\textsuperscript{275} In The Devil Made Me Do It, Juliet Haines Mofford mentioned that one’s social status often influenced the kind of punishment one received. She explained that wealthy colonists and those of high rank were generally punished with fines, and that even those were often times waived. (Juliet Haines Mofford, The Devil Made Me Do It!: Crime and Punishment in Early New England (Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 2012), 10.) For more on this, see James McManus, “Unequal Protection of the Law,” in Law and Liberty in Early New England: Criminal Justice and Due Process, 1620-1692 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 115-130.
there were many more laws and restrictions that referred specifically to Africans in the Acts and Resolves than in previous versions of the law. At the turn of the eighteenth century, many of the laws that were on the books relating to servants and people of African descent remained in the Acts and Resolves, but there were also many additions. One significant change to the law took place in 1695, when slaves were no longer taxed as human beings, but were instead cataloged and taxed like property. Although slaves were bequeathed like property before this, up until this point the legal codes had them taxed like children. This changed in 1695, though, when the “Act for Granting a Tax Upon Polls and Estates” categorized them as “estates,” rather than “polls.” The Act required that, “All negro, molatto and Indian servants, males of fourteen years of age and upward” would be taxed, “at the rate of twenty pound estate, and females at fourteen pounds estate, unless disabled by infirmit[y] [ies.]” It then went on to catalog the rate at which livestock above a certain age would be taxed. This new categorization was further clarified in 1707 when section six of chapter seven explained that the value of “Indian, molatto and negro slaves” was to be estimated “proportionally as other personal estate,” whereas servants, regardless of race, were to be numbered and taxed at the same rate as other polls, “not as personal estate.” A similar clarification was made in 1718 when the law specified that all men and women held as servants for life (i.e. slaves) were to be taxed as part of the personal estate, whereas Indians and African Americans who had a time limit on their servitude were to be

276 Lorenzo Greene claimed that this had already begun to change by 1675. He cited the taxable estate of Paul White of Newbury, which included an African slave. Greene also said that this status was given legal recognition in 1692 when taxes were raised to help strengthen the defense of Boston harbor. Although the 1692 law called for a tax on both polls and property, I could find no indication that slaves were to be counted as estates rather than polls in that year’s code. Greene was correct in pointing out that in 1694 servants and slaves were explicitly counted as polls and taxed at a rate of twelve pence per person, whereas the following year they were listed and taxed as part of one’s estate, but again, I see no record in the Acts and Resolves prior to 1695 that suggest that servants or slaves were considered property. (Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 169.)

277 Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, Volume I, 214. Later versions of the law required that the worth of slaves be estimated, rather than proscribing exact amounts per individual, but they remained part of the estate, rather than polls. These kinds of laws remained on the books throughout the colonial period.

counted and taxed at the same rate as other polls.\textsuperscript{279} On June 22, 1717 Samuel Sewall expressed his concern over categorizing slaves in this way and recorded in his dairy that earlier that day he had “essay’d…to prevent Indians and Negros being Rated with Horses and Hogs; but could not prevail.”\textsuperscript{280} Although there were times when Indian and African servants were also counted as estates rather than polls, slaves were never again counted as people and instead remained taxable property throughout the rest of the colonial period.\textsuperscript{281} This shift was dramatic because it quite literally made slaves property, rather than people in the eyes of the law, which further distinguished them from other members of the society and distanced them from the position they used to hold as dependent family members. This change in perspective also contributed to a move away from the communalism that had characterized earlier puritan culture. By categorizing slaves a property, colonists were acknowledging their inability to integrate the entire population into the larger culture, and they were allowing slave owners to treat their slaves like any other forms of property, rather than encouraging them to prepare them to be members of the society.

A 1696 Resolve also illustrated the increased concern about defining slaves’ status. In that year there was a call for a law that explicitly stated that baptized slaves would not become free. Ten years before Cotton Mather published “The Negro Christianized,” in which he encouraged slave owners to convert their slaves and assured them that their Christian status would not free them, colonists were already concerned about this issue and were looking for guarantees that slaves would remain their property. The resolve explained, “It is Desired That ye well-knowne Discouragemt upon ye endeavours of many masters [to] Christianize their slaves,

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\textsuperscript{279} Acts and Resolves 1715-1741, Vol. II, 106.  
\textsuperscript{280} Samuel Sewall, The Diary of Samuel Sewall, volume II (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 822. Lorenzo Greene stated in The Negro in Colonial New England that Sewall made this plea in 1706, but it appears in his diary, as printed by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, in the year 1716.  
\textsuperscript{281} For examples of both servants and slaves being counted as property, see the Acts and Resolves 1715-1741, Volume II for the year 1734, chapter 14; and 1741, chapter 9.
may be removed by a Law which may take away all pre[text] to Release from just servitude, by receiving of Baptisme.”

Although no such law was ever enacted, the call for it shows that colonists were becoming increasingly aware of and concerned about controlling the slave population. An act passed in May of 1703 also dealt with concern over freed African Americans and Indians by making it impossible for owners to manumit their slaves unless the owner paid at least fifty pounds to the town’s treasury. Their concern was that slave owners would free their servants once they were no longer deemed useful due to age or illness. If this were the case, towns would be forced to support these recently freed slaves who could not financially support themselves. Section one of the act set the cost for manumission, and section two explicitly stated that no slave would be considered free unless his or her owner had paid the fee.

Although it could be argued that this law was meant to provide elderly or infirmed slaves with a measure of security and to protect them from being abandoned by their masters, this seems to have been a secondary concern, if one at all. The language of the law stated that the reason for the fifty pound fee was to “secure and indemnify the town or place from all charge for or about such molato or negro, to be manumitted and set at liberty, in case he or she by sickness, lameness, or otherwise, be rendred uncapable to support him- or herself.”

The concern was not about the wellbeing of the slave, but about the cost to the town. This was further clarified by a resolve that appeared thirteen years later, in 1716. It was an order that granted the petition of an enslaved man, William Brown. Brown’s owner had agreed to manumit him, but only if the court agreed to waive the fifty-pound fee. They determined that because Brown was young and healthy, he would be able to provide for himself and would therefore not become a burden to the town, so his petition was granted. Again, the apprehension here was primarily about who would pay to support a former

slaves, and it was only after it was decided that he would not become dependent on others that Brown was granted his freedom.\textsuperscript{285} It is clear from this act and this resolve that colonists were primarily concerned about the economic strain of having to support freed slaves who could no longer earn a living. Although it is also clear that they planned to support members of their community who could not provide for themselves, regardless of their race or former status, this hardly translated to a significant concern for the well being of Massachusetts’ slaves.

Though not a stated purpose, another possible advantage to passing this law was that it could help limit the number of Africans in the Massachusetts Bay. Requiring slave owners to financially support their slaves for their entire lives may have deterred slave ownership in the region, which was something that Massachusetts colonists were certainly thinking about. In 1706 an act was passed that leveled a four-pound tax for every African brought into the colony. Shipmasters were required to register each African slave, and faced a fine of eight-pounds for any slaves for which he did not account. Although it may appear at first glance that this tax was meant to limit the slave trade generally and was not specifically about limiting the African population in New England, in the final section it became clear that the goal was to discourage importing slaves into Massachusetts in particular. The final section explained that, “if any negro, imported as aforesaid, for whom the duty is paid, shall be again exported within the space of twelve months,… the importer here shall be allowed to draw back the whole duty of four pounds by him paid, and order shall be given accordingly.”\textsuperscript{286} Slaves that were brought to Massachusetts Bay but did not remain there were not taxed. This allowed slave traders to continue to import Africans without any penalty, as long as they sold them to people outside of the colony within a year. This tax did not punish slave traders per se, but it did penalize people in Massachusetts who

\textsuperscript{285} Resolves 1708-1719, Vol. IX, 492.
wanted to own slaves. In 1728 an additional act was passed in an attempt to more effectively
collect the tax on the “Importation of Negros.” It included a new section that dealt with the
problem of people bringing African slaves into the Massachusetts Bay Province from
neighboring colonies in order to avoid paying the duty. As a result, section two required anyone
who brought a slave into the colony to report their presence to the clerk of the town and pay the
four-pound duty within fourteen days. Those who failed to do so were fined an additional four
pounds on top of the original duty.\textsuperscript{287} This tax, which affected people in Massachusetts who
wanted to own slaves, but not the larger slave trade, was one way in which colonists attempted to
limit the presence of Africans in Massachusetts Bay. Another was an act passed in 1708 entitled,
“An Act to Encourage the Importation of White Servants.” This act imposed the same duty on
Indian slaves brought to Massachusetts that was already in place for African slaves and forbid
enslaving any Indians that were not held in bond-slavery somewhere else before coming to the
region. This showed that there was concern about the presence of non-whites and supports the
claim that the duty imposed on African slaves was meant to limit their numbers in New England.
In addition to discouraging the importation of non-white slaves, this act also encouraged the
importation of white servants by offering masters forty shillings for each male servant between
the ages of eight and twenty-five brought to Massachusetts from Great Britain.\textsuperscript{288}

This concern over the number of non-whites in the area was certainly related to the
increase in crime associated with the slave population.\textsuperscript{289} In addition to the laws that were meant

\textsuperscript{287} Acts and Resolves 1715-1741, Vol. II, 517.
When this law was enacted, section four indicated that it would be in place for seven years, but in 1738 it was
\textsuperscript{288} Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, Volume I, 634.
Explanations for new laws often described criminal behavior on the part of slaves, but James McManus pointed out
that slaves were actually rarely mentioned in colonial criminal records. He suggested that this was not because they
did not commit criminal acts, but that their crimes may have been underreported. Owners had an interest in not
to protect servants and children from corrupt influences, there were also a number of laws
enacted during the first half of the eighteenth century that were meant to combat the deviant
behavior of slaves. In 1703 an act “to prevent disorders in the night” was passed that explained
that “great disorders, insolencies and burglaries are ofttimes raised and committed in the night
time by Indian, negro and molatto servants and slaves…”290 Because of these “disorders” and
burglaries, a law was put into place that made it illegal for Indian or African servants or slaves to
be out after nine o’clock at night, unless they were out on an errand for their owner. Punishment
for breaking this law was imprisonment in the local house of correction or public whipping.291 A
similar law was passed in 1752, which made it a crime for anyone within a group of four or more
to carry a stick, club, or weapon of any kind. Although this law technically restricted the
behavior of all people, the explanation for the law was that “many great and disorders have of
late years been committed by tumultuous companies of men, children and negroes…” in the
streets of Boston where they used “abusive language” and demanded money from the
townspeople.292 In 1705 there were also anti-miscegenation laws enacted, which were deemed
necessary because, according to a note about the law, there were complaints about black men
having sex with white women.293 The first section of the law made it illegal for men of African
descent to “commit fornication with an English woman, or a woman of any other Christian
nation.” The punishment for breaking this law was a severe whipping, with no imposed limit to

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reporting their slaves because they were either responsible for paying their fines, which was not in their financial
interest, or they might have lost their slaves’ service for a few days while he or she recovered from being whipped.

(John Wood Sweet, Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 72.)

293 Acts and Resolves 1692-1714, Volume I, 580.
the number of stripes, and removal from the colony within six months. The woman was also made responsible for caring for any child that resulted from the union. The punishment for a white man having sex with a woman of African descent was that he would be publicly whipped, fined five pounds, and would be responsible for any child that resulted, and the woman would be sent out of the province.\(^{294}\) The severity of these punishments illustrate the level of concern over racial mixing, as does the final section of the law, which made it illegal for anyone to marry an African and a European. The fine for doing so was fifty pounds.\(^{295}\) In addition to distinguishing slaves from the rest of the New England population, laws against interracial marriage also functioned to reaffirm colonial power dynamics. As John Wood Sweet explained, “It is not difficult to imagine that their goal was less to keep the races apart than to keep relations of power clear. Marriage… [was] a public relationship that served not only to unite individuals but also to merge families and fortunes and seal alliances. In this sense, marriage affirmed identity and equality in a way that required public consent and legal authorization. Thus, repudiating interracial marriage was a powerful way to repudiate racial equality.”\(^{296}\) In addition to curfews and marriage restrictions, laws were also enacted that made it illegal for slaves to purchase lottery tickets. The law stated that although the lottery had previously been open to everyone, it was no longer because permitting “Indians, Negroes, and Molattoes to purchase tickets or draw any Lot or Lots might prove of mischievous consequences.” It thus became illegal for anyone to sell tickets to Indians or Africans, and if they somehow bought a winning ticket, they would be

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\(^{294}\) The punishment assigned to whites for committing acts of miscegenation were not only less severe than for Africans, but it is also noteworthy that although these laws were a result of complaints about African men engaging in sex acts with white women. Legislators had failed to institute any such laws earlier, even though there were a number of cases that dealt with African women and white men. This is not at all surprising considering the dynamics of colonial oppression and power, but it does support the claim that these laws were less about reducing interracial mixing and more about reaffirming hierarchies of power. (John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 150.)


Although the lottery may seem like a relatively minor issue, the enactment of this law means that it was deemed important enough to be controlled, and it distinguished people of color from whites in yet another way.

In addition to the laws that were put in place to control the slave population, in 1707 there were also laws enacted that were specific to the free African population. Chapter three of that year’s laws was concerned with the fact that there were able-bodied Africans who were not participating in military training or keeping watch. This chapter allowed selectmen of each town to require free African men to work repairing highways, cleaning streets, or doing other work around the town. Failure to perform their assigned tasks resulted in a fine of five shillings for each day he missed. It also called for freemen sixteen and over to join military duty in times of “alarm,” and imposed fines on any free people of African descent who entertained black servants. These laws went a step further than others by distinguishing free blacks from other free people. Whereas other laws distinguished enslaved and free populations, this section imposed legal distinctions based solely on race.

Although colonial law in Massachusetts did not originally differentiate between people based on race, by the beginning of the eighteenth century a number of laws were put into place to distinguish people of African and European descent, relegating Africans to an inferior status. They were punished differently and went from being categorized like children, which fit into the original view of them as dependent family members, to being classified and counted as property. Throughout the first half of the century, an increasing number of laws were also enacted to regulate Africans’ behaviors and to limit their interactions with the white population. By focusing on the earliest years of the colonial period and emphasizing apparent rights that were

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granted to people of African descent, other accounts of Massachusetts law have mischaracterized the legal system there as encouraging equality. By looking at how the legal code changed throughout the colonial period, however, it becomes clear that whites in Massachusetts came to accept the validity of laws that categorized slaves as property and that limited peoples’ rights based on race. Like the travel narratives discussed in the previous chapter, these laws expedited a move away from the religious communalism that characterized the early years of settlement, towards a more commercial ethos in which moral virtue became associated more strongly with individual Christians than in the corporate structures of society. Slaves were no longer described as members of the larger community, and there was no longer an expectation that they would be integrated into the larger culture. Slavery and the treatment of slaves became a private matter, which in turn allowed colonists to view and handle their slaves as chattel, rather than human beings, and this had long lasting implications. This change set the stage for the ratification of a constitution that similarly categorized slaves as property rather than human beings, severely limited their rights, and allowed for the continuation and spread of slavery in the United States.

