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REBELS IN THEIR MIDST: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF GENDER, GEOGRAPHY AND CONSCIOUSNESS AS RELATED TO THE RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL OF FEMALE SLAVES IN NEW JERSEY

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ABSTRACT

REBELS IN THEIR MIDST: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF GENDER, GEOGRAPHY AND CONSCIOUSNESS AS RELATED TO THE RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL OF FEMALE SLAVES IN NEW JERSEY

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This thesis offers a holistic view of female slave consciousness in New Jersey. Whether a bondwoman was rebellious or passive, she was mainly concerned with basic human survival. That is, both camps possessed what might be termed a "rebellious consciousness." Special attention is also given to female slave flight. To build on the information provided in newspaper advertisements, extensive consideration is given to both geography and demographics. This method provides clues concerning why certain slave women risked taking off and where they may have headed. The basic intent here is to examine female slave flight in more complete terms. Overall, this essay demonstrates that New Jersey slave women were active participants in the struggles for freedom and survival.

To all those women--black, white, and indigen--who braved the system of bondage in New Jersey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are several persons whom I must thank for being in my life during this long experience. I first thank God for my mother, Peggie Bellamy, who provided me with perhaps too much kindness. Miss Peggie has stood by me ever since I expressed my desire for higher learning. If not for her, the completion of this project would still be just a dream. Thanks, Peg!

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The Comparative Black History Program played a major role in cultivating my ideas regarding black freedom, resistance, and survival. I offer heartfelt thanks to Drs. Darlene Clark Hine, David Barry Gaspar, and Wilma King for their excellent seminars.

Both Donald Bray and Michelle McCormack gave freely of themselves during times of financial and social need. Mr. Bray also provided me with a fine example of black male success outside of the academy. Equally supportive were Lisa Schell, Shalonda Kelly, Earnestine Jenkins, Michael Wiest, Ty Ross, and Dr. Roderick McDonald of Rider University. Words can not express my appreciation for such good friends.

If there are any errors or shortcomings in this presentation, only I am to blame. Heaven knows I was afforded with more than enough assistance and concern.

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Introduction

Perhaps more than anything else, the enslavement experience is a story of resistance. However, when historians talk about slave resistance, they usually place greater emphasis on black males. The implication is that slave resistance was essentially a genderless affair, an obvious untruth. This paper will further challenge this biased interpretation of slave resistance by focusing upon the efforts of bondwomen in New Jersey.

Historians tend also to look at slave resistance and/or survival purely in terms of what the sources say. Thus, the perception is that "good slaves" (those whose contempt was not documented) were completely devoid of "rebellious consciousness" (survival by whatever means necessary). But as Kenneth Stampp keenly observes in *The Peculiar Institution* (1956):

> If slaves yielded to authority most of the time, they did so because they usually saw no other practical choice. Yet few went through life without expressing discontent somehow sometime. Even the most passive slaves, usually before they reached middle age, flared up in protest now and then.[1]

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[1]Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 91.

Much like Stampp, this thesis suggests that "good slaves" possessed the same inner strength or will to survive as those captives who, at one time or another, we know directly challenged white supremacy. As we shall later see, New Jersey's slave regime was a brutal one. So in this project, a rebel slave woman was also one who exploited all the amenities afforded her to survive this barbarous and chaotic institution and society. In a true sense a rebel slave woman was cunning and practical and realistic; she knew what she could and could not do against white supremacy. Day-to-day survival in New Jersey slave society was no easy task; it took a stout and willful black woman to maintain her sense of herself. The implication, then, is that New Jersey white folk lived amongst a substantial number of bondwomen rebels.

"Rebels in Their Midst" might be considered cutting edge, for there is no book on female slave resistance for North America.[2] The only examination of the black woman's experience in slavery during the eighteenth century is Deborah Gray White's *Ar'n't I a Woman?* (1985).[3] This pathbreaking monograph challenges the myth of the southern Mammy and Jezebel, and raises important questions about the culture, life cycles, and female networks that slave women developed in the plantation South for their survival. White's discussion, however, on female slave resistance is not as

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[2]Only one book has been written specifically on rebellious slave women. See Lucille Mathurin, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery* (Kingston: Published by Institute of Jamaica for the African-Caribbean Institute, 1975).

[3]Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985).

provocative. That is, she briefly reinforces the idea that the black woman was aggressive and strong under slavery.

A more perceptive analysis of bondwomen's willfulness under slavery is the first chapter in Jacqueline Jones' *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (1985).[4] As does the rest of this excellent account, " 'My Mother Was Much of a Woman': Slavery" focuses on black women's dual role as mothers and workers, and their efforts to survive the oppressive marketplace. More precisely, though responsibilities to family and work pulled southern slave women in different directions, they were still able to find the means to define life on their own terms. Jones is not concerned, however, with discussing female slave resistance comprehensively.

There are a few articles that look exclusively at rebellious slave women. The first to do so is Angela Davis's pioneering "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (1971).[5] Davis's thesis is that enslaved women used their domestic work to assist the black community in undermining the slaveocracy. She argues that the black woman understood her people's oppression because she was as much a laborer as the black man, and demonstrates her rebelliousness by locating her in numerous activities of maroon societies (bands of "guerrilla warriors" of fugitive slaves). Davis relies mostly on the scholarship of Herbert

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[4]Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), chapter 1.

[5]Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" *The Black Scholar* 3 (December 1971): 3-15.

Aptheker, particularly his *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943).[6] Two criticisms of this acclaimed study are that it classifies even the smallest plots as major uprisings and includes slave women even when the sources do not mention them. Other shortcomings in "Reflections" is that it views the institution of slavery in rather singular-terms and fails to discuss gender-specific forms of female slave resistance.[7] Nevertheless, "Reflections" laid down a provocative theoretical framework for understanding the black woman's oppression as female and slave, and her important role in resistance. In hindsight, this methodological framework had a tremendous impact on my belief that there was a black freedom movement in colonial New Jersey, which relied on the participation of both enslaved men and women.

Gerda Lerner continued the assault against the gender imbalance in slave resistance in her "The Struggle For Survival--Day to Day Resistance" (1973).[8] Lerner is concerned with providing a more complete portrayal of enslaved women's resistance thus she presents an assortment of informative primary accounts.

Another essay which calls attention to female slave resistance is Johnnetta Cole's "Militant Black Women in Early U.S. History" (1978).[9] Cole argues that "mainstream" historians were

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[6]Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1969).

[7]For interesting comments on Davis's presentation, see E. Frances White, "Listening to the Voices of Black Feminism" *Radical America* 18 (November 1984): 12, 13.

[8]Gerda Lerner, "The Struggle for Survival--Day to Day Resistance," in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, ed. Lerner (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 27-45.

[9]Johnnetta Cole, "Militant Black Women in Early U.S. History" *The Black Scholar* 9 (April 1978): 38-44.

wrong in assuming that women slaves were aggressive persons who castrated men slaves, and who collaborated with the oppressors to achieve their own personal gain. She makes her point by extending Davis's idea that slave women were the "socializers of resistance"--they used their work to challenge slavery. In addition to depending too much on Davis's think piece, Cole does not present the reader with any new methodological framework.

In "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex" (1981), Darlene Clark Hine and Kate Wittenstein examine female slave resistance along different lines.[10] They speculate that the principle concerns of bondwomen evolved around resistance, survival, and how to exercise control over their bodies. Precisely, abstention from sexual intercourse, abortion, and infanticide were means through which enslaved females expressed their political and economic opposition to slavery. Despite the logic of their argument, the paucity of primary source material makes it difficult to access its validity. But as the two authors point out, "the important point with respect to these modes of female resistance is not the infrequency with which they occurred, if indeed they were infrequent, but the fact that these methods were used at all."[11]

Hine and Wittenstein and other historians have taken note of the article written by Raymond and Alice Bauer, "Day to Day

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[10]Darlene Clark Hine and Kate Wittenstein, "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex," in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally,* ed. Filomina Chimona Steady (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1981), pp. 289-300.

[11]Ibid., p. 127.

Resistance to Slavery" (1942).[12] This piece was the first to really acknowledge gender-specific forms of female slave resistance: feigning illness and pregnancy and infanticide. In a very true sense it played the leading role behind the scholarly assault previously mentioned.

Indeed, the proliferation of work done on rebellious black women under slavery calls for a study of New Jersey bondwomen. Enslaved females in New Jersey were major participants in the long history of African Diaspora women's resistance, whose roots began in Africa.[13] Like the males, African females resisted European slavery on the African continent, in the long marches from the African interior to the coast, then aboard slave ships crossing the third leg of the brutal Middle Passage.[14] They helped continue this fight in their new environments. Presumably, there were many New Jersey bondwomen who had assumed that their involvement in the

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[12]Raymond Bauer and Alice Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History* 27 (October 1942): 388-419.

[13]For an insightful discussion on cross-cultural black female slave resistance, see Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Black Women in Resistance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), pp. 188-209. The essay suffers, however, from a lack of documentation.

[14]See Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America*, 4 volumes (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1931-35), passim; Lorenzo J. Greene, "Mutiny on the Slave Ships," *Phylon* 5 (January 1944): 346-354; Daniel P. Mannix and Malcom Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), pp. 50, 108-111, 117-121, 127, 157-158, 216-219, 226; Donald D. Wax, "Negro Resistance to the Early American Slave Trade," *Journal of Negro History* 51 (January 1966): 1-15; Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), pp. 3-23; Kenneth E. Marshall, "The Middle Passage: A Critical and Spiritual Link of African Consciousness" (Seminar Paper, Michigan State University, 1992).

fight against European degradation and exploitation was absolutely critical.

It is extremely difficult to access New Jersey slave women's role as community activists. In addition to being ignored by historical writing, there is a paucity of slave testimony and other primary sources which underscore these black females' experiences. Even so, does this mean that we give up trying to provide them with a greater historical voice? While the lack of primary data has persuaded many historians to ignore these women, I view this obstacle as a challenge, an opportunity to combine creativity with the materials that do exist. When dealing with enslaved blacks and resistance, one is essentially exploring the slave mind. It is imperative, therefore, that historians incorporate different methods of inquiry.

The topic of runaway slaves has received special attention from a number of historians. In addition to being a very fascinating subject, flight was perhaps the most dangerous act of slave self-assertion. I have discovered, however, that even the most informed discussions on runaway slaves fail to probe fully the relationship between geography and demographics.[15] The brief talks concerning slave flight in New Jersey have not only followed suit, but are also usually devoid of any real analysis. Given how serious a venture running away was, it would seem that it necessitated both a "rebelliousness consciousness" and serious contemplation of human

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[15]I will elaborate upon this point shortly.

and topographic allies. My discussion on bondwomen runaways in New Jersey will explore the "interconnections" of these three roles.

Instead of focusing on a slave regime as obscure as New Jersey's, I could have indeed written an analysis on one of the southern slave societies. Far too often, however, do people associate slavery in this country only with the South. There was extensive, and as commented earlier, severe slavery in New Jersey. "[T]o enforce slave labor," says Graham Hodges, "New Jerseyans constructed the most repressive legal system in the North, surpassing even New York's."[16] New Jersey also has the distinction of being a slave institution before it was organized as a colony in 1664. By 1776 New Jersey had a larger slave population than any colony north of Maryland, with the exception of New York. Further, slavery persisted in New Jersey longer than any other northern state, finally terminated by state law in 1846. Still, according to the 1860 census, there were eighteen blacks legally classified as "apprentices" for life.[17] New Jersey was clearly an important enslaving area and thus commands our attention.

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[16]Graham R. Hodges, *African-Americans in Monmouth County During the Age of the Revolution* (Lincroft, N.J.: Published by Monmouth County Park System for Black History Month Celebration, 1990), p. 5.

[17]For the long process involved in achieving gradual emancipation in New Jersey, see Henry S. Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey*, ser. 14, 9-10 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1922), pp. 30, 31; Simeon F. Moss, "The Persistence of Slavery and Involuntary Servitude in a Free State (1685-1866)," *Journal of Negro History* 35 (July 1950): 289-312; Arthur Zilversmit, *First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 136-142, 173-174, 184-193, 220-221.

While a dearth of scholarship has been written on slavery in New Jersey, insufficient work has been done on slave resistance.[18] In his *Freedom Not Far Distant* (1980), Clement Price sheds some needed light on the subject by placing important documents in historical context.[19] Unfortunately, though, Price does not do enough to make rebellious slave women more visible.

Two recent and informative discussions on slavery in New Jersey that focus on the slaves themselves were published in 1990: Graham R. Hodges's aforementioned *African-Americans in Monmouth County,* and George Fishman's "The Struggle for Freedom and Equality."[20] Hodges provides a wealth of material regarding the efforts of blacks to gain their freedom in Monmouth County (a leading enslaving area in East New Jersey) during the colonial and revolutionary eras. To his credit Hodges suggests that Monmouth slave women were active in the freedom struggle, but the voice of slave men still dominate his discussion.

Fishman's study is by far the most thorough account of the black freedom struggle in New Jersey during slavery. Though he is principally concerned with the efforts of the enslaved to free themselves, Fishman also discusses the important roles of free blacks, Native Americans, and whites in the struggle. Without

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[18]Cooley's *Slavery in New Jersey* was the first monograph written specifically on the subject in New Jersey. Although dated, it is still recognized by many historians as the definitive study for the province.

[19]Clement Price, *Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1980).

[20]George Fishman, "The Struggle for Freedom and Equality: African Americans in New Jersey, 1624-1849/50" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1990).

question, he is conscious of the resistance of slave women; however his analysis of them lacks real depth. Still, Fishman provides us with a more realistic portrayal of the war waged against New Jersey slavery.

The proliferation of work done on northern slavery has also helped to lay down the foundation for a treatment of New Jersey bondwomen. The best study of the North's slave regime is provided by Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (1973).[21] McManus talks about the nature and operation of this institution, the captives general day-to-day experiences, and their resistance. In regards to the latter, he discusses defiant forms of slave self-assertion as well as the use of bargaining power and other passive means which the captives employed to alleviate their suffering. On the other hand, this discussion is limited to three rather small chapters, and one does not get a full view of enslaved women's resistance.

The other prominent book on northern slavery is Arthur Zilversmit's aforesaid *The First Emancipation* (1967). This treatment is mainly concerned with the Quakers attempt to end slavery in New Jersey and other northern provinces. But in his quest to acknowledge the Quakers, Zilversmit ends up trivializing the efforts of slaves to free themselves. Nonetheless, this is still a very useful resource: it provides pertinent information regarding the conditions of northern slaves, the types of crimes they committed, and white attitude towards them.

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[21]Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y.: University of Syracuse Press, 1973).

In addition to the general studies on northern slavery are several valuable local examinations on the subject. Foremost among these is Lorenzo J. Greene's *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942).[22] Greene argues that while many "Negroes" were not imported over to New England, this black minority still exerted a tremendous influence upon the social, economic, and political life there. He carefully examines the status and treatment of slave folk as well as their day-to-day experiences. But probably most important, at least for my study, Greene's research suggest that New England bondwomen were concerned about freedom. Unfortunately, though, his discussion on female resistance is not particularly engaging, and he says little about the black woman's survival methods.

Examinations on southern slavery were equally informative. An extremely important study on the dynamic black struggle in colonial Virginia is Gerald Mullin's *Flight and Rebellion* (1972).[23] Building on the earlier works of Ulrich B. Phillips[24] and Kenneth Stampp,[25] Mullin produced one of the first significant comprehensive examinations of slavery from the perspective of the slaves

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[22]Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

[23]Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[24]Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918). This is the earliest comprehensive scholarly examination of slavery in the United States. Though Phillips's racism mars the book, it nevertheless contains a vast amount of information on the subject.

[25]*The Peculiar Institution* replaced Phillips's book as the standard textbook on American slavery. It is a more widely researched examination and provides a more liberal answer to its predecessor.

themselves. Using some 1,500 advertisements placed in various Virginia newspapers, between 1736 and the end of the century, Mullin describes the attributes, roles, and backgrounds of fugitive slaves. His data shows that in comparison to male slaves, very few Virginia bondwomen absconded and escaped slavery completely. Mullin reminds us that it was extremely difficult for a black female to go about in a society where all women were usually in some kind of company. Thus more than a fourth of all female slaves who took flight were accompanied by men, both black and white; and sometimes by their own children.

But perhaps Mullin's most valuable contributions to the discourse on runaway slaves are his observations concerning where Virginia blacks absconded. "[S]laves usually ran off," he says, "along the rivers in a southeasterly direction and into the oldest areas of settlement; specifically they ran to the peninsula formed by the York and James Rivers." He also makes the important point that "North Carolina's reputation as a haven for [Virginia] fugitives" was partly due its geographic accessibility.[26] By looking at geography, albeit narrowly, Mullin was able to peer into the consciousness of slaves. A more in-depth look at Virginia's topography, however, would have provided a more nuanced interpretation.

Peter Wood's monumental *Black Majority* (1974)[27] is arguably the best account of colonial slavery in the North or South. Wood talks about black culture, the escalating paranoia of whites in South

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[26]Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion,* pp. 110, 112, 188-89.

[27]Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974).

Carolina, and the growing slave militancy. Wood also examines advertisements for runaways in more than 1,500 newspapers. His findings are quite similar to those of Mullin for Virginia. He indicates that seventy-seven percent of the fugitives advertised were males, and this disparity had no relation to an unbalanced sex ratio in South Carolina. On the other hand, Wood's statistics reveal that female slaves were more likely to visit other relatives (or keep familial bonds in tact) and return on their own accord, thus swaying masters from prompt public advertisement. Wood also sees the important connection between flight and geography:

> The paths of some slaves were naturally determined by misinformation or ignorance about local geography, but a far greater number had a clear sense about where they were heading and why, having weighed at least to some degree the comparative dangers and prospects associated with each direction.[28]

However, like Mullin, Wood does not provide us with a comprehensive view of his runaways' topography. Maybe they saw that this could be done, but believed such an undertaking was unnecessary. I believe differently.

