"AIN'T NO ACCOUNT": ISSUES OF MANHOOD AND RESISTANCE AMONG EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SLAVES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE PERTAINING TO CENTRAL NEW JERSEY

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

2003

ABSTRACT

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Since the 1890s, "Negro" bondage in eighteenth-century New Jersey has been accorded seemingly endless attention from scholars and historians interested primarily in the manumission movement and the legal system which repressed black peoples. Despite the recent profusion of scholarship on this group of northern captives (and free blacks), important lacuna remain in our knowledge about the lives of these largely mute and faceless persons, particularly in how bondsmen constructed or achieved masculinity. To put it differently, we are still lacking in our understanding as regards slaves' sense of identity and modes of day-to-day survival with respect to gender.

These gaps in the historical literature are related directly to the paucity of useful testimonials, by blacks and whites alike, explicating the experiences of former New Jersey bondspeople who had neither the educational skills nor economic resources to have their lives recorded, and whose perseverance under slavery was dismissed by the local white folk. As a one time New Jersey slave woman bitterly commented in the late nineteenth century, whites tend to believe that blacks have no history. It is imperative, therefore, that scholars and historians interested in analyzing the human depths of this obscure segment of New Jersey's historical past utilize, creatively, sources traditionally ignored and overlooked by previous writers.

This study focuses on bondsmen (and women) in eighteenth-century Central New Jersey (i.e. Somerset County and its environs) in a novel way. Unlike the monographs on southern slavery which employ the numerous life stories and reminisces of blacks held

previously in captivity, "'Ain't no account'" is based upon two seldom used pieces of nineteenth-century literature: the 1851 *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist*, written by abolitionist William J. Allinson; and Andrew D. Mellick, Jr.'s 1889 book of local history, *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century*. Together, they form an intriguing narrative of slave life and manhood in Central Jersey from the 1740s through the 1790s. By verifying and analyzing the lives of the study's three male protagonists - Yombo (a physically lame, West African-born troublemaker of probable noble African background), Dick (a seemingly passive yet committed family man), and Quamino (a zealously pious Christian who possesses qualities of his two compatriots) - we are able to pose questions about slave manhood here that we could not otherwise. Through them, we are able to discern, albeit minimally, that captives were not passive ciphers swept away by the awesome tides of racial oppression in and around their lives. They are telling proof that the lives of bondspeople were often one of both triumph and tragedy, and comprised of complex elements of manhood.

All said, "'Ain't no account'" is an extensive intellectual conversation with two important pieces of nineteenth-century literature about three important eighteenth-century bondsmen.

In memory of Harold G. Marcus - who gave me the chance to become a scholar

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the course of this project I have been fortunate to have met and been helped by many persons who believed in its value. Among the first was Susan E. Klepp. Though not affiliated with Michigan State University, she enthusiastically read my 1995 M.A. thesis focusing on the resistance of New Jersey slave women, helped me to get my paper on female captive Nance Melick published in a prestigious journal in 1998, and commented on several drafts of chapters in "'Ain't no account.'" More than any other professional scholar, Dr. Klepp instilled in me that my work would make an important contribution to the academy. For this I am forever grateful.

My dissertation advisor, Harry Reed, was helpful, encouraging, and above all, a friend - on and off "the court." The other members of my committee - Professors Darlene Clark Hine, David Bailey, Laurent Dubois, and Stephen Esquith - assisted me in significant ways as well. Like Dr. Reed, Professors Hine and Bailey, and to a lesser extent Dubois, have been long-time supporters of my research interests. Moreover, Dr. Hine allowed me to serve as a research assistant for the 1999 anthology of black manhood in America she co-edited with Earnestine Jenkins. Needless to say, this experience had a major impact on the manifestation of "'Ain't no account.'" The same can also be said of the numerous discussions I had with Dr. Bailey over the years about American slavery. I am pleased to see the chats pertaining to geography and fugitive slaves, and the middle passage appear in print. Before becoming an official committee member, Dr. Dubois graciously critiqued a number of drafts on one of my subjects which was rejected by a certain American history journal, and which he reassured me was on the right track nonetheless.

I am also thankful for the kindness shown me by Keely Stauter-Halsted, James C. Scott, and Pero Dagbovie. Dr. Stauter-Halsted is not an American historian, and yet she gave a close reading to one of the chapters which she compared to the work of Natalie Zemon-Davis. To be sure, such high praise went a long way for a graduate student who

was unsure as to whether his analysis was convincing enough. Dr. Scott also read a certain chapter, offering both approbation and useful advice. Dr. Dagbovie, my friend, eagerly read the entire manuscript and provided numerous helpful comments and suggestions.

A special thanks to Fred Sisser, III, who provided me with a wealth of primary sources I would not have found otherwise, tracked down numerous leads, and decoded the last name of one of my subjects. I would also like to acknowledge William "Buzzy" Hundley for his help and encouragement, and the archivists at the New Jersey State Library and Archives at Trenton for their professionalism and good cheer.

The lack of financial support and recognition within the academy were constant sources of frustration. I am greatly indebted to the New Jersey Historical Commission at Trenton and The Graduate School at Michigan State University for providing funds for the research and writing of this dissertation. Having my essay on Nance Melick published in *Slavery and Abolition* (December 1998) was one of the high points of my graduate career. A warm thanks to the editors for this honor, and allowing me to reproduce the piece.

I was very fortunate to have great friends in Meredith L. Roman, Jesse Edwards, Frank Spooner, Jason Rogers, and Eric Duke. Despite having her own pressing graduate work to do, Meredith read and commented on the full manuscript more times than I can remember (which sometimes led to heated debates between us), and did a thousand other good deeds too precious for me to share; but enabled me to just think and write. She was my own private resource center and a wellspring of compassion, love, and wisdom during the most dismal period of my life. I could not have asked for a better companion. Jesse and Frank, both of whom hold doctorate degrees, were always forthcoming with words of sympathy and encouragement. In addition, without my asking, Jesse would generously help out my empty pockets. Though Jason is my oldest friend in terms of time, I did not always treat him as such. He was "my boy" even when I was too busy or too selfish to be

his. A fellow graduate student, Eric was constantly willing to listen to me talk about my work and have a cocktail with Meredith and I.

Last but not least, to my family I extend deep feelings of gratitude. Many thanks to Donald G. Bray - my surrogate father - who will never know how much it meant to me knowing that I could turn to him at anytime for anything. Words cannot adequately express my appreciation to mother, Peggie O. Bellamy, and brother, Troy E. Marshall, for the support they have given me through the years. In particular Miss Peggie made it her business to stick with me through this "peculiar" experience which has not only robbed us of precious time together, but also led to misunderstandings. I can say with pride that I always had "a mother" while in graduate school.

I dedicate this project to the memory of Harold G. Marcus, who gave a mediocre student from a small college in New Jersey the opportunity to do graduate work at a Big Ten university. I was told that Dr. Marcus had "a feeling about me." I hope that "'Ain't no account'" shows he was right.

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Upon being asked by Hunterdon County, New Jersey, resident Dr. Cornelius Wilson Larison on January 27, 1883, if he could record and possibly publish her life story which was then part of local legend, Silvia Dubois (c.1788-c.1889), a free black woman who currently lived and had been initially enslaved in the Somerset-Hunterdon area, retorted:

> Most of folks think that niggers ain't no account, but if you think what I tell you is worth publishing, I will be glad if you do it. 'T won't do me no good, but maybe 't will somebody else. I've lived a good while, and have seen a good deal, and if I should tell you all I've seen, it would make the hair stand up all over your head.[1]

The profundity of Dubois's ardent response to this professional white man's request is unmistakable. Despite the fact that by 1800, New Jersey's slave population was larger than that of any other northern state save New York, blacks previously held as captives in the Jersey province are virtually mute.[2] Out of fear of creating discontent among

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[1] Jared C. Lobdell, ed., *Silvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*, by C. W. Larison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; orig. pub. 1883), pp. 1-12, 20, 49, 51 (quotation). According to one contemporary account, Silvia Dubois "became famed for her feats of strength and the prize-fights in which she engaged. She boasted that she was never beaten, and had knocked out scores of the strongest men . . . Her fondness for fighting, for liquor, and her profanity soon made her notorious"; ibid., p. 119.