The following chapter will look at how changes in religious thought supported the emergence of a stronger commercialism in New England and how this affected the institution of slavery in the region.
CHAPTER FIVE

“GOD IS THE GOVERNOUR OF OUR COMMERCE:” RELIGION, SLAVERY, AND THE EXPASION OF NEW ENGLAND MARKETS

There is no lack of literature on the New England economy. As one author explained, there has been a “long-standing but vigorously ongoing debate about the pace, pattern, and genesis of growth in the early American economy.” Numerous historians have attempted to explain how and why the region’s economic system changed and developed over time, and these explanations often revolve around a discussion of religion and the marketplace. Perhaps the best-known attempt to connect puritan thought and the emergence of the New England economy was Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Although Weber was not concerned with New England exclusively, he did argue that the religious worldview most associated with the region was essential to the emergence of capitalism. He claimed that capitalism developed in New England and Protestant Europe because of what he described as a Protestant work ethic. According to Weber, puritans were driven to work tirelessly by their belief in predestination. He maintained that because Calvinism removed any means of assuring salvation, early colonists looked to their temporal status in order to feel confident that they were among the elect. The more success one attained, the more assured he felt that he was predestined to be saved, and as a result, puritans worked to accumulate wealth in a way that had never been seen before.

Since Weber’s early attempt at explaining the relationship between puritan thought and the New England economy, many other authors have taken up the task of understanding the

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region’s marketplace. Some have agreed with Weber in so far as they maintain that there was something particular about puritan thought that led to the expansion of the colonial market, while others have suggested that the area’s economic success was a result of a move away from religious authority. Richard Bushman, for example, argued in *From Puritan to Yankee* that over time New England settlers moved away from their initial, communal religious ideology and became increasingly individualistic as their original means of social control and cohesion “gave way under the impact first of economic ambition and later of the religious impulses of the Great Awakening.” According to Bushman, by the middle of the eighteenth century, puritan ideology was no longer controlling economic ambitions as it had in the past. Colonists were encouraged to be industrious and prosper, while simultaneously being told not to covet riches, and these two messages were simply too difficult to uphold simultaneously. As a result, Bushman outlined a move away from puritan ideology to what he called a “Yankee society.”

Many later authors have taken issue with Bushman’s analysis, however, claiming that his story of declension is inaccurate. Darrett Rutman, for instance, emphasized the diversity of economic ideologies found in New England from the beginning of settlements there. In *Winthrop’s Boston*, Rutman explained that within the first years of arriving in New England the idealism that Winthrop had expressed in his “Model of Christian Charity” sermon aboard the Arbella was waning. There was simultaneously a need for skilled labor and a shortage of capable tradesmen, which resulted in colonists charging “exorbitant rates” until the courts stepped in to

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implement limitations.\textsuperscript{305} According to Rutman, there was never an ideal puritan economy in place from which to fall. From the earliest years of colonial settlement, he showed that there was diversity in religious and economic thought, and this was not only found among laborers and farmers. As Louise A. Breen illustrated in her 2001 work, \textit{Transgressing the Bounds}, there was not consensus among “elite men of the first generation” either.\textsuperscript{306} She too was working against what she saw as a misguided “declension” narrative and maintained that involvement within the Atlantic marketplace was not just about making money, but also showed a willingness among many colonists to accept and be part of a diverse world. Although she did not deny that there were New Englanders who wanted to remain relatively isolated and homogeneous, she showed that they were not the only voices, even in the first years of colonial settlement.\textsuperscript{307} John Frederick Martin made a similar point in his \textit{Profits in the Wilderness} where he argued that “Economics did not replace ethics in some slowly unfolding declension of values. Rather, the ethical demands to develop the wilderness (boosted by practical arguments) prevailed over the ethical demands to leave it alone.”\textsuperscript{308} In order to work against a story of religious decline, he not only recognized that there was diversity among early New England colonists, but he also attempted to show that religious thought was not always removed from the equation, even among colonists who supported the expanding economy.

Stephen Innes similarly emphasized the role that religious thought and morality played in the development of the New England economy. In a work reminiscent of Weber’s, Innes

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\textsuperscript{306} Louise A. Breen, \textit{Transgressing the Bounds: Subversive Enterprise among the Puritan Elite in Massachusetts, 1630-1692} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.
\textsuperscript{307} Louise A. Breen, \textit{Transgressing the Bounds: Subversive Enterprise among the Puritan Elite in Massachusetts, 1630-1692} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.
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maintained that New Englanders developed “moral capitalism.” He argued that puritan ideas about the importance of one’s calling led them to work diligently and accumulate wealth, while their religious insistence on self-denial and stewardship reined in economic excesses. It was the combination of these religious ideologies, not a move away from religious thought, that gave puritans an advantage in the marketplace. Margaret Ellen Newell also discussed the relationship between religion and economics in the colonial Northeast in *From Dependency to Independence*. In this work she explained that, “By the late 1640s, the colonists all but abandoned most traditional forms of socioeconomic regulation that circumscribed market behavior in favor of policies that facilitated it…[They] justified an activist state on the grounds that commercial expansion enhanced the common good by ensuring collective prosperity.”

According to Newell, religion was not removed from economic thought, but there was an important shift that occurred early in the colonial period. As early forms of control failed to result in economic success, New Englanders shifted their view of economic issues. The marketplace was no longer discussed in terms of “sin and salvation,” but instead became a matter of “political economy.”

Even so, colonists were careful to frame these policies within a puritan worldview. As a result, economic success and expansion were no longer discussed as a threat to one’s spiritual well-being, but were instead described as a positive way to enhance the common good. Newell also added a new perspective that earlier authors had overlooked by including some discussion of natural law, although she primarily discussed how this thought influenced ideas about currency

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Mark Valeri made a similar argument in *Heavenly Merchandize*, where he rejected the idea that religious influences were removed from the New England economy. He traced how the marketplace went from being a realm of religious danger to a place where good Christian businessmen could act virtuously. He wrote that changes in how New Englanders viewed economic involvement, “represented neither secularization and the decline of piety nor the mere unfolding of a commercial ethos essential to puritanism. Instead, it represents the importance of theological and moral transformations from within puritanism – changes in conceptions of the church, providence, and the civic order.”\(^{313}\) In this work, Valeri showed that changes to the New England economy were not a result of decline of religious authority, but instead came in part from changes in religious thought, and he too integrated a discussion of natural law into his account. He argued that colonists’ ideas about providence changed over time and that by the early eighteenth century they had come to accept that God ruled his people through a natural law that sanctioned those practices that allowed colonial Christians to achieve economic success.\(^{314}\)

Although there has been significant debate about exactly how and why the New England economy developed the way it did, all of the above-mentioned authors do agree that major changes occurred. Because of the environment, New Englanders were never going to be able to develop an economy based strictly on agriculture, so towns like Boston, Salem, and Springfield quickly developed as centers of international commercial trade.\(^{315}\) The earliest settlers of Massachusetts Bay “organized localized markets, [and were] dependent on new immigrants and

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capital imported from England.”316 In other words, the process of settling in a new place was enough to maintain a viable economy in the first years of colonization. Colonists of Plymouth also developed the fur trade and had initial success trading with Native Americans in the region.317 Relying on migration from Europe and the fur trade did not provide a stable economic system, however, and by the 1640s the original New England economy was already collapsing.318 In response, colonists developed an economy based on exporting “provisions, fish, and commercial services to a variety of markets in return for English manufactures.”319 When establishing a settlement was no longer enough to maintain an economy, New Englanders were forced to expand their dealings, and since agriculture was not a viable alternative, they began to look to trade. By the middle of the 1650s New England’s economy had begun to rebound, especially in Massachusetts where settlers began to develop commercial ties throughout the Atlantic world. Shipbuilding became a lucrative business, so much so that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Massachusetts was second only to London in ship production within the English-speaking world.320 Trade also expanded to the West Indies, which Stephen Innes pointed out, linked the success of New England’s economy of the growth of the Atlantic slave trade.321 During the 1660s Massachusetts Bay colonists shipped thousands of slaughtered farm animals to places like Barbados and Jamaica so that sailors in those regions could stock their ships with

Within a very short time, then, the region’s economy was no longer based in local markets. Over time, with the population growing, the New England economy became less centered around exporting food, although fish remained an important export, and instead trading in lumber, barrels, cider, and especially ships, became essential to the region’s economy. By 1700 the Massachusetts economy had changed dramatically, as “New England merchants managed networks of exchange that linked producers of agricultural goods and would-be consumers of finished goods to European markets.” During this time, there was a steady flow of British goods, West Indian sugar and molasses, furs from the middle colonies, and lumber and fish from New England traveling through towns like Boston. The development of the region’s economy meant that most puritan communities were by no means isolated, that colonists were making their livings in diverse ways, and that people were accruing more wealth than they had in the first years of settling, and this expansion into the economy of the Atlantic world only continued. In 1701 13% of all English exports came to the colonies in North America, and by 1772 that number had increased to 33%.

It is clear, then, that the New England economy expanded and changed in dramatic ways in the first decades of puritan settlement. As authors like Margaret Ellen Newell and Mark Valeri have shown, though, this change did not result in an abandonment of religious ideology. Religion remained an important lens through which New Englanders understood their dealings, even as

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the nature of the economy changed. Ministers continued to discuss how people should run their businesses and treat each other, even as they stopped trying to literally control the market. Influential New Englanders continued to call on scripture and tradition in order to direct colonists’ behavior as they integrated ideas about natural law into their economic debates. The market and religion were clearly not separate for New Englanders. Although there has been extensive work done tracing changes in the New England economy and religious thought, what is almost entirely absent from these texts is mention of the slave trade. Religious thought was important for how New Englander’s understood slavery and the economy, and the slave trade was an important part of the Atlantic economy during this time, yet mentions of it are noticeably missing from many of the above-mentioned works. The contribution of this chapter is a discussion of how changes to the marketplace, religious ideas about the economy, and emerging ideas about property affected the institution of slavery and how colonists viewed the slave trade in New England.

Religious thought and ideology remained an important influence as the New England economy changed, and many New Englanders continued to relate their religious worldviews back to their economic lives and vice versa. Although there was a general sense among many colonists that religion was on the decline and that by the early 1700s the population was “greatly degenerated,” this view was not due to an actual divide between religion and economics. Rather, these two aspects of people’s lives continued to affect each other, even as many colonists worried that this influence had faded. As Peter Thacher explained, “All men are bound to Act and Exercise the Fear of God thro’ their whole Commerce, and in all their Dealings one with another. This is a Scriptural Truth, tho’ contrary to the practice of the Age we live in; and indeed

327 Valeri is the one exception to this. He looked closely at Hugh Hall, an influential Boston slave trader originally from Barbados, in order to show how changes to religious thought influenced his commercial dealings. 328 Samuel Whitman, Practical Godliness (New London: Timothy Green, 1714), 36.
if this Truth were so weighed as it deserves, ‘twould overturn many of the wicked ways of Dealings in these Times.”

Although Thacher believed that religious ideals were no longer guiding commerce, he maintained firmly that they should, and advising people about how they should behave in their business transactions remained important for New England ministers throughout the colonial period. Thomas Foxcroft made a similar observation, claiming that, “Now we are Guilty of these provoking Evils: when we Turn from the predominant Love of God and of his Holy Ways, neglect his Interest, and seek the Pleasures, Wealth or Honours of the present World, with a greater Ardour, as a more desirable Source of Good and Happiness…and how dreadfully is the Love of the World prevailing more and more upon this Professing People!”

In order to confront this perceived loss of devotion, many preachers gave sermons encouraging their listeners to reevaluate their business lives, deal fairly with one another, to use their success in order to help others, and warned of the dangers of both wealth and poverty. Joseph Sewall, for example, encouraged his readers to, “Examine by the rules of God’s Word, whether our Desire, Esteem and Trust be nor inordinately plac’d on Worldly Riches; whether our hearts do not go out after them with too much Vehemency; and whether our pursuit of them be not too Eager and Earnest.”

As markets expanded and the colonial economy grew, ministers entreated their congregants to reexamine their lives and make sure that they were living in accordance with God’s will. Colonists even used their religion to debate whether setting up local marketplaces was acceptable or morally problematic. When Bostonians were discussing whether to set up a local market, some colonists expressed their concern and argued that this would cause moral problems. For example, some opposed to the market claimed that it would allow servants

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to squander their masters’ time and that greater anonymity would make it easier for people to cheat each other. One commentator also warned that setting up a market simply because other towns had them was dangerous and compared it with the Israelites asking God for a king so that they could be like other nations. He said that they did so “without considering whether it would suit with the Genius or Interest of that People,” and as a result God punished them for their foolishness. Although this is a very specific example, it illustrates a larger point, that religious perspectives continued to influence how New Englanders thought about their economy. In addition to specific debates like this, colonists also discussed the relationship between religious convictions and economics in more general ways.

Cotton Mather, one of the most influential and prolific ministers of his generation, was one of the many religious leaders of his time who was concerned about how New Englanders were doing business. Mather wrote a number of tracts and sermons in which he confronted these issues, and in 1709 he delivered a sermon to the General Assembly of Massachusetts in which he gave a “testimony against the corruptions of the market-place.” He was concerned that men were not dealing fairly with one another and that religion was no longer enough of a guiding force in how people ran their business lives. In this address he clearly expressed the connection he saw between religion and economic dealings when he wrote, “Ill-Dealings are not at all

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332 Some Considerations against the Setting up of a Market in this Town (Boston: n. p., 1733), 4.
333 New Englanders saw such a connection between the marketplace and religion that some ministers came to draw on marketplace metaphors when discussing religious ideas. One early example of this was Samuel Willard’s Heavenly Merchandize. In this publication Willard discussed religious truth as a commodity that every person should purchase. He wrote, “There is something advised to, viz. Buy the Truth; and something dehorted from, i.e. Sell it not. The words are Metaphorical; a form of Speech which the Holy Ghost makes frequent use of in the Holy Scriptures; therein dressing up of Heavenly Matter in Earthly Language, and thus accommodating of himself to our capacity…” (Samuel Willard, Heavenly Merchandize (Boston: Samuel Green, 1686), 2.) Willard then went on tell his reader that they could not inherit the truth, but had to purchase it, and it would come at a price. (Willard, 2.) This kind of discussion illustrates that economic issues were not seen as separate or “secular,” but instead became a way for people to understand their religious lives. (For more on Willard’s publication, see: Mark Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), especially the introduction and pages 158-160.)
334 Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana (B. Green: Boston, 1710).
Countenanced; no, they are vehemently Disallowed, by the Religion of NEW-ENGLAND. We do PROTEST against them, with a transporting Vehemency, and behold with Agony the Blood, and the Grace, of our Great SAVIOUR, abused in them, with most aggravated Violations.”