Without question, I have benefited from the vast amount of knowledge and inquiry concerning the enslavement experience in this country. This particular treatment of black bondage in New Jersey has three chapters. The first chapter argues that the enslaved, particularly in East New Jersey, created "movements" for freedom which were not devoid of black female participation. Female slave runaways is the topic of discussion in chapter two. To build on the

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[28]Ibid., p. 257.

pieces of information provided by slave owners in newspaper advertisements, I look closely at the roles of demographics and geography. As a group, New Jersey's bondwomen ran away less frequently than male slaves. Thus the object in chapter two is to better understand why certain females risked the dangers of flight. The discussion in the third chapter focuses on slave women's physical retaliation as well as their internal will to survive this often barbarous, tension-stricken society. It emphasizes the importance of African religion, Christianity, family, and other elements. The major sources used in this examination are Andrew Mellick's account of slavery in Somerset County, the *New Jersey Archives,* old newspapers, and Sylvia Dubois's narrative (the only slave testimony for New Jersey). The overall intent of this study is to analyze the life experiences and resistance activity of New Jersey bondwomen, from the early settlement period through the American Revolution.

Chapter 1

Colonial Slave Women and the Freedom Movement

This chapter will look at the origins of slave militancy in New Jersey as well as the emergence of the province's slave regime. In large part, however, it suggests that enslaved women were from the very beginning, active in the freedom struggle which took place in colonial New Jersey. As one might expect, the literature gives the impression that this movement was wholly a black male affair. This discussion argues the contrary, emphasizing the following: the New Jersey criminal code, the murder of Colonel Lewis Morris, individual acts of slave women's resistance, the "Negro" conspiracies of 1734 and 1741, white crime, and the Middle Passage. It would seem that all of these have ties--either directly or indirectly--to the manifestation of slave consciousness in New Jersey that bondwomen helped to construct.

During the early seventeenth century, the Dutch and then other European groups began to inhabit the territory which, in 1664, became known as Novia-Ceasarea, or New Jersey.[29] Like the so-

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[29]For the bests works on early European settlement in New Jersey, see John E. Pomfret, *The Province of West New Jersey, 1609-1702* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956); Pomfret, *The Province of East New Jersey, 1609-1702; The Rebellious Proprietary* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962).

called Indians,[30] it seems that blacks labored as slaves from the outset of this European encroachment. Fort Nassau (near present day Gloucester City in West Jersey), erected by the Dutch West India Company in 1626, was probably were black slavery in Novia-Ceasarea originated. As Giles Wright points out, "the Dutch customarily used slave labor to fortify posts of this kind."[31] Fort Nassau may well have been where enslaved black folk in New Jersey planted the first seeds of resistance. (See Map 1.) However, the province's most important slave areas--Bergen, Middlesex, Somerset, and Monmouth Counties--were located in the East, and they mirrored New York's. The concentration of population during the colonial period was in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan Valleys and in the fertile areas of Monmouth County.[32] These were where the most dynamic slave communities were located,

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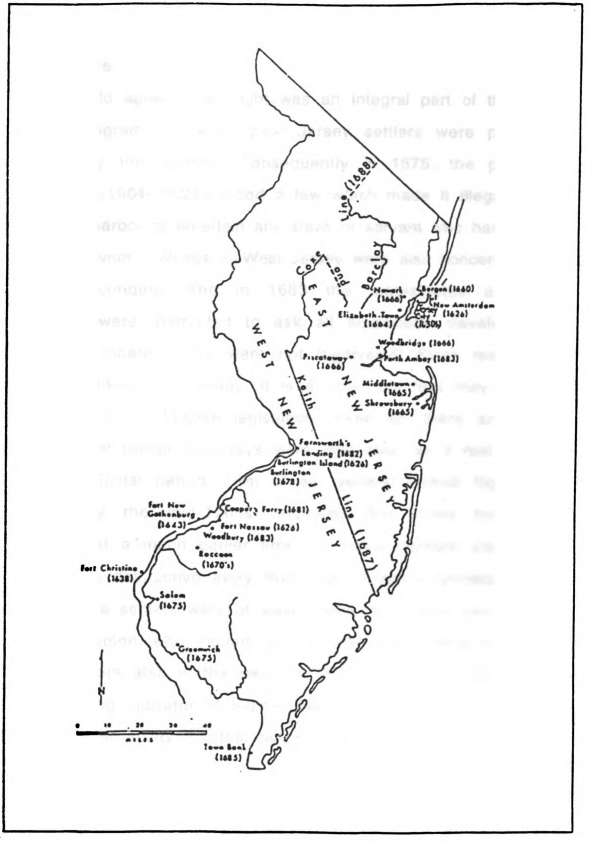
[30]For the record, these people and not the Europeans were the first to inhabit the New Jersey province. They were known as the Lenni-Lenape, meaning the "first people." Whites often referred to them as the Delawares because they mostly lived along the Delaware River. They belonged to the Great Algonkin-speaking family and organized into three subdivisions--Minsi, Unami, and Unalachtigo--inhabiting respectively the northern, central, and southern sectors of New Jersey. For a concisely written work on the Lenape people and their origins, see Gregory Evans Dowd, *The Indians of New Jersey* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1992). Though it is clear that the Lenni-Lenape labored as slaves, it is impossible to determine exactly how early. However, the preamble to the "Act against trading with negro slaves," enacted at Elizabeth Town in 1682, mentions that enslaved Indians served as early as that. See Aaron Leaming and Jacob Spicer, *The Grants, Concessions, and Original Constitutions of the Province of New Jersey: The Acts Passed During the Proprietary Governments, and other Material Transactions Before the Surrender Thereof to Queen Anne* (Philadelphia: W. Bradford, 1758), p. 254.

[31]Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, Department of State, 1988), p. 18.

[32]See Peter O. Wacker, *Land and People: A Cultural Geography of Preindustrial New Jersey: Origins and Settlement Patterns* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1975), p. 126; Moss, "Persistence of Slavery," p. 294.



Map 1. "Initial European settlements." Source: Wacker, *Land and People*, p. 123.

where the most significant platforms for freedom eventually came into existence.

It would appear that flight was an integral part of the slaves' freedom program, for early East Jersey settlers were particularly disturbed by this activity. Consequently in 1675, the proprietary government (1664-1702) passed a law which made it illegal for any persons to harbor or entertain any slave or servant who had runaway from their owner. Whites in West Jersey were also concerned about slaves absconding, and in 1683 the magistrates and other inhabitants were instructed to ask all suspicious travelers for a certificate indicating they were not fugitives.[33] Since male slaves were more likely to runaway, it is a good bet that they were the main spur behind fugitive legislation. Even so, there are several indicators that female runaways were also seen as a real nuisance during this initial period. First of all, several female flights were recorded by the mid-1700s, implying that some bondwomen absconded at a much earlier time.[34] Second, female slaves were known to be destructive away from their master's residency. Given how leery the settlers were of slave militancy, a case can be made that bondwomen who "acted up" outside their owner's farm or plantation were also in the midst of flight. The third, and perhaps most revealing indicator of fugitive slave women's impact on settler folk, was their ability to steal before absconding. To be sure, with

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[33]Leaming and Spicer, *Original Constitutions,* pp. 109, 238.

[34]This apparent lack of initial record keeping was probably related to the difficulties of colonial settlement.

profit in hand, some black women had no intentions of returning to slavery.

Native Americans also contributed to the settlers' anxiety. The Lenni-Lenape's most annoying resistance was perhaps their willingness to assist the struggle of enslaved blacks. They were such a valuable ally that, in 1682, the General Assembly "Agreed and Ordered that a Message be sent to the Indian Sachems to Confer with them about their Entertainment of Negro Servants."[35] That the black and Indian races came together as often as they did, suggests there was some discourse between them regarding how freedom--either individual or communal--could be achieved and then sustained in this colonial wilderness.

To be sure, slaves and their communities were well aware that freedom--or some semblance of it--depended largely upon the expropriation of white people's resources. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese concurs: "most slaves recognized the importance of the master's prosperity to their own well-being, even if they did not accept his view of them as perpetual dependents."[36] Not so surprisingly, the first white peoples in East Jersey were also disturbed by the pervasiveness of slave theft. They complained that slaves stole goods and then sold them at other locations. As mentioned earlier, in an attempt to curb this annoying practice, the "Act against trading with Negro slaves" was erected at Elizabeth Town in 1682. "Whereas, it is found by daily experience that negro and Indian

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[35]Leaming and Spicer, *Original Constitutions,* p. 477.

[36]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 96.

slaves, or servants under pretense of trade, or liberty of traffic, do frequently steal from their masters, etc.,"[37] reads the preamble.

If the prevalence of slave theft in East Jersey is any indication of a community oriented plan for freedom, then the community must have counted on resourceful black women. Slave women were prominent in theft. As a case in point, in 1735 a certain "Black Hannah" of Essex County, pleaded guilty to three indictments of petty larceny as well as an assault upon a white man.[38] According to Judah Hays, when his slave Sarah ran away in 1751, she also "robb'd her said Master, in Apparel, &c. upwards of fifty Pounds."[39] Three years later, a Monmouth slave named Ash was accused of stealing rum, tobacco, a pewter quart, and several gallons of cider.[40] In all likelihood, Ash's intention was to sell the booty at some other place. There are several other points to consider in regards to female slave theft. Since bondwomen had less opportunity than the menfolk to vary their work experience--that is, black females were more likely to officiate as cooks and domestic servants[41]--the former perhaps had greater access to white resources. Petty crime was also an alternative economy for slave women. Precisely, theft provided Ash

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[37]Leaming and Spicer, *Original Constitutions,* p. 254.

[38]Henry Clay Reed, "Chapters in a History of Crime and Punishment in New Jersey" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1939), p. 380.

[39]William A. Whitehead and William Nelson, et. al eds., *Archives of the State of New Jersey: Documents Relating to the Colonial, Revolutionary, and Post-Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey.* Two series: First series, 34 volumes (Newark and Somerville: State of New Jersey, 1880-1928); Second series, 5 volumes (Trenton: State of New Jersey, 1901-17): first series, 5:429, 430 (hereafter cited as *N.J.A.*).

[40]Hodges, *African-Americans,* p. 9.

[41]Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey,* p. 31.

and other black females with some needed resources--economic and material--that enhanced their survival.[42] But although female slaves stole for their own personal benefit, it is certain that their families and other members of the community benefited from their prosperity. The survival of the slave community depended largely upon both the sharing and exchanging of resources. Jacqueline Jones believes that this was also true of the South's slave community:

> In their devotion to family ties--a devotion that encompassed kin and ultimately the whole community--black women and men affirmed the value of group survival over the slaveholders' base financial and political considerations.[43]

In sum, both New Jersey slave women's ability to steal and willingness to share and exchange their plunder with other blacks, perhaps provided them with a certain status within the freedom movement in the East.

Enslaved blacks in colonial West Jersey[44] did not come together as often--or to the extent--as their eastern counterparts. However, in one rare but dramatic example in 1764, five slaves (three females and two males) from Amwell, Hunterdon County, took flight together. Certainly the lack of collective activity among slaves in West Jersey had much to do with the region's much smaller slave population. But does this mean that slaves there never

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[42]Interestingly, not much has been said in slavery literature about what theft meant to female slaves.

[43]Jones, *Labor of Love,* p. 43.

[44]Precisely Burlington, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, Hunterdon, Sussex, and Morris Counties.

conspired in some type of protest movement, or believed that their resistance was not part of a larger movement for freedom?

Indeed, like their counterparts in the East, slaves in West Jersey were also determined to be free. For example, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* of February 28, 1737, reported that two slaves had been imprisoned in Trenton because "they were about to perswade another Negroe to poison his master." To convince him of the efficacy of the poison they claimed "that Mr. Trent and two of his Sons, Mr. Lambert and two of his Wives, and sundry other Persons were remov'd by their Slaves in that Manner." However, the plot was overheard and the slaves were arrested, said to have confessed, and then executed. Interestingly, the whites mentioned had all died of common ailments and it was not believed "that any such method was used to destroy them." On one of the conspirators arsenic and an unknown root were found.[45] Conversely, in 1738, two Burlington slaves were found guilty of destroying sundry persons by poison; they too were executed.[46] These events are fascinating not so much because they inform us of a couple of slaves' desire for freedom, but that they suggest there were many more blacks in West Jersey who also wished to eliminate whites and the slave system. Even so, western slaves must have been realistic about such aspirations. Conditions in the West simply were not as conducive for rebellion as they were in the East. Nevertheless, it is probable that freedom

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[45]*The Pennsylvania Gazette,* February 28, 1737, cited in Harry B. Weiss and Grace M. Weiss, *An Introduction to Crime and Punishment in Colonial New Jersey* (Trenton: The Past Times Press, 1960), p. 75; Price, *Freedom Not Far,* pp. 49, 50.

[46]*N.J.A.,* first series, 11:523, 537; Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey,* p. 39.

"operations" were created by slaves in the West, but they embraced more subtle tactics.

We may speculate that, because of the demographic situation in colonial West Jersey, theft rather flight or rebellion was the primary means through which slaves there expressed their political opposition to bondage. At any rate, slave theft was also a problem in West Jersey during this time; and again, bondwomen participated in this unnerving activity. In one striking example in 1696 in Burlington County, Sarah confessed to plundering and marring an Indian belt.[47] The boundaries of Burlington County were created in 1694,[48] implying that Sarah was one of the first persons there--black or white--to oppose authority, and served as an inspiration for other oppressed people to do likewise. As we shall later see, Sarah was only one of many slave women in West Jersey who behaved aggressively.

In an attempt to quell the resistance of folk like Sarah, in 1694, an act was passed at Perth Amboy which prohibited slaves from carrying firearms and taking dogs around with them, unless they were accompanied by the master or his representative. A year later, special courts were established for the trial of slaves and a severe punishment was prescribed for the criminals. For slave crimes involving the stealing of either poultry or provisions, the

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[47]Earnest Lyght, *Path of Freedom; The Black Presence in New Jersey's Burlington County, 1650-1900* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: E & E Publishing House, 1978), p. 16.

[48]For an informative discussion on eighteenth century New Jersey topography, see John W. Barber and Henry Rowe, *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (New Haven, CT: John W. Barber, 1868); reprint in Historical Collections of New Jersey: Past and Present (Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Company, 1966), p. 85.

owner had to pay the injured party the value of the stolen merchandise within ten days. Further, the master was charged for the public flogging of no more than forty lashes of the guilty offenders.[49] To be sure, these rather expensive laws made many masters even more hostile towards their slaves. At the same time, the laws probably helped foster the black rage. Precisely, the manifestation of slave resistance in New Jersey may have also been a product of the province's barbarous slave code, which it borrowed in almost all essentials from New York. Interestingly, New York's slave code was mostly attributed to its slaves' rebelliousness.[50] We might speculate, therefore, that like their enslaved counterparts across the Hudson, during the early years of settlement, New Jersey slave folk also had their white peoples up-in-arms.

This was undoubtedly true of Monmouth County. A black man charged with murder in Monmouth in 1694 was convicted by presiding justice, John Johnston, in the following manner:

> Caesar, thou art found guilty by thy country of those crimes that are laid to thy charge; therefore, the court doth judged that thou, the said Caesar, shall return to the place from whence thou camest, and from thence to the place of execution, when thy right hand shall be cut off and burned before thine eyes. Then thou shalt be hanged up by the neck till thou art dead, dead, dead; then thy body shall be cut down and

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[49]See Leaming and Spicer, *Original Constitutions,* pp. 254, 357. Also see Marion Thompson Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 28 (April 1943): 163; Zilversmit, *First Emancipation,* p. 13.

[50]See Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1966), chapter 5; McManus, *Black Bondage,* chapter 5; Zilversmit, pp. 12-24.

> burned to ashes in a fire, and so the Lord have mercy on thy soul, Caesar.[51]

No doubt, such inhuman brutality on the part of New Jersey whites resulted from both their fear of and perverse prejudice towards blacks. Another consideration is that given how bothersome slaves were in colonial New Jersey, John Johnston and other white racists probably felt they had no other choice but to employ such severe tactics. Indeed, slaves did their part to foster such hostility towards them.

Black slaves were first recorded in New Jersey in 1676, when there were sixty to seventy on Colonel Lewis Morris's Tinton Falls plantation in Shrewsbury, Monmouth County.[52] Several of these captives were indeed outraged over the perils of slavery. For in 1695, Jermie and Agebee[53] were accused of shooting and killing Morris with a handgun. There is speculation that the slaves murdered the Colonel in revenge for his earlier homicide of a black female, which despite pleas from blacks, the New Jersey courts simply dismissed. After a rather speedy trial, Agebee and Jermie were typically hanged, Oliver was cruelly flogged while the other suspects (which included black women) were exonerated.[54] Frances

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[51]Quoted from Andrew Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; Or Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: The Unionist-Gazette, 1889); reprint in Lesser Crossroads, Edited and with a preface by Hubert G. Schmidt (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1948), p. 225.

[52]The Morris family may have been the largest slave holders in both New York and New Jersey.

[53]Agebee was probably a woman.

[54]See Reed, "Crime and Punishment," p. 321; Hodges, *African-Americans*, p. 5; Weiss and Weiss, *Introduction to Crime*, p. 49.

Pingeon informs us that at least three more slaves were executed in Monmouth during the proprietary era.[55] Indeed, Monmouth whites did everything in their power to crush the black resistance.