[2] For a collection of the relevant censuses, see Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), Appendix (pp. 199-214). On slave demography in New Jersey, 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), pp. 195, 290-295. For census data on black New Jerseyans from 1790 to 1870 (when there are no slaves recorded for New Jersey), see Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1988), Appendix 4 (pp. 81-87).

bondspeople, southern whites deliberately denied the majority of slaves literacy skills by enacting stringent state laws and local ordinances which forbade their instruction in reading and writing. Many northern whites, lacking such legislative weaponry but equally aware that literacy stimulated black ambition, also deprived captives of education.[3] Black people in freedom from the revolutionary through the antebellum periods confronted two similarly devastating modes of white paranoia and/or domination - institutionalized segregation and discrimination. These obstacles likewise inhibited many African Americans from receiving an education and, by extension, from recording their personal histories under slavery.[4]

This is not to say that former slaves are completely speechless about their bondage. Indeed, in exploring and reconstructing the lives of southern bondspeople, historians most frequently utilize the seemingly countless autobiographies of former captives (slave narratives) and the even more numerous interviews of ex-bondswomen and -men.[5] By

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[3] On antebellum white opposition to the educating of slaves, see especially C. G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York: Arno, 1968; orig. pub. 1919), ch. 7. The modest literacy of northern slaves and the movement to have them educated is discussed in Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 24-28, 159, 188-189. For an exploration of these themes on the state level in New Jersey, see Marion M. Thompson Wright, *The Education of Negroes in New Jersey* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College of Columbia University, 1941), pp. 20-21, 23-25, 34, 56, 63, 71-76, and Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1997), pp. 60, 61, 70, 71, 116, 156.

[4] See Woodson, *Education of the Negro*, pp. 159-169; Wright, *Negroes in New Jersey*, esp. pp. 34-35, 49-50; John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (New York: Norton, 1971; orig. pub. 1943), pp. 165-174; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), ch. 1; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 106-115; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), pp. 76-78, 285-286; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), pp. 70-76; Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 150, 161-167; and Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 22, 208-209, 269-270.

[5] See the "Bibliographical Essay" in Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), pp. 258-259.

contrast, a paucity of useful published sources exist in which African Americans discuss their lives in the context of northern bondage.[6] Historians have thus relied upon eighteenth-century white records, often with very limited information pertaining to slaves. These include wills and deeds, newspaper advertisements for the sale of slaves and recapture of fugitives, census reports, law books, tax records, slave manifests, writings of observers, and court and manumission records. But even the possibility of using these invaluable records collectively may yield only a shadowy sketch of bondspeople north of the Mason-Dixon line.

It is time that scholars of northern slavery examine two seldom used yet critical sources: the 1851 *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist*, written by New Jersey Quaker and abolitionist William J. Allinson (1810-1874); and the comprehensive 1889 account of local family history, *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century*, the author of which, Andrew D. Mellick, Jr. (1844-1895), was an invalid.[7] This study uses these pieces of nineteenth-century literature to elucidate the lives of bondspeople in Central New Jersey (i.e. Somerset County and its environs particularly

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[6] See the "Bibliography" in Stanley Feldstein, *Once a Slave: The Slaves' View of Slavery* (New York: W. Morrow, 1971), pp. 305-314.

[7] William J. Allinson, *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist* (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1851). Book copies of Quamino Buccau's memoir are extremely rare. The only known copy to the author's knowledge is located at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, N.Y. The author initially found the *Memoir* on microfilm in Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. See also the following website designed by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries: http://docsouth.unc.edu/ neh/ allinson/allinson.html. Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889). On the lives of William Allinson and Andrew Mellick, see, respectively, William Nelson, *New Jersey Biographical and Genealogical Notes* (Baltimore, Md.: Clearfield, 1992; orig. pub. 1916), pp. 10-11, and A. Van Doren Honeyman, "The Author of 'The Story of an Old Farm,'" *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (January 1912): 23-34. While on a business trip in New Mexico in 1882, Mellick was thrown from a pony which resulted in a gradual paralysis that eventually killed him. Had it not been for this unfortunate accident, Mellick probably would not have produced *The Story of an old Farm*, which he dictated to his unmarried sister Abigail.

in Hunterdon and Middlesex counties), which constituted a major enslaving area in the Middle Atlantic region during the eighteenth century.[8]

"'Ain't no account'" concerns itself with the ways in which the captives Yombo (c.1739-c.1819), Dick (b. around 1768), and Quamino (1762-1850) attempted to achieve manhood or masculinity.[9] They suggest that though manhood among bondsmen consisted of, in varying degrees, at least five distinct but interrelated elements - 1) pride, 2) self-control, 3) calculated self-assertion, 4) family responsibility, and 5) religious faith - not all enslaved males perceived themselves as men in the exact same manner. In other words, slave manhood was multifaceted and complex, and rooted in the willingness of bondsmen to survive oppression by any means necessary, including compromising their masculine principles for the sake of their families' safety. Yombo, Dick, and Quamino - in their own way - testify that slave manhood was characterized by a range of masculine resistance.[10]

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[8] This definition of Central Jersey reflects those locales where the study's three main protagonists were largely enslaved.

[9] According to Andrew Mellick in *The Story of an Old Farm*, Yombo was seventy years old upon the death of his Bedminster, Somerset County owner, Aaron Malick, in 1809. Hence, Yombo was born around 1739. Yombo died "several years" after his 1809 departure from Bedminster. It is plausible that he deceased around 1819, that is, ten years after his relocation to Elizabethtown in Essex County, New Jersey (pp. 608, 611-612). Dick arrived at Aaron Malick's Bedminster farmstead in 1798 with his wife and three children, the oldest of whom was seven years old. Surely, Dick was not much older than thirty in 1798, which would place his birth around 1768 (pp. 604, 605).
William Allinson indicates that Quamino was born near Brunswick, New Jersey, in February 1762 and died in Burlington County, New Jersey, in November 1850. These dates appear to be accurate. The 1850 census again places Quamino's birth in 1762, noting that he was eighty-eight years old. Similarly, according to Burlington County death records for the period 1848-1867, Quamino died on October 30, 1850, at the age of eighty-seven - hence he was born in 1763. See Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 2, 28-29; U.S. Federal Census (MS), 1850, for City of Burlington in Burlington County, New Jersey (copy at Library of Michigan, Lansing); and New Jersey Vital Statistics, Vol. C. (1848-1878): Burlington County Deaths (1848-1867), p. 399, New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Archives Section, Trenton (hereafter New Jersey State Archives).

[10] For the basis of this perspective, see Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity*, vol. 1 *"Manhood Rights": The Construction of Black Male History and Manhood, 1750-1870* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 1-58. The author would like to thank Darlene Clark Hine for providing him with a personal copy of this seminal volume.