He also went on to describe the connection he saw between a holy marketplace and a holy city when he explained that in order for God to favor a place, the marketplace of that city had to have “godly” proceedings. Like Thacher and Prince, Mather did not see business as being outside the bounds of religion; rather, he believed that in order for a place and people to be holy, their marketplace had to be holy. He also explained that business transactions had to be fair and “without corruption” and then enumerated ways in which some people sinned in their business transactions by deceiving and taking advantage of each other and how others sinned by living beyond their means and accruing debt. Mather continued to express his concerns about these issues, and five years later he called for men to repent if they stole, cheated, or used “any undue exactions” in order to gain wealth. The following year he also published a pamphlet entitled Fair Dealings between Debtor and Creditor in which he lamented that, “tho’ the Religion of God, be Professed with an uncommon Show among our selves, yet among us there are too often found such Iniquities in the Dealings of Men…” In this work he reiterated many of the issues that he had confronted six years earlier and warned against unfair dealings and the dangers of running into debt.

Benjamin Wadsworth also took time to clarify what constituted immoral business practices and wrote, “when the Sellers Principle is, to get as much as possibly he can, and

335 Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana (B. Green: Boston, 1710), 15.
338 Cotton Mather, Pascentius (Boston, B. Green, 1714), 19.
339 Cotton Mather, Fair Dealing between Debtor and Creditor (Boston: Green for Gerrish, 1716), 1-2.
340 Cotton Mather, Fair Dealing between Debtor and Creditor (Boston: Green for Gerrish, 1716), 1-2.
regards only his own Profit and not the Buyers; he then acts Unjustly. To ask and receive an excessive unreasonably Price for what is Sold, is Oppression and Extortion…”

According to Wadsworth, there were New Englanders who were so focused on making a profit that they were setting unreasonable prices and, for him, this was tantamount to extortion and completely unacceptable. In addition to their concern that people were sinning by stealing and cheating, ministers also connected their religious worldviews to economic issues by describing the dangers of wealth and poverty. Although it was considered possible for both rich and poor people to live pious lives, the general consensus for quite some time was that they were more susceptible to sin. For instance, according to one minister the very rich were likely to disavow God or become proud, while the poor were liable to begin stealing in order to get by. As a result, colonists were advised to ask God to make them neither rich nor poor, but instead allow them to find a “middle state between both.”

Although colonists were advised to be cautious about accumulating too much wealth, over time many came to accept that economic success was not necessarily immoral. As Valeri has shown, New England ministers rethought the meaning of providence over time. The earliest religious leaders of the region believed that God ruled society “through the gathered church and its peculiar discipline,” while the second generation came to accept that economic prosperity was acceptable when it supported the common good. They were followed by ministers who embraced economic success because it supported the British Empire and the triumph of Protestantism over Catholicism, and by the 1710s “civility as a religious virtue… gave meaning to commerce by describing it as a natural law.”

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341 Benjamin Wadsworth, “Fraud and Injustice, Detected and Condemned,” in The Saint’s Prayer (Boston: B. Green, 1715), 39. (sermon delivered in 1711)
342 Benjamin Wadsworth, The Saint’s Prayer to Escape Temptations (Boston: B. Green, 1715), 8 16, 22.
religiously acceptable, colonial ministers sought to influence how people spent their money. For men like Ebenezer Pemberton, how one made his or her money was only part of the equation. The other concern was how that money was spent. Pemberton explained that although affluence could bring about one’s ruin, Christians could choose to support the common good with their wealth. He wrote, “we serve our generation, when we do not spend our Riches upon our Lusts, nor yet only hoard them up for Posterity; but Expend a just Proportion of them in works of Charity and Liberty; in feeding the Hungry, in cloathing the Naked, in doing good to the Bodies and Souls of men, promoting both the Temporal and Eternal Happiness of Others.”

Pemberton suggested that one way to avoid the pitfalls of wealth was to use one’s riches for the good of others. Helping people with their material needs was not only useful to the poor, but would also help the rich because it would remove many of the dangers of wealth mentioned above. According to Pemberton, this is what Moses did when he refused to identify as an Egyptian and gave up his lavish life as a son of the Pharaoh’s daughter in order to serve God and lead the Israelites.

Benjamin Colman had a similar view, which he expressed in a sermon he gave eulogizing William Brattle and Pemberton. In it he praised these men for being “careful and prudent” with their estates and for doing good with their money by being “Rich in Good works, and Great Benefactors.” Joseph Sewall similarly warned his miserly readers not to hide behind claims of “frugality” and to make sure that they used their wealth to do good for others, and Cotton Mather advised colonists to, “Do GOOD; and Employ a convenient Portion of thy Estate, in that which is Emphatically Doing of Good…Every Man Living ordinarily Owes a Portion of his Estate unto

345 Ebenezer Pemberton, A True Servants of his Generation (Boson: Bartholomew Green, 1712), 12.
346 For a more detailed discussion of how and why this shift took place, see Newell and Valeri.
347 Ebenezer Pemberton, A True Servants of his Generation (Boson: Bartholomew Green, 1712), 13.
348 Benjamin Colman, A Sermon at the Lecture in Boston (Boston: Green for Gerrish and Henchman, 1717), 29.
Although there was a general unease among many of the earliest New Englanders about acquiring any wealth, within a few generations it seemed that wealth in and of itself was not necessarily a problem. If people conducted their business fairly and used their riches to help others, it became morally acceptable to attain temporal success. On a similar note, many New Englanders explicitly related morality to the temporal success or failure of individuals and communities. Not only was it acceptable to amass wealth under certain circumstances, but a person’s, or more commonly, a community’s ability (or inability) to do so was also thought to be related to their moral integrity. As Samuel Whitman wrote, “God usually indulges Religious Nations with much Outward Prosperity…When there is much of Practical Religion among a People, God usually maketh them to Prosper in all that they set their hands to.”

Not only did religion bring temporal success, but according to Whitman, sin also brought poverty, “As it brings Impoverishing Judgments on a people. Sin is an Impoverishing thing; it brings a People Low.”

Ebenezer Pemberton made a similar claim when he explained that, “Riches and Wealth may be abused by a People, and turn finally to their Infamy, Hurt and Ruin: Nevertheless in themselves they are blessings to particular Persons, and whole Societies: and it is their Sin alone that can transubstantiate them into Curses.”

Success, then, was tied to the holiness or sinfulness of communities. Although it was possible for bad people to find temporal success and righteous people to suffer in poverty, entire communities could not succeed if they were unrighteous, nor could they fail if they were holy. This notion was further supported by

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349 Joseph Sewall, A Caveat against Covetousness (Boston: Green for Gerrish, 1718), 5, 21-22.; Cotton Mather, Pascentius (Boston: B. Green, 1714), 21.
352 Ebenezer Pemberton, A True Servants of his Generation (Boson: Bartholomew Green, 1712), 5.
353 Benjamin Wadsworth illustrated the view that any number of sins, even those that seemed unrelated to economic success, led to poverty his 1719 pamphlet, Vicious Courses. In it he wrote, “Filthy unclean practices, these also tend to bring Poverty… Whoremongers and Adulterers God will judge. Such persons are going in the broad way to Hell;
the idea that God actually determined how successful a person or community would be. Certainly hard work was seen as godly, and laziness was sinful, but in the end no amount of work could guarantee success unless it was God’s will. As Benjamin Wadsworth explained, “Well-Laid Schemes, and most Diligent Essays; can’t Rid us from the Straits of Pinching Poverty, nor Supply us with Convenient Food, unless God give his blessing to the Indeavours us’d…God can Order to Persons great Riches, or great Poverty, or a Middle State between both…”  

This view of success not only made God central in people’s economic lives, but it also suggested that he approved of how the New England economy was developing. If God determined whether or not a person or community was going to be successful, then the fact that New Englanders’ economy was expanding and thriving was good evidence that God supported their actions. As colonial Christians struggled to reimagine their expanding communities and marketplaces, religion remained central in a number of important ways. Religious worldviews continued to influence how prominent ministers viewed economic issues, and they used their understanding of scripture and natural law to advise their congregants on how to behave in their business lives and how to handle their financial success.

Changes to how people viewed the accumulation of wealth were significant in and of themselves, but they are also important for understanding how colonists viewed slavery. Although there were still dangers associated with extreme wealth and poverty, having resources became acceptable when people used them to improve the local economy and benefit others. This meant that engaging in the slave trade, being involved in other economic systems that relied heavily on slave labor, and even owning slaves could serve a positive function. By embracing these aspects of the growing economy, New Englanders were able to attain more financial

yet they often meet with sore Judgments in he present life, before they sink…” (Benjamin Wadsworth, *Vicious Courses* (Boston: Allen, 1719), 24.)

success, which was increasingly viewed in a positive light. Whereas engaging in these practices before would have created problems for people who were concerned about the nature of the trade and those who were concerned about accumulating wealth, this new perspective on financial success eliminated one of these problems. If slavery yielded more money, then by the turn of the seventeenth century, it came to have a positive affect. 355 Similarly, if God ultimately determined how successful a community would be, then the success of the developing New England economy was good evidence that God approved of colonists accumulating wealth through their increased involvement in an Atlantic economy and consequently the slave trade.

In addition to religious changes, which allowed New Englanders to view the accumulation of wealth in a positive light, colonists were also being influenced by new ideas about property, which encouraged colonists to view slaves as chattel and then in turn allowed them to embrace an economic system that included the slave trade. During this time, the idea that property was a natural right began to gain support. Interpretations of natural law became important for colonists’ understanding about how society should function, and in addition to using them to describe commerce as natural, they also explained that property and legal protections for property owners were part of the natural order. 356 There were differing theories about from where this right originated, but many influential thinkers agreed that it was natural. As Stuart Banner explained, “Theorists differed over the details – some located the origin of property in labor, others in the occupancy of previously unoccupied land, still others in a hypothesized social compact – but they agreed on the basic point that property was a natural

355 Valeri mentioned how these changes affected Hugh Hall and how he viewed his involvement in the slave trade. (Mark Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 180.)
right.”

Men like William Wollaston expressed this opinion, writing “There is then such a thing as Property, founded in nature and truth: or, there are things, which one man only can, consistently with nature and truth, call his…” He asserted that because property was a natural right, it had to be protected and to take or destroy another man’s property was unjust. As a result, he wrote that, “When a man is become member of a society, if he would behave himself according to truth, he ought to do these things: viz. to consider property as founded not only in nature, but also in law.” This perspective made owning property a natural as well as a legal right, which gave supporters of slavery incentive to stress slaves’ status as property rather than human beings. If ownership was a natural right that had to be protected, then supporters of the slave trade simply had to show that slaves were beings that could be owned, just like any other form of chattel, a job that was made easier by the dehumanization of Africans that occurred throughout the colonial period. Furthermore, many of these emerging concepts came to include one’s labor as his “property.” Wollaston, for example, extended property protections beyond traditional views and explained how the product of one’s labor should also be protected as his property. In a somewhat convoluted explanation, he wrote,

the effect or produce of the labor of B is not the effect of the labor of C: and therefore this effect or produce is B’s, not C’s; as much B’s, as the labor was B’s, and not C’s. Because, what the labor of B causes or produces, B produces by his labor; or it is the product of B by his labor; that is, it is B’s product not C’s, or any other’s. And if C

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George William Van Cleve also noted differences in how theorists conceived of Natural Law, explaining that “Natural rights could either be seen as unalterable ‘natural’ or divine restraints on the sovereignty of any government, as in John Locke’s thought, or as rights existing in a state of nature that could be limited by legitimate governments exercising their sovereignty through positive law, as in the work of writers such as Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes.” (George William Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders’ Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 43.)


should pretend to any property in that, which B only can truly call his, he would act contrary to truth.\textsuperscript{361}

Property was to include not just one’s land and belongings, but also the product of one’s labor. Adam Smith took this a step further by including not just the final product, but also the labor itself. As Jedediah Purdy described, “Adam Smith was the iconic advocate and theorist of the principle that each person’s labor is personal property...”\textsuperscript{362} Again, this view encouraged colonists to view slaves as property rather than human beings because if they were men, then they, not their masters, by nature law owned their labor. These developing views of property consequently facilitated thinking about slaves as brutes or any other kind of object that could be bought and sold because it placed slaves outside of the natural law. Furthermore, the view that property was a natural right added another justification for owning slaves and being involved in the trade.\textsuperscript{363} If slaves were rightly considered property, then denying slave owners their right to that property became unjust based on natural law as well as the established legal code.

Even though changing views of commerce encouraged colonists to dehumanize slaves, the fact that religious views continued to be an integral part of the colonial economy might lead one to assume that slavery would be an important issue as well. As New Englanders expanded their markets into the Atlantic, they became increasingly involved with the slave trade and, as discussed in earlier chapters, slave populations became increasingly visible in the Northeast.

\textsuperscript{361} William Wollaston, \textit{The Religion of Nature Delineated} (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1722), 93.
\textsuperscript{363} Although many theorists agreed that property was a “natural right,” there were authors who disagreed with this assertion. William Blackstone, for example, agreed that property rights were essential and needed to be protected, but he took issue with the claim that they were “natural.” Instead, he argued that they were a social construct that developed over time in response to increases in population and settlement. He wrote, “the permanent right of property, vested in the ancestor himself, was no natural, but merely a civil right.” According to his view, the right to property was not a “natural” right, but it was nonetheless a universal necessity that allowed society to function. (William Blackstone, \textit{Commentaries on the Laws of England, Volume II}, Wayne Morrison, ed. (London: Cavendish Publishing, 2001), 10.)
Even so, there was relatively little mention of slavery and the slave trade in larger discussions of colonial economics. While authors implored their readers to treat each other with fairness in their dealings, and to live their business lives in accordance with scripture, discussions of the escalating slave trade were notably absent. One exception was Cotton Mather, who did mention the trade when discussing larger economic issues and concerns. As established in earlier chapters, although Mather was not opposed to slavery, he was concerned about the nature of the trade and how masters were treating their human property. In *Theopolis Americana*, Mather discussed economic issues at length, many of which have already been mentioned above. In addition to his general concern about colonists dealing fairly with each other, though, he also explicitly brought up the Atlantic slave trade by quoting Richard Baxter. Mather wrote,

> There is one sort of Trade also, about which my way of Addressing you, shall be by Reciting the words of the Excellent BAXTER. They are these… “To go as Pirates, and Catch up poor Negroes, or People of another Land, that have never forfeited Life, or Liberty, and to make them Slaves, and Sell them, is One of the worst kinds of Thievery in the World; and such Persons are to be taken for the common Enemies of Mankind; and they that buy them, and use them as Beasts, for their meer Commodity, and betray, or destroy, or neglect their Souls, are fitter to be called, Incarnate Devils, than Christians, tho’ they be no Christians whom they so Abuse.”