To be sure, Colonel Morris's murder also helped to establish the aforesaid special court system for blacks. More oppressive legislation was enacted after East and West Jersey united as the Royal Colony (1702-1714). The former's attitude prevailed in the laws. The legal status of slaves was never defined by statute, however. In 1703 an act was passed by the General Assembly to regulate enslaved blacks, Indians, and mulattos. It basically established harsher penalties for earlier impositions. These laws concerned the sale of stolen goods; the punishment of captives that wandered ten miles away from the master's residency; forty lashes and the burning of a "T" with a hot iron on the left cheek for thefts up to forty shillings; burning for acts of arson and murder, and castration of any slave who by force or persuasion had sexual intercourse with a white woman. Basically, any black man who had sex with a white woman was considered a rapist. Like earlier perceptions of enslaved blacks, the 1703 law believed that "Negroes" were potentially dangerous "creatures," and felt that only cruel and unusual punishments could counter their resistance. After some intense debate, the law of 1703 was abandoned. The New Jersey slave code of 1713 reenacted the provisions of 1703 but omitted any

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[55]Frances D. Pingeon, *Blacks in the Revolutionary Era,* New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience 14 (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), p. 11. Unfortunately, Pingeon does not indicate whether any of the executed were black women.

allusion to heinous forms of punishment, or torture to be more precise.[56]

Despite such oppressive legislation, slaves at Tinton Falls continued their resistance. Lewis Morris (1671-1746), who inherited his dead uncle's entire estate in 1696, was also plagued by the slaves' desire for freedom. The younger Morris contended that his captives were "both Stupid and conceited and will follow their own way if not carefully looked to," and warned his son, John, whom he left in charge of the Tinton operation that "negroes will Steale, I feare, in Spite of all your caution to prevent them."[57] No doubt, Morris was also referring to his bondwomen; his inheritance included eleven female captives, more than enough to cause him tremendous anxiety. The prevalence of slave recalcitrance in Monmouth County and Tinton Falls in particular, suggests that the captives had put together a rather multi-faceted protest movement, which was of great concern to the master class.

It appears that whites in Somerville, Somerset County, were also subjected to a rather sophisticated protest or freedom movement. For a letter printed in *The New York Gazette* between March 18 and 25, 1734, described a slave plot there. The correspondent first mentioned that some years previous to the Somerville conspiracy there had been a series of slave rebellions in

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[56]See Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, pp. 13, 16; Hodges, *African-Americans*, p. 5; Wright, "New Jersey Laws," pp. 165-166; ibid., p. 12.

[57]Quoted in Eugene R. Sheridan, *Lewis Morris, 1671-1746; A Study in American Politics* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981), pp. 11, 211.

several West Indian islands.[58] These events were reported in the New Jersey press, but also by seamen (white, free black, and enslaved) arriving from the West Indies. As a result of all this excitement, blacks in Somerville had become inspired to seek freedom like their West Indian counterparts. The writer then explained that,

> It appear'd upon Examination that Coll. Thomas *L___d* keeps at some Miles distance from his dwelling House, Negro-Quarters (as they are called) who provide for themselves, which Quarters have been a Randevouze for the Negroes, and proved a Pest to the Neighbourhood, by encouraging the Neighbours Negroes to steal from their Masters both Beef, Pork, Wheat, Fowles, &c., wherewith they feast and junket at those Quarters, and at times have met in great Companies.

To be sure, these meetings debated how the movement for freedom should proceed. Apparently an agreement was reached:

> It was at one of these Meetings their design of Rising was agreed and some time since fully resolved on by some hundreds of them, but kept so private amongst themselves, that there was not the least appearance or suspicion of it.

That is, until a drunken slave mistakenly revealed the details of the plot to a white man named Renolds, telling him that the "English-men were generally a pack of Villains, and kept the Negroes as Slaves contrary to a positive Order from King George, sent to the Governor of New York, to set them all free." After a brief

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[58]Specifically, the islands of St. John's and Jamaica. Slaves revolted in St. John's, a Danish possession, on November 13, 1733. Jamaican slaves, under the leadership of a bondman named Cudjoe, rebelled against the British settlers in 1734. The rebellion was brought to and end by a negotiated settlement in 1739 which freed many of the captives, provided them with 1,500 acres of land, and their pledge to assist in the capture of any other runaways.

conversation with the imprudent black, Renolds quickly alerted the authorities of the plot. The slave who confronted Renolds and another bondman were arrested, tried, and condemned. The first was hanged but the other slave took flight. Then the correspondent reported:

> Upon this Examination and Tryal it appeared, that the Design of these Negroes was this, That as soon as the Season was advanced that they could be in the Woods, one certain Night was agreed on, that **every** Negro in each family was to Rise at midnight, cut the Throats of their Masters and Sons, but not meddle with the Women, whom they intended to plunder and ravish the following day, and then set all their houses and barns on Fire, Kill all the Draught Horses, and secure the best saddle Horses for their flight toward the Indians in the French interest.[59]

Similarly, the Philadelphia newspaper, *The Weekly-Rehearsel* of February 11, 1734, contended that there was a conspiracy among "Negroes" in Somerset County on the Raritan River to form a body, take flight, and settle in some new country.[60]

Though a large portion of New Jersey's slaves were from the West Indies, we should not automatically assume that the rebels endeavored to unite with their brothers and sisters there. The province got a large portion of its blacks from Jamaica, and according to Orlando Patterson, "In contrast to Latin America and North America, Jamaican slave society was loosely integrated; so much so, that one hesitates to call it a society since all that it

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[59]*The New York Gazette,* March 18-25, 1734.

[60]*The Weekly-Rehearsel* (Philadelphia), February 11, 1734.

amounted to was an ill-organized system of exploitation."[61] To be sure, the female rebels in Somerville had no intentions of taking their children to a more hostile place, where a viable existence was not feasible.

Towards the end of his letter, the correspondent urged that the events in Somerville teach how "necessary it is for every Colony to make proper Laws and Ordinances for their Own Security, and against the Attempts of barbarous Monsters (by some so much indulged)." To reinforce his argument, he urged his white readers not to forget "the great Calamity and Disolation there was in the City of New-York" in 1712.[62] These are interesting comments indeed. They reveal that, despite all the harsh impositions of the 1713 slave code, there were still some New Jersey whites who terrified over rebellious slaves like "Black Hannah." This may explain why the Somerville conspirators were dealt with in such an extreme manner. According to a report in the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* between January 24 and February 7, 1734, one was hanged, some had their ears cut off, and others were whipped. "Several had Poyson found upon 'em," the report concluded.[63]

The Somerville plot is interesting for several reasons. For one, it suggests that a dynamic movement for freedom was organized by

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[61]Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1967), p. 70.

[62]*New York Gazette,* March 18-25, 1734, cited in Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans: From Africa to the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom,* 3 volumes (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 1:271-272; Price, *Freedom Not Far,* pp. 48-49. The best analysis of the New York slave revolt in 1712 is Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 45 (January 1961): 43-74.

[63]*Boston Weekly News-Letter,* January 24-February 7, 1734, cited in *N.J.A.*, second series, 11:333, 340; Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey,* p. 43; Foner, p. 1:272.

the slave community there, and it was influenced by the freedom movement abroad. To be sure, the decision to rebel did not happen in a day; the extent of slave participation implies that this was a very sophisticated and unnerving process. It would also appear that some concessions were made between the conspirators. That is, they compromised on when and where to actually rebel, whom to kill, and agreed to put their trust in the Lenni-Lenape. Then, too, there was probably some debate over the rape issue: Was rape absolutely necessary? What would such a violation of white womanhood really prove? Given all this, and considering what was at stake, a tremendous level of trust must have been established in Somerville's black community.

But perhaps most important all of, the event in 1734 reveals that slave women were involved in the freedom struggle. However, as bondmen generally held positions of leadership in slave communities throughout the Diaspora, there is reason to believe that black females were not part of the slave vanguard in Somerville. Still, their importance can not be denied. As commented earlier, the plot's success hinged largely upon absolute secrecy from the slave community. We might speculate that this secretive design weighed more heavily upon the shoulders of slave women, for they were the ones who generally worked in closer contact with whites, and were mostly responsible for keeping the black youth in line. Moreover, their position in the main household[64] suggests that they had something to do with the poison found on some of the conspirators. Unfortunately, though, the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* failed to

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[64]It is important to note that New Jersey slave women did non-domestic work as well.

comment upon the gender element. At any rate, it is certain that a level of involvement and discipline was required of the black women--maybe even more than the black men.

Lastly, the plot reveals that slave women were indeed willing to commit murder in the name of freedom and even condoned the raping of white women. To put it differently, it seems that some of these female insurgents possessed a kind of vindictive mentality--what was good for them was also good for white females.[65]

Slaves in Bergen County were equally determined to be free. Looking only at the demographic makeup there, one is compelled to believe that a rather serious freedom movement had eventually emerged in Bergen. Simeon Moss says that, "Bergen County's slave population not only exceeded that of any other county in actual numbers throughout the Colonial period, but also in the percentage of slave population to total population."[66] Two other reasons why a movement was likely are that slaves, particularly those in the Hackensack Valley, lived in close proximity to each other, and they were permitted to congregate on occasion. "During the early 1700s," explains Price, "dance contests between New York and New Jersey blacks helped make New York's Catherine Market a social market."[67] Besides from informing us that slave life in New Jersey was not totally devoid of social outlets, this statement suggests that slaves in Bergen County did have opportunities to come together and discuss issues of a serious nature.

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[65]The issue of rape will be discussed in Chapter 3.

[66]Moss, "Persistence of Slavery," p. 294.

[67]Price, *Freedom Not Far,* p. 31.

A good indication that the slave community in Bergen had decided to liberate itself is the enormous amount of crime they perpetrated against the white folk. Needless to say, there were serious risks involved. As a case in point, in October 1731, a slave was sentenced to forty-one lashes on his bare back for assaulting a white woman. Later that same year, another bondman was hanged for threatening the life of his master and poisoning a fellow slave. In a rather sensational crime in 1735, Jack, a slave of Peter Kipp, was burned at the stake for "having beaten the said master, and threatened several times to murder him and his son, and also to burn down his house." In May 1744 a black man was hanged for poisoning, or attempting to poison, several persons, white and black. Interestingly, though, a bondwoman was caught with "pounded pepper" in her pocket, implying that she was in cahoots with the offending slave. There was more group activity in 1757. That year, two bondmen were incarcerated then executed for having poisoned their masters and mistresses. For murdering a white named Claas Toers in 1768, the slave Harry was promptly executed.[68] Obviously not all of these crimes were related to one cause. However, when population density and culture are taken into account, one can not ignore the possibility that many black on white crimes were linked to a common movement for freedom.

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[68]For these examples, see Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey*, pp. 39, 450; Weiss and Weiss, *Introduction to Crime*, pp. 55, 89, 90; Abraham Honeyman, "Early Trials of Negroes in Bergen County," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, New Series 10 (1925): 357; William Alexander Linn, "Slavery in Bergen County, N.J.," *Papers and Proceedings of the Bergen County Historical Society* 4 (1907-1908): 23-40.

To be sure, slaves in Bergen were aware that flight also struck a serious blow against whites. In one interesting example in 1753, Nell, "with three diamonds in her face, one on each side and the other on her forehead," escaped from Isaac Kingsland of Saddle River. Kingsland was serious about getting his property back: he warned "all Masters of Vessels and others, of carrying off, concealing or harboring said Wench, as they will answer at their Peril with the Utmost Rigor of the Law."[69] Another possible concern of his was that the cunning woman would seek refuge amongst her many people in Bergen.

The Hackensack conspiracy in July 1741 is perhaps the most convincing reason why a freedom program existed in Bergen County. According to the *The Boston Evening-Post,* in one day, a number of blacks, including enslaved persons, burned down seven barns in Hackensack. Several whites, one of which was a priest, also participated in the conspiracy. The plot was foiled, however, by a military watch. Three black men were charged with committing the crimes, and as typical of East Jersey were burned alive. There is no indication that any of the convicted whites were executed in this heinous manner. This inhuman brutality was supposedly a consequence of the alleged "Negro" plot in New York City in March that same year.[70]

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[69]*N.J.A.*, second series, 19:262.

[70]*The Boston Evening-Post,* July 6, 1741, cited in *N.J.A.*, second series, 2:98-99. For the panic in New York in 1741, see T. Wood Clarke, "The Negro Plot of 1741" *New York History* 25 (April 1944): 167-181; Ference M. Szasz, "The New York Slave Revolt of 1741; A Reexamination" *New York History* 48 (July 1966): 215-230; Thomas J. Davis, "The New York Slave Conspiracy of 1741 as Black Protest" *Journal of Negro History* 56 (January 1971): 17-30. The best analysis of the event, however, is Walter F. Prince, "The New York 'Negro Plot' of 1741" New Haven (Conn.) *Sunday Chronicle,* July 18-August 23, 1902, copy in New York Public Library.

Unfortunately, though, the sources regarding the Hackensack affair do not explicitly mention female slave participation. Still, is seems highly improbable that out of the goodly number of bondwomen in Hackensack, there was absolutely no black female involvement. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese would agree:

> In assessing [white sources] . . . we must take into account of the blinders that white assumptions imposed on white perceptions. White commentators may well have missed many female contributions to resistance [and revolt] because they did not expect them.[71]

Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that like their female counterparts in Somerville, at least a few Hackensack bondwomen believed that the 1741 event was an opportune time to help undermine the establishment.

Black slaves were hardly the only discontented persons in colonial New Jersey. Equally dissatisfied and oppressed were white indentured servants. James Connolly argues that considering how harshly Redemptioners were treated by their masters, black slaves enjoyed a more superior position:

> The slave was a permanent servant, to be cared for by the master like any other thing of value the master possessed, while he was able to work. The Redemptioner was his only

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[71]See Fox-Genovese, *Plantation Household*, pp. 303, 305, 307-308, 331-332. Also see Fox-Genovese, "Strategies and Forms of Resistance: Focus on Slave Women in the United States," in *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p. 147.

> temporarily, and during the period of service, the master worked him or her as much as possible.[72]

White indentures, also known as Redemptioners, were of English, Irish, Scottish, and German extraction. They left Great Britain and Europe to escape poverty as well as political and religious persecution. Lured by promises of land, opportunity, and personal expression they contracted out their labor for a number of years in exchange for passage to this New World. Many, however, died during these long journeys. A great number were physically and mentally abused. By the time the passenger ships reached the two main ports of entry--Perth Amboy in East Jersey, and Cooper's Ferry (now Camden) in the West--many white indentures were probably in no shape for extensive labor. Their physical and mental conditions must have worsened on the farms and plantations of harsh masters.

Perhaps Redemptioners felt that because they were neither inferior to "Negroes," or were slaves in the legal sense, they had every right to express their demands for better treatment. Said a report written in 1644: "Negroes would accomplish more work for their masters, and at less expense, than [white] farm servants, who must be bribed to go hither by a great deal of money and promises."[73] So while immigrant-servants, particularly German and Scotch-Irish

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[72]James C. Connolly, "Slavery in Colonial New Jersey and the Causes Operating Against its Extension," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society,* New Series 14 (1929): 191.

[73]Quoted in Edmund B. O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York,* 15 volumes (Albany, N.Y.: Wells, Parsons, and Company, 1887), 1:53.

peoples, were still brought into the province in large numbers during the early 1700s, black slave labor was becoming more acceptable.[74]

The high incidence of white crime in New Jersey may have also convinced some planters to disband white servitude for the black kind. Indeed, oppressed whites were as--if not more--prominent with respect to crime as their "Negro" counterparts. Between 1704 and 1779, servants, the majority of whom were white, absconded three times more than slaves.[75] Rudolph Vecoli says that,

> the frequency of runaways among [white] servants, also [imply] that many were dissatisfied with their treatment; and although the law provided for apprehensions and punishments of such fugitives, many were in fact never returned to the master.[76]

Redemptioners suffered a relative deprivation and responded as slaves did to their oppression. To be sure, blacks in bondage could not help but take notice of how dehumanized whites aggressively went after freedom.

White women were major participants in crime. This, and the fact that black and white females experienced similar types of gender oppression, implies that many bondwomen were encouraged by their female rivals criminal behavior, and vice-versa. Since the literature says very little about the criminal behavior of Native American women, one might assume that they did not have as great

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[74]See Rudolph Vecoli, *People of New Jersey* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, Inc., 1965), p. 36; Wacker, *Land and People*, pp. 191-195; Wright, "New Jersey Laws," p. 160.

[75]Weiss and Weiss, *Introduction to Crime*, pp. 71-72.

[76]Vecoli, p. 36.

an impact on the black woman seeking freedom. It is striking how similarly black and white females behaved. As commented earlier, bondwomen were prone to steal. But so were white women. For example, in 1686 a Burlington white woman named Anne Potts confessed to stealing a "shirt, shift, pieces of serge, linen, ribbon, handkerchiefs, scissors, buttons, thread, beef" and a host of other items. That same year, two married white women in Middlesex County were jailed for taking the goods of a deceased man. Another white woman there was arrested for stealing linen and some other materials valuing five pounds from a merchant. She was given "nine lashes on her bare back and then jailed until she gave security for her good behavior for one year and paid her fees."[77] White females were also known to take flight. For instance, in 1770 Fanny of Gloucester County, ran away with a bondman named Mingo. They were probably lovers.[78] In sum, the many unlawful acts committed by white females probably had a great impact on numerous black women wanting to liberate themselves, their families, and their race from slavery. Though the slave woman saw the mistress and other white females as the enemy, she could still identify with and learn from how they--also marginalized and oppressed by this white male dominated society--attempted to enlarge their freedom and their families' freedom.

Indeed, persons who sought cheap labor had every reason to be leery of the white kind. But as we have seen, even slave labor, which may well have been treated more humanely than white servitude,

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[77]Weiss and Weiss, *Introduction to Crime,* pp. 55; Reed, *Crime and Punishment,* p. 313.

[78]*N.J.A.*, first series, 27:191.

was not always dependable. It, too, was comprised of individuals who believed they were deserving of better treatment and greater autonomy. Enslaved women like the two Sarahs, Ash, and Nell did not resist for the sake of doing so. They believed that the slave system had wronged them and their families. Perhaps these and other New Jersey bondwomen would have been less tractable if society were not so infirm about black people having "some" real freedom on their own terms. However, particularly during the early settlement period, black freedom had serious repercussions: black freedom impinged upon society's ability to enlarge its own freedom.

Lord Cornbury, the first royal governor of the royal colony, was urged by Queen Ann (1702-1714) to promote the importation of slaves "so that the colony might have a constant and sufficient supply of merchantable Negroes at moderate rates."[79] There is no reason to believe this ever occurred. Though blacks were still being sold on the block at Cooper's Ferry until late as 1780,[80] it seems that significant numbers never arrived at that port or, for that matter, the one in Perth Amboy. The situation at Cooper's Ferry can probably be attributed to Quaker influence. Basically, the amount of slave importation into New Jersey is a matter of conjecture.

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[79]Leaming and Spicer, *Original Constitutions*, p. 640.