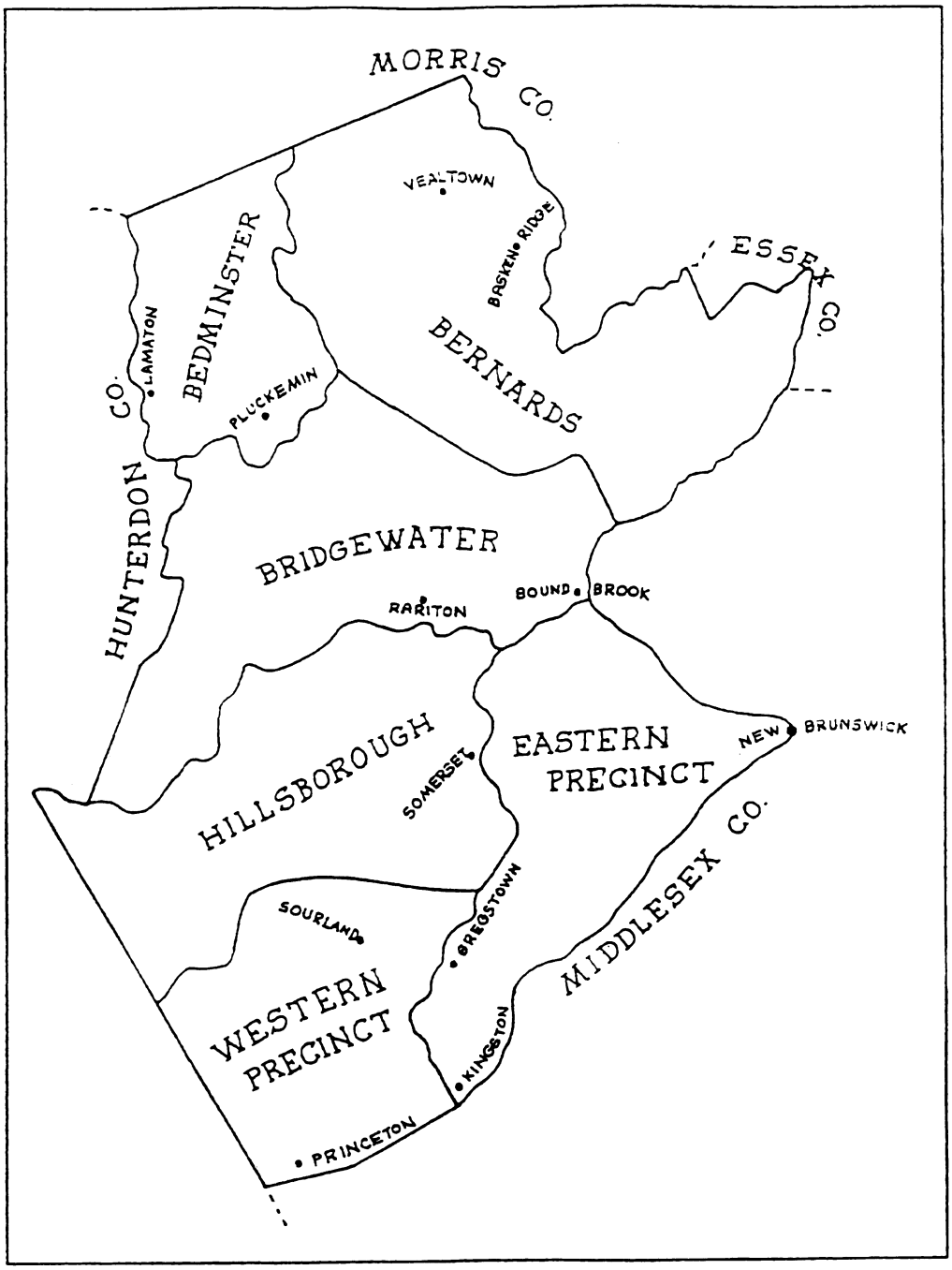

Figure 1. Map of Somerset County in 1790, by Fred Sisser, III.

This dissertation is part of an emergent body of work that focuses on slave manhood. Daniel Black, in his 1997 study *Dismantling Black Manhood*, examines the issue through a host of first-person accounts of black men formerly held as captives in the United States.[11] Like "'Ain't no account,'" *Dismantling Black Manhood* approaches the lives of enslaved males from an historical and literary perspective. But whereas Black focuses mainly on the ways in which the enslavement process made it nearly impossible for black men to exercise manhood as warriors, husbands, and fathers (the concept of manhood in pre-colonial West Africa), I present their quest for manhood status in less pessimistic terms, though always bearing in mind the difficulties of their endeavor. More to the point, "'Ain't no account'" attempts to understand how some black men were able to achieve manhood despite white oppression. For Yombo, Dick, and Quamino manhood was an empowering, enriching force in their lives which was not entirely political. That is, manhood enhanced their sense of personhood - how they saw themselves as human beings.

Both "'Ain't no account'" and *Dismantling Black Manhood* are the beneficiaries of the rich scholarly discourse on enslaved males in the United States. In his controversial 1959 book *Slavery*, Stanley Elkins argued that the especially repressive system of slavery here created a "Sambo" personality in blacks. That is, the complete authority which slaveholders possessed negated alternative social bases and standards for captives, thereby reducing them to a state of childlike dependency. Elkins, in short, depicted this personality deforming bondage as emasculating black men.[12] During the 1970s, a coterie of now

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[11] Daniel P. Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery* (New York: Garland, 1997). See also Hine and Jenkins, *Question of Manhood*, passim.

[12] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968; orig. pub. 1959), pp. 81-89. Even prior to Stanley Elkins, there were scholars who maintained that bondspeople were essentially docile and thereby content with slavery. See especially Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor As Determined by the Plantation Regime* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969; orig. pub. 1918), pp. 341-342. Those works which initially contested this interpretation included:

distinguished historians countered Elkins, both directly and indirectly, by demonstrating that southern bondsmen exercised their masculinity in courtship, work, providing for and protecting slave women and children, naming offspring, and in overt and subtle forms of resistance.[13] As a result of this pathbreaking literature, it is now generally accepted within the scholarly community that male slaves were the possessors of manhood. According to Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, "Slavery generated a response in black men that can at best be described as 'resistant masculinity,'" adding that, "American manhood has always been contested ground, and the ground on which black men were forced to assert their masculine identity was slavery."[14]

Despite the recent interest among some historians as regards black men, enslaved and free alike, living in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century North, significant

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Joseph Cephas Carroll, *Slave Insurrections in the United States, 1800-1865* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968; orig. pub. 1938); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1969; orig. pub. 1943); and Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1989; orig. pub. 1956), ch. 3.

[13] On male courtship, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1972), pp. 156-161. On the status of male occupations, see Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 141. On men providing for women and children, see Blassingame, *Slave Community*, p. 92, and Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 486. On male protection and the naming of offspring, see Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), pp. 188-191, 385-387. See also Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 422-423, 484-486, 491, regarding the protection of women. A great deal has been written on male resistance. See, for example, Blassingame, *Slave Community*, p. 284, passim; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 491, passim; Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 145-147, passim; Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 75-91; and George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972), pp. 95-119. For a good selection of the critics of Stanley Elkins's "Sambo" thesis, see Ann J. Lane, ed., *The Debate Over "Slavery": Stanley Elkins and His Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 23-75, 245-268.