Although Mather described the slave trade as “one of the worst kinds of thievery,” he then went on to encourage his reader to treat his or her slaves with humanity and provide them a Christian education. Mather did not support New Englanders engaging in the slave trade, but also did not support manumission. Instead, he hoped that those slaves who were already present in the colonies would be Christianized and treated relatively humanely. He did not want additional Africans to be “caught” and sold, even though he saw nothing inherently wrong with holding those already enslaved in perpetual bondage. With this discussion, Mather was one of just a few

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early New Englanders who expressed any concern over the Atlantic slave trade when discussing the dangers of the expanding colonial economy.

A more common concern, albeit still rare, was that New Englanders were at risk of becoming metaphorically “enslaved” themselves by economic, political, and religious systems. One early example of this can be found in Increase Mather’s 1689 “Declaration,” in which he stated that it was “plainly affirmed” by many that the people of New England were “all Slaves and the only difference between them and Slaves is their not being bought and sold.” Mather was not discussing actual bond slavery here, but was instead expressing his concern that colonists were not enjoying the privileges and liberties that were assured to Englishmen in Britain. More than twenty five years later, his son, Cotton Mather, also used the threat of servitude in order to express his concern about the current state of Massachusetts, although he was concerned with debt enslaving his fellow colonists. He wrote, “Did Men Love one another, they would not seek to make others become their Servants, which you know, Debtors are. And where they are so, they would not be Cruel in Exactions and Extortions upon them.” Like his father before him, the younger Mather was not discussing the Atlantic slave trade here, but was instead describing how debt could force Europeans into servitude. In both of these cases, these men were not discussing the systematic enslavement of Africans and Native Americans, but their mentions of slavery and servitude were nonetheless noteworthy. Discussing metaphorical slavery was a common rhetorical strategy, especially when Protestants discussed the dangers of Catholicism, and although these allusions did not confront the literal slavery with which this dissertation is concerned, they do provide some useful insights into the institution during this time. First, they show that slavery was on colonial New Englanders’ minds. Although it was not

366 [Increase Mather], The Declaration, of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston... (Boston: n. p., 1689), 2.
367 Cotton Mather, Fair Dealing between Debtor and Creditor (Boston: Green for Gerrish, 1716), 27.
as prevalent in New England as it was in the South, slavery was enough a part of people’s consciousness that authors used it to add weight to their arguments and references to it were assumed to be meaningful to the reader. Second, these kinds of discussions show that slavery was seen as something to be feared. Even as many colonists accepted the enslavement of Africans as divinely sanctioned, it was clear that they did not want to be in this position personally, and they warned others not to allow themselves to fall victim to it, even symbolically. It is clear from these kinds of discussions, then, that although slavery was less common in the North, New Englanders were very much aware of its existence in North America and they found the idea of slavery frightening when confronted with the possibility that they could fall victim to it themselves. These facts make the lack of attention paid to slavery in discussions of the economy even more noteworthy. Slavery and servitude were part of New Englanders’ consciousness, and yet slaves and the slave trade were almost never included in discussions of fair and just economic dealings.

Although explicit discussions of the morality of the slave trade were largely absent from writings about the New England economy, these texts nonetheless provide some insight into how colonists in this region thought about slaves and slavery. As mentioned above, the fact that the Mathers mentioned slavery in order to scare their readers into action was telling, but there were even subtler ways in which slavery would be tied to these discussions. Although few wrote about the institution or the trade, they did write about issues that were mirrored in abolitionist writings. Where these men failed to connect economic morality to slavery, later abolitionists picked up. One clear example of this mirroring was in abolitionist writings about stealing. As mentioned in chapter two, one of the most common sins that abolitionists accused slave owners and traders of
committing was “man stealing.” Although this was discussed in these tracts as a specific kind of stealing, it was nonetheless related to other forms of theft, and the primary distinction was simply that it was the worst kind that one could commit. Slave traders and owners stole people’s freedom, stole them from their families, and in many ways stole their free will. Although ministers writing about fair economic dealings were very concerned about stealing in various forms, they did not include the slave trade in these discussions. Unlike doctoring weights at a market, which many New England ministered warned against as theft, these same men apparently did not consider taking Africans in order to sell them to be a related issue. Another example of this mirroring was with discussion of the “Golden Rule.” Many abolitionists used the concept of the Golden Rule in order to argue that slavery was an unchristian practice. John Hepburn even entitled his anti-slavery tracts The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule. It was common for abolitionists to use the concept of the Golden Rule to argue that because Christians would not want to be enslaved, they could not justify enslaving others. It is clear from the discussions above that there was a general consensus that colonists would not want to be enslaved, which is why it was a powerful threat, and by maintaining that the Golden Rule was at the core of Christianity, anti-slavery proponents hoped to counter every possible pro-slavery argument. Most abolitionists believed that this rule applied to slaves, even though earlier writers about the Golden Rule and the economy failed to make this connection. Cotton Mather, for example, discussed the importance of using the Golden Rule as a guide for business transactions, but he did not extend this reasoning to mention slavery. In 1710, he wrote that the

“Business of the CITY, shall be managed by the Golden Rule,” and warned his reader not to ignore the Golden Rule, or else “forfeit the Name of, Christians…” Four years later he echoed this call when he wrote, “We are to do Good; and in all our Dealings we are to go by that Golden Rule of most comprehensive Goodness, To do as we would be done unto.” Although Mather discussed both slavery and the Golden Rule more than most, he did not connect these issues. He argued that slaves should be treated humanely and that the Golden Rule should guide people’s business lives, but he never went as far as to claim that the Golden Rule should govern slavery, perhaps because he realized that this would create a conflict. Later abolitionists, however, saw how those issues could be connected and did so in order to argue not just for Christianizing slaves and treating them humanely, but for ending the slave trade all together.

Another theme that was found in discussions of the New England economy and in later abolitionist writings was concern about sloth. Ebenezer Pemberton mentioned this sin in his text *A True Servant of his Generation*. In addition to the importance of serving others with one’s wealth, Pemberton also stated that God’s will was “that no man Live in Sloth and Idleness…” Benjamin Wadsworth similarly wrote, “our Bibles know no Religion that can consist with Sloth, and therefore we must needs take it for a great Sin in Christians, and an inconsistency with their Profession…Our Great Creator has sensibly form’d and endow’d us for Work and Industry. The Faculties of our Souls and all our Bodily Organs were plainly made for Exercise…” These men viewed sloth as a dangerous sin, and Wadsworth argued that living an idle life was not only

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371 Cotton Mather, *Pascentius* (Boston, B. Green, 1714), 19.
374 Benjamin Colman, *A Sermon at the Lecture in Boston* (Boston: Green for Gerrish and Henchman, 1717), 12.
an insult to God, but also damaging to the bodies and souls of individuals as well as the larger society. Colonists were expected to work hard, and although none of these texts mentioned a conflict between that command and slavery, some abolitionists did. In addition to arguing that slavery was cruel towards slaves, many abolitionists also argued that the institution was damaging to slave holders and their society. Rather than focusing exclusively on how slavery hurt Africans, authors like James Swan also spent a great deal of time describing how white slave owners were going to be punished for their sins. Concern for the well-being of Africans was apparently not enough to convince most Christians that slavery should end, so men like Swan hoped that they could convince owners and traders that they were endangering themselves and damning their souls by enslaving Africans, and one of the many sins that slave owners were committing was sloth.

According to Benjamin Rush, slavery was making whites lazy and vain. He explained that slavery allowed white owners to “keep their Wives idel (Jezebel like) to paint their Faces, and Puff, and powder their Hair, and to bring up their Sons and Daughters in Idleness and Wantonness, and in all manner of Pride and Prodigality, in decking and adoring their Carkasses with pufft and powdered Hair…” Though according to abolitionists the most glaring sins were related to how whites treated their slaves and the pain and suffering they caused them, some authors also stressed the ways in which slavery allowed whites to be lazy and

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376 James Swan, *A Dissuasion from the Slave-Trade* (Boston: Greenleaf, 1773).
proud, which was sinful in the eyes of abolitionists and supporters of slavery alike.\textsuperscript{378} Although
colonists writing about the New England economy rarely mentioned slavery in their texts, abolitionists saw clear connections between the sins committed by businessmen and the slave trade. They used prohibitions against stealing and sloth to argue against capturing and enslaving Africans and the Golden Rule to maintain that both were unchristian practices, even though many other colonists who wrote about these same topics failed to relate them.

The fact that New Englanders failed to mention slavery in their discussions of the expanding economy, even as the trade was growing and slavery was becoming increasingly visible in the region suggests one of two things. The first possibility for this omission was that these authors intentionally ignored the issue of slavery because they did not want to deal with the conflict that it posed. It is plausible that these New England authors saw a conflict between encouraging their readers to deal fairly with each other and supporting the slave trade and that rather than deal with this conflict they simply ignored the presence of slavery in the region. A second, more probable explanation, however, is that they left slavery out of their discussions because it simply did not seem relevant. Because slavery was generally accepted as a religious right among colonial New Englanders, the accumulation of wealth was no longer viewed in strictly negative terms, and slaves were increasingly being viewed as property, it seems less likely that these men were avoiding a conflict and more likely that they simply did not see one. Slaves were viewed as a distinct group, a perspective that only increased as colonial Christianity became less communal and ideas about one’s natural right to property developed. As a result, it is more probable that these authors were not ignoring a portion of the population in order to avoid a conflict, rather, they did not view slaves as a relevant segment of the population when it

\textsuperscript{378} Benjamin Rush also discussed the sins of covetousness, pride, intemperance, and uncleanness in his abolitionist tract, \textit{An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlement in American upon Slave-Keeping} (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773), 13.
came to these discussions and therefore did not recognize a conflict in the first place. This shift
towards viewing African slaves as primarily property rather than human beings became even
more evident when one looks at abolitionist texts from the Revolutionary period. Unlike earlier
writings, which took for granted the humanity of slaves and therefore focused on proving that
enslaving people was wrong, by the time of the Revolution, anti-slavery writers were focusing
much more on simply proving that Africans were human beings who deserved consideration.
In the early years of the colonial period, puritans described African slaves as human beings who were temporally inferior to whites but spiritually their equals. As a result, many early abolitionist authors took for granted that their readers would recognize that slaves were human and focused on explaining why this shared humanity meant that slavery must end. This changed by the time of the American Revolution, however. After years of shifting religious, legal, and economic cultures in the colonial North, more and more people came to accept the view that people of African descent were naturally inferior to Europeans and that they were best understood as property first and foremost. As one author wrote, “we have been used to look on them in a mean, contemptible light; and our education is filled us with strong prejudices against them, and led us to consider them, not as our brethren, or in any degree on a level with us; but as quite another species of animals…”

The religious assumption, that all people were descendants of the same original parents and created in God’s image, had lost ground and abolitionists could no longer take for granted that their audience accepted that slaves were in fact human beings who deserved to be treated as such. This was clear in abolitionist writings from the early republic, as authors focused much more than they had in the past on illustrating that Africans were human beings and that they were not innately different that whites.

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In the eighteenth century, a distinction was made between “species” and “varieties,” where differences between species were understood as fixed and unchanging. For more on how these ideas developed over the course of the eighteenth century, see: Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
In the decades leading up to the Revolutionary War, the dehumanization of African
slaves paved the way for the ratification of a Constitution that solidified their status as property
rather than people. By the time of the Revolution, even many Northern Christians were willing to
embrace a document that classified most African Americans as possessions. As historian George
William Van Cleve wrote, “Contrary to the traditional view, the Revolution era strengthened
slavery as a political institution.” The three-fifths and fugitive-slave clauses of the
Constitution ended any debate about whether slaves should be primarily understood as human
beings or as property. When the Constitution was ratified, slaves were counted as three-fifths of
a free person for representation purposes. This was not because they held a status as persons,
however, and was in fact related exclusively to their status as property. As Van Cleve explained,
the three-fifths clause was a way for the government to use “a particular kind of wealth – slave
property – as a basis for allocating congressional representation.” In other words, the debate
about how to count slaves was not about whether they should be considered human beings, but
was instead about how much representation their Southern owners deserved for owning them as
property. Slaves did not gain any rights or freedoms through this compromise; instead, their
nation-wide status as property rather than people was solidified. By this time, even in the North,
many Americans had come to accept the view that Africans were innately inferior to Europeans,
and many were therefore not opposed to national laws that reaffirmed this view. They simply

382 In his book, Bodies Politic, John Wood Sweet discusses Northerners’ unease with racial diversity and how they sought to create the illusion of a homogenous, white society even in the face of diversity. He argued that they did this by describing slavery as “private, absolute, and permanent,” even though their daily experiences showed them that it was not. Sweet also explained that Northerners refused to accept that Africans could become full members of their religious communities in order to keep them from becoming full, integrated members of the larger society. (Quote from: John Wood Sweet, Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 99-100.)
wanted to guarantee that Southerners would not gain an upper hand in national representation. Similarly, the fugitive slaves clause, which received very little opposition, declared that slaves would be considered the property of their owners even in states where slavery was illegal, again reinforcing their status as property throughout the new nation. This marginalization of blacks did not end with the ratification of the Constitution or the passing of additional measures that strengthened the institution of slavery in the United States and its territories, however. This process continued as groups jockeyed to influence the development of American nationalism. As David Waldstreicher described it, “partisan competition helped keep women and blacks beyond the pale of citizenship.” According to Waldstreicher, most white men envisioned a nation that they would dominate and many political groups only rejected racism or embraced abolitionism when attempting to discredit their adversaries. They were less concerned with ending slavery or confirming Africans’ humanity than gaining political ground. In the years leading up to the ratification of the Constitution and in the decades that followed, there was an increase in dehumanizing arguments meant to defend slavery and justify the country’s founding documents. As a result, many abolitionists responded to the systematic dehumanization of slaves by increasing their emphasis on their humanity in tracts and books. They were forced to confront not only a social view, but also a nationwide legal and political system that deemed slaves inferior and they did so by focusing more explicitly on their equality and humanity than they had in the past.