[80]Wacker, *Land and People*, p. 200; Federal Writers Project, New Jersey, "The Underground Railroad in New Jersey," *Stories of New Jersey*, 1939-40 series, bulletin no. 9.

A report from the customs house in Perth Amboy, in 1726, gives an account of the number of slaves that were imported into East Jersey since 1698. It proposes that no slaves were introduced from 1698 to 1717 inclusive. Between 1718 and 1726, a total of 155 slaves arrived at the port in Perth Amboy. The largest cargo was fifty on the Sloop George in 1721. See *N.J.A.*, second series, 5:152. As Cooley explains, "it is hardly probable that this testimony gives an accurate indication of the real amount of slave importation" into New Jersey. Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey*, p. 14.

A more important issue is that Africans were actually uprooted from their home and subjected to the brutal enslavement experience. Numerous captives were shipped over to New Jersey directly from the coast of West Africa. It seems, however, that the majority were seasoned--that is, acclimated to the more temperate West Indian Islands like Jamaica and Barbados--and introduced to the English language before being forced over to New Jersey. As these ships did not bring over particularly large numbers of blacks, the captives probably did not suffer as did their peoples who were headed to the southern colonies. Nonetheless, the journey over to New Jersey was undoubtedly a horrible and traumatic experience.[81] This was probably the case during the travels of the ship *Catherine,* which between 1732 and 1733 brought 238 slaves, nineteen of whom died, from the "Coast of Guinea." The *Catherine* was one of the vessels importing slaves to New York and New Jersey (particularly Perth Amboy).[82] It is a strong bet that slaves became filled with both rage and sorrow as they witnessed fellow blacks suffer and die under such inhumane conditions.

Indeed, the Middle Passage is an important link of slave consciousness which commands our attention, regardless of the paucity of black testimony.[83] But how do we address the restive

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[81]Unfortunately, I was not able to find any personal accounts of the trek across the Atlantic for New Jersey.

[82]Price, *Freedom Not Far,* p. 143; Hodges, *African-Americans,* p. 4.

[83]Two useful African accounts of the middle passage were provided by Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano (Gustavas Vassa). See Abraham Chapman ed., *Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), pp. 6-13, 14-38. For Equiano's entire narrative, see Arna Bontemps ed., *Great Slave Narratives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 1-192.

behavior of New Jersey bondwomen in relation to this most crucial experience? Perhaps the answer lies in what we already know. As mentioned earlier, some black women did involve themselves in the struggles aboard slave ships. The note that merchant Samuel Waldo sent to Captain Samuel Rhodes in 1734 is most revealing:

> For your own safety as well as mine You'll have the needful Guard over your Slaves, and putt not too much confidence in the Women nor Children least they happen to be instrumental to your being surprised which may be fatall.[84]

In 1721 the English slaver *Robert* almost fell victim to Waldo's keen observation. An anonymous black woman, using the freedom allowed her on the ship's deck,[85] assisted a fellow African known as Captain Tomba to stage a rebellion. She was to inform Tomba of the best time to strike out against the ship's crew. One night she did just this and Tomba and his small band of recruits promptly killed several sailors. Their success was short lived however. The noise from the struggle awoke the other crewmen who joined in the altercation, which the sailors eventually won. For her participation, the female informant was hung by her thumbs and flogged to death.[86]

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[84]Donnan, *Documents*, 3:45.

[85]Women and children were generally held captive on the ship's deck, while the men were kept in chains in the hold, located underneath the deck.

[86]See Donnan, 2:266. Also see Harding, *There is a River*, pp. 12, 13; Mannix and Cowley, *Black Cargoes*, p. 82.

Unfortunately, the log books of ships bounded for ports in New York and New Jersey do not bear such testimony. Even so, it seems very unlikely that the rebellious consciousness of enslaved women aboard these vessels was opposite those black females who could--and did--openly demonstrate their contempt. It is conceivable that because of the modest black populations aboard ships headed to New York and New Jersey, the females acted in ways which did not merit documentation.

Another possible indicator that black females helped to transplant a militant consciousness over to New Jersey is white characterization of slave personality. For instance, John Barbot commented in 1682 that,

> One thing is to be taken notice by sea-faring men, that these Fidah [Whydah] and Ardra slaves are of all others, the most apt to revolt aboard ships. [They] watch all opportunities to deliver themselves, by assaulting a ship's crew, and murdering them all, if possible.[87]

Similarly, says John Atkins, a surgeon in the Royal Navy in 1712:

> Slaves differ in their Goodness; those from the Gold Coast are accounted best, being cleanest limbed, and more docible by our Settlements than others; but they are, for that very reason, more prompt to Revenge, and Murder the instruments of their slavery.[88]

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[87]Donnan, 1:295.

[88]Ibid., 2:282.

Though these and many other statements regarding "slave personality" are undeniably racist,[89] some may have actually resulted from keen insight. David Barry Gaspar explains that during the eighteenth century British traders emphasized "the relevance of environment and diet, which suggests that [their] ethnic characterizations were not wholly whimsical."[90] In any regard, it is probable that a number of New Jersey bondwomen were kin to some of these "warrior" peoples and thus helped to transplant elements of this black militancy over to their new environs.

Andrew Mellick sustains this point: "The blacks on arrival were physically powerful and good workers, but without much power of reasoning or of controlling their undisciplined imaginations."[91] There is more to this passage than Mellick's racism. Unbeknownst to Mellick, he reveals that despite the awful oppression associated with the enslavement experience, the captives who landed in New Jersey remained forever willful in their right to freedom. Still, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that many blacks were in shock over this horrid experience and were therefore incapable of any resistance. But it was only a matter of time until these very same persons would also assert their right to better treatment and freedom.

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[89]See Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1968), chapter 1.

[90]David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Durham, S.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), p. 91.

[91]Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 105.

The struggle for freedom in colonial New Jersey was not solely a male slave affair. From the outset of black people's forced servitude, black females did their part to express what freedom meant. Slave women stole, lied, took flight, and even supported all out rebellion. Probably most intriguing about bonded females is that they were able to help develop this rebellious consciousness despite being deprived of the types of life experiences afforded black males. The master class quickly realized that the "Negro" race possessed a significant number of determined lawbreakers and thus implemented numerous and cruel laws to control their resistance. However, as will be stressed throughout the rest of this examination, the enslaved in New Jersey were a relentless people who did all they could to fight against and survive oppression.

Chapter 2

Female Slave Runaways: The Interconnections of Geography, Demographics and Consciousness

This chapter looks at slave resistance in New Jersey but with a particular emphasis on female runaways. Admittedly, only a small number of New Jersey bondwomen actually left their owners. "Most [runaways]," says Price, "were young men in their twenties and thirties."[92] Nevertheless, there was a body of black women who, despite tremendous odds, attempted to steal themselves. In my quest to bring these daring females to life, I emphasize the importance of geography and demographics. Together, they provide clues regarding certain females' choice of flight and their possible destinations. This method builds on the scant information provided by slave owners in newspaper advertisements. Moreover, it demonstrates that enslaved blacks in New Jersey did not share the same opportunities for escape and rebellion. The overall intent here is to show that fugitive slave women can be examined beyond the periphery.

New Jersey is located between New York on the north and east and Pennsylvania and Delaware on the west. It is the fourth smallest state in the Union; only Delaware, Connecticut, and Rhode Island are smaller. The province has a total area of 8,224 miles, of which 710

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[92]Price, *Freedom Not Far,* p. 34.

miles are water surface. There are natural water boundaries, rivers, and the Atlantic Ocean on all sides except the north.[93] William Starr Myers appropriately asserts that, "[New Jersey's] geographical situation causes it to be a great highway between New York and Pennsylvania."[94] It can also be argued that, from the vantage point of enslaved folk, New Jersey was a great highway to freedom.

New Jersey naturally falls into five physiographic regions: the Ridge and Valley (or Valley), the Highlands, the Piedmont, and the Inner and Outer Coastal Plains. The first three regions comprise what is known as North Jersey, while the latter two cover South Jersey. To a great extent, these regions run in a northeast-southwest direction. (See Map 2.)

Ridge and Valley

Furthest north and occupying nearly eight percent of New Jersey's total land area is the Appalachian Ridge and Valley. This section is part of the greater Ridge and Valley geologic province that runs from the St. Lawrence River in Canada all the way down to Alabama as a narrow highway of ridges and interconnecting valleys having a northeast-southwest orientation. New Jersey's Valley is mostly comprised of the broad Kittatiny Valley and the narrow upper Delaware Valley. The two are separated by the province's most

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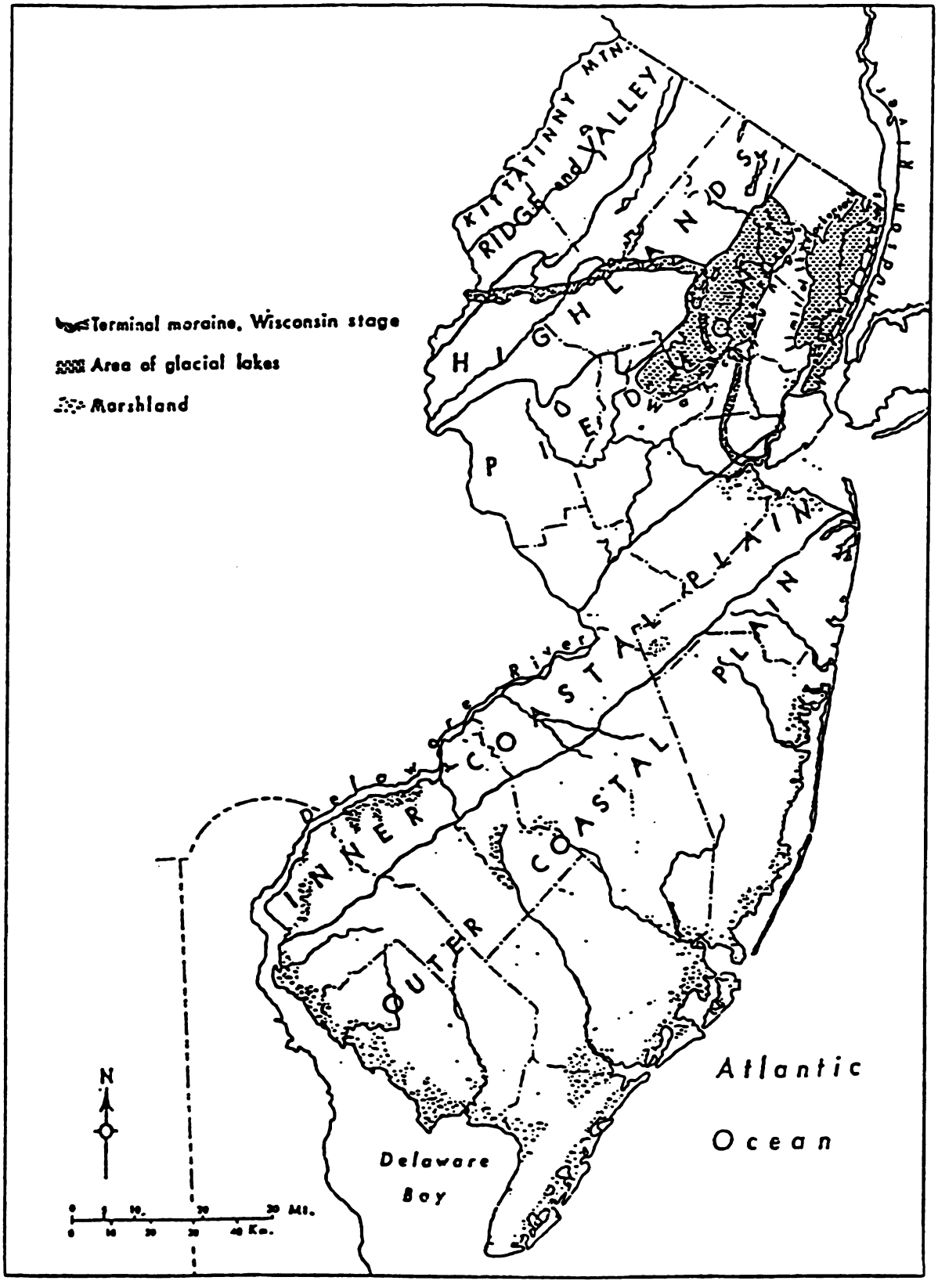
[93]Several studies have been done on New Jersey geography and geology. See Frank S. Kelland and Marylin C. Kelland, *New Jersey, Garden or Suburb?: A Geography of New Jersey* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1978); Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections*; Steele Mabon Kennedy, et al. eds., *The New Jersey Almanac and Travel Guide* (Cedar Grove, N.J.: The New Jersey Almanac, Inc., 1966).

[94]William Starr Myers, ed., *The Story of New Jersey,* 4 volumes (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1945), 1:5.



Map 2. "New Jersey landforms." Source: Kelland and Kelland, *A Geography of New Jersey*, p. 15.

prominent mountain range, the flat topped Kittatiny: approximately five miles wide, extending for about thirty-five miles from the New York border to the Delaware Water Gap, and has a maximum height of 1,803 feet at High Point in Sussex County, the highest altitude in New Jersey.[95] The Kittatiny is most impressive indeed. However, when compared to many other mountain ranges, the Kittatiny looks more like a very large hill.[96] Even so, both the Kittatiny and the Valley possess many valuable natural resources.

The runaway slave dubbed Nanny was probably well aware of this point. According to her owner, Thomas Hunt, in 1778 the twenty-two-year-old woman absconded from his residence in Hardwick, Sussex County. Other information provided by Hunt is that Nanny had a yellowish complexion, long hair, and was wearing "a white linen short gown, a pale flannel petticoat, pale blue stockings, and leather heeled shoes."[97] Hunt's advertisement informs us that Nanny was dressed for life outdoors but sheds no light regarding where she may have headed, or why she ran away by herself.

Though there is no census record for 1778, the "Incomplete Census" of 1772 verifies that there were only 285 total blacks in Sussex County. The white population was 8,944.[98] These figures would have changed very little by the time Nanny took flight. One must also bear in mind that in 1778, Sussex and its scattered

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[95]Kelland and Kelland, *A Geography of New Jersey*, pp. 9, 10, 13, 15, 16.

[96]John T. Cunningham, *This is New Jersey* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1968), p. 9.

[97]*The Pennsylvania Packet*, June 3, 1779, cited in *N.J.A.*, second series, 3:400.

[98]Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 112.

farmsteads occupied the largest portion of the Valley region. (See Map 3.) It is probable, therefore, that Nanny's inability to form significant ties with enslaved and other oppressed peoples in this very rural and scantily populated region explains why she took off on her own. She may well have reasoned to herself that Hardwick's diverse topography would protect her from possible recapture.

Except for the fact that Hardwick was the first settlement in the Valley, very little else is known about it. We do know, however, that in 1824 Hardwick became Stillwater township: about seven to ten miles in length, five miles wide, but more importantly, sat right on the Paulins Kill River, the major waterway in Sussex County.[99] (See Map 4.) The river's origins are near Augusta, and the tree-covered Kittatiny parallels its entire course, the rocky hills running to its shore. The best time to raft down the Paulins Kill was during the springtime when the run-off water from the winter snow provided an extra foot or so of water. A continuous trip requires higher than normal water. Since Nanny took off during the summertime in June, it is doubtful that she rafted down the Paulins Kill. Besides, to navigate either up or down such uncompromising water required much time and probably more energy. As the Paulins Kill twists and turns around the plethora of hills it soon hurries along to the Delaware River, the passage to Pennsylvania and possible freedom. It is important to note that products from the Hardwick mills, built along the Paulins Kill in 1750, were sent down