[14] Hine and Jenkins, *Question of Manhood*, p. 1.

lacunae remain in our knowledge of their lives or "masculinities."[15] It is useful, therefore, to recognize the importance of William Allinson's and Andrew Mellick's writings. Unlike many former northern slaves, Quamino's intriguing personal history was recorded for posterity - often in his own words - in a thirty-page memoir. Seven pages discuss his bondage in Central Jersey and upstate New York which was characterized by familial instability and personal conflicts with his male owners.[16] Mellick, in his dense history of early Somerset County, devotes ten illuminating pages to the slaves Nance, Dick, and Yombo who belonged to his great-grandfather, Aaron Malick, a prosperous tanner and landowner. Mellick essentially characterizes Yombo as a physically lame, West African-born troublemaker of probable noble African background, whom his ancestor had to periodically bring-in-line. By contrast, Mellick depicts Nance and Dick as respectable, God-fearing, faithful slaves who adopted the cultural values of their owners.[17]

In a way, Mellick presents us with two images of black manhood. Yombo represents a form of manhood grounded in obstinacy and pride in one's African ancestry, whereas Dick represents a passive type of manhood exercised mainly through one's family relations. To put it differently, Yombo is portrayed by Mellick as the "bad nigger" version of black manhood, and Dick as the "house nigger" version. In African-American culture, the "bad nigger" is a heroic person who refuses to be docile or rejects the social norms of oppression imposed by the dominant culture. The "house nigger" is the individual who has extensive contact with whites, and *seems* to be more loyal to them than to his/her black compatriots.[18] If Dick is representative of the "house nigger," he was highly self-

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[15] See the essays found in ibid., pp. 61-81, 165-202, 252-273, 274-301; see also, pp. 354-381, 382-398. The term "masculinities" is discussed in Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 5.

[16] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 4-11.

[17] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-612.

[18] For succinct definitions, see Clarence Major, ed., *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang* (New York: Penguin, 1994; orig. pub. 1970), pp. 17, 244. For a sampling of additional sources that illuminate these descriptions, see Genovese, *Roll,*

controlled and, by implication, highly deceptive. Quamino, who is presented by William Allinson as a black saint who has Jesus as an ally against the evils of slavery, falls somewhere in between them.

II

Of the two works under discussion, Andrew Mellick's *The Story of an Old Farm* is by far the most well-known. Not only did it achieve international acclaim upon initial publication in 1889, but has been used often by scholars attempting to demonstrate, in varying degrees, the paternalistic nature of New Jersey slavery. In particular, frequent mention is made of both Nance and Dick's joyous experiences during the Christmas season when they did little work and General Training, a holiday event centered on the drilling of the local militia.[19] The importance of *The Story of an Old Farm* was not lost on Clement Price, who has called it "a personal account which provides some interesting insights into black life under slavery in eighteenth-century New Jersey."[20] But neither Price nor any other scholar has acknowledged how Mellick's book illuminates the ways in which some New Jersey male captives saw themselves as men.

Jordan, Roll, pp. 361-365, 436-437; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, pp. 277, 319-322; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 415-420; and Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 7, 29-30.

[19] On Andrew Mellick's book, see Honeyman, "Author of 'The Story of an Old Farm,'" p. 29. Scholars who have used *The Story of an Old Farm* to argue that New Jersey slavery was essentially paternalistic include: Henry Scofield Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896), p. 57; Irving S. Kull, "Slavery in New Jersey," in *New Jersey: A History*, ed.-in-chief Irving S. Kull, 6 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, 1930-1932), 2: 729; and Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, pp. 28-31, esp. p. 30.

[20] Clement Alexander Price, ed. and comp., *Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey* (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Society, 1980), p. 318.

Perhaps because there are just a few copies of the *Memoir of Quamino Buccau* available, only Arthur Zilversmit, in his important 1967 investigation of northern slavery and abolition, and Earnest Lyght, whose study of blacks in Burlington County, New Jersey, was published in 1978, seem to have employed it to any real extent. Yet Zilversmit uses the piece merely as supplementary documentation about the harsh realities of northern bondage, and to stress the ebullience of newly emancipated African Americans. In Lyght's book, it serves simply as "an interesting story in the history of manumissions."[21] Neither author considers that one of the greatest attributes of Quamino's biography is its range of complex human emotions - sorrow, contrition, tears of gratitude, and righteous indignation - which allow us to begin to probe into the thoughts of northern bonded males. Moreover, his narrative forcibly dispels the popular belief propagated by such prominent scholars as W. E. B. Du Bois, Lorenzo Greene, Zilversmit, Winthrop Jordan, Ira Berlin, Gary Nash, and William Piersen that northern slavery, in comparison to the institution below Mason and Dixon's line, was relatively mild or benign.[22] On the other hand, it supports the more recent work of Nash and Jean Soderlund, Shane White, Susan Klepp, Graham Hodges, and Berlin (who changed his position) which stress that in very meaningful ways northern slavery was not only a heinously cruel system, but in terms of black family life (due largely

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[21] Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, pp. 21-22, 225-226; Earnest Lyght, *Path of Freedom: The Black Presence in New Jersey's Burlington County, 1659-1900* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: E. and E. Publishing House, 1978), pp. 29-31 (quotation, p. 30).

[22] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schoken, 1967; orig. pub. 1899), p. 15; Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1969; orig. pub. 1942), pp. 218-219; Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, p. 32; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 105; Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85 (February 1980): 45-54; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, p. 11; William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 146. For a critique of William Piersen's paternalism thesis in *Black Yankees*, see Robert K. Fitts, "The Landscapes of Northern Bondage," *Historical Archaeology* 30 (1996): 54-73.

to the especially high rate of turnover among holders) was probably more oppressive than its southern counterpart.[23]

Arguably, Quamino's overlooked memoir is a more reliable and hence more useful account of northern slavery than the highly celebrated book *Silvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom* (1883). Although Silvia Dubois is somewhat grateful to Cornelius Larison for expressing interest in documenting and publishing her life story, there is obviously a great deal of tension between the unlettered black woman and the professional white man. Similar to late nineteenth-century colonial literature, Larison describes his sojourn to Dubois's "mansion" (as he sarcastically puts it) on snowy Sourland Mountain as leaving his civilized white world for the backwards, dark world of this physically large and powerful woman. Not surprisingly, therefore, Larison initially perceives his fabled subject as a "dusky form," an image he never forgoes during their colloquy. Dubois may have been aware that she was the exotic, immutable object of Larison's imperial gaze because she deliberately seeks to offend Larison through her casual use of profanity, and is rather selective in what she chooses to tell him about her life. For example, Dubois withholds information about the father(s) of her children. Since both Dubois and Larison are intent on exercising authorial power during these interview sessions, it is often times difficult for the reader to differentiate between what is truth and fiction in the *Biografy*.[24] As Jared Lobdell accurately explains, "we can never be quite sure

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[23] Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 9, 27-29, 38-40, 76, 127; Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 87-93; Susan E. Klepp, "Seasoning and Society: Racial Differences in Mortality in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (July 1994): 473-506; Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 16-18, 59, 60, 122-123, 155-156, 177, 178; idem, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 17, 52-53, 63-68, 116, 179-180, 208-209; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 184-187, 188.

[24] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 35-47 (phrases, pp. 37, 39). On colonial literature, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 10-12, 30, 40-42, 119-120, 244-245. On the power

of the degree to which Sylvia is telling her interlocutor what she thought he wanted to hear, and we should remember that he had heard her stories before. His questions may have been aimed at getting from her only those particular tales (or even expressions) he wanted to hear."[25]

Though Quamino's narrative transcribed by William Allinson represents its own unique version of American captivity writing (which shall be addressed in Chapter 1), it does not contain the same heightened tension that exists between Silvia Dubois and Cornelius Larison. Not only was Allinson an important figure in the antislavery movement in New Jersey (indeed, the *Memoir* was a piece of antislavery propaganda), but also both he and Quamino were religious leaders in Burlington County (Quamino in the Methodist Episcopal Society, and Allinson in the Society of Friends). This enabled them to form an enduring mutual respect for one another. Allinson, whom Quamino refers to in the *Memoir* as his "dear friend," became part of Quamino's interracial world where he interacted relatively freely with prominent white reformers and clergymen who treated him as an equal or nearly so.[26] "During his latter years, [Quamino] was often visited by pious individuals, who were led to his abode to derive instruction, and to impart encouragement, and sometimes pecuniary aid."[27] Hence, Quamino was more open and honest with Allinson about his experiences under slavery than Silvia Dubois was with Cornelius Larison.