Although this explicit focus on proving Africans’ humanity was relatively new, many of the arguments that were made to oppose slavery and the slave trade during the early eighteenth-century reappeared at the time of the Revolution and in the early republic.  Although one may assume that emerging Revolutionary ideas about natural rights and liberty influenced arguments about slavery and caused Americans to question their right to own slaves, these ideas actually had a relatively small influence on debates about slavery and the trade. Instead, many of the same religious arguments resurfaced in the early Republic. One religious debate that reappeared was over the issue of Abraham and the ancient Israelites owning slaves. Early-American abolitionists relied on the arguments of their predecessors when maintaining that because Christianity had made everyone equal, slavery was now unlawful, and that slavery in ancient times was fundamentally different than it was in the United States. One author maintained that when the “pure, and peaceable religion, of the meek and lowly Jesus, which taught the original equality of mankind, and brought life, and immortality to light, had spread its divine influence, a new aera commenced. The value of man was enlarged upon the scale of christianity, and it was deemed impious to treat a candidate for eternal happiness, in the character of a brute.” Others maintained that Abraham’s “slaves” were not held in conditions like those found in modern slavery. Morgan John Rhees wrote that Abraham had, “three hundred and eighteen trained servants, born in his house, whom Josephus calls respectable men, well instructed; they were a part of his family, had received the covenant of circumcision, and adopted into the church of God; therefore [they] could not be involuntary slaves. And if they were, how unlike your negro

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386 Many pro-slavery arguments were also very similar. For more on this, see: Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).
slaves!”\(^{389}\) It seemed that many Americans were still using the bible to defend the institution of slavery, and abolitionists continued to confront these claims in order to show that the American institution was not divinely sanctioned. Another religious argument worth mentioning revolved around a biblical prohibition against “man stealing.” As has already been discussed, many abolitionists considered the slave trade to be large-scale “man stealing,” which they believed was clearly forbidden in the Hebrew Bible and was a crime punishable by death. Again, discussion of this sin was not simply replaced with rhetoric of natural rights; rather, abolitionists continued to reference it well into the Revolutionary period.\(^{390}\) One author who chose to integrate this prohibition into a more timely opposition to slavery was Isaac Foster. Foster, like those who came before him, focused on the sin of stealing in his 1777 tract *A Discours upon Extortion*.\(^{391}\) In this work, Foster focused on the sin of stealing, but rather than describing slave traders and owners of “man stealing,” he maintained that slavery was the worst kind of stealing because “to those enslaved, it wholly deprives them of their natural liberty and freedom and subjects them to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man.”\(^{392}\) Here the author built off of an earlier argument against stealing by adding newer ideas about “natural liberty and freedom” to argue for abolition.

In addition to these arguments, many abolitionists during this time also attempted to draw on Americans’ sense of sympathy by reiterating colonial arguments. Adam Smith and other common sense realists based their concept of morality on sympathy, which he described as the


\(^{391}\) The only known copy of Foster’s tract is imperfect. The last four chapters are missing completely and others are incomplete.

\(^{392}\) Isaac Foster, *A Discours upon Extortion* (Hartford: Watson, 1777), 7.
ability to imagine what it would be like to be in another person’s situation.\textsuperscript{393} This view of morality was very influential in the early Republic, and Elizabeth Barnes has shown that sympathy was “crucial to the construction of American identity.”\textsuperscript{394} Ideas of democracy were in many ways based on Americans’ ability to sympathize with each other, and abolitionists sought to identify blacks as people with whom moral Christians should sympathize. One way in which they did this was through a discussion of the Golden Rule. Authors who utilized this concept argued that sympathy was at the core of the Christian message because Jesus’ most important command was to treat others as one would like to be treated. As a result, many who questioned the validity of slavery used this rule to maintain that because slave owners would not want to be slaves themselves, they should not force others into perpetual servitude either.\textsuperscript{395} As Charles Crawford wrote, like many who came before him, “men of every colour and shape, …negroes, as well as the rest of mankind, should be considered as their neighbours by the disciples of Christ.”\textsuperscript{396} Because all men should be understood as neighbors, Crawford argued, slavery was unchristian and had to end. The issue of family was also regularly mentioned in colonial arguments about the slave trade. As discussed in previous chapters, the family was an important religious and social unit for colonial New Englanders in particular, so many abolitionists pointed to the destruction of slaves’ families to illustrate the horrors of the institution, and this continued after the Revolution. Abolitionists entreated their readers to sympathize with the scores of

\textsuperscript{393} Adam Smith, \textit{The theory of moral sentiments} (London: A. Miller, 1759), 2.


parents and children and husbands and wives who were torn apart by the slave trade. They asked their fellow Americans to imagine their own families being destroyed, hoping that this would lead them to realize that their behavior was immoral and unchristian. The problem with arguments based on sympathy, however, was that many white Americans had come to view people of African descent as fundamentally different. Sympathy required the readers to be able and willing to put themselves in the position of slaves, but by describing them as a different sort of being, supporters of slavery moved slaves outside of the scope of most Americans’ sympathy.

Although many colonial critiques of slavery resurfaced in the early republic, revolutionary rhetoric was also not completely absent from early-American abolitionist documents, though it was less prevalent than one might expect. Many integrated discussion of liberty and natural rights, but they almost always included additional arguments, and rather than maintaining that natural liberty and freedom required an abolition of slavery, many referenced these concepts primarily to point out that American slave owners were hypocritical. In one letter written in 1776 and published in 1784, the author expressed his frustration with Americans’ refusal to extend the liberty that they were fighting for to the enslaved population. He wrote, “If there be an object truly ridiculous in nature, it is an American patriot, signing resolutions of independency with the one hand, and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves.” This author either did not understand, or would not express, why

Americans were willing to fight for freedom for themselves but would not give it to their slaves, and he was not alone. Others also chastised Americans for ignoring their laws, “their declaration of Independence, [and] the situation they were once themselves in…” by continuing to participate in the trade. An author using the pseudonym “Philanthropos” perhaps stated this perspective best when he wrote, “Where is the man who is a Christian, and a Republican, that can lay his hand upon his heart, and say, -- ‘he is justifiable in keeping his fellow-creatures in slavery?’ Shew me the man, and I will shew you a hypocrite and a tyrant.”

While some of these attacks ended with cries of hypocrisy, others expressed why so many were willing to embrace this apparent contradiction. Isaac Foster, for example, questioned whether American patriots truly believed in the universal “right to liberty,” as they claimed. He wrote, “But I have been induced to believe that our late sticklers for liberty, have not considered it as a prerogative belonging to human nature… I have been forced to think, that they did not in their hearts, believe that this privilege belonged to all mankind; but only to themselves, and a few such distinguished favourites of heaven.” Here Foster began to get to the heart of the matter. Revolutionary ideas were not having the kind of effect that many abolitionists had hoped because supporters of the institution did not believe that the “natural rights” they spoke of and fought for applied to slaves. Although Foster accused his audience of not embracing these ideas for all men, others recognized that the larger problem was that slaves were not considered men. As one author wrote,

The only question therefore which can arise on a mature consideration of the subject, is in my opinion this, Are the Negroes men? For if they be men, and if all men have a right to liberty, as is universally acknowledged, and as you also most particularly assert, they

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must indubitably, as men, be entitled to a participation of that right; and you, consequently, nor no other nation in the world, can rightfully deprive them of it. 403

This question of slaves’ humanity became a major part of post-Revolutionary arguments about slavery. By the time Revolutionary ideas about natural rights and liberty became influential in America, slaves had already become dehumanized by legal, social, and economic systems and abolitionists were left having to convince the larger population not only that it was wrong to enslave their fellow man, but more importantly, that Africans were in fact their fellow man. This task was made more difficult by the fact that the young country had developed a system of governance that required that most blacks be considered property rather than people and that guaranteed certain rights to American men, rights that most agreed should not be extended to African Americans. As a result, both abolitionists and supporters of slavery responded to the nation-wide legalization of the institution by including much more discussion of Africans’ humanity than they had in texts that came before. This certainly was an issue prior to this period, as discussed in chapter two, but it received comparatively little attention. There were relatively few pro-slavery tracts published prior to 1776, and although abolitionist publications often reaffirmed the humanity of Africans and slaves, they did so in subtle ways and generally took their humanity for granted. Colonial abolitionists were attempting to work against a religious tradition that had traditionally accepted that slavery was part of a divinely sanctioned social order, and they therefore focused on trying to show that slavery was immoral. By the time of the Revolution, however, abolitionist arguments had shifted to focus to proving slaves’ humanity. The idea that God ordained social hierarchies had lost favor, so discussion of Africans inherent inferiority or equality became increasingly prominent. Thomas Day described the foundation of these debates in a letter that he published. The letter read,

403 Juvenis, Observations on Slavery of the Negroes, in the Southern States (New York: Ross, 1785), 8.
whenever any individual presumes to exercise this species of authority of his fellow creatures, he must be a tyrant and an oppressor whom it is permitted to destroy by every possible method. Whoever would deny this, must either deny the existence of right and justice entirely, and then it is in vain to argue; or must shew some natural distinction by which one part of the species is entitled to privileges from which the other is excluded.  

Day denied that any such “natural distinction” existed between Africans and Europeans, but others disagreed, and this became an important focus in slavery debates in the early years of the United States. As another author wrote in 1776, “Whether there be different races of men, or whether all men be of one race, without any difference but what proceeds from climate or other accident, is a profound question of natural history, which remains still undetermined after all that has been said upon it.”

One side of this debate, which gained momentum by the time of the American Revolution, was that people of African descent were naturally different than Europeans and that their differences made slavery acceptable. The idea that African slaves were sub-human was certainly present during the colonial period, and this view became solidified for many people through a move towards more individualistic forms of Christianity and by the accompanying legal, economic, and social changes that took place, but there was relatively little explicit discussion of this perspective in print during the colonial period. By the time of the Revolution, however, this point of view was expressed with increasing regularity, and one of the most unambiguous supporters of it was Henry Home Kames. In 1776 Kames published his work *Six Sketches on the History of Man*, in which he responded to arguments that supported the natural equality of whites and blacks. For example, he rejected the idea that climate explained apparent racial differences, and took issue with those who maintained that because people of African and

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405 A similar argument was articulated in *A Letter from *********, in London (New York: Samuel Loudon, 1784), 15.
European descent could reproduce through multiple generations, they must be of the same species.\textsuperscript{407} Kames was of the opinion, first and foremost, that differences in color were a strong indication that Africans and Europeans were different in kind.\textsuperscript{408} To support this view, he presented both religious and nonreligious arguments in favor of his position. His most telling nonreligious argument was based on his view of mixed race people. He explained that, “men are not all of one kind; for if a White mix with a Black in whatever climate… the result will not be either an improvement of the kind, or contrary; but a mongrel breed differing from both parents. It is thus ascertained beyond any rational doubt, that there are different races or kinds of men, and that these races or kinds are naturally fitted for different climates…”\textsuperscript{409} Although mixed-race people could reproduce, this “mongrel breed” suggested to Kames that people of diverse races were fundamentally different and that they were meant to remain that way.

If readers were to accept that different races of people were created to exist in specific climates, however, they were forced to reject the traditional Christian narrative, which said that all people were the offspring of an original set of created parents. This was where Kame’s religious argument came in. He maintained that the only reasonable explanation for differences in complexion and culture was that God created different groups of people and that the story of Adam and Eve was the story of just one of those creations. He believed that “were all men of one species, there never could have existed, without a miracle, different kinds, such as exist at present.”\textsuperscript{410} Because of this impossibility, he suggested that “God created many pairs of the human race, differing from each other both externally and internally; that he fitted these pairs for

\textsuperscript{407} Henry Home Kames, \textit{Six Sketches on the History of Man} (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 9, 13-16.
\textsuperscript{408} Henry Home Kames, \textit{Six Sketches on the History of Man} (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 37-8.
\textsuperscript{409} Henry Home Kames, \textit{Six Sketches on the History of Man} (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 44-5.
\textsuperscript{410} Henry Home Kames, \textit{Six Sketches on the History of Man} (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 44.
different climates, and placed each pair in its proper climate…” Although Kames referred to all of these pairs as part of the “human race,” by suggesting that Africans and Europeans had different origins and were created to be fundamentally different, so as to suit their climate, he was going against a long-standing Christian tradition that maintained that all people came from the same original parents. This was a significant change, which Kames realized. He clarified that although this is the only reasonable explanation, it could not be accepted easily. He wrote, “this opinion, however plausible, we are not permitted to adopt; being taught a different lesson by revelation, viz. That God created but a single pair of the human species. Thought we cannot doubt of the authority of Moses, yet his account of the creation of man is not a little puzzling, as it seems to contradict every one of the facts mentioned above.”

Kames spent dozens of pages supporting the view that Africans were inferior to Europeans by claiming that multiple creations were the only reasonable explanation for racial differences, a position that was gaining support, and yet he refused to unequivocally embrace this idea because he knew that it was not in keeping with his religious tradition.

Although Kames was significant for explicitly rejecting arguments for equality and for his awareness of how his perspective contradicted Christian tradition, an even more noteworthy figure came along to question the equality of African people. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson described what he perceived as the inferiority of African people.

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411 Henry Home Kames, *Six Sketches on the History of Man* (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 45. Kame’s theory of multiple creations was not new. In 1677 Matthew Hale referenced a book in which the author claimed that the Biblical narrative set forth by Moses was a story only of the origins of the Jewish people and that there were additional creations. Hale maintained “That Moses in the History of the Creation of Man doth not set down the Original of Mankind, but only the Original or common Parent of the Jewish Nation: that Adam was not the first man that was created, but there were very many Ages of Men before him that peopled the greater part of the World long before the Creation of Adam; And consequently, though Adam was the common Parent of the Inhabitants of Palestine and many of the Countries adjacent, yet those that people the far greater part of the world, especially the parts of America, were not descended from him.” (Matthew Hale, *The Origination of Mankind, Considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature* (London: William Godbid, 1677), 184.)

Like Kames, Jefferson argued that differences in complexion were significant. He wrote that, “The first difference which strikes us is that of colour… the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its sear and cause were better known to us.” He then asked, “is this difference of no importance?” and went on to claim that it was, first because of inherent differences in beauty, then in physical form, and finally in character and mental capacities.\(^{413}\) In addition to stating that Africans and Europeans had differences in “colour, figure, and hair,” he went on to explain physiological differences including a distinct odor, higher heat tolerance, different respiratory systems, and their requiring less sleep.\(^ {414}\) As far as character, Jefferson described people of African descent saying that, “In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.” He maintained that Africans universally lacked forethought, were unable to remain collected in the face of danger, and experienced only transitory love and grief.\(^ {415}\) Finally, he described the inferior mental capacities of Africans. According to Jefferson, there was also no comparison when it came to their ability to reason, imagine, or produce artistic works.\(^ {416}\) To make this point, he wrote specifically about Phyllis Wheatley and Ignatius Sancho, two highly praised African American writers, stating that he was unimpressed by their work. Whereas some abolitionists used figures like Wheatley and Sancho to argue that people of African descent appeared different than Europeans because of circumstances, Jefferson maintained that they too were inferior to whites in their mental and artistic abilities.\(^ {417}\) After presenting this evidence, Jefferson concluded his remarks about the nature of African Americans by writing that, “their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life… It is not their conditions then, but


In a letter published the same year, the unnamed author also suggested that it was impossible to find examples of Africans living well because they were “naturally of a different bent of mind,” and therefore, trying to compare them to Europeans was unjust. (*A Letter to Phil Africanus, upon Slavery* (New Port, R. I.: Edes, 1788), 12.)
nature, which had produced the distinction.”

Jefferson believed that blacks were inherently different than and inferior to whites in most regards, and although he stated this opinion as an unambiguous matter of fact, he too realized the implications of his claims. Unlike Kames, who recognized that his position on multiple creations conflicted with Christian tradition, Jefferson appreciated how debasing claims of Africans’ natural inferiority were, writing,

The opinion, that they are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great dissidence… let me add too, as a circumstance of great tenderness, where our conclusion would degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of being which their Creator may perhaps have given them… I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications.