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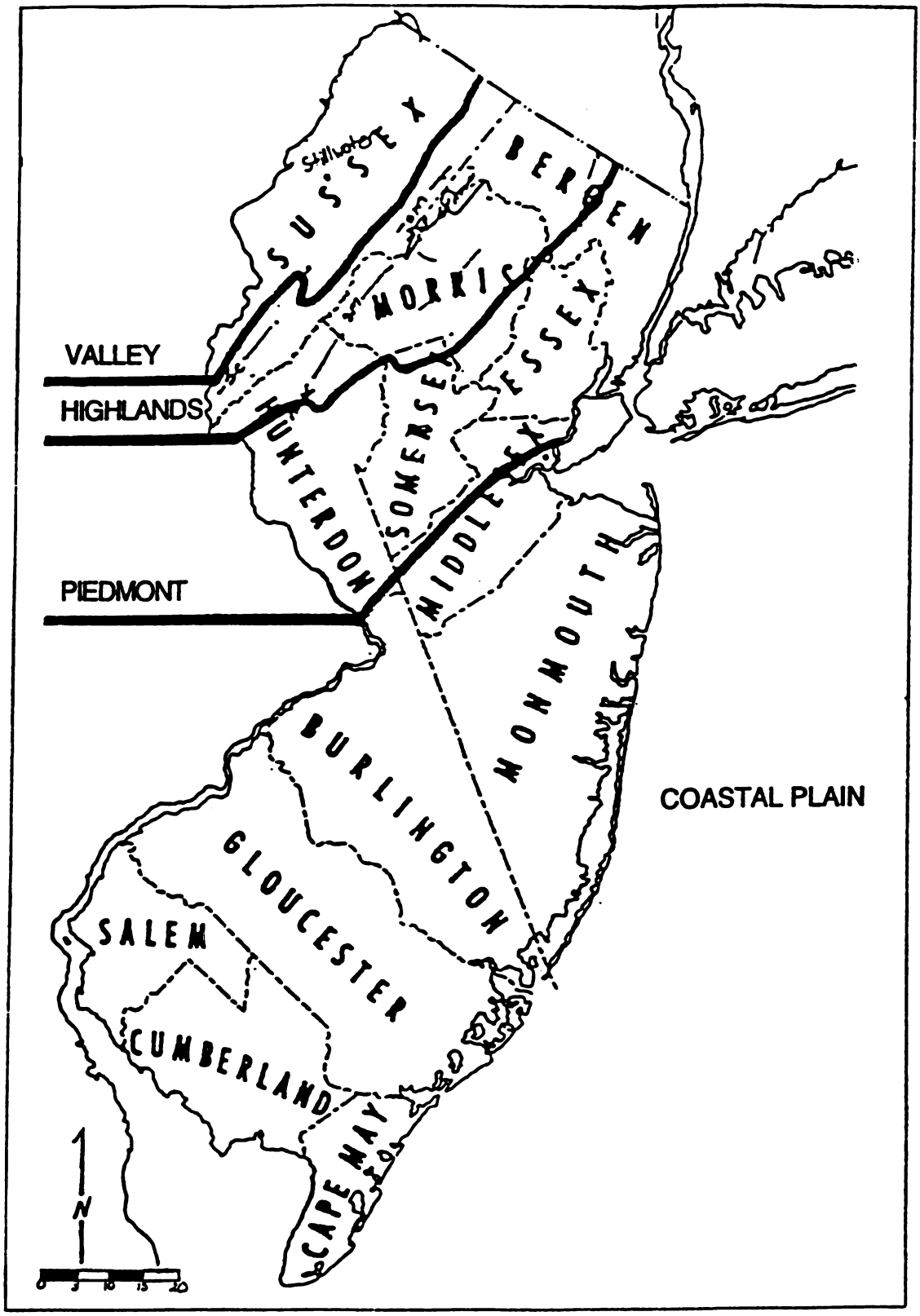
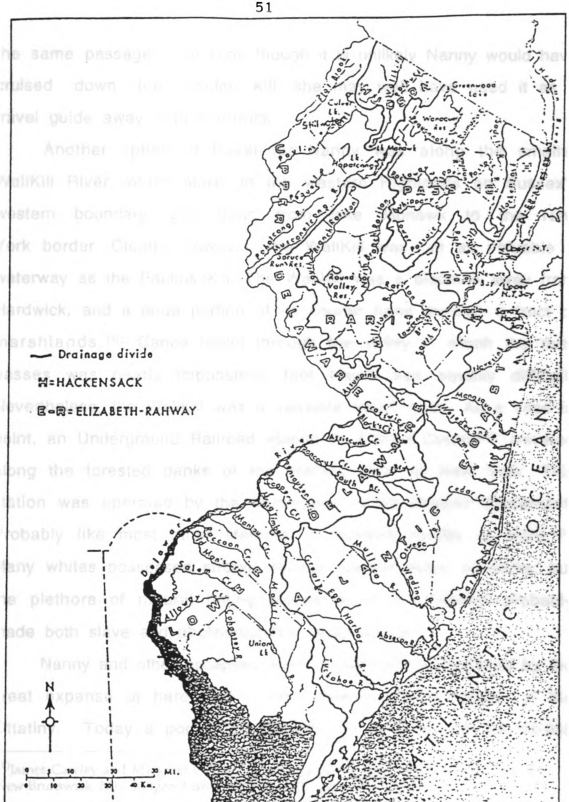
[99]See James P. Snell, *History of Sussex and Warren Counties, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881), pp. 379-389; Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections,* pp. 478, 479.



Map 3. "County boundaries as they existed for the censuses of 1772-1820." Source: Wacker, *Land and People*, p. 142, emphasis on physiographic regions is mine.



Map 4. "New Jersey drainage." Source: Kelland and Kelland, *A Geography of New Jersey*, p. 39.

the same passage.[100] In sum, though it is unlikely Nanny would have cruised down the Paulins Kill, she may well have used it as a travel guide away from Hardwick.

Another option of travel for Nanny was along the smaller WallKill River, which starts in the western Highlands on Sussex's western boundary, and flows from lake Mohawk to the New York border. Clearly, however, the WallKill was not as valuable a waterway as the Paulins Kill. The WallKill was a distance away from Hardwick, and a large portion of its course flows through a tract of marshlands.[101] Canoe travel through the valley in which the river passes was nearly impossible; foot travel was equally difficult. Nevertheless, the WallKill was a valuable travel route. As a case in point, an Underground Railroad station in Warren County[102] traveled along the forested banks of the Wallkill River to New York. This station was operated by the community called Quaker Settlement. Probably like most other stations, it traveled mostly at night.[103] Many whites possessed strong feelings against these networks; but the plethora of natural hiding places along the Wallkill probably made both slave and abolitionist feel quite secure.

Nanny and other escapees were undoubtedly encouraged by the great expanse of hardwood forests located on the slopes of the Kittatiny. Today a portion of Stillwater is occupied by the 14,869

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[100]James Cawley and Margaret Cawley, *Exploring the Little Rivers of New Jersey,* 3rd. ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971), pp. 134, 137, 138-140.

[101]Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections,* p. 481.

[102]"Warren County was originally the southern part of Sussex co.: it was formed into a district county in 1824." Ibid., p. 488.

[103]"The Underground Railroad in New Jersey."

acre Stokes State Forest, the most expansive tract of woodland in Sussex County. Other major tracts of forest found on the Kittatiny are High Point State Park (12,686 acres) and Worthington State Forest (5,711 acres), which is also part of the Delaware Water Gap area. This tree cover is expansive but not particularly thick.[104] This was probably the case during slavery times as well. Still, any substantial tree cover would have helped in concealing Nanny from or slowing down any hostile persons.

Besides vast tracts of forest, fugitives were provided with a number of rock shelters (cavities in rocks offering shelter from the weather) and caves (natural underground tunnels and caverns accessible to humans) which were dispersed throughout the Valley. Most of the shelters and caves in New Jersey are located here.[105] Frequently Native Americans utilized these structures.[106] So it seems reasonable to assume that black fugitives used them as well. A most famous cave in Sussex County is Vulture Cave, found on the edge of the Delaware River, about three miles away from Port Jervis in New York. Presumably, it was used as a stop on the Underground Railroad before and during the Revolutionary War.[107] Like other caves, it was probably dark, dank, and beset with rodents and other creatures. Even so, caves like this provided protective resting grounds for Nanny and other fugitives after treks across Kittatiny

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[104]Kelland and Kelland, *A Geography of New Jersey,* pp. 9, 163.

[105]Richard F. Dalton, et al., *Caves in New Jersey,* Bureau of Geology & Topography, bulletin 70 (Trenton: Department of Environmental Protection, 1976), p. 5.

[106]See Max Schrabisch, *Indian Habitations in Sussex County, New Jersey,* Geological Survey of New Jersey, bulletin 13 (Union Hill, N.J.: Dispatch Printing Company, 1915), pp. 16-20.

[107]Dalton, pp. 32, 48.

Mountain, where the terrain is very rough and the soils equally rocky.[108]

As we can see, Sussex's diverse topography provided Nanny with many allies. They may well have played some role in fostering her rebelliousness and eased some of her tensions when in flight. Hardwick was located on and near valuable rivers and was flanked by the Kittatiny Mountain Range with its expansive tract of forests and numerous rock shelters and caves. There was also a plethora of lakes and ponds where Nanny could have taken refuge. The most prominent of these is Lake Hopatcong, the largest inland body of water in New Jersey--seven miles long and 2,685 total acres--and is situated on both Sussex's southern border[109] and in the fortress like Highland region. Nanny may not have had much contact with members of her own race, but Sussex's rich topography more than made up for this shortcoming--it made freedom a real possibility.

The Highlands

The New Jersey Highlands is located south and east of the Valley in the northcentral part of the state. Part of the geologic province called the New England Uplands, the New Jersey region is ten to twenty-five miles wide, encompassing about twelve percent of the total land area, and has a general elevation of 1,000 feet. The Highlands run like the Valley but its ridges are more massive and generally much broader, and its valleys are narrower with steeper slopes. Whereas the south is relatively smooth, the north is quite

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[108]Wacker, *Land and People,* p. 15.

[109]Kennedy, *New Jersey Almanac,* p. 60; Cunningham, *This is New Jersey,* p. 62

rugged in some places. This rough area is known as the Ramapo Mountains, and they lie on Bergen County's northern border.

Although not of great elevation, the wild and inhospitable Ramapo Mountains were of great use to persons on the run.[110] During the Revolutionary War, enslaved blacks often escaped to the Ramapo Mountains where they interacted with Native Americans, deserting Hessian soldiers, Tory refugees, and other outlaws and bandits.[111] This group must have included fugitive slave women. The article titled "A Community of Outcasts" in *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science, and Art,* March 23, 1872, sustains this view:

> The people [Ramapo whites] will tell you that the stain upon their fair country was first put there by fugitive slaves, more than a hundred years ago.
>
> They [fugitive slaves] buried themselves deep in the fastnesses and gorges of the mountains, and reared children, wilder and more savage than themselves.[112]

If there were black children in these mountains, then obviously there were bondwomen who helped in raising and protecting them (as did their maroon sisters in the Caribbean).[113] Given that slave men understood that large and secluded hills such as the Ramapo symbolized freedom, it seems only logical that they meant the same

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[110]Kennedy, p. 392; Wacker, *Land and People,* p. 7; Kelland and Kelland, *A Geography of New Jersey,* pp. 9, 13, 15, 16, 17.

[111]"The Underground Railroad in New Jersey."

[112]"A Community of Outcasts," *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science, and Art* (March 1872): 325, quoted in David Steven Cohen, *The Ramapo Mountain People* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974), p. 12.

[113]See Mathurin, *Rebel Woman,* pp. 11, 34, 36-37; Terborg-Penn, "Black Women in Resistance," pp. 193-202.

thing to slave women who wanted to liberate themselves and their children. Specifically, a lack of life experience away from the master's residence does not necessarily mean that bondwomen were completely ignorant of what the topography could do for them.

Except for areas in northern Hunterdon County, there were basically no dense populations of slaves in the Highlands. This was mainly due to the fact that both the Highlands and Valley were settled relatively late by the Europeans.[114] It would seem, then, that there were slaves in the Highlands who felt it was safer to runaway and take advantage of the region's hills and valleys, than to commit acts of violence and face the consequences of the very harsh East Jersey slave code.

This was probably true of the two black slaves and one white person who absconded together from Mendham in Morris County on December 22, 1780. One of the fugitives was an anonymous twenty-eight-year-old black woman. The other black escapee was named Cuffee, about thirty-years-old and a victim of much abuse. Among other things, he had lost some teeth and his back was horribly "scarified in lumps by whippings." The white escapee was a male soldier in the Pennsylvania regiment, a portion of the American Army whose main headquarters was located at adjoining Morristown. Barracked in the rude huts and suffering from the affects of the New Jersey winter--disease and want--the soldiers in Mendham began to loot and plunder. The three fugitives took full advantage of this chaos: they stole a variety of clothing, the white soldier pilfered a

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[114]Wacker, *Land and People,* p. 128.

written discharge and, most important, the rebels were able to steal two horses which quickly carried them out of Mendham.[115]

Of all the topographic allies afforded the rebels, it would seem that the most valuable was Schooley's Mountain, located directly west of Mendham. The flat-topped and tree-covered ridge (sometimes called Schugl's hills) parallels the South Branch of the Raritan River, and dominates a large portion of western Morris. Further, it rises to an elevation of 1,100 feet above sea level and 600 feet above the adjacent country. Most important, however, these big hills possessed many secluded spots which were occupied by some white families in earlier times because of the mineral springs located there. Additionally, Schooley's Mountain was about thirty miles from Pennsylvania (where the white soldier was probably from), but only twenty-two miles from Somerset County (most of which sits in the Piedmont) where there were rebels of various ethnic backgrounds.[116]

Another but less likely refuge was the Great Swamp, which sits in southern Chatham in the Piedmont. This remarkable formation was about 2,560 total acres: approximately seven miles long, three wide, but more importantly, was covered with a heavy growth of timber which would have provided runaways with at least temporary asylum.[117] Another positive attribute was the high Long Hill, which bounds the Great Swamp on the east. (See Map 5.) It would seem,

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[115]*New Jersey Gazette*, v. 4, no. 157, December 27, 1780, cited in *N.J.A.*, second series, 5:157. See also Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections*, p. 384.

[116]Barber and Rowe, p. 403.

[117]Edmund Drake Halsey ed., *The History of Morris County, New Jersey* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Company, 1882), p. 187; ibid., pp. 90, 91, 98.

Map 5. "Morris County." Source: Cunningham, *This is New Jersey*, p. 54.

however, that the frosty Great Swamp and its many qualities were not as appealing to runaways during the wintertime in December.

In all likelihood, the white soldier and Cuffee were more cognizant than their female partner about what Morris's landscape offered in terms of peace and protection. This probably had much to do with why she ran away in the first place. Even so, it would be unfair to assume that she was totally unaware of Morris's tremendous physicality. More than half of the 467 square mile county sits in the rugged Highlands--in fact, it occupies most of the region.[118] There was simply too much incentive for her not to runaway. She had allies who were men and Mendham was located within and around a bevy of physical resources. Moreover, she lived a short distance from other potential rebels--black, white, and indigen--in the more heavily populated Piedmont, the nuclei of settlement in New Jersey. With all this in her favor, she probably reasoned that she could not turn freedom down.

The Piedmont

Large areas of Somerset, Middlesex, and Mercer Counties, the southeastern portions of Morris, Passaic, and Hunterdon Counties, and all of Bergen, Union, Essex, and Hudson Counties occupy the New Jersey Piedmont. This region is a dissected plateau which gradually slopes away from the Highlands to the north and west and consumes about twenty-one percent of New Jersey's land. Most of the plateau, however, is a lowland of rounded hills separated by parallel and wide valleys. Thus the Piedmont it is not as mountainous as the

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[118]Kennedy, *New Jersey Almanac,* p. 459.

Highlands, or Valley for that matter. However, in some areas the Piedmont's surface is broken by ridges elevating several hundred feet above the general surface. The highest and longest are the three Watchung Mountains (850, 650, and 350 feet high). Another major ridge on the eastern edge are the rugged Palisades in Bergen County, rising in some places almost perpendicularly from the shore, to more than 500 feet in elevation, and form for miles a solid wall of dark rock. Its summit is about two miles wide and is populated with many trees.[119] From there, fugitive persons could hide themselves and look down upon the Hudson River and the ferries crossing over to New York.

In October 1774 a married black couple belonging to Mark Prevost in Hackensack took flight. There are several reasons why they may have headed to the Palisades and then attempted to board a ferry traveling across the Hudson. First of all, Hackensack is bounded directly east by the forested Palisades. Second, the couple took along several pieces of luggage which would have been easier to handle on a ferry. And third, the "smart" and "lusty" wife was given a note to took for a new master, which Prevost believes she aimed to "make a pass of it to travel through New England."[120] It was both quicker and safer to ride a ferry than to journey on foot.

Many New Jersey bondwomen wanting freedom were denied interaction of any kind with fellow blacks. Thus, it is reasonable to speculate that Prevost's bondwoman felt fortunate to be in Hackensack, where she could marry and network with other black

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[119]Wacker, *Land and People,* pp. 5, 6; Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections,* pp. 73, 74.

[120]*N.J.A.,* first series, 29:499.

people. (As commented earlier, most of Bergen's slaves were in the Hackensack Valley.) Still, we should not automatically assume that she would not have taken flight if she were unmarried, or did not live around other blacks. Prevost's advertisement suggests that she was well traveled, and he appears to have had a great deal of respect for both her intelligence and determination. All this implies that she was at least somewhat aware of how Hackensack's topography could aid her cause. It is probable that she had as much--if not more--knowledge than her preacher husband. We might assume, then, that she just happened to be married when she bolted. But on the other hand, she was probably very thankful to have a reliable running mate.

Hagar is another fugitive slave woman worth looking at. Her owner was Jacob Morrell who, according to Donald White, appears to have been the wealthiest man in Chatham, Morris County:

> He was the leading merchant, who lived on the main road in a large two-story building that combined store and home. From his profits he bought a riding chair, and for a time owned a slave named Hagar, until she stole some clothes and goods and ran away in 1773.[121]

Hagar seems to have been the only servant of this rather large establishment, implying that Morrell placed many demands on her. She obviously got fed up with her oppressed condition and decided it was time for her to bolt. Perhaps Hagar wished to bring Morrell

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[121]Donald W. White, *A Village at War: Chatham, New Jersey, and the American Revolution* (Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), p. 43.

physical harm, but it was safer to just runaway. One might assume that a running mate would have been a great comfort to her.

Hagar may not have lived around many blacks. White says that between 1775 and 1783 there was a "population of 288 men, women, and children, including slaves," in Chatham village, "about three square miles."[122] In 1772 there were only 367 total blacks scattered about in Morris County; less than half were women. The much larger white populace stood at 11,168.[123] So probably because of minimal contact with her own race, on a Sunday night probably while Morrell was asleep, Hagar, around twenty, ran away by herself somewhere within Morris's physically challenging but protective landscape. To be sure, she was well aware of the full benefits of night flight: it provided her with a head start over and made it extremely difficult for the enemy to follow her tracks. The items that she stole and carried with her indicate she had no intentions of returning to Morrell, who published a reward of ten dollars for her recapture,[124] the exact sum he offered for the return of a stray horse four years later.[125] Morrell clearly saw Hagar as chattel and most likely treated her as such. In all likelihood, Hagar's flight was in response to being dehumanized by him.

In light of how organized Hagar was, she may well have possessed some general knowledge of the geography surrounding

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[122]Ibid., p. 17.

[123]Green and Harrington, *American Population*, p. 112. No census was taken in 1773.

[124]*N.J.A.*, first series, 9:514.

[125]White, p. 44.

Chatham. If Hagar decided to exit Morris completely, she would have likely fled to either Essex or Union Counties, respectively southwest and southeast of Chatham. Admittedly, though, she would have to deal with the Passaic River. Once this was accomplished, however, she could then take refuge somewhere in the Short Hills and plan her next move. As Chatham had a clear view of these protective hills, they must have looked very tempting to her.[126] Another likely place of hiding was the Great Swamp which, as commented earlier, was flanked by the heavily wooded Long Hill.

The Raritan River also commands our attention. Originally the Raritan was called Lalelan, an aboriginal word meaning "forked river." It is comprised of the North and South Branches of the Raritan River, whose origins are in Morris County. They join together in Somerset County, extending into Hudson Bay. Together, these two arteries form a river over one hundred miles, the longest in New Jersey. Until they were removed by the Europeans in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Naraticong Indians in Somerset County had erected villages all along its shores. The Raritan became their main artery of travel by canoe.[127] To be sure, enslaved blacks also viewed the Raritan as being very important.