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struggle between Silvia Dubois and Cornelius Larison, see Michael C. Berthold, "'The peals of her terrific language': The Control of Representation in *Silvia Dubois, a Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*,'" *MELUS: Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 20 (Summer 1995): 3-14.

[25] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 19.

[26] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 14-15, 16, 19-20, 24-25, 26-27, 29 (phrase).

[27] Ibid., p. 27.

III

The relative importance of slave labor in Central Jersey merits an analysis of the male captives in the works by William Allinson and Andrew Mellick. This study focuses mainly on the late eighteenth century, and in 1790 Somerset was the second largest slaveholding county in New Jersey, having a total of 1,810 captives. Middlesex and Hunterdon counties were fourth and fifth in this regard with 1,318 and 1,301 slaves, respectively. At the height of New Jersey slavery in 1800 (when the province trailed only New York in the North with 12,422 blacks in bondage), Somerset again was second in slave population (1,863), Middlesex again fourth (1,564), and Hunterdon now sixth (1,220).[28] By 1810 if not earlier, according to Peter Wacker, "central Somerset with some adjoining townships in Hunterdon and Middlesex" represented one of the "areas of especially dense Afro-American population" in New Jersey, and where the institution of slavery continued to flourish.[29]

Despite the fact that late eighteenth-century Central Jersey was inhabited by a heterogeneous group of Europeans - English, Scotch-Irish, Dutch, French, and German - racial bondage there was associated primarily with the Dutch who - along with their slaves - came to the fertile Raritan Valley in the 1680s from New York, making it a major Dutch settlement dependent on black labor.[30] In Somerset proper, Dutch peoples, the principal landowners during the 1800s, resided primarily in the county's southern section comprised of Bridgewater and Hillsborough townships and the Eastern and the Western precincts, where lay the pastureland so crucial to the feeding of their livestock which was maintained

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[28] McManus, *Black Bondage*, Appendix (p. 214).

[29] Wacker, *Land and People*, p. 195.

[30] Ibid., pp. 133, 162 (table), 166, 189-195, 202; Frances D. Pingeon, *Blacks in the Revolutionary Era*. New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience, 14 (Trenton, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), pp. 5-6.

by their "Negroes."[31] Like most slaveowners in the New York hinterland, the majority of those in the Somerset area probably kept no more than one or two captives at a time. Whereas a few holders owned six or seven, there were fewer still who possessed twenty or more slaves.[32]

And yet New Jersey was the last northern state to enact legislation abolishing slavery, which it did in the adoption of a gradual abolition law in 1804 freeing all children born of slave women after July 4th of that year - females after twenty-two years, males after twenty-five.[33] This gradualist approach to emancipation allowed slavery to continue in New Jersey up to the Civil War. In 1850 the state had a total of 236 slaves, fifty-one of these were located in the three counties under discussion (thirty-one in Somerset, eleven in Middlesex, and nine in Hunterdon). Ten years later New Jersey's slave population had dropped to eighteen, with Somerset totaling nine slaves, Middlesex one, and Hunterdon

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[31] Steven B. Frakt, "Patterns of Slave-Holding in Somerset County, N.J." (unpublished seminar paper, Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, 1967), pp. 12-17, 21-26. Somerset County's other three townships during the early 1800s were Basking Ridge, Bedminster, and Warren. The Eastern Precinct is present-day Franklin Township, and the Western Precinct present-day Montgomery Township.

[32] On slaveholding in the New York hinterland, see White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 88-93, and Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 16-21, 155-156. According to Hubert G. Schmidt regarding slavery in Hunterdon County, "both tradition and documentary evidence show that there were a great many masters who owned one, two, or three slaves," adding that, "It is unfortunate that the abstracts of the probate records of the state do not always specify whether the various estates included slave property, but enough cases are given to indicate the small number held by most masters"; "Slavery and Attitudes on Slavery, Hunterdon County, New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 58 (July 1940): 151. Correspondingly, a 1784 ratable turned census for Hillsborough Township lists 326 slaves living in 322 households, which translates into 1.4 slaves per household. The following is a breakdown of households based on the number of slaves each possessed: 1 (35); 2 (18); 3 (21); 4 (12); 5 (4); 6 (7); 7 (4); 8 (2); 9 (1); 10 (1); 20 (1); "Hillsborough Township 'Census' of 1874," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 2 (September 1984): 101-106; and 2 (September 1984): 130-133. Insofar as I can make out in the hard to read Bridgewater Township ratable of 1784, there were thirteen households with one slave; seven with two; 7 (3); 12 (4); 2 (5); 10 (6); 2 (7); 1 (10); 1 (11); 5 (21); and 1 (22); Ratables of Bridgewater Township, Somerset County, 1784, New Jersey State Archives. A more nuanced discussion of slave demography in New Jersey can be found in Chapter 4 of this study.

[33] On the 1804 law, see especially Arthur Zilversmit, "Liberty and Property: New Jersey and the Abolition of Slavery," *New Jersey History* 88 (Winter 1970): 215-226.

four. The 1870 census finally shows no African Americans as slaves in the Garden State.[34]

In summary, Yombo, Dick, and Quamino lived as bondsmen in a society which placed a high premium on the ownership of black people, where slavery - though to a much lesser degree - lasted as long as it did in the South. Nevertheless, very little in terms of serious historical analysis has been written on slavery in Central Jersey. For example, in his study of Perth Amboy, Middlesex County, published in 1856, William Whitehead writes about slavery there in only five pages where he discusses the resistance of captives and the brutal punishments meted out to the offenders, including their public burning at the stake. In addition, the author makes the important point that "Barracks of considerable size once stood at Perth Amboy, near the junction of Smith and Water streets, in which the slaves were immured as imported."[35] Similarly, the thin chapter on slavery in Abraham Messler's 1878 history of Somerset County reads more like a listing of notes than a well-thought out essay. Yet he shows how white brutality could affect the psyche of slaves, explaining that after witnessing the burning of the slave who, in 1753, killed his owner Jacob Van Neste for "taking a leaf of tobacco out of the negro's box," the black onlookers "did not eat any meat for a long time afterwards."[36] Useful information can also be found in the brief account of slavery in Hunterdon and Somerset written by James Snell in his history of the two counties, published in 1881. Of particular value is the story of the slave woman Phillis who vividly recalled being kidnapped in Africa as a young girl, and being afraid of the white crew during her journey across the Atlantic whom she believed was

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[34] Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey*, Appendix 4 (pp. 85, 86, 87).

[35] William A. Whitehead, *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy and the Adjoining Country, with Sketches of Men and Events in New Jersey during the Provincial Era* (New York: D. Appleton, 1856), pp. 316-320 (quotation, p. 317).