Jefferson acknowledged the weight of his claims and included a caveat, mentioning that he could not be certain why people of African descent appeared inferior to Europeans. Even so, it was clear that he believed that they were lesser, as he began to speak of blacks as an entirely different species, or at least a distinct variety of human being.

Jefferson was surely one of the most famous supporters of the view that Africans were innately inferior, but he was certainly not alone. By the end of the eighteenth century, many authors were of the opinion that Africans were naturally less intelligent than Europeans, and for many this rationalized enslaving them, and in some cases, treating them poorly. William Knox was one supporter of slavery who struggled with how to deal with a group of people who he

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419 Although Jefferson believed that people of African descent were inferior to Europeans in most ways, he did believe their they were equal to whites with regard to their memory, and he said that “In music they are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time… [but] whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved.” This is noteworthy because one of the most pervasive and long-lasting characteristics attributed to people of African descent has been an innate, superior musical ability. (Quote from: Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Prichard & Hall, 1788), 149-150).
believed were lesser. He, like Cotton Mather many years before, was concerned about the religious education of African American slaves, but he maintained that African slaves and Native Americans would have to be educated differently because while “The quick sagacity of the Indian keeps him aloof from every attempt to convert him, The dull stupidity of the Negroe leaves him without any desire for instruction.” Knox went on to say that he could not know for sure whether God had created Africans “a littler lower than other men,” or if they had declined in their intellectual abilities over time, but he remained certain that they were universally less capable than their white counterparts. Knox also explained that African slaves’ “stupidity did not authorize us to consider them as beasts for our use,” although he quickly provided his reader with a way around this by explaining that sometimes their stupidity required them to be treated as such. He said, “The stupid obstinacy of the Negroes may indeed make it always necessary to subject them to severe discipline from their masters… [because they have] hardly more knowledge of their duty, than is common to them with domestic animals, it is no wonder that they are treated like brute beasts, or that it should be almost necessary to treat them as such.” Unlike Cotton Mather, Knox provided his reader with an excuse for why it was necessary for them to treat their slaves like animals, and that reason was because they were fundamentally not much smarter. In order to defend the legalization of slavery in the United States, an institution that categorized slaves as possessions rather than human beings, some authors attempted to show that Africans were in fact naturally inferior beings, a view that had become so pervasive that even some abolitionists could not avoid it. In 1791, Zephaniah Swift, for example, mentioned in

422 William Knox, Three Tracts Respecting the Conversion and Instruction of the Free Indians and Negroe Slaves in the Colonies (London: J. Debrett, 1789), 15.
a tract that Africans were inferior in “intellectual capacity,” but he maintained that although this “inferiority of mind” was used by many to justify slavery, it was not a valid reason to take “unfair advantage of the weak and defenceless state of their fellow creature…” Some abolitionists came to accept the premise that people of African descent were innately different, although they often used these claims about inferiority as a reason why whites should not enslave blacks, as it was taking advantage of a defenseless segment of the population.

Although some abolitionists came to believe that Africans were naturally senseless, others held firm to the belief that they had equal capacity and that any perceived differences were the result of circumstance. This debate was clearly expressed in a dialogue recounted in The African Miscellanist in 1802, in which the author, referred to as Philanthropos, debated with his slave-holding neighbor, “Major Fribble,” about whether or not he had a right to own Africans as property. Philanthropos insisted that this was unacceptable, while Fribble insisted it was permissible because “all men are by nature as free as the air we breath – except the Negroes… [their] mind is the source of inferiority.” He went on to say, “You know nature has established grades in animation which cannot be altered; and Negroes will be Negroes, and infinitum,” and “You will never convince me that Negroes may become Philosophers; or, that the possess refined mental faculties, like us white folks… I would as soon undertake to learn my spaniel dog the manual exercise as any Negro I have. They are as dull as dullness itself – scarcely rational…”

Though Fibble believed that this mental insufficiency meant that Africans were inferior and that he did not need to care about them, Philanthropos responded to these claims by arguing that Africans were fully capable and equal to Europeans and because of their equality,

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425 Zephaniah Swift, An Oration upon Domestic Slavery (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1791), 11.
they should not be held in bondage, a common abolitionist argument. He wrote, “It is true, ‘the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the Leopard his spots,’ but tyranny and custom have raised partition walls in creation, where wiser nature acknowledged none… Believing the benevolent Author of Nature has given no exclusive right to any class or complexion of men, I acknowledge the African my brother, tho he may be your slave.” 428 When challenged that he could not “sincerely believe Negroes are capable of refinement by education,” Philanthropos responded unequivocally that he did, and he was not alone. 429 There was certainly an increase in publications that called into question the humanity of slaves by arguing that Africans were innately inferior and perhaps a different species of being, but these were countered by many abolitionist texts. Unlike colonial tracts, which typically took for granted that slaves were human beings and spiritual equals, by the time of the Revolution, most abolitionist texts spent a great deal of time arguing that people of African descent were created in God’s image and equal to Europeans. Authors were no longer able to assume that their reader would share that view, and they had to respond to the overt commodification of slaves as objects that was put in place by the laws of the United States.

Many abolitionist authors agreed that most African Americans, both free and enslaved, were in many ways inferior to their European counterparts, but unlike those who supported slavery, most of them maintained that the differences that they perceived were a result of circumstances and not the result of an inherent, natural inferiority of African people. They remained firm in the assertion that all people were of the same species, came from the same parents, and were made in God’s image, and therefore maintained that Africans and African

Americans were capable of improvement. As people came to reject the view that God had ordained distinctions between men, the focus became on whether or not Africans should be considered men. In order to argue that they were human beings, many authors began by explaining why there seemed to be differences between whites and blacks. One strategy was to stress the dehumanizing nature of slavery to argue that it made it impossible for whites to view blacks objectively. Isaac Foster expressed this position when he described a conversation that he had with an officer in the army who was held captive by the British. He said that the British soldiers, “looked upon themselves as men, but considered the Americans as animals in the shape, but without the sense of men, and therefore not entitled to humane treatment.” He then went on to connect this to American slavery, writing, “But as we look upon such treatment in our own case to be unjust, how inexcusable shall we be to treat other people so?” Here Foster was not arguing that slavery made it impossible for African Americans to reach their full potential, but instead he stressed how the institution made it impossible for whites to even see the reality of that potential. By showing how British soldiers came to view Americans in much the same way as Americans were viewing Africans, he illustrated that the perception that whites had of blacks often had less to do with the reality of Africans’ abilities, and more to do with preconceived notions of what black people were like based on years of dehumanization. He also condemned slavery by including a quote that said, “Men, who are surrounded with great Numbers of their fellow-Creatures, who are their own absolute Property, come soon to consider them in the Light of Animals and Beasts of Burthen, and by Degrees, extend that Consideration to all the rest of the Species.”

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431 This is not to say that Foster thought that African Americans were able to reach their full potential as slaves or as freemen. This was simply not his main point in this tract.
blacks as lesser beings because they held them as property. Again, rather than focusing on how social inequalities led to actual disparities between whites and blacks, Foster concentrated on how the institution of slavery made it nearly impossible for European Americans to view Africans and African Americans as their fellow man.433

Another author explained this same problem, saying, “It is argued in favor of slavery, that the Africans are an inferior order of beings, and designed by nature to be slaves. But the assertions of men governed by self-interest and prejudice, deserve little credit.”434 Again, according to this view, prejudice and self-interest blinded these men from being able to see Africans’ true potential, and according to Thomas Branagan, slavery not only made it difficult for whites to see the truth about Africans, but it also “destroys social intercourse, by exalting one part of society to demagods, and degrading the other part to brutes.”435 Discussing whites’ inability to recognize African Americans’ potential not only supported the view that slaves were fully human, but it also had implications for arguments based on sympathy. As mentioned above, many abolitionist authors asked their readers to sympathize with the plight and suffering of slaves. The problem that these authors were pointing out was that the institution of slavery itself made this difficult. Slavery created circumstances that made it impossible for whites to see past their own prejudice and self interest in order to view Africans as fellow men. A moral code based on sympathy required people to view each other as essentially the same because this allowed

them to appreciate what another person was experiencing. By degrading Africans, these abolitionists argued that slavery had unjustly removed them from the sphere of sympathy.

This process of dehumanization began when slaves were brought to North America and were taken to the market. One author described it, saying they were sent “to the market, naked, weeping, and in chains – how one man dares to examine his fellow creatures as he would do beasts, and bargain for their persons – how all the most sacred duties, affections, and feelings of the human heart, are violated and insulted...” Though dehumanization began at markets where Africans were treated as livestock, it did not end there. After their purchase, slaves were then subjected to different legal considerations than free people, which was another way in which they were debased. Charles Crawford expressed his concern that African slaves had “scarcely a greater protection from the laws than a horse” in the West Indies and in some American states, and he went on to say that a major obstacle in abolition was the prejudices that so many colonists had embraced that led them to believe that Africans were not worthy of their kindness or benevolence. The following year an author using the penname “Juvenis” similarly wrote that, “In point of liberty, they [African slaves] are by no means to be considered as superior to the Brutes in our fields...” In addition to the prejudices that Africans faced, abolitionists were also forced to deal with the fact that because of the circumstances they were kept in, the reality was that most slaves did not appear equal to many whites. This was not because they were naturally unable to be their equals, but was the result of their treatment. In addition to claiming that whites

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436 Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter* (Philadelphia: Bailey, 1784), 7. In an 1805 publication, written under the penname “Humanitas,” the author similarly noted, “What will become of those, who degrade their species by daring to examine their fellow-men as they would brute beasts...” Here the author was expressing concern not only for the slaves who are being degraded by the process of the slave trade, but also the traders and slave owners who were participating in these acts. (Humanitas, *Reflections on Slavery, with Recent Evidence of its Inhumanity* (Philadelphia: R. Cochran, 1803), 37.)
437 For more on this, see chapter 4.
were unable to see the truth about Africans’ abilities, many abolitionists also claimed that slavery created a system in which slaves were force to live in a way that reinforced these misconceptions about their potential. As Buchanan explained, “Nothing more assimilates a man to a beast,…than being among freemen, himself a slave, reduces the conduct of man to the standard of brutes. What right then have you to expect greater things from these poor mortals?”\textsuperscript{440} Another author similarly supported this position, writing, “Dispirited, trodden down, and trampled upon, they have lost all manhood, and find relief only in their stupidity, the effect of cruelty and despair.”\textsuperscript{441} These abolitionists were not denying that slaves were in many ways inferior to free persons, but they maintained that this was a consequence of their treatment, not evidence of their natural capabilities.

According to many abolitionists, slavery was the reason why so many early Americans viewed Africans as inferior. They claimed that the institution had made people believe that there were fundamental differences between Africans and Europeans when in fact none existed. In addition to explaining that slavery had lead to this view, many abolitionist writers countered this perspective much more forcefully than they had in the past. Although some early eighteenth-century authors explicitly stated that Africans were human, most took this point for granted. They argued their opposition to the institution of slavery by explaining why it was harmful to their fellow human beings and rarely presented arguments for why they should be considered people. This changed by the time of the Revolution, though. After decades of slaves being dehumanized by legal, economic, and social systems, abolitionists could no longer take for granted that their readers would assume that Africans were human beings who were deserving of human considerations. In 1785, for example, Juvenis referenced a work by Montesquieu, in

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\item \textsuperscript{440} George Buchanan, \textit{An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery} (Baltimore, Md.: Edwards, 1793), 11.
\item \textsuperscript{441} \textit{Tyrannical Libertymen} (Hanover, N. H.: Eagle Office, 1795), 15.
\end{itemize}
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which he sarcastically suggested that Africans were inherently suited for slavery because their hair texture was different. He wrote,

> those persons who can persuade themselves that the enslaving of them [Africans] is not one of the most unwarranted and inhuman practices that ever characterized the people of any country, or time, must either be entirely devested of every sentiment of humanity, -- or must be so extremely ignorant as to suppose that the Creator of the universe made a discrimination between the White People and the Negroes, with respect to their privileges, and that he gave the pre-eminence to White People; to whom it became the Negroes, either on account of their unbecoming colour, or as M. Montesquieu very ironically observes, of their short and curly hair, to be obedient and submissive; -- a supposition which however ridiculous it may be, is nevertheless not more so than many others which are used by the proprietors of Negroes, in vindication of their conduct.\(^{442}\)

The idea that differences in complexion or hair could justify enslavement was ridiculous to abolitionists like Juvenis, but by the time of the American Revolution, the belief that these physical distinctions marked real and meaningful differences in capability was widespread. Abolitionists were being forced to counter popular views of slaves as inferior in a nation where the law of the land said that they were in fact primarily property, and they were therefore not afforded the natural rights of freemen. As a result, those who opposed slavery were much more straightforward about their claims of slaves’ humanity and equality than they had been in the past. One way in which they did this was to acknowledge the inferiority that their retractors pointed out.

> Many abolitionists agreed that slaves and people of African descent were in many ways inferior to their European counterparts, but these authors argued that this was because they were

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\(^{442}\) Juvenis, *Observations on Slavery of the Negroes, in the Southern States* (New York: Ross, 1785), 9. Thomas Day referenced the same work and made a similar point in a letter written in 1776 and published in 1784. He wrote, “Or do you choose to make use of that argument, which the great Montesquieu has thrown out as the severest ridicule, that they are black and you white; that you have lank, long hair, while theirs is short and whoolly?” (Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter* (Philadelphia: Bailey, 1784), 7.)
not afforded the same opportunities. George Wallis, for example, maintained that Africans were men, just as Europeans were and insisted that they would become social equals to Europeans if they were given the chance. He wrote, “Let the Negroes Free, and in a few Generations, this vast and fertile Continent would be crowded with Inhabitants; Learning, Arts, and every Thing would flourish amongst them, instead of being inhabited by wild Beasts and by Savages, it would be peopled by Philosophers, and by Men.” Although Wallis at first reinforced the view that Africans were inhuman by describing them as “beasts” and “savages,” he went on to claim that this was not a natural or unchanging state. Africans were not literally “beasts” and therefore fundamentally different than Europeans, rather, they were living in conditions that made it difficult for them to progress, but given the opportunity, they would improve and become temporally equal to whites. Charles Crawford made similar claims in his 1784 publication, Observations upon Negro-Slavery. In addition to asserting that claims of Africans’ inferiority were “contradicted by those who have had a peculiar opportunity of being acquainted with the dispositions and talents of the Negroes,” he also described Phillis Wheatley, claiming that her genius proved that blacks were as mentally and artistically capable as whites.