The Raritan River seems to have figured in the Somerville conspiracy of 1734. Its many attributes beg examination. First of all, as Somerville was a short distance north of the stream, it was fairly accessible. Second, there was a tremendous wealth of trees

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[126]See Maps 3 and 5.

[127]Cawley and Cawley, *Little Rivers,* p. 88.

and other places of hiding that lined the river's entire course. It is reasonable to assume that the February cold was not the sole reason why the conspirators decided to hold off their plans until the weather had broken--a forest in bloom would conceal them better than one which had thinned out. Third, and perhaps most important, the Raritan was a travel route to other protective areas, such as the hilly area of the Hunterdon Plateau, the southwesternmost portion of the Piedmont in Hunterdon County. All this considered, a case can be made that like other slaves in the Diaspora, those in Somerville realized the important connection between war and the physical landscape. Given the severity of their intent, how could they not have? To be sure, the women would not have involved themselves if the conditions were not right. But at least they had the option.

Slaves who sought freedom in Hunterdon must have also been inspired by both the county's demographic situation and relatively diverse topography. Hunterdon began to show appreciable numbers of slaves by 1745; in 1772 it had 1,095 total blacks.[128] Though northern Hunterdon was known for having slaves, many may have also lived in the south. As mentioned earlier, in 1764[129] three female slaves about twenty-five-years-old and two male slaves from Amwell in south Hunterdon, joined forces and ran away as a group. The advertisement for their recapture was signed by five different individuals, implying that numerous whites owned slaves there. But most revealing is that the five blacks were able to come together for a

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[128]Greene and Harrington, *American Population*, p. 112.

[129]No census was taken in 1764.

common cause. This display of camaraderie suggests that there was a real slave consciousness in Hunterdon's southern end.

As the five Amwell escapees had only been in the country for about two years, they probably had no real command of the English language,[130] a most serious liability. Presumably, they were also not well acquainted with the surrounding geography. A little knowledge was probably all they needed. Amwell is bounded on the west by the Delaware River, and Sourland Mountain (839 feet tall) extends along its southeastern boundary. It is also important to note that though Lambertville in West Amwell was on the site of Congel's Ferry, where black slave labor was used,[131] the said runaways probably did not try to utilize this resource. The ferry was so close to their residence that whites were probably watching it very closely. But there were other resources available to them. For example, the ferry in Trenton was sixteen miles away from Amwell, due north.[132] Other possible means of transportation were the flatboats, rafts, and long, narrow-beamed Durham boats which transported wheat, lumber, and other commodities from Hunterdon to both Sussex and Trenton.[133] Even if the Amwell fugitives did not utilize these travel resources, it is doubtful they were completely ignorant of them. To be sure, there were servants and slaves who realized their value.

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[130]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:429, 430.

[131]Price, *Freedom Not Far*, p. 31.

[132]Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections*, pp. 240-241.

[133]John E. Pomfret, *Colonial New Jersey: A History* (New York: Scribner, 1973), p. 196.

A probable case in point was the black woman named Lucy, alias Sue. In 1763 this daring woman escaped from her master Patrick Hanlon in Cranbury, Middlesex County. Hanlon suspected that she either fled to

> Bucks county, to one Lambert Vandyks near Neshaminy meet-house, where she has a daughter; or to one Waglers near Franckfort, where her old masters daughter lives: or is in Philadelphia at some free Negro's house.[134]

If Lucy had any intentions of reaching these destinations, she had to gain passage across the Delaware River. So we can speculate that the spirited woman followed what was known as the "upper road" (which extended from South Amboy to Burlington via Cranbury) to Trenton, and attempted to board a vessel from somewhere in its vicinity. Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where her daughter was, is located directly across from Trenton.

It is also important to bear in mind that though Middlesex was a leader in slave population as well as in the percentage of enslaved to total population, Lucy probably had only minimal contact with other blacks. The large plantations in Middlesex were located in the Raritan Valley[135] and not within Cranbury's vicinity. So Lucy probably had no other choice but to runaway on her own about Middlesex, which by the time of her departure, was fairly well cultivated and occupied by many whites. Still, Lucy was better off than most other fugitive slave women in New Jersey. She lived in the Piedmont

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[134]*N.J.A.*, second series, 24:402.

[135]Moss, "Persistence of Slavery," pp. 294, 300.

where blacks were most prominent in numbers, and had access to the region's plethora of resources made by nature as well as by man.

The Coastal Plain

New Jersey's Coastal Plain is located south of the Piedmont, and it accounts for about sixty percent of the province's land, beginning south of the line from the Raritan River estuary to Trenton. The New Jersey Plain is part of the greater Coastal Plain that stretches from New York to Florida; it includes portions of Mercer and Middlesex Counties and all the counties farther south. The northern portion of the Plain is approximately twenty-four miles wide and widens to the south about sixty miles.

A very seldom talked about but seemingly important resource to fugitive persons in the Plain was Delaware Bay. Price reminds us that in 1852, Harriet Tubman (ca. 1821-1913) worked as a cook in a hotel in Cape May County, bounded west by this wide body of water. "It is possible," he says, "that from this strategic location she helped slaves from Maryland and Delaware escape across the Delaware Bay and on to safer northern havens."[136] Jeffery Dorwart mentions that another important conductor of the Underground Railroad in Cape May was a black man named Edward Turner, whose wagon transported fugitive slaves to Snow Hill (Lawnside), Haddonfield, and other stations further north. Dorwart suggests that Turner may have worked with Ms. Tubman, adding that "freed slaves

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[136]Price, *Freedom Not Far,* p. 92.

and possibly runaways from other areas settled in pockets of remote Cape May woodlands before the middle of the [nineteenth] century."[137]

Conversely, a great disadvantage to enslaved folk in Cape May and in the Plain in general was the surface's relative flatness. No elevations exceed 500 feet; more than half the Plain lies below 100 feet. In several places isolated hills between 100 and 200 feet stand above the surrounding countryside. Some examples are Apple Pie Hill, Mount Holly, and Spring Hill.

A prominent feature of the Inner Coastal Plain[138] is the Navesinks Highlands, whose highest point is only 276 feet. Even so, slaves on the run must have found both its great mass of forest and facing of Sandy Hook and Raritan Bay to be useful allies. Hodges explains that many slaves in Monmouth County fled to New York.[139] These families and couples were undoubtedly cognizant of the Navesinks many attributes.

There was no natural resource more important to fugitives in the Plain than the large mass of stunted pine woods--the great Pine Barrens. The pine region covers the Plain's southern and central parts. According to John Barber and Henry Rowe, "this immense tract [was] very thinly settled, there being many square miles on which there is not a single inhabitant."[140] James Still of Burlington County

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[137]Jeffery M. Dorwart, *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of an American Resort Community* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 82, 83.

[138]The main difference between the Plain's two divisions--the Inner and Outer Coastal Plains--are the materials outcropping at the surface. The Inner Coastal Plain has a greater amount of clay than its counterpart. The Outer Coastal Plain is covered largely by porous sand, and represents the larger part of the Plain, encompassing about three-quarters of its total area.

[139]Hodges, *African-Americans,* p. 24.

[140]Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections,* p. 63.

spoke along similar lines: "Our house . . . was surrounded by forest, and only now and then a habitation near."[141] Many people, however, utilized this impressionable resource. For example, it is said that during the Revolutionary War slaves "joined robber bands that terrorized farm districts on the edge of the Pine Barrens and other forest regions."[142]

The Pine Barrens' importance can not be emphasized enough. The slave woman named Bet was undoubtedly inspired by its great mass. In July 1781, Bet, around twenty, took flight from her master Jacob Phillips in Burlington County. The young woman brought along her three-year-old daughter as well as some additional clothing.[143] Like many female fugitives, Bet was relatively prepared to take to the woods. The largest area of pine woodlands located in the Plain is East Burlington, or Wharton State Forest (99,638 total acres). Other notable woodland areas in Burlington are Lebanon State Forest (29,304 acres), Penn State Forest (3,366 acres), and Rancocas State Park (1,057 acres) on the Delaware River.[144] In sum, though Burlington lacks prominent hills and such, this mass of woodlands may well have played a major role in fostering Bet's rebelliousness.

There is no census record for the year Bet took flight. Still, we might assume that she had a difficult time finding a partner-in-

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[141]James Still, *Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Company, 1877), pp. 21, 22.

[142]"The Underground Railroad in New Jersey"; Barber and Rowe, pp. 351-353.

[143]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:272.

[144]Kelland and Kelland, *A Geography of New Jersey*, p. 163.

crime. As been already noted, Monmouth was the major slaving area in the Plain. According to the census of 1790, when slavery was still very much alive in New Jersey, there were 227 blacks in bondage out of a total population of 18,095 in Burlington County. In all likelihood, there were fewer numbers of slaves in 1784, when the county's total population was 15,801. Bet may have also had a difficult time meeting both free black and Native American peoples. In 1790 there were 598 total free persons in Burlington. Though the 1784 census does not indicate what the free population was, it is probable that the number of free blacks in 1781 was smaller than both the 1784 and 1790 totals.[145] This is all very relevant when one considers that Burlington is New Jersey's largest county--fifty miles in length--extending from the Delaware River almost to the Atlantic Ocean.[146] Specifically, Burlington's tremendous size probably made it even more difficult for Bet to find dependable allies.

Another useful topographic ally in Burlington was undoubtedly the Rancocas River, "the highway of the [Indian] tribes and the means of communication among their many villages."[147] Bet may have also been cognizant of the Rancocas's many attributes. Not only does this waterway run right into the Delaware River, but on both its shores are a heavy growth of oak and other pine woods. Passage across the

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[145]Greene and Harrington, *American Population,* p. 113.

[146]See Map 3.

[147]Cawley and Cawley, *Little Rivers,* p. 41. It is debatable whether there were many Indian villages in Rancocas's vicinity.

Delaware was a serious task indeed. However, during the Revolution, a valuable ferry on the Delaware was located at Willingboro.[148]

It appears, though, that Bet never made it to the Delaware River, or anywhere too far away from Phillips's domicile. In the same year she took off, Phillips had the following advertisement published:

> **TO BE SOLD**
>
> A Likely, hearty Negro woman, about 21 years of age: Also a Negro girl about 16 years of age; both may have had the small pox, were born and brought up in New-Jersey, and are fit for either town or country business: there is a female child, about 4 years of age. For further particulars enquire of the subscriber in Burlington.[149]

Bet was undoubtedly the "Likely" woman. Though the month of publication is not provided with Phillips's advertisement, is it grouped along with those newspaper extracts in the *New Jersey Archives* for the month of September, indicating that Bet was recaptured somewhere between July and that month.

Bet was probably caught by one of Burlington's constables. James Still recalls seeing a constable as a young boy:

> His name was Israel Small. He was riding on horseback in pursuit of some one of the Milligan family, who lived opposite of us, and so impressed was I by the terror of law, that I did not know at the time but that in the constable was vested all power on the earth.[150]

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[148]Barber and Rowe, *Historical Collections,* p. 122.

[149]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:297.

[150]Still, *Early Recollections,* pp. 14, 15.

No doubt, many grown-ups were equally impressed by them. Bet clearly ran away under extreme circumstances. However, she had access to a host of natural resources which would have eased some of the burdens of bringing along her daughter, who she had to carry and nurture by herself. This added responsibility may have led to her recapture.

Despite insurmountable odds, there were female slaves who took flight in all four of New Jersey's physiographic regions. Indeed, there is a story behind all of these heroic acts which historians have conveniently ignored. In light of both the paucity of first hand accounts and information provided in newspaper advertisements, it is important to consider geography and demographic elements. It was only "human" for Sarah, Hagar, Bet, and other female fugitives to consider these two issues. What other allies did most of these women have? As noted earlier, in regards to flight, female slaves were generally more disadvantaged than male slaves. The fact that most of these women were twenty-five or younger did not help either. Interestingly, though, many newspaper advertisements reveal that these presumably naive ladies were both prepared and smart individuals, implying that they had a plan in mind when they bolted for freedom. When the local and surrounding topography and demographics are added to the picture, this becomes even more evident.

Chapter 3
Female Consciousness and Survival

It is imperative to realize that while all enslaved females wanted freedom of some kind, many could not or refused to assert themselves like a Hagar or a Nanny. So in this chapter, in addition to discussing New Jersey bondwomen who directly challenged their slavery, I will also analyze some female slaves who dealt with their plight in a seemingly more passive manner. Perhaps the most intriguing (and difficult) aspect of slave study is the ambiguity that surrounds the captive's behavior. This is precisely why I have not excluded these "complacent" females. Though they were accommodating, surely they were also fighting to survive. In many respects, this internal will was just as powerful as flight or physical retaliation.

A major concern of even the most militant slave was the master's breaking up of his or her family. "[T]he slave family," says Zilversmit, "was a precarious institution subject to the needs and wishes of the master . . . [it] was unprotected by law, weakened in security, and easily destroyed."[151] As Fishman points out, however, the term slave family is inaccurate when used in general, for free

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[151]Zilversmit, *First Emancipation,* pp. 10-11.

persons (of either African, European, and Indian descent) and slaves were commonly members of the same family.[152] At any rate, family was an important aspect of slave life, providing many captives with shelter against the slave regime's brutality. For slave women, family gave them a sense of purpose in a otherwise monotonous and unfulfilling existence.[153]

Certainly Dick and his family were grateful they were together. Mellick says that,

> Dick was a 'most likely nigger' . . . and his family but reflected the virtue of the sire. The children proved to be quiet and obedient and quickly found themselves possessed of a happy home; they had playmates in Daniel's [the old master's son] boys and girls, mutually kind feelings existed almost immediately, and black and white lived together.[154]

Much of the situation's success was undoubtedly attributable to Dick's wife, Nance. Upon meeting their new masters in Somerset, Nance did all the talking and laughing for the family, implying that she played the lead role in maintaining good relations between the two parties. To be sure, Nance was well aware of how easily and often slave families were broken up in New Jersey. And she was certainly well aware of the consequences that befell any black who

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[152]Fishman, "Freedom and Equality," p. 158.

[153]For a convincing analysis of the strength and centrality of the black family, see Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

[154]Mellick, *Old Farm,* pp. 604, 605.

disrespected a white. Thus Nance became her mistress's "devoted attendant, cook, and skillful housekeeper."[155]

Though Nance was very accommodating, it would be unfair to assume that she had no rebellious consciousness. Hidden beneath the pleasant smiles and laughs was undoubtedly a tremendous will to survive. We should not dismiss the possibility that Nance did not relish smiling to or serving white folks--no matter how well she and her family were treated as slaves. Mellick claims that Somerset slaves "were comfortably clad; when sick, well cared for."[156] If this were so, Nance may well have thought she could endure being a slave, even a respectful one.

This was probably also true of the slave woman who, in 1769 in Burlington County, tried to rescue her mistress from the fatal beating she received at the hands of her jealous husband. Before attempting to kill his wife, the angry master informed his bondwoman of his intent. He later found the mistress and proceeded to shoot her, but only in the shoulder. Alarmed by the gun's report, the black woman "directly sprang out of a window, one story high, rushed into the room, where she saw her mistress wallowing in her blood." The enraged husband had bashed her head with the end part of the weapon, which the anonymous slave quickly forced from his hands and then supposedly ran seven miles to the closest neighbor's house. When she returned with help, the battered mistress lay dead

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[155]Ibid., p. 605.

[156]Ibid., p. 225.

in a pool of blood, and the master was found hanging dead from somewhere in their barn.[157]

This is indeed an intriguing story, not only in terms of its violence, but also in the extent to which the loyal black woman involved herself. With her mistress dead and the master in an apparent state of delirium, she could have easily taken flight. She could have possibly been free. Her owner's closest neighbors were a distance away and, as mentioned earlier, Burlington County possessed a massive cover of pine woodlands and other natural resources which would have aided her escape. Her owner's farm was most likely located in some densely wooded and wild area. She chose to stay.

It is easy to conclude that she had lost all sense of rebellion. Or, that she was simply a cowardly slave. Though these are all valid possibilities, a more reasonable consideration is that she felt secure in her environment, away from all the hostility that consumed the lives of both free and enslaved black people in New Jersey. It is known that Quaker abolitionist sentiment ran high in Burlington County,[158] so maybe she benefited from its influence. In any regard, it would seem that kindly treatment played a major role in convincing her to remain on the Burlington farm. When considering that she was physically able to runaway, and lived in a remote area with tremendous natural resources, there is little reason to believe otherwise.

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[157]*N.J.A.*, first series, 7:526, 527.

[158]See Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 23, 94, 102, 104, 106, 110, 182-183.

Decent treatment may have also encouraged the forty-six-year-old slave woman advertised for sale on March 2, 1781, to act in a non-confrontational manner. The advertisement mentions "she has served many years in a genteel family . . . would particularly suit a genteel tavern or family that entertains much,"[159] implying that her owners were concerned about her welfare. Given that many New Jersey masters possessed no real feelings for their slaves, one can only assume that she reasoned it was not in her best interest to convey contempt towards folk who held her in positive regard. Certainly, like most enslaved females, she was conscious of surviving day-to-day and played the "role" in order to do so.

Another interesting case concerns the slave woman named Sarah. She was one of many blacks owned by David D. Demarest's grandfather. Though Sarah might have been "A miracle of faithfulness and industry entirely devoted to the interests of her master and his household," she was obviously a woman of strong will who commanded a certain amount of respect and authority. For as Demarest explains, "In many respects she ruled [the household] . . . Nobody trespassed on the domain of Sarah. Even grandfather bowed in submission."[160] Sarah had achieved a level of freedom that eluded many free black persons, a good indication she felt it was in her best interest to stay with her master than to begin anew in this racist, sexist, and exploitative society.

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[159]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:207.

[160]Quoted in Kull, "Slavery in New Jersey," p. 730.