[36] Abraham Messler, *Centennial History of Somerset County* (Somerville, N.J.: C. M. Jameson, 1878), ch. 10, especially pp. 128-129.

going to eat her. This is one of few extant accounts of the middle passage left by a black female.[37]

In limited but in more significant ways, a coterie of contemporary works on racial bondage in Central Jersey have enhanced our knowledge about the subject. Though Hubert Schmidt's 1950 article on slavery in Hunterdon County is racist and only examines whites' attitudes about the institution, it covers a broad range of important topics with respect to bondage there. These include the size of slaveholdings, the types of labor performed by bondspeople (females were generally maids, and males farm hands), the presumably congenial relationship between owners and slaves which encouraged many of the latter to adopt Christianity, and the manumission movement connected closely with black colonization to Africa.[38] Frances Pingeon, in her 1991 exploration of the New Jersey slave trade, focuses primarily on the corrupt affairs of two white Middlesex County merchants. "The records of the 1818 slave trade from Perth Amboy to New Orleans," she contends, "relate how powerful New Jerseyans, faced with strong opposition from an enlightened public, used their power to evade the law prohibiting the exportation of blacks or exploited its loopholes to sell them in the Deep South."[39] My 1998 essay on female slave Nance Mellick, which is based upon Andrew Mellick's *The Story of an Old Farm*, examines the important issue of gender with respect to bondswomen. It shows that the sufferings of American slave women were not unique to females in the South, that their

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[37] James P. Snell, comp., *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881), pp. 101-102.

[38] Schmidt, "Hunterdon County," pp. 151-169, 240-253.

[39] Frances D. Pingeon, "An Abominable Business: The New Jersey Slave Trade, 1818," *New Jersey History* 109 (Fall/Winter 1991): 15-35 (quotation, p. 15). In 1786 and 1798, laws were passed in New Jersey prohibiting the removal of black servants and slaves from the state without their permission.

female counterparts in the rural North endured similar and, in some respects, greater hardships.[40]

As can be discerned from the works discussed above, very little work on New Jersey slavery (and on the institution in the North in general) has focused directly on bondspeople themselves. The most notable exceptions are the seminal studies by Graham Hodges. In his 1997 monograph on African Americans in rural Monmouth County, southeast of Somerset County, Hodges deftly explores a range of important topics pertaining to enslaved peoples, namely their adoption of Christianity, labor roles, levels of autonomy, forms of resistance and/or subterfuge which reached its peak during the Revolutionary War, and subjugation to physical brutality. These same themes are more fully developed in Hodges's 1999 comprehensive history of African Americans in New York City and its rural environs including the Somerset County area, where he persuasively argues that the resistance and cultural lives of slaves were inextricably linked.[41]

Much of the same ground is covered in this dissertation, but within the context of slave manhood - an issue Hodges discusses sporadically and solely with respect to overt forms of resistance in *Root and Branch*.[42] To be sure, "'Ain't no account'" serves as a complement to his studies, by providing a much needed detailed analysis of the fluid masculine identities of bondsmen shaped by circumstances beyond their own control. As pointed out by Michael Kimmel in his examination of white manhood in the United States, "Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our

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[40] Kenneth E. Marshall, "Work, Family and Day-to-Day Survival on an Old Farm: Nance Melick, a Rural Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-century New Jersey Slave Woman," *Slavery and Abolition* 19 (December 1998): 22-45.

[41] Hodges, *Rural North*, chs. 2-3, and *Root and Branch*, esp. pp. 38-40, 80, 134-136.

[42] Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 65, 117-118, 135-136.

culture."[43] Yombo, Dick, and Quamino reveal that this notion also applies to nameless and faceless bondsmen. They were enslaved in the Somerset County area where owners and captives lived closely together in an intensely rural environment, where the local whites became highly cognizant of the black male populace, and because of its centralized location between New York City and Philadelphia was the scene of a great deal of military related activity and thereby heightened racial tensions during the Revolutionary War. It was within this intriguing sociopolitical milieu that these three men forged their distinct masculine identities, and why a study of them can tell us much about enslaved black males (and females) in eighteenth-century New Jersey and in the North in general. Indeed, a gendered analysis of slavery is useful because it enables us to conceive of bondspeople in ways that we probably would not otherwise.

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. The first situates the writings of William Allinson and Andrew Mellick within the larger tradition of racist nineteenth-century literature about black peoples, and addresses the many gaps in the *Memoir*. In doing so, the reader is better able to understand not only Mellick and Allinson as writers, but also the meanings of the lives of Yombo, Dick, and Quamino.

Chapter 2 concentrates mainly on Yombo's anonymous West African-born parents. It discusses them in the context of how African religions seemingly enabled many captives to survive the horrors of the middle passage (an aspect of the enslavement process frequently ignored by historians), and to resist their oppression on the North American mainland. Hence, Yombo came from a respectable West African family that became the basis of his identity, and, by extension, day-to-day survival in racially brutal eighteenth-century Central Jersey.

Yombo is the sole focus of Chapter 3, which argues that his inability to become a real runaway forced the bondsman to develop strategies enabling him to distance himself

[43] Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, p. 5.

from his potentially demanding owners. This chapter reveals how Yombo's sense of manhood was partly a manifestation of circumstances beyond his own control.

Chapter 4 is a revised version of my 1998 article which focused primarily on Nance Melick's many hardships as a New Jersey bondswoman. It pays more attention to Nance's husband, Dick, who represents those captives who constructed their masculine identity largely within the context of their tenuous family relations.

Chapter 5 examines Quamino's rise from docile to heroic slave imbued with the power of Christianity. Like Yombo, Quamino's sense of manhood was a product of unforeseen circumstances. Similar to Dick, he was very much a committed family man who became vulnerable because of this source of both pain and joy that helped to foster his sense of self-identity.

Though Yombo, Dick, and Quamino are the main focus of this study, they are in no way the only important figures in it. A host of other intriguing characters who appear throughout the text are vital to the telling of their forgotten stories. Foremost among these secondary black individuals is Silvia Dubois, whose colloquy with Cornelius Larison provides a wealth of useful information about life in Central Jersey and Northeastern Pennsylvania during the period 1793-1803. Of particular significance are Dubois's vivid recollections about food and drink (or the lack thereof) and black peoples' subjugation to white brutality.[44] Indeed, white authored works like Dubois's *Biografy* help to make the *Memoir* and *The Story of an Old Farm* less problematic in terms of their racist and complicated portrayal of my three protagonists, as do advertisements for runaway slaves which are extensively employed in this dissertation. Without these invaluable sources, it would be nearly impossible to unravel the many complex and nagging issues concerning the often times ambiguous lives of Yombo, Dick, and Quamino.

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[44] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, esp. pp. 4-12.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOURCES, A CRITIQUE

William Allinson's depiction of Quamino in the *Memoir* as a passive and emotional slave who becomes imbued with the power of Christianity, and Andrew Mellick's portrayal of Yombo as the troublesome slave and Dick as the good slave on his great-grandfather's plantation in *The Story of an Old Farm*, are representative of the literary tradition which racializes or essentializes black peoples.[1] In other words, comments such as "tender-spirited Quamino burst into tears," "the darkey [Yombo] was treacherous," and "Dick was a 'most likely nigger,'" belong to a certain genus of writing that intentionally disempowers its subjects.[2] Like other white authors in the nineteenth century, the majority of whom were male, Allinson and Mellick constituted the conduits of power or racism through which

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[1] In 1982, a group of South Asian historians led by Ranajit Guha formed Subaltern Studies, which sought to restore the agency stripped of subaltern peoples by colonialist, Marxist, and nationalist versions of history. Appropriating the term "subaltern" from Gramsci's work (connoting subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture), subaltern scholars have influenced studies in Latin American, European, and African history by advocating that elite texts be read "against the grain" in order to make the subaltern speak. For a detailed perspective on these issues and debates, see Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 45-84; Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* 99 (December 1994): 1475-1490; Florence E. Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," ibid. 99 (December 1994): 1491-1515; Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," ibid. 99 (December 1994): 1516-1545; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Carry Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313.

[2] William J. Allinson, *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist* (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1851), p. 10; Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889), pp. 603, 605.