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443 Isaac Foster made a similar claim when he wrote, “It must proceed either from ignorance or malice, for all acquainted with negroes know that they have natural abilities equal with other people.” (Isaac Foster, A Discours upon Extortion (Hartford, Conn.: Watson, 1777), 13.) George Buchanan also asserted this position in 1793 when he said that because white Americans had not see many examples of successful African Americans, they were “ready to enjoy the common opinion, that they are an inferior set of beings, and destined by nature to the cruelties and hardships you impose on them.” (An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery (Baltimore, Md.: Edwards, 1793), 11.)

444 Samuel Stanhope Smith made a similar argument more than twenty-five years later in An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species… In it he responded to a story of a Native American child and said that if a European and a Native-American child were raised under the same conditions, there would be no noticeable differences between them by the time they reached puberty. Although he was not writing about Africans here, he made clear throughout his book that Africans were also only different because of culture and circumstances and was simply relying on an example of a Native American child to make this larger point. (Samuel Stanhope Smith, An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species (New-Brunswick: J. Simpson and Co., 1810), 174.)

445 Charles Crawford, Observations upon Negro-Slavery (Philadelphia: Crushank, 1784), 4. On the next page in a footnote Crawford also described one person who had been “acquainted,” saying that Anthony Benezet “has found
Unlike Thomas Jefferson, who maintained that Wheatley’s works were not noteworthy, Crawford described her as an “extraordinary genius.” George Buchanan made a similar point when he wrote,

Witness, Ingatius Sancho, whose letters are admired by all men of taste – Phillis Wheatley, who distinguished herself as a poetess – The physicians of New-Orleans – The Virginia calculator – Banker [sic], the Maryland astronomer, the many others whom it would be needless to mention. These are sufficient to shew, that the Africans, whom you despise, whom you more inhumanly treat than brutes, and who you unlawfully subject to slavery, with the tyrannizing hands of Despots, are equally capable of improvement with yourselves.

These authors all agreed that there was nothing inherently different or inferior about people of African descent and that they had the same human capacities as Europeans, and they attempted to make this point not by claiming that African Americans were presently equal to European Americans, but by arguing that they would be their equals if they were given the same opportunities.

In addition to simply stating that Africans could be equal to Europeans and using examples of Africans who had succeeded, many abolitionists also related these claims that Africans were fully human to their religious beliefs about the creation. Traditionally, Christians had maintained that all people came from a single creation and were formed in God’s image. For many, this meant that perceived differences between whites and blacks had to be the result of

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Philanthropos also used Phillis Wheatley and Benjamin Banneker as examples of African Americans who proved that blacks were as capable as whites. (Philanthropos, *The African Miscellanist; or, A Collection of Original Essays, on the Subject of Negro Slavery* (Trenton: Wilson & Blackwell, 1802), 32-33.)
circumstances and not inherent, unchanging distinctions. Examples of African Americans’ success only functioned to prove a point that Christian abolitionists believed was self-evident. Isaac Foster, for instance, wrote, “For let men say what they will, it is certain we had all one father. That God hath made of one blood the whole nation of men to inhabit all the face of the earth. That they all share the same common nature, faculties and powers are in nature equal, and ought to partake in the same common rights and privileges…” This assertion, that God created all people “of one blood” was a common way that abolitionist authors came to reaffirmed their position. Whereas most earlier authors seemed to take for granted that their readers would agree that all people came from “one blood,” by the time of the Revolution, many abolitionists felt the need to make this point explicitly in their works. Charles Crawford illustrated this conflict and his concern about how some Christians were reimagining the creation when he wrote,

It is first said, that God hath made of one blood, all nations of men, and then again it is said, that these of one blood are to dwell on all the fact of the earth. When therefore it can be proved that one blood signifies various bloods, that all nations signify some nations, and that all the faces of the earth signified only a part of the earth, then it may be proven that those who call themselves Christians are not culpable in oppressing the Africans.

According to some, the idea that revelation proved that all people descended from the same parents was further supported in the early nineteenth century by the emergence of natural philosophy.

By the turn of the century, many abolitionists were attempting to support their religious claims about the humanity of slaves by utilizing similar arguments to those presented by supporters of the institution. While supporters of the slave trade often argued that empirical,

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449 Isaac Foster, A Discourse upon Extortion (Hartford: Watson, 1777), 8-9.  
physical evidence supported their assertion that Africans were fundamentally different from and inferior to Europeans, some abolitionists began to use similar kinds of arguments to counter their claims. In a text comparable to John Dunlap’s, where he categorized Africans along with lesser primates, Charles Linne attempted to organize the natural world into classes, orders, genera, and species. Unlike Dunlap, however, Linne considered all races of men to be “HOMO. Sapiens,” who varied “by education and situation.” He described the most common physical characteristics associated with different races of people, but again, never suggested that these physical differences were indicative of inherent variances in ability or potential. He also clearly distinguished between human beings and apes and orangutans, which were relegated to a separate, lesser category. Although Linne described the differences found among people, and emphasized that these did not make them different species, Samuel Stanhope Smith went into further detail about these differences in his work *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*… Smith saw his work as significant because it connected “science” and revealed religion. He wrote, “Although the following essay may seem, at first view, to propose nothing to itself but to amuse the public with a philosophical speculation; yet as its object is to establish the unity of the human species, by tracing its varieties to their natural causes, it has an obvious and intimate relation with religion, by bringing in science to confirm the verity of the Mosaic history.” He went on to say that although some people had come to believe that “the spirit of piety” was “hostile to profound researches into

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451 See chapter 2.
“Natural Science,” Smith said, was being used to attack religious doctrine, but the reality was that there was no conflict there. He wrote specifically about how scientific inquiry proved that all people had the same origins and that, regardless of what others had claimed, the Christian creation narrative that described a single set of parents did not contradict scientific findings.

According to Smith,

> The unity of the human race, notwithstanding the diversity of colour, and form under which it appears in different portions of the globe, is a doctrine, independently of the authority of divine revelation, much more consistent with the principles of sound philosophy, than any of those numerous hypotheses which have referred its varieties to a racial and original diversity of species, adapted by the Creator, or by the necessary laws of the material world, to the respective climates which they were destined to inhabit.

Like many who came before him, Smith described how differences in culture and climate explain all of the apparent distinctions between the races, but he also recognized the religious implications of his perspective, and he believed there was serious danger in the perspectives of others. The philosophies of men like Dunlap posed a religious problem for Smith because he saw them as refuting a revealed Christian truth. He explained, “it is an homage which we owe to philosophy, as well as to religion, to refer all the different nations of the earth to the same original stock. It is a debt which we owe to humanity to recognize our brethren in every class of men into which society is divided, and under every shade of complexion which diversifies their

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various tribes from the equator to the poles."\(^{459}\) Smith articulated the problem that many abolitionists were facing. They could no longer focus on arguments that assumed slaves’ humanity and instead had to pair those with arguments that proved that people of African descent were in fact human beings.

In addition to including arguments to prove that blacks were equal to whites, many early-American authors were also forced to deal with the concerns of their fellow citizens. Most Americans, including many abolitionists, were worried that African slaves were not prepared for their freedom, and this posed a problem for convincing people to emancipate them. Jupiter Hammon, himself a slave, articulated the concern that many Americans had about the state of slaves. In an address he wrote to the African American population of New York, he wrote, “when I think of you, which is very often, and of the poor, despised, and miserable state you are in, as to the things of this world; and when I think of your ignorance and stupidity, and the great wickedness of the most of you, I am pained to the heart.”\(^{460}\) There was widespread concern that because of African slaves’ nature and how they had been treated, they were not in a position to care of themselves if they were freed. According to Hammon, they were unfamiliar with the ways of the world and were accustomed to living wicked lives, neither of which would have boded well for anyone if they were freed. Perceptions like these made it difficult for abolitionists to convince supporters of slavery that emancipation was a good idea, even if they were able to persuade them that slaves were human beings and capable of improvement. Some, like Hammon, encouraged the enslaved population to live righteous lives while in bondage, so that they could

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\(^{459}\) Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (New-Brunswick: J. Simpson and Co., 1810), 34.

prove to the white community that they would be able to live productive lives as free persons.⁴⁶¹

Others put the burden on the free population to prepare slaves for freedom. As one author wrote, “I confess, I should not wish the Negroes to be freed at once without a preparatory education, tho it be injustice to hold them in bondage a single day. The evil exists, and the question is, how shall it be remedied?”⁴⁶² Here the author acknowledged the concern of many Americans, that slaves were not fit to be freed, but he insisted that this was no excuse for continuing to keep them in bondage. He suggested that they needed “a preparatory education,” and he was not alone.

Seven years earlier, in a tract entitled Tyrannical Libertymen, the author made a similar suggestion, saying that if slaves were not “fit for freedom, they must be fitted.” He rejected the idea that slavery should continue because slaves were not prepared for their freedom, but also believed it would be unfair to free them without providing them with any guidance.⁴⁶³ As a result, he suggested that slaves should be taken from their masters and become dependent on the government for a period of time. This would allow them to be educated so that they could train for employment and to become “prepared for citizenship.”⁴⁶⁴

These abstract concerns about slaves’ ability to integrate into society were furthered by texts that cited examples of when manumission had appeared to create problems.⁴⁶⁵ In one letter originally published in London but reprinted in the states, the author claimed that,

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⁴⁶³ Tyrannical Libertymen (Hanover, N. H.: Eagle Office, 1795), 4-5.
⁴⁶⁴ Tyrannical Libertymen (Hanover, N. H.: Eagle Office, 1795), 9.
⁴⁶⁵ Morgan John Rhees also suggested that slaves be gradually emancipated and “instructed” rather than simply set free and left to their own devices. (Morgan John Rhees, Letters on Liberty and Slavery: In Answer to a Pamphlet, Entitled, “Negro-Slavery Defended by the World of God” (New York: Wilson, 1798), 3.) Thomas Branagan claimed that Northern attempts at emancipating slaves, even once they were educated, was “big with unpleasant effects, and exceedingly injurious to the citizens of the North.” (Serious Remonstrances (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), 38-39.)
During the late war with America, some of the United States to the northward emancipated their slaves, and those slaves having lived in the habit of industry, under humane masters, one would naturally think they would be able to provide for themselves when they had their freedom; but ask any candid man from that country, and he will tell you, that more than half of them are become vagabonds in this short space of time, and but very few of them are able to provide for themselves.\textsuperscript{466}

The author’s claim was that even Northern slaves, who he assumed were relatively prepared for emancipation, could not fend for themselves once freed. He then went on to say that African Americans who were living in London faced similar fates because they were unable to provide for themselves and therefore became a burden to the society.\textsuperscript{467} When colonists viewed slaves as simply temporally inferior, there was hope (and often an expectation) that they could be molded into useful members of society, but as people came to view them as naturally inferior the assumption became that they could never contribute and would have to be provided for, if not by owners, then by the state. In addition to financial concerns, many early Americans were also worried that freeing slaves was a dangerous proposition.\textsuperscript{468} Again, the author of \textit{Tyrannical Libertymen}, confronted this concern when he explained that if there was a sudden manumission with no education, slaves would not only become a “nuisance to society,” but there could also be instances of violent and deadly crimes. This, he said, would be the result of ignorance, wantonness, and revenge, but these acts would not be entirely the fault of slaves. According to his view, they were treated too harshly, taught to obey rather than reason, and were not educated in proper “social relations.” They lacked the moral conscious necessary to be able to participate in society immediately, which was why they needed to be taught to enter into the culture.\textsuperscript{469}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{466} \textit{A Letter to Philo Africanus, upon Slavery} (Newport: Edes, 1788), 12.
\item \textsuperscript{467} \textit{A Letter to Philo Africanus, upon Slavery} (Newport: Edes, 1788), 12-13.
\item \textsuperscript{468} Thomas Branagan wrote that there was nothing “more certain, than that blacks, however they may disagree among themselves, will be unanimous in their hostility against the whites…” (\textit{Serious Remonstrances} (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), 85-6. He also made similar claims on pages 44 and 70-71.)
\item \textsuperscript{469} \textit{Tyrannical Libertymen} (Hanover, N. H.: Eagle Office, 1795), 8.
\end{itemize}
author was not alone, and others also confronted the concern that freeing slaves could be
dangerous, but abolitionist authors agreed that this fear did not justify the institution.\textsuperscript{470} Even so,
according to Thomas Branagan, the dangers associated with abolition would only grow if the
institution were permitted to continue to exist. He was concerned about the growing number of
slaves in the South and implored his Northern readers to realize that eventually “the votes of all
the citizens of the North, including their negro citizens, will not be equal to the negro votes of the
South!,” a thought that made him “shudder.”\textsuperscript{471} He believed that this imbalance not only
threatened the influence of Northern states, but could eventually lead to anarchy and an
“annihilation of the federal compact.”\textsuperscript{472} If this threat to the new nation was not enough, he also
explained that as soon as the nation became involved in a military conflict, slaves would
certainly take the opportunity to rise up and avenge the wrongs against them, which was a
constant threat to the safety of white Americans and the security of the United States.\textsuperscript{473}

Although colonial Americans would have been concerned about what would happen if slaves
were suddenly freed, this issue was dealt with in much more detail near the turn of the eighteenth
century. Because Americans had come to view slaves as innately different and inferior, they no
longer believed that they could be integrated into society. As a result, abolitionist authors had to
deal with this concern and explain how and why their integration was possible.

In addition to trying to show that integrating African slaves into American culture was
possible, some abolitionists also mentioned the possibility of having freed slaves colonize other

\textsuperscript{470} Isaac Foster, \textit{A Discours upon Extortion} (Hartford: Watson, 1777), 12-13.; Morgan John Rhees, \textit{Letters on
Liberty and Slavery: In Answer to a Pamphlet, Entitl ed, “Negro-Slavery Defended by the World of God”} (New
York: Wilson, 1798), 3.
\textsuperscript{471} Thomas Branagan, \textit{Serious Remonstrances} (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), xiii.
\textsuperscript{472} Thomas Branagan, \textit{Serious Remonstrances} (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), xiv.
\textsuperscript{473} Thomas Branagan, \textit{Serious Remonstrances} (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), 16-17.
Henry Home Kames made a similar point in 1776 when he said that “ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of
the injuries they have sustained…” would make it impossible for them to be “incorporated” into the state. (\textit{Six
Sketches on the History of Man} (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 147.)
parts of the country or the world. According to one author, Americans saw themselves as “being burthened with so many negroes, which they declare they know not what to do with, and whom they wish to be rid of…”

Many early Americans believed that integrating Africans into the culture was impossible because they were fundamentally different, so in order to abolish slavery, Africans would have to leave the region. Some abolitionists believed it was best to send African slaves to other countries, while others suggested that they move to areas of North America that were not widely settled. Thomas Branagan thought that the presence of slaves in the union had retarded the North’s success and that they would have been much better off if no Africans had ever entered the country. Even so, it would be unfair to send slaves to a foreign country, he said, writing that, “it would be far better, if it could be done, without inhumanity, to send the blacks to some distant island, out of our territories altogether. But this measure would be both unjust and cruel, though it has been recommended by many respectable politicians, as a necessary defensive measure.”