Many New Jersey bondwomen endured tremendous hardships. No doubt, the most devastating was when their children were taken away from them. While at Perth Amboy in 1797, William Dunlap took notice of a black woman who was separated from her child: "the Mother by her cries has made the town re-echo & has continued her exclamations for two hours incessantly & still continued them. I am sick of oppression."[161] Phillis must have experienced a similar helplessness after her owner Azariah Horton died on March 27, 1777. According to Azariah's will, Phillis and her two sons, Pompy and Pizarro, were to be sold and the money equally divided between his wife and two of his children.[162] Cane and his mother also suffered when he was sent away to Louisiana as a young boy. After almost thirty years with no word between them, Cane was able to send her a message in 1844. As expected, she was very happy to hear from him. She was now eighty-two and known to be as intelligent and active as any forty-year-old woman,[163] all indications that she made it a point to deal with her oppression. To be sure, this was characteristic of many New Jersey bondwomen. But the pain of their babies being stripped away probably never did completely go away.

To avoid such heartache, numerous New Jersey slave women absconded with their children. A case in point is the slave Sarah. In 1778 the thirty-four-year-old and pregnant mulatto woman escaped

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[161]William Dunlap, "William Dunlap's Diary, 1776-1839," *New York Historical Society Collections,* 3 volumes, LXII-LXIV, New York (1929-31), I.

[162]White, *Village at War,* p. 99.

[163]See Ann Malone, "Against the Spirit of the Laws" (Research Paper, Illinois State University, n.d.), pp. 14, 15. This is a good survey of the domestic slave trade in New Jersey.

from the Trenton Ferry with her six-year-old son, Bob. Though Sarah took flight under rather extreme circumstances, her only real concern was that her small family remain together and free from slavery. This never occurred, for the "lusty wench" was easily captured and incarcerated in the Somerset County Jail.[164] We might speculate that, at some point, Sarah had come to terms with what freedom meant and believed she and her children were entitled to all its benefits.

The same might be said of Cash who, in 1778, was said to have stolen her daughter, Dianah (about nine or ten-years-old), from a New Jersey master. Also of interest is that Cash was married to an Native American man named Lewis Wolis, and they had a son who was about four-years-old at the time his sister was retrieved.[165] It would seem that the family's separation from Dianah was difficult for them to bear thus prompting Cash to get her back.

Maria, alias Amoritta, also believed that she and her child had a right to freedom. After having spent some time in Flemington, New Jersey, she was forced to live in Philadelphia. Maria decided in December 1780 that it was time for she and her four-year-old daughter Jane to experience liberty. Her owner, John Duffield, confirms that the fugitive woman planned to go back to her home in New Jersey.[166] He was probably right, for if anybody was remotely aware of how the slave thought it was the master. Gerald Mullin

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[164]*N.J.A.*, second series, 2:511, 573.

[165]Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, p. 10.

[166]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:176.

concurs: "Most of the women in the notices worked in the plantation house rather than in the quarters and in the fields; we would expect their masters, then, to have more opportunity to know them well."[167] Peter Wood adds that, "Sometimes the whereabouts of an absent slave could only be guessed by the master, but often the knowledge of a runaway's location seems strikingly specific."[168] Further, it is certain that Duffield either admired or was vexed by his bondwoman's self-determination. But more important, like Sarah, Cash, and other female escapees, Maria seems to have constructed her own conceptions and perceptions of freedom and believed in them wholeheartedly.

Long distance family relationships were particularly difficult for slaves to endure, or accept for that matter. Indeed, female slaves did their part to preserve family ties. As commented earlier, Lucy left Patrick Hanlon in 1763; to be sure, this was so that she could eventually be with her daughter over in Pennsylvania. In 1778, Dinah, around thirty and "very lusty," escaped from bondage in Maidenhead (Lawrenceville). She had a brother who was a slave in Freehold and was suspected of heading there to see him.[169] Having lived as a slave in three different locales, it must have been difficult for Dinah to develop or maintain meaningful relationships of any kind, a strong incentive for her to take flight and reunite with family. A lack or absence of family may have also influenced

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[167]Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion,* p. 103. Similarly, most of the bondwomen advertised in the *New Jersey Archives* were domestic laborers.

[168]Wood, *Black Majority,* p. 266.

[169]*N.J.A.*, second series, 2:162.

twenty-two-year-old Elsy to take flight from her master in Princeton in 1818. In all probability, she was on her way to Piscataway, where her brother lived as a slave.[170] In short, family was such an important part of slave life that many black females traveled far and wide to see loved ones again. Certainly freedom did not mean as much to these women without meaningful family relationships.

Not every bondwoman, however, was in a position to reestablishment family bonds. Nance is a case in point. When the head owner of the household died in 1809 at the age of eighty-four, Nance's family, despite years of faithful service, was put on the auctioned block. Whereas she, her husband, and youngest child got to stay, her four other siblings were sold to two new (but supposedly kind) owners. Another consolation, if we may call it that, was that the estates of these new owners were located relatively close by the Somerset farm.[171] At any rate, it is certain that this state of affairs caused both husband and wife a tremendous amount of agony. Seemingly strong family ties were severed, and there was basically nothing they could do to challenge the Malick's authority. Any recalcitrance on their part would have undoubtedly strained relations with their owners--it might have cost them the rest of their family. No doubt, Nance was mostly concerned with protecting what family she did have.[172]

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[170]*Freedonian* (New Brunswick), May 7, 1818.

[171]Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 608, 611.

[172]Some whites did try to keep slave families together. For example, a owner of seven blacks made it plain in 1780 that, "The man and wife and three children must not be parted, nor the

To be sure, Nance was also grateful for her enduring and devoted husband. Many New Jersey bondwomen were denied meaningful and lasting intimate relations with black men. We might speculate, therefore, that harsh treatment was not the sole reason why young, single black females like Nanny in Sussex County took flight--there were no young black males in their neighborhoods. In one particular case, a New Jersey man owned four bondwomen and two children slaves, but no men captives. This suggests that the four black females had little or possibly no interaction with black males. Hubert Schmidt makes the important point that such "conditions were hardly conducive to morality." (Hopefully, he meant how morality was defined by black people.) Nelly's misfortune may have been related to her inability to find a black male partner of her choice, for at no time did Hopewell possess large numbers of slaves. Schmidt explains that Nelly was excommunicated from the Hopewell church for bearing a bastard child.[173] Perhaps Nelly reasoned that she had every right to tend to her sexuality, even if it meant defamation by the church.

Certainly issues concerning sexuality and intimate relationships in the lives of enslaved black females were of no interest to the majority of slave owners. Indeed, many of them could not have cared less how their slaves felt about anything. At the Federal Convention in 1787, William Patterson, governor of New Jersey, expressed a

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mother and son; as they have lived long in one family together." *Pennsylvania Packet,* March 18, 1780.

[173]Hubert G. Schmidt, *Rural Hunterdon: An Agricultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1946), p. 250.

common sentiment regarding black slaves: "[I can] regard negro slaves in no light but property."[174] Thus, it is understandable why female slaves in New Jersey, like bondwomen elsewhere, were subjected to white men's rape or sexual exploitation--black womanhood was rendered valueless. As a case in point, one New Jersey master had children from all three of his bondwomen. "Whenever he could dispose of his own offspring, he sold them, in the same manner as he sold his hogs."[175] Mingo's slave wife was also forced to bed with their owner. For publicly stating what the master had done, Mingo was severely flogged.[176] Beatings like this, says Darlene Clark Hine, confirm that "[black] men were, on the whole, unable to offer much protection for the sexual integrity of their wives, daughters, and sisters."[177] Native American women were also raped. For example, in 1776 at Morreston, Burlington County, two well known Native American women were killed by two white men who intended to ravish them.[178] In sum, New Jersey society generally saw black females as unfeeling brutes, whose chief purpose was to

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[174]Quoted in Max Ferrand ed., *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, 4 volumes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911-1937), 1:561.

[175]Quoted in Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, p. 11.

[176]Pingeon, *Revolutionary Era*, p. 10.

[177]Darlene Clark Hine, "Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women's History in Slavery and Freedom," in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Hine (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 225.

[178]Weiss and Weiss, *Introduction to Crime*, p. 53.

satisfy white men unconditionally. It was inconceivable that enslaved women had any real human-emotional needs and desires.[179]

The majority of black females, however, had a different view of themselveshowever. In West African society during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, women were often highly valued persons. Not only did they become spiritual diviners and such, but they were often at the center of religious philosophy. Religion revealed and affirmed everyone's place in the universe, their culture, and their relationship to humankind. Woman was "guardian of life and link between the living and the dead, between the past and the future." Hence, women were the "foundation of philosophical reflection."[180] Additionally, women served as the crux of the working force in many West African societies, and were seen as crucial (as wives and concubines) to a man's social standing.[181] Thus African women were generally highly valued individuals who became cognizant of their own self-worth--on society's terms as well as on their own terms. To be sure, many African women carried some understanding of their self-worth over to Novia-Caesarea. It must have been particularly dehumanizing for a black woman who retained a strong sense of her value in African society to be sexually exploited, or sold along with commodities like

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[179]For a good information on the negative impressions of black womanhood, see Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 35, 39-40, 140, 145, 151, 169, 174.

[180]Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional West Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 31, 36.

[181]Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), chapters 1, 2, 5, 10, 17.

a used "featherbed and bolster . . . set of bed and window curtains, a pair of rose blankets, and a rug."[182]

Given the severity and callousness of the New Jersey slavery, anger must have dominated the lives of most bondwomen. Certainly the always peaceful and trustworthy Nance became filled with rage when her babes were taken away from her. Phillis must have experienced a similar anger when she and her boys were put on the auction block, facing possible separation. The black woman at Perth Amboy was clearly beside herself, as were the aforementioned runaways. The same might be said of the black woman who John Lee put up for sale in 1782. Lee's advertisement says that his slave was "good tempered,"[183] but it would not be unreasonable to assume that she was outraged over her situation. The woman's supposedly good temper was most likely a reflection of her desire to survive oppression. This was probably true of Cane's mother as well.

The most revealing indicator of the black woman's anger towards slavery was her willful or aggressive behavior. It is a strong bet that Violet's determination was mostly a product of her contempt. In 1762 the thirty-five-year-old mulatto woman escaped from Philip Kearney of Perth Amboy. She was recaptured in 1764 at Frederick-Town in Maryland, but again managed to escape. Violet was later discovered near a ferry in Frederick County, where she had three children. Kearney was well aware of her rebelliousness: "any person who may take her up must secure her strictly, or she will

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[182]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:147.

[183]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:396.

escape again, being remarkable artful."[184] Some female slaves vented their anger and frustration through sabotage. Needless to say, their owners did not take too kindly to such destructiveness. As a case in point, in 1779 two bondwomen were killed for "endeavoring to drive off some cattle belonging to their masters."[185] A year later two slave women, "one an old one, the other about twenty-eight or thirty years of age," were put up for sale. "They are sold for no fault, but for want of a strict master," reads the advertisement,[186] implying that they were unagreeable or perhaps rebellious. Catherine appears to have antagonized her master to no end. The distraught man explained that she was a "noted liar" and even more prominent thief, adding that "to say the least, this is the fair side of her character."[187] As one can clearly see, the anger of New Jersey bondwomen ran incredibly deep, to the point where it became both feared and respected by the master class. No doubt, deceptive and villainous black women like Catherine had eventually pushed their white folk into very compromising positions.

Certainly, though, slave women who contemplated revenge or resistance took into account the very extreme New Jersey criminal code. "In those days of severe punishment," Mellick notes, "the penalty followed closely after conviction." He adds that, "At the

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[184]*Pennsylvania Gazette,* July 4, 1771, cited in Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1790* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 105.

[185]*New Jersey Gazette,* May 26, 1779.

[186]*N.J.A.*, second series, 5:154.

[187]Quoted in Schmidt, *Rural Hunterdon,* p. 252.

execution [of Negroes] all the slaves of the neighborhood were obliged to be present." For example, when the aforesaid bondman Harry was put to death for threatening the life of his master and poisoning a fellow slave, other captives were summoned to witness the event. These scenes were to "serve as an exemplary warning and a terrible example," says Mellick.[188] The witnesses must have been greatly affected by them. Norrece Jones, Jr. concurs:

> These displays had to have been a powerful inducement to pacific behavior since the slave onlookers would have experienced vicariously the suffering of their brethren and, thereby, the fearful might of their masters. Nothing was more painful psychologically than to stand by and watch as friends, loved ones, and relatives underwent such agonizing punishment.[189]

In effect, "exemplary warnings" not only curbed many New Jersey bondwomen's appetite for personal revenge or resistance of any kind, but also heightened their despair. But on the other hand, it took tremendous strength to want to survive under such cruelty and depression.

Besides being subjected to regular occurrences of white oppression, enslaved females had to withstand the chaos within their very own communities. For instance, at Hackensack in 1744, a bondman was put to death for poisoning three bondwomen and a

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[188]Mellick, *Old Farm,* 106, 107.

[189]Norrece T. Jones, Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990), p. 91.

horse.[190] Blacks in Monmouth County were subjected to one particularly sensational crime in 1760. On Christmas day of that year, a valuable servant named Caesar and a female slave were to be married. A few days prior, however, Caesar was found dead with severe burns, two broken legs, and a dislocated neck. This was all the work of a jealous suitor who used an "Old Wench" to inform him to stop visiting his love interest, or "he would not live to see Christmas."[191] Needless to say, bondwomen--young and particularly old--could have done without these senseless displays of violence: they already had enough problems in their lives. To put it differently, the everyday tensions within the black community intensified, to some degree, the black woman's oppression as female and slave. Amazingly, though, these battered women still found the strength to stand strong for their family and community--both of whom, no doubt, often failed to live up to their expectations.

In light of their wretchedness, many female slaves in New Jersey must have turned to their religious faith for inspiration and comfort.[192] Mellick says that Nance and Dick "were devout Christians and regular attendants at church."[193] Religion must have provided

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[190]Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey,* p. 39; *N.J.A.*, second series, 11:523, 537 and 12:223.

[191]*New York Weekly Post-Boy,* March 1, 1756; *New York Mercury,* February 2, 1761.

[192]For informative discussions on the importance of religion under slavery, see John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972; rev. ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 60-75; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), pp. 161-167; Bert James Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin, *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), pp. 9-12; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: "The Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 303-309, 310-311, passim.

[193]Mellick, *Old Farm,* p. 605.

Nance with the sustenance to survive in this cruel world which made her a slave and her children slaves. Certainly the moving words of song and spiritual and the powerful imagery of god helped to ease some of her pain after four of her children were eventually sold to new masters. Besides Dick, who was as powerless as she, religion was the only other source Nance could turn to for strength and endurance.

Another likely source of inspiration were free blacks. "Free black people," says Fishman, "as a living testimonial that freedom was achievable, served as a spur as well as an abettor to enslaved Black people to achieve their own freedom."[194] One person who slaves looked up to during the Revolutionary era was Sharper Veree's wife. Frances Pingeon explains that this black woman "was reported to be an inspiration to both her black and white neighbors. Her character, New Jersey Quakers wrote, 'shines with distinguished luster in the sphere of life in which she stands . . . ' "[195] Most whites did not believe that "Negroes" were worthy of such privilege and praise. Said the General Assembly in 1776: "Whereas it is found by daily Experience, that the free Negroes are an idle slothful people, and prove very often a charge to the place where they are."[196] Theophile Cazenove agreed:

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[194]Fishman, "Freedom and Equality," pp. 161, 162.

[195]Pingeon, *Revolutionary Era,* p. 8.

[196]Quoted from Samuel Allison, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton, N.J.: Isaac Collins, 1776), p. 20.

> The free negroes are quarrelsome, intemperate, lazy, and dishonest . . . You do not see one out of a hundred that makes good use of his freedom, or that can make a comfortable living, own a cow, a horse; they remain in cabins where they live miserably, barely raise some corn, but do not rise to anything, are worse off when they were slaves, although the race is open to them the same as to white people.[197]

Cazenove was clearly a very ignorant man. He never considered the fact that manumitted blacks had restrictions placed upon their mobility, and were even denied house and land ownership.[198] But in spite of such sentiment and oppressive legislation, free blacks like the Verees survived and even prospered in New Jersey, thus substantiating Fishman's argument.[199]

Another possible source of black inspiration were desperate or irrational acts of slave resistance. The most stirring was probably suicide. Even though most slaves were not about to kill themselves, or their children for that matter,[200] such displays of self-

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[197]Theophile Cazenove, *Cazenove Journal, 1794: A Record of the Journey of Theophile Cazenove Through New Jersey and Pennsylvania,* ed. Raynor W. Kelsey (Haverford: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1922), p. 8.

[198]See Wright, "New Jersey Laws," p. 171; Zilversmit, *First Emancipation,* pp. 16-18.

[199]Admittedly, though, Fishman's acknowledgment of the importance of free black inspiration is limited in its overall scope. As commented earlier, it would seem that certain whites also provided enslaved blacks with incentive to assert themselves. Surely the efforts of Abigail Goodwin (1793-1867) had a tremendous impact on the black race. Abigail was one of the early and most active white workers on the Underground Railroad. The courageous Abigail was so committed to the black freedom cause that she denied herself proper clothing so that she might have enough money with which to aid the fugitives. Indeed, she was someone the race could look up to. See William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1872), p. 617; Charles L. Blockson, *The Underground Railroad: First-Person Narratives of Escapes to Freedom in the North* (New York: Prentice-Hall Press, 1987), pp. 241-242.