"Negro" slaves and other "subaltern" subjects appear in the historical record. As we shall see, though the intentions behind Allinson's religious-abolitionist tract and Mellick's cheerful discussion of his ancestors' captives - implicitly an apologia for slavery - appear to be quite different, in the end they both dehumanize their black personages. The two writers present Yombo, Dick, and Quamino not as individuals with personalities having multiple dimensions, but as mutable (and exotic) objects who were largely acted upon by whites - including the authors themselves.

This study of slave manhood begins with an analysis of William Allinson's and Andrew Mellick's racialized accounts of its three male protagonists. The purpose here is to situate their writings within broader ideological and literary contexts during the nineteenth century. Thus, Allinson and Mellick, for the first time, become part of the greater white discourse on black peoples. An attempt will also be made to clarify many of the temporal gaps in Quamino's memoir, apparently due to Allinson's preoccupation with ideological issues. This verification significantly increases the religious-antislavery piece's value as a commentary on racial bondage in the eighteenth-century rural North. In turn, the *Memoir of Quamino Buccau* and *The Story of an Old Farm* become greater complements of each other in terms of reconstructing the lives and masculinities of Yombo, Dick, and Quamino.

In no way is this an effort to simply denounce the white male authors' flawed portrayals of these three bondsmen. After all, the overall success of this study is largely dependent upon the *Memoir of Quamino Buccau* and *The Story of an Old Farm* being able to yield positive insights regarding the lives and self-concepts of rural northern slaves - which they both do. Yet this does not exclude them from scholarly criticism. Only by thoroughly scrutinizing these important works, can we understand fully their potential in terms of historical analysis.

I

There are some drawbacks in using the *Memoir of Quamino Buccau* as a historical commentary on northern slavery. Liberated in Burlington County (South Jersey) in 1806, Quamino was forty-three years removed from slavery when William Allinson began interviewing him around 1849.[3] Surely, then, like most former slaves who were queried years after being freed, Quamino had forgotten various specifics about his bondage. Too, Allinson vaguely writes that Quamino "was born a slave . . . in the vicinity of Brunswick, New Jersey," and fails to mention both the residences and first names of his first five owners: the elder Buccau and his oldest son, Schenk, Smock, and Dr. Griffith.[4] Thus it is difficult for the reader to determine all of the places where Quamino was enslaved (the subject of section two in this chapter). Equally problematic, the *Memoir* neither records the names of Quamino's parents and four siblings (one brother and three sisters), nor discusses any significant family relations.[5] Yet we are told that the elder Buccau was fond of Quamino during his boyhood years. Recalls the former bondsman, "I was de only young cub dat he had." Curiously, Allinson emphasizes Quamino's seemingly close relationship with Buccau, a man who had hired him out to Schenk and thus separated him from his enslaved family when he was but a young boy, and who later had contemplated selling him as an adult.[6]

Conversely, Allinson writes nothing about Quamino's African heritage. The name "Quamino" appears to be a corruption of the West African day-names "Kwame" or

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[3] William Allinson does not mention an earlier date regarding the interviews, which would suggest that they commenced about 1849, more than a year prior to the publication of Quamino's narrative in 1851; *Memoir*, p. 21; see pp. 14-15 for manumission.

[4] Ibid., p. 4.

[5] Ibid., pp. 6, 9.

[6] Ibid., pp. 4, 9 (quotation, p. 4).

"Kwamina," which mean a male born on Saturday among Twi and Fante speaking peoples. This signifies not only Quamino's birth on this particular day, but also his African roots in either Ghana, Togo, or Dahomey.[7] Not unlike many other slaves on the North American mainland, this African-derived name probably was given to Quamino by his parents, one or both of whom were natives of West Africa.[8] This would have been a matter of great importance to the enslaved couple. Writes John Mbiti, almost "all African names have a meaning. The naming of children is therefore an important occasion which is often marked by ceremonies in many [African] societies."[9] As such, Quamino's name may have had significant personal meaning which imbued him with a sense of "two-ness" as an African and American. Historically, this "double consciousness" has been a source of distress among blacks in virulently racist North American society. Quamino's possible difficulty with reconciling these "two warring ideals" may partly explain why there is no mention of his African heritage in the *Memoir*.[10]

Ultimately, however, this important omission rests largely with William Allinson. Why, then, would Allinson fail to address Quamino's black ancestry, which may have had

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[7] See F. W. H. Migeod, "Personal Names Among Some West African Tribes," *Journal of the African Society* (1917-1918): 38-39, reprinted as *African Affairs*, vol. 17; Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002; orig. pub. 1949), p. 304 n.15; J. L. Dillard, *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States* (New York: Vintage, 1973; orig. pub. 1972), p. 124; and Newbell Niles Puckett, collector, *Black Names in America: Origins and Usage*, ed. Murray Heller (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1975), p. 434.

[8] For informative discussions on naming in slave communities, see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, reprint (New York: Norton, 1975; orig. pub. 1974), pp. 181-185, and Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), pp. 185-201.

[9] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1970; orig. pub. 1969), p. 154. For a fine discussion of the naming of children in one part of Africa, Yorubaland, see Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. O. Johnson (Lagos, Nigeria: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1956; orig. pub. 1921), pp. 79-87.

[10] See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Millwood, N.Y.: Vintage, 1990; orig. pub. 1903), p. 3.

a major impact on his masculine identity? At first glance, the answer seems to be related simply to Allinson's biases and selectivity as an author. Indeed, regarding Quamino's life as a free man in the city of Burlington, the abolitionist makes it clear that he has no intention of recording "the details of his meridian life."[11]

No doubt William Allinson's Quaker background and emergent politicization played major roles in how he decided to write the *Memoir*. Therefore, a few moments of digression are in order. Quamino's biographer was a descendent of the highly respected Allinson family in Burlington County, who were "rigid members of the Religious Society of Friends," as well as antislavery sympathizers.[12] For example, in 1773 his grandfather, Samuel Allinson (d. 1791), a prominent lawyer, argued "in favor of a New Jersey law eliminating the required surety bond for manumission, that free blacks would lead peaceful and productive lives under the law."[13] Such a law, however, was never enacted, which may partly explain the letter Allinson wrote to New Jersey governor, William Livingston, in 1778. "I fear," he maintained, "America never can or will prosper in a right manner; or receive & enjoy true peace . . . until she 'proclaims Liberty to the captives, and Lets the oppressed go free.'" The Patriot governor replied that he shared the Friend's sentiment and promised to use his influence to eliminate slavery in their state.[14] The moderate tactics of the elder Allinson presaged the more open or assertive strategies of his two grandsons, the brothers Samuel (1808-1883) and William (author of the *Memoir*).

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[11] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 16.

[12] See John F. Hageman, "Memorial of Samuel Allinson, 'The Philanthropist of New Jersey,'" *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 8 (1884): 69-89 (quotation, p. 72), and William Nelson, *New Jersey Biographical and Genealogical Notes* (Baltimore, Md.: Clearfield, 1992; orig. pub. 1916), pp. 5-16.

[13] Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 182. On the life of Samuel Allinson, see Nelson, *Biographical and Genealogical Notes*, pp. 7-8.

[14] Quoted in Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 140; see also p. 77.