Instead of sending them to a foreign place, Branagan recommended that a portion of the land acquired through the Louisiana Purchase be set aside as a separate state where African Americans could obtain land and develop a system of governance, and he assured his reader that if they were sent to the furthest reaches of the region, they would be upwards of two thousand miles away. He believed that it would be in the best interest of the United States government, because the Louisiana territory was a worthless wilderness, and

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474 Humanitas, Reflections on Slavery, with Recent Evidence of its Inhumanity (Philadelphia: R. Cochran, 1803), 10.
475 Henry Home Kames explained this problem in 1776 when he wrote, “It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expence of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites.” (Six Sketches on the History of Man (Philadelphia: Bell and Aitken, 1776), 147.
477 Thomas Branagan, Serious Remonstrances (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), 111.
478 Thomas Branagan, Serious Remonstrances (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), 17.
479 Thomas Branagan, Serious Remonstrances (Philadelphia: Stiles, 1805), 22-23.
African Americans, because there they could govern themselves fairly independently. Another author suggested a similar course of action and wrote, “Let a portion of our new territory be assigned for the purpose; and let the great body of the negroes be sent to colonize it…If the negroes should remain among us, though fully enfranchised, they will not be treated upon terms of equality; and perhaps never rise to that rank where they deserve… They will never be men till they are treated like men…” These abolitionists were concerned that Africans were viewed as too different than whites to ever be treated as equals, and so the only way for them to succeed and develop was for them to be sent to a place where they could live on their own.

In addition to concerns about the ability of African slaves to care for themselves and become useful members of society, there was also rising concern in the early Republic about miscegenation. The most famous, and surely one of the more ironic, authors worried about the races mixing if slaves were freed was Thomas Jefferson. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson explained the problem, saying it was the first time in history that something extra had to be done alongside emancipation in order to maintain a culture. He wrote, “Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his maters. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.” According to his view, slaves were not only incapable of participating in American life, but they also had to be removed from the American landscape so that they could not mix with whites and “stain” their blood. Thomas Branagan reiterated this point in his 1805 work, *Serious Remonstrances*, by quoting Jefferson.

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482 For more on how colonists in Massachusetts dealt with their anxieties about miscegenation by imposing new laws, see chapter 3.
and going on to write, “It may be proved with mathematical certainty, that... all our progeny will be a mixture of mungrels and mulattoes in another century.” In order to avoid this inevitability, he presented his plan for relocated emancipated slaves to Louisiana.

By the time of the Revolution, abolitionist were being forced to deal with the popular view that Africans were sub-human, but many of them also struggled with this view. Men like Branagan wanted to end slavery, but he also did not want Africans to become part of American society. Perhaps the publication that best illustrates the conflict that developed between those who continued to maintain that Africans were human beings and those who objected to this view was *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of enslaving the Africans*. This tract proves particularly useful because it was written as a discussion between two men, one who opposed the slave trade and one who supported it. Because these two positions are side-by-side, it is easy to see how pro-slavery arguments began to rely on a discussion of the natural inferiority of Africans and how abolitionists attempted to counter these claims. Although this publication clearly shows these differences in perspective, it also illustrates how people on both sides of this argument struggled to maintain consistency in their claims about inherent equality or inferiority. Both authors were forced to deal with a religious tradition that described a single creation, while also being bombarded with cultural, legal, and economic systems that described Africans as inferior, and this tract shows how these conflicting ideas made it difficult for abolitionists and pro-slavery activists alike to remain consistent in their arguments.

This publication began with the question the two proposed to answer, “Whether the slavery, to which Africans are in this province, by the permission of law, subjected, be agreeable

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486 For more on early American colonization efforts, why people came to support these plans, and how they evolved over time, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 302-308.
to the law of nature? The author opposed to the trade, designated with an “A,” began with his first argument, explaining that he believed in the “idea of natural equality” and therefore did not accept the legality of enslaving Africans. Although he described what we might consider to be Revolutionary ideas about the “principles of natural equality and civil Liberty,” and the “natural rights of mankind,” the heart of this debate quickly became whether or not Africans were human beings deserving of equal consideration. Author A maintained that regardless of their complexion and their legal status, Africans and people of African descent were natural equals to whites, while author B attempted to show that there were significant differences between whites and blacks and that these differences made Africans unequal and therefore not deserving of the same rights as Europeans. In order to support his view, this first author began with a religious argument for the equality of Africans, saying that slavery was a system “whereby such multitudes of our fellow-men, descendants… from the same common parent with you and me, and between whom and us nature has made no distinction, save what arises from the stronger influence of the sun in the climate whence they originated, are held to grown under the insupportable burden of the most abject slavery…” Here the author echoed earlier critics of the slave trade who emphasized that Africans and their descendants in the British colonies were spiritually equal to European colonists and that differences in behavior and appearance were the result of distinct climates and cultures.

After these initial claims, author B began with his defense of slavery saying that he would focus on Africans and determine if “there is any thing in the nature of their particular case not agreeable” to enslaving them. He began by stating that the principle of natural equality was

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487 A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 3-4.
488 A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 4.
489 A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 5.
490 A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 10-11.
not true, and as a result, slavery did not break the laws of nature. He explained that people
around the world freely accepted that there were natural distinctions between parents and
children and God and man and that this proved that not all people were equal. He then went on
to emphasize apparent differences between Europeans and Africans and, unlike his co-author,
maintained that these differences could be inherent. He argued that no one could deny the,

vast inequality observable between different individuals of the human species, in point of
qualification for the proper direction of conduct. Now whether this inequality be
considered as arising from difference in natural capacity, difference in the means of
improvement, or in disposition on properly to employ such means; in a word, whether it
arises from nature or education, or any other supposeable quarter, it matters not…

Although he wrote here that African slaves were part of the “human species,” he went on to say
that they were dramatically different than whites and that he did not think that it mattered
whether these differences were cultural or natural. What mattered to him was that he believed
these differences existed and required Europeans to exercise their authority over Africans. The
abolitionist author, however, did think this mattered, and as a result, he took issue with author
B’s claims, writing,

I am much at a loss to conceive how your reasoning in favor of slavery in general…
could possibly justify us in forcibly subjugating the Africans, between whom and us
nature seems to have made no such difference as that, upon which you suppose the notion
of natural inequality to be founded: For I suppose you will hardly imagine the darkness
of a man’s skin incapacitates him for the direction of his conduct, and authorizes his
neighbours, who may have the good fortune of a complexion a shade or two lighter, to
exercise authority over him.

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491 It is worth noting that author B never discussed if all white men were naturally equal. He stated early on that in
order to refute the idea of natural equality all he had to do was show that Africans were unequal, which allowed him
to avoid a broader discussion that would have been difficult considering the rise of Revolutionary ideas about
natural rights and equality.

492 *A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans* (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 14-15.

493 *A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans* (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 21.
Here, the author attempted to refute the idea that African slaves were naturally inferior to Europeans. In his argument, author B suggested that we find a natural inequality between God and man and parents and children, and likened the difference between Africans and Europeans to these generally accepted inequalities. While author A admitted that inequalities existed in these cases, he maintained that there was no such natural distinction between adult Africans and Europeans. Consequently, he rejected his co-author’s idea that slavery was in the best interest of both races because slaves could not adequately take care of themselves.494

At this point, the authors began to show the difficulty that colonists had when trying to define Africans as either naturally equal or inferior, as the pro-slavery author started to move away from his earlier claim, that Africans were of the human species and were perhaps different because of circumstance. Instead, he began expressing more rigid ideas, stating that Africans were lacking in all social virtues that allowed for the “cultivation of those principles of humanity…” He also went on to say that Africans lacked the “rational nature… by which the human species is distinguished from the other parts of the animal creation.”495 Here the author argued not only that Africans were different from Europeans in a fundamental way, but also that they lacked what made human beings distinct from other creatures, which strikes a much different tone than his earlier assertions. Author B was no longer describing Africans as human beings, but was instead explaining how they shared an important characteristic with non-human animals. Furthermore, he went on to ask his reader to reflect on the condition of those still on the African continent, describing them as a “creature in human shape, (for in such a state of degradation one can hardly call him a man),” again moving away from his earlier description of them as “individuals of the human species” and instead suggesting they simply resembled true

494 A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 21.
495 A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 26.
human beings.\textsuperscript{496} In response, the first author agreed that Africans on the continent were in a miserable state, but nonetheless reaffirmed his belief that they had a “rational nature” and that they were “still [to] some degrees above brutes.”\textsuperscript{497} Although this was hardly a forceful declaration of natural equality, he was clear that Africans were rational, just like whites, and that this made it possible for them to improve their circumstances in Africa and around the world. He then went on to explain why advocates of slavery described Africans as inhuman, writing, “indeed it is not to be wondered that those who have been disposed to make a gain by this iniquitous practice of enslaving their fellow men, should be careful, for their justification, to represent them as nearly upon a level with the brute creation as possible; not to mention the ridiculous attempts that have, in this view, been made to prove them actually of another species.”\textsuperscript{498} Author A explained here that supporters of slavery had to view Africans as less than human in order to justify their treatment, and that shift in perspective was a cause of concern for him. It not only rationalized the slave trade and the inhumane treatment of Africans, to which he was opposed, but it also conflicted with his religious belief, that all people came from the same parents and were therefore members of the same human family.

Although the two perspectives outlined in this tract seem to be diametrically opposed, even the abolitionist author struggled to remain consistent in his stance that Africans and Europeans were naturally equal. Near the end of his final argument, author A wrote that Africans were “naturally peaceable, and less inclined to acts of hostility than the generality of mankind…”\textsuperscript{499} Although this is a relatively minor point in his overall argument and could easily have been overlooked by his readers, it is more significant than it may at first appear. This author

\textsuperscript{496} A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 26-7.
\textsuperscript{497} A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 36.
\textsuperscript{498} A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 37-8.
\textsuperscript{499} A Forensic Dispute on The Legality of enslaving the Africans (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 42.
wrote extensively to argue that Africans were naturally equal to Europeans, and yet he could not resist including this bit of romantic racism. He claimed to believe in the natural equality of all people and yet this is a clear statement of perceived natural difference. Africans’ peaceable nature and aversion to hostility appeared to support the author’s abolitionist stance, but the unintended consequence was that it reinforced a point that he had been working against, that Africans and Europeans were naturally different.

Although there was ambiguity about slaves’ humanity from the earliest years of the eighteenth century, over time, that ambiguity was replaced by increased certainty that Africans were less than human. As George Buchanan explained in 1793, “although the authority exercised was at first mild, and ensured to the bondsmen almost the same privileges with their masters, yet the idea of power soon crept in upon the mind, and at length lenity was converted into rigidity, and the gall of servitude became insupportable…”500 Though slaves were never truly granted the “same privileges with their masters,” there certainly was a shift that occurred throughout the eighteenth century that led early Americans to view slaves and people of African descent in a way that differed significantly from how early colonial Northerners saw them. New England puritans maintained that Africans were fully human and only differed temporally, not spiritually from Europeans, and this view led them to believe that they could incorporate African slaves into their society. Over time, however, colonial Christianity became less communal in its focus and popular depictions of Africans along with legal and economic transformations caused many colonists and early Americans to view people of African descent as innately inferior to whites. During the first years of settlement, ministers were preaching to congregants who valued communalism, had fairly little contact with slaves and Africans, and had an economy that was relatively insular, which allowed them to maintain a traditional view of humanity that included

500 George Buchanan, An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery (Baltimore, Md.: Edwards, 1793), 8.
people of all races. Though popular travel narratives existed that described Africans as fundamentally different than Europeans, their lack of contact with blacks and their economic separation from the slave trade allowed New Englanders to maintain the rhetoric of spiritual equality with relatively few objections. This did not last, however. As colonist began to stress the importance of individual Christian virtue over communalism, the number of African slaves in the region increased, and reports of slave violence spread, New Englanders attempted to control the African American population by creating legal systems that distinguished them as a distinct category and limited their rights. The expansion of the Northern economy and evolving notions of property further relegated African slaves not just to an inferior temporal status, but also a spiritual one. Travel accounts had set the stage for these shifts by placing Africans outside of the Adam and Eve paradigm, and changes to the law and the economy solidified slaves’ status as property, rather than human beings, by the time of the American Revolution. For many, this progression seemed natural as they embraced theories that described Africans as lesser beings who were better compared to animals than people, but for others it caused a religious problem. Abolitionists became concerned about the growing view that Africans were sub-human and when the United States Constitution defined the majority of African Americans as property they responded by attempting to emphasize their shared parentage and their human capabilities. This was no small task, however, as the view of Africans as inferior was so pervasive by the time of the American Revolution that even many supporters of abolition could not help but see and describe blacks as fundamentally different than whites, a trend that only increased over time. Nonetheless, many Christians fought to assert this traditional view as it became more and more clear that their fellow Americans were coming to doubt its authority.
The dehumanization of Africans outlined in this dissertation helps to explain why slavery, which was once viewed as a divinely sanctioned means of ordering society, became a moral evil for some Christians. Slaves and African Americans were no longer seen or treated as just temporally inferior to whites, but were being described as a distinct sub-group, which some simply could not meld with their religious tradition. For many who could not accept this inevitability, abolition was the only option because they believed that slavery was unjust and the cause of this misconception. In addition to explaining why some Christians felt forced to reject slavery, even though there was a long tradition of its acceptance, this process of dehumanization also helps to explain why revolutionary ideology did not put an end to American slavery. Abolitionists were fighting to end slavery based on claims about slaves’ humanity during a time when this view of them was on the decline. As one author explained in a published discourse written for a federal day of thanksgiving, “But shame to the whole union, that more than a seventh part of the human beings in these states… are not of the nation; and, therefore, have no national blessings to acknowledge. They have no share in the commonwealth. They are politically nothing. And by celebrating this day, we subscribe to their nonexistence.”

By the turn of the eighteenth century, many American Christians had come to reject the view of Africans as human beings and instead saw them as an innately different group, and the abolitionists who rejected this view as heretical were fighting a losing battle. Even as abolitionism gained support, the view that people of African descent were inherently different remained influential for generations. Published debates about the nature of Africans and their inherent capabilities illustrated a growing divide between American Christians who continued to accept a religious view of Africans as human beings and therefore felt the need to reject the dehumanizing institution of slavery and those who came to accept newer perspectives that

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claimed that perceived differences between whites and blacks were a result of inherent and unchanging variances, a race essentialist view that would continue to influence American culture and politics for generations. As historian David Brion Davis wrote, “From the era of Theodore Roosevelt to the early 1950s, the most authoritative works on slavery and Reconstruction rested on a simple, bedrock assumption: ‘Negroes’ were inherently inferior to whites, and were wholly unprepared at the end of the Civil War to look out for themselves or take on the responsibility of equal citizenship.”502 In other words, Cotton Mather’s message, that African slaves were “Men, and not Beasts,” failed not only to win the day, but also the following two and a half centuries.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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