[200]I found only two probable examples of infanticide in New Jersey, which suggests that the practice was especially rare there. In 1748, Bet was reported to have strangled and suffocated her daughter. She pleaded not guilty of the charges, and after a brief trial was set free. The black woman who, as mentioned earlier, ran away with the two men in Mendham in 1778, was also believed to have killed her child. For Bet's case, see Historical Records Survey of the

determination could not be easily ignored. Henry Reed found that in the 1750s two "Negresses" had committed suicide.[201] In 1770 an anonymous female slave belonging to a Mr. Congar had jumped over board his ship and drowned. Prior to taking her fatal leap, she was said to have been "disordered in her senses."[202] Of course, Congar was not about to be blamed for her plight. The disorderly behavior that he spoke of may well have been the woman telling him that she had been pushed to the edge and was about to do something about it. To put it differently, like the number of Africans who jumped over board slave vessels crossing the Middle Passage, she was probably attempting to free herself from bondage.[203]

Obviously the majority of slaves felt that suicide was a rather extreme form of resistance; as was physical retaliation of any kind, poison, sabotage, and even flight. For some, it made good sense to seek freedom through the judicial system. In 1725 Bella and Will, slaves who were liberated by terms of their former owner's will, petitioned the Provincial Council for their freedom. However, the master had not posted a surety bond and they remained enslaved.[204] Grace did not fare any better in 1785. Grace claimed her freedom on

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Works Progress Administration, *Transcriptions of the Early County Records of New Jersey, Slave Documents,* Gloucester County Series (Newark, N.J.: Historical Records Survey, 1940), pp. 49, 55. The practice of infanticide is convincingly argued against in Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?" *Journal of Southern History* 47 (1981): 510-515.

[201]Reed, "Crime and Punishment," p. 313.

[202]*N.J.A.,* first series, 8:247.

[203]For examples of suicide aboard slave ships, see Donnan, *Documents,* 1:403; 2:359.

[204]*N.J.A.,* second series, 14:284-286.

the ground that when she was sold to Thomas Kerlin, he convented that if she gave him ten years of service without bearing any children, at the end of the said term, he would liberate her. She had an illegitimate child four years after the purchase. Kerlin sold her, and within ten years, she had more babies. The court ruled that since Grace was sold to her new master with this stipulation "in her favor" she had to consent to it.[205]

This case is most intriguing indeed. No doubt, Grace wanted to be free. Kerlin provided her with a way out, but it would cost her ten long years of service and no children of her own. Certainly Grace was not at all pleased with Kerlin's ability to control her life. This would explain why she kept having children, although it was not in her best interest to do so. To say that Grace did not understand the terms of her slavery is to imply that she was unintelligent. So Grace may well have gone to trial knowing the full extent of her actions, but felt that she could somehow appeal to the court's sensitivity and manipulate her way out of bondage.

Native Americans did not fare any better than blacks in court. The New Jersey laws placed Algonkins on the same footing as Africans. The 1797 case of the Native American woman named Rose sustains this view. Rose claimed that she was not a slave. It was proved that her mother, also Native American, had been purchased as a slave and died as one. Chief Justice Kinsley, delivering the opinion of the court, stated:

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[205]A. Q. Keasby, "Slavery in New Jersey" *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society,* Third Series 5 (1906-1907): 20.

> They [Native Americans] have been so long recognized as slaves in our law, that it would be as great a violation of the rights of property to establish a contrary doctrine at the present day, as it would be in the case of Africans; and unless to investigate the manner in which they originally lost their freedom.[206]

It was decided that Rose's enslavement had been sufficiently proved, and she was therefore remanded to the custody of the master. Another Native American woman argued in 1773 that, "she and her children were free from a master's claim." She took this stand when her owner forced her to go to Philadelphia. Abolitionists there assisted her in filing a freedom suit which, in 1775, also proved unsuccessful.[207]

On the other hand, a few slaves did receive favorable decisions in court. For example, in 1775 in Burlington County, a slave named Beulah claimed "she was free by manumission by will, even without surety bond." The bondwoman won her case.[208] Rather than just accepting what she believed was unjust, Beulah took direct action against white supremacy. The same might also be said for Grace and other black females who took their masters to court. To be sure, the master class took great offense to slaves who used the white man's laws to challenge their ownership. Obviously some enslaved females were devastated by unfavorable court decisions. Even so, it seems very unlikely that they gave up on freedom--they did other things to

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[206]Quoted from Keasby, "Slavery in New Jersey," p. 80. See also Cooley, *Slavery in New Jersey*, pp. 12, 13.

[207]Fishman, "Freedom and Equality," p. 163.

[208]Ibid., pp. 163, 164.

either bring or add quality to their lives. We might speculate that, had Beulah lost her case, she would have done the same thing. In short, when one plan for freedom failed, slave women employed something else.

In her illuminating narrative, Sylvia Dubois gives reference to another slave woman who eventually used the law to alleviate her suffering--her mother, Dorcas Compton. Sylvia and her parents labored as slaves in Somerset. She explains that her father Cuffee was owned by John Baird, while Dorcas belonged to Richard Compton. Cuffee was a veteran in the American Revolution, serving as a fifer in the Battle of Princeton.[209] Bert Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin point out that, "If loyal service to his country gave him freedom, it is not certain, but he did nothing to extricate his wife and child from bondage."[210] Consequently, Dorcas had to survive amidst a cruel and hostile master on her own.

Dorcas was "ambitious to be free." On three different occasions did she attempt to "buy her time" through mortgaging herself against a loan.[211] A question which immediately comes to mind is why did Dorcas choose this exasperating process over flight? Perhaps Dorcas felt that her children would weigh her down.[212] Like most bonded females, Dorcas was probably against leaving her children behind. Quite possibly, she feared the consequences of recapture. Even more

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[209]C.W. Larison, *Sylvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom* (Ringos, N.J.: C.W. Larison, 1883); reprint, Edited and with a translation and introduction by Jared C. Lobdell (New York: The Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 53-54.

[210]Lowenberg and Bogin, *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life,* p. 40.

[211]Larison, p. 54.

[212]Sylvia does not indicate how many children Dorcas had.

reasonable is that Dorcas believed running away was not how "Negroes" should handle such matters. The determined but seemingly mindful woman may have thought that buying her time was the more sensible, more dignified route to go.

However, Dorcas was always unable to meet the payments as they accrued; thus she became her creditor's slave. Dorcas was initially claimed by Minical Dubois, but he never had any intentions of providing for her and her children. So Minical decided to treat Dorcas cruelly. For example,

> on one occasion, when her babe was but three days old, he whipped her with an ox-goad, because she didn't hold a hog while he yoked it. It was March; the ground was wet and slippery, and the hog proved too strong for her under the circumstances. From the exposure and the whipping she became severely sick with perpetual fever. But after a long while she recovered.[213]

After her health returned, Dorcas decided to take action against Minical. Apparently she knew exactly what privilege and protection was afforded her, for Sylvia explains that according to the New Jersey slave laws, "when the slave thought the master too severe, and the slave and master did not get along harmoniously, the slave had the right to hunt a new master."[214] This is exactly what Dorcas did, even at the cost of being separated from her children. Again, it is doubtful that Dorcas ever wanted to be away from her babes. But

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[213]Larison, *Sylvia,* p. 54.

[214]Ibid., p. 129. This practice, however, was never mandated by New Jersey law. Zilversmit, *First Emancipation,* p. 29.

Minical's violence left her with no other choice: she had to take a stand.

Dorcas was eventually sold to a much kinder master named William Baird who, according to Sylvia, "used to send things for her and her children to eat when Dubois neglected or refused to furnish enough to satisfy their craving stomachs."[215] Basically, Dorcas told Minical that though a slave, she was also a human being and was therefore deserving of humane treatment. He was probably taken aback by her indignation.

Dorcas's undaunted will to be free must have influenced Sylvia to remain strong under white supremacy. When about five years old, Sylvia moved with her owners to a farm in Flagtown, Hunterdon County. As a child she was not unaccustomed to punishment. However, she claims that "only my mistress was terribly cross to me. I did not like her and she did not like me, so she used to beat me badly."[216]

Despite the constant abuse young Sylvia received from her mistress, she does not appear to have started running away until her adult years. Though enslaved children were prone to take flight, their naiveté greatly increased their chances of being recaptured. Moreover, flight was a very dangerous venture which many youngsters--no matter how much they were abused--were not prepared for either physically or psychologically. This was probably also true of Sylvia. Fear of her owners may also explain her failure to take advantage of Hunterdon's attributes: its location right off

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[215]Larison, p. 54.

[216]Ibid., p. 55.

the Delaware River, and its plenitude of natural resources like Sourland Mountain and the South Branch of the Raritan River.

At the age of fourteen, Sylvia and her owners relocated to a farm near the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. Minical also ran a tavern by a ferry on the river. Sylvia was still being beaten by the awful mistress, but she had developed into a powerful young woman, and her physical attributes enabled her to endure the woman's behavior. The situation between the two females usually intensified when Minical was away because of grand jury duty. During one of his absences, the mistress had ordered Sylvia to scrub the barroom. But feeling a bit down that day, the bondwoman was in no particular mood to work. The highly displeased mistress then scolded her. Sylvia made a disrespectful comment, and immediately received a sharp blow from the back of the woman's hand. Like Dorcas, Sylvia was forced to take a stand:

> Thinks I, it's a good time now to dress you out, and damned if I won't do it. I set down my tools and squared for a fight. The first whack, I struck her a hell of a blow with my fist. I didn't knock her entirely through the panels of the door, but her landing against the door made a terrible smash . . . [thought] I killed the old devil.[217]

Needless to say, Sylvia was being a bit dramatic. Still, a serious fight may have occurred between the two women, and it resulted from a rage that had swelled in Sylvia over time. There is more to consider about this confrontation. Obviously Sylvia knew full well who she could and could not confront. As Fox-Genovese explains,

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[217]Ibid., pp. 55, 64, 65, 66.

> Slave women, well understanding the limits of the mistress's power, not surprisingly tested it. Gender ascribed white and black women to a common sphere within the household, even as class and race separated them.[218]

Perhaps, then, as Sylvia became older, she realized that the mistress was as powerless as she and decided that when the time was right, she would go after her. In a real sense a direct confrontation with the mistress was the only way a female slave could get some peace of mind.

Sylvia maintains that after her violent attack she left for Chenago, New York, and found work. But when Minical sent for her, she quietly went back to him. Her reasoning: "I had to go. I was a slave, and if I didn't go, he would have brought me, and in a hurry too. In those days the masters made the niggers mind, and when he spoke I knew I must obey."[219] Sylvia had two diametrically opposed personalities. On the one hand, she was strong and outrageous; on the other, she was a timid woman who was very fearful of white superiority. To be sure, Sylvia was not the only bondwoman who possessed this "double-personality"--survival greatly depended upon it.

Fortunately for Sylvia, Minical understood the tension between her and his wife. He promised to free Sylvia and her child only if they went to New Jersey and stayed there. Sylvia immediately headed for Flagtown in search of her mother. Upon her arrival, she

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[218]Fox-Genovese, *Plantation Household,* p. 142.

[219]Larison, *Sylvia,* p. 66.

was approached by a white man who inquired "Whose nigger are you?" Sylvia retorted: "I'm no man's nigger--I belong to God--I belong to no man . . . I'm free."[220] From then on, Sylvia, like so many other free black persons in New Jersey, would live her life trying to enlarge the meaning of freedom.

Just because a slave woman remained with her owner and served him faithfully, we should not automatically assume that she was devoid of any kind of rebellious consciousness. In a slave society which was as oppressive and chaotic as New Jersey's, even the most accommodating of slave women could not afford to be without it. Sometimes survival meant staying put and taking some abuse. It also meant asserting oneself in the owner's household and fighting back. In short, New Jersey bondwomen, like their female counterparts elsewhere, did what they thought was necessary to survive another day. Consequently, they were able to help sustain not only themselves, but also their families and their race.

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[220]Ibid., pp. 66, 69.

Epilogue

The only useful way to the pieces of information regarding the experiences of slave women in New Jersey and elsewhere is to present different types of inquiry. This is what has been done in this essay. At a time when black women in this country are receiving some serious scholarly attention, female slaves in New Jersey have gone unnoticed. I saw there was a need to be fulfilled and thus attempted to make a contribution. From the outset of their forced servitude, black women fought against and were determined to survive the province's hostile slave regime. One of the ways black females demonstrated their opposition to slavery was to take flight. I focused on more than the scant information presented in fugitive advertisements, the only set of slave narratives available for New Jersey. By also looking at the important roles of geography and demographics, I was able to make some strong assertions why my female subjects ran away by themselves or in other company, the topographic resources which aided their escape, and where they possibly relocated. In a real sense this methodology has shed some new light on female slave flight. The other chapters demonstrated that New Jersey slave women were more than active participants in the struggles for freedom and survival.

Admittedly, I did not intend on doing an examination specifically on New Jersey's bondwomen. Though my intent was to do

a project on the black people there, I did not know exactly where or during which time period. After being introduced first to Clement Price's informative book, and later to George Fishman's and Graham Hodges's excellent accounts, I was compelled to do a case study on slavery in New Jersey. Subsequently, I went searching for testimonials of former New Jersey slaves, an element which would have undoubtedly strengthened the valuable studies previously mentioned. That is, I was interested in finding interviews conducted by the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) for New Jersey.

Like Gerald Mullin, Peter Wood, and other notable scholars of slavery in the United States, I wanted my project to center around the slave voice. In my search for that voice I journeyed to several notable libraries in New Jersey as well as to the Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. To my surprise, none of the personnel at these institutions had ever heard of a compilation of W.P.A. interviews for New Jersey. I then realized why the black voice in most New Jersey slave studies is so passive. Needless to say, I was very disappointed and equally discouraged.

How I thought, could I make an important contribution without slave narratives? There was Sylvia Dubois's testimony but it obviously was not enough. The subject of runaway slaves had always interested me, and in the *New Jersey State Archives* are numerous examples of blacks who had taken flight. After having found several interesting examples of female runaways there and in other sources, it became clear to me that Price, Fishman, Hodges, and Edgar McManus had basically ignored their activity. Eventually, I

discovered several other examples of black female day-to-day resistance to slavery. Even so, I was still not convinced to concentrate specifically on female slave resistance. I decided to focus on slave resistance and survival, but black males would receive the bulk of the attention.

I soon realize, however, that slave resistance was not unique to Novia-Ceasarea. I had to discuss slave resistance in a meaningful way. Thankfully, I have had the opportunity to attend class with some fine historians--namely, Professors Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, David Barry Gaspar, and Harry Reed. Because of their wisdom and encouragement, I found the need to focus primarily on slave women's resistance in New Jersey. Given that few historians have given slave women anywhere full attention, this topic provided me the opportunity to do something that the historiography desperately needed.

But something was still missing. For a graduate seminar in the spring of 1993, I wrote a paper which attempted to compare slave resistance in Jamaica and New Jersey. One of my principle arguments was that Jamaica's tremendous topography and high slave to white population, made running away a more attractive endeavor for the black females there. Indeed, I found out how difficult it is to do successful comparative analysis. But I never abandoned the idea that geography and demographics were viewed by slaves wanting to leave as being very important.

After examining New Jersey's geography more closely, I realized I had belittled its impact in the comparative essay. New Jersey is extremely diverse physiographically; moreover, it is

situated between the asylums of New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. While some female slaves did not have much opportunity to find suitable running mates, none in the province's four but distinct regions were without some very valuable topographic allies.

Certainly, though, slave women were well aware that flight was a dangerous affair, that minimal contact with life outside their master's farm or plantation was a serious liability. Thus, it is only reasonable to conclude that most females did not runaway in haste. They sought out or wished for running mates--male or female, black, white, or brown--who had some knowledge of both the local and neighboring landscapes. Successful flight largely depended upon this knowledge base. We might assume that most black females thought along such lines because many fugitive advertisements describe them as rather intelligent persons. Would any slave woman--who did not have much knowledge of the outside world--put herself in a dangerous situation without some serious contemplation or planning? Would any slave woman blindly take to the unsuspecting woods or mountains with their child?

For numerous reasons, then, the issue of demographics is a very important one: it provides us with some strong understanding of what Nanny, Hagar, Bet, and other female fugitives were up against. But though many bondwomen did not live around potential running mates, they still wanted to be free. No doubt, the majority of bondwomen lived rather empty and suffocating lives. So they took off to Kittatiny Mountain, the Long Hills, the Great Swamp, and into the dense pine woodlands. They were prepared and intelligent, two strong indications that they were cognizant of what was before

them and where they had to go for shelter, food, and protection. Many slave women did not know these things, but these conscientious persons probably did.

Instead of concentrating on only one place such as Hardwick, it is more valuable to understand that particular region in some detail. This method enables us to better understand the full range of possibilities that were afforded the runaways; it also allows us to examine flight comparatively. As I am a native New Jerseyan, I have had the opportunity to see these diverse landscapes up close. Though their appearances today are very different from what they were during the colonial and revolutionary eras, one can still see that Bet in Burlington County did not have access to the same kinds of topographic resources as did Nanny over in Sussex.

But not all bondpeople were willing to take on the dangerous Valley and Highlands, or Coastal Plain for that matter. This was not necessarily because they were afraid of these spectacular and dangerous landscapes. For many slaves, their little communities was all they knew, where all their associations--black, white, and indigen--were established. Andrew Mellick and Sylvia Dubois both attest to the grand times that slaves had at holiday functions and dances. These occasions were important, so much that people obviously had a difficult time removing themselves. Thus, it is important that we examine the constraints which possibly affected the behavior of women like Nance, Sarah, Grace, Dorcas Compton, Sylvia Dubois, and Cane's mother. Were they merely "Toms" or "Sambos," or were these women fighting for their lives in a society that it made it a point to oppress and even destroy? These seemingly

complacent women--some of which sought freedom through the court system and who imposed their will in the domestic arena--were just as heroic as their counterparts who stole, physically fought black, and took off into the wild.

Though we may never know exactly where female slaves ran off to, or why they ran away by themselves, it is clear that they attempted to go somewhere safe and far away from oppression. And though we may never know exactly why that bondwoman in Burlington County was so compelled to save someone who kept her in bondage, it is certain that she had a plan in mind, which was based on basic survival. As such, she and all those other enduring slave women in New Jersey deserve both our attention and utmost respect.

I believe that this examination has proven that more work on enslaved black women in New Jersey is desperately needed. In addition to the *New Jersey Archives* and old newspapers, fruitful avenues for further investigation are tax ratables, wills, genealogies, jail and county records, church documents, court cases, the numerous historical societies in the state, and records pertaining to the Quakers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In regards to the latter, I recommend the archival materials found at the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College. A thorough probing of these materials will undoubtedly build on this project and others concerned with providing black people, particularly the women, with a louder historical voice. Hopefully, people seeking to better understand issues of survival and consciousness will see my work as a useful resource. There is no doubt in my mind that it is.

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