According to one account, the prominence of the Allinson brothers "in temperance and anti-slavery movements brought them and others in Burlington," particularly the older Samuel, "under the ban of the then existing general public sentiment regarding those measures of reform."[15] By this statement, Samuel, a distinguished philanthropist and prison reformer who opposed products made by slave labor, was the more outspoken activist.[16] Yet William - druggist, poet, librarian - became an equally passionate reformer. In 1845 he and five other Quakers not including Samuel, organized the Free Produce Association of Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (later known as the Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends). Combining evangelistic faith with an urgent desire to change the world, the Association advocated the boycotting of slave-produced goods as a main tactic in the fight against slavery. Discontented with the old orthodox Quaker journal, the *Friend*, and the great many others "constituted of matter which can contribute little to the [moral and intellectual] advancement of their readers," in 1847 they founded the *Friends' Review* under the editorship of Enoch Lewis. There is reason to believe that William served in this capacity as well. The *Friends' Review* professed not to "be devoted to any single object of discussion or enquiry," yet made it clear that two topics would be addressed in ensuing editions - slavery and war - "evils which disgrace our age and nation, and retard the progress of civilization."[17]

In 1846 the Free Produce Association created a special periodical, the *Non-Slaveholder*, the purpose of which was to further advance its free-produce and antislavery positions. The editors stated unequivocally that "We are opposed to slavery," and sought

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[15] Nelson, *Biographical and Genealogical Notes*, pp. 10-11 (quotation, p. 11).

[16] Hageman, "Memorial of Samuel Allinson," esp. pp. 75-76, 78.

[17] Quoted in *Friends' Review: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* (Philadelphia), September 4, 1847. On the Free Produce Association and William Allinson's participation in it, see Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 172-174. William Nelson comments that Allinson "established himself in Burlington as a druggist, but subsequently devoted himself to literary pursuits, compiled one or more school books, and for a number of years was editor of the *Friends' Review*"; *Biographical and Genealogical Notes*, p. 10.

to "overthrow [the institution] by all just and peaceful means." Despite their intention not to neglect "any of the just modes for the slave's liberation, the doctrine of abstinence from the productions of his toil will be prominently held up to view." They "regard[ed] it necessary to give the proper force to all proper modes for accomplishing that purpose."[18] Living up to its creed, the *Non-Slaveholder* denounced the controversial Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 allowing slaveholders and their representatives to enter northern states and apprehend runaways. By contrast, the *Friend*, while deploring the compromise made by the North, applauded the "peace" and "harmony" that resulted from it. In the opinion of the *Non-Slaveholder* (which as a Quaker publication could not advocate the use of force to liberate blacks, and thus in a sense was as moderate as the *Friend*), this view dishonored the legacy of those Quaker forefathers who risked their lives for black emancipation.[19] The fervent *Non-Slaveholder* suspended publication in 1850, but was revived under William Allinson's editorship from 1853 until its total demise in 1854.[20]

The Free Produce Association of Friends was not the only vehicle through which Allinson expressed his antislavery sentiment. He also did so through his poetry, namely in the piece entitled "A Plea for Liberty," published prior to 1873. In the first stanza he writes,

> . . . The injured, outraged slave to hope shall cling,
> And stay his vengeful hand, consoled to know
> That human breasts commiserate his woe.
> Cheered by the thought, that thousands feel his wrong,
> He *bides his time*, in faith that they, made strong
> By Him, the God of Freedom, Truth, and Right,
> Will on the oppressor's hearts pour floods of light,
> Till Tyranny, made hideous in its blaze,

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[18] *Non-Slaveholder* (Philadelphia), January 1846.

[19] Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, pp. 181-182. Much has been written on the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. For useful commentary in the context of black participation in the antislavery movement, see Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), passim.

[20] Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, p. 174.

Disperse, like noxious mists at morning's rays.
Speak trumpet-tongued - your shout shall save the land.[21]

According to Allinson, although the bondsman's anger is justified, what prevents him from acting upon it is the hope that abolitionists such as himself, with the grace of God, ultimately will be able to enlighten slaveholders.

Given how devoted he and members of his family were to the emancipation cause, Allinson may have had a certain political agenda in mind when interviewing Quamino. That is, like other abolitionists who recorded the lives of former slaves, Allinson's account of Quamino's life was partly an indictment against United States slavery, thereby explaining his disinterest in biographical details.[22] As alluded to in the introduction, the *Memoir* is a compelling testimony of the racially brutal eighteenth-century northern backcountry. As evidence, while he was under Schenk's ownership in Poughkeepsie, New York, young Quamino "was compelled to witness every public execution, with the idea that a salutary lesson would thus be impressed." One of these executions was the ghastly burning of a young bondsman.[23]

Underlying Allinson's rendition of Quamino's life story at the expense of our learning about his family and heritage, is the struggle for survival and ultimate redemption of a black saint in a hostile white world. On the *Memoir's* first page, Allinson sets up Quamino as a blind, poor, and crippled man who had been chosen by God to receive the "Divine gift." Rather than attributing Quamino's former enslavement and economic distress as a free man to some curse or disfavor of God, Allinson cites numerous New Testament passages in order to prove that this "good old man" had been blessed as a result

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[21] William J. Allinson, *Poems* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger, 1873), pp. 30-38 (quotation, pp. 30-31).

[22] See John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. xxviii-xxxii.

[23] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 4-5 (quotation, p. 4).

of these unfavorable circumstances. In other words, slavery and poverty had allowed Quamino to focus his attention on "things above" and thereby gain "treasure in heaven."[24] Hence, Quamino emerges from the *Memoir* as one of the downtrodden, meek, and poor whom, unlike the rich and powerful, would "inherit the kingdom of heaven."[25] Allinson even closes the narrative on this theme, going so far as to compare Quamino to the poor man Lazarus in Luke 16: 19-31, whose cry the Lord heard and who was thus "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom."[26] Similar to Christ and his disciples, Quamino, after his life changing conversion experience, is accused by one of his Buccau owners (a reputed minister) of performing not the work of God but of the "Evil Spirit." Buccau had watched the slave praying by himself with great passion in the family barn. Still, alluding to John 14: 27, Allinson claims that Quamino had discovered "that peace which is independent of external circumstances" - such as hostile slaveowners - and which would allow him to take his place alongside God in his heavenly "mansion."[27]

So it comes as no surprise that we learn little about Quamino's family and nothing of his African heritage. As William Allinson portrays it, Quamino's life, like that of other holy men, begins only when he experiences his religious epiphany, that is, when "he had been called out of darkness into [God's] marvelous light."[28] Thus, although Quamino was known in his latter years by the surname "Smock," Allinson insists upon referring to him in the title of the *Memoir* as "Quamino Buccau" - the surname of his owner under whom he experienced his life changing Christian enlightenment.[29] In doing so, Allinson asserts his

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[24] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 3, 17, 30. The phrase "treasure in heaven" (p. 30) is from Matthew 19: 16-24, and Luke 12: 32-34.

[25] Matthew 5: 3-12; Luke 6: 20-26.

[26] Luke 16: 22, as quoted in Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 30.

[27] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 8, 19.

[28] John 12: 35-36, 46, as quoted in Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 20.

[29] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 4, 6, 7.

control over Quamino's identity, thereby rendering him no better than the slaveowners he holds in so much contempt. The abolitionist molds Quamino into an image by which he could further his own political agenda.

There are some interesting parallels between William Allinson's slanted account of Quamino and *The Anecdotes and Memoirs of William Boen, A Coloured Man* (1834), which was probably written by a fellow Quaker and may have influenced how Allinson approached his subject. As a free man, William Boen (1748-1824) was a devout and highly respected Quaker in Mount Holly, Burlington County, where he had been enslaved. Although *Anecdotes* claims to be a memoir of Boen's life, like Quamino's narrative, it is in fact a testimony of his religious epiphany and subsequent religious existence. One day, when Boen's owner demanded (shortly after his epiphany) that he cut down all the trees on a hillside, the slave believed that God, whom he considered to be his "new" or true "Master," ordered him to leave a certain tree standing, which he did. In the end, Boen had placed his religious duty above obedience to his white owner. Boen was asked by the anonymous writer "how he and his old master got along together, after his change" (he responded, "Very well"), implying that his life under slavery, before he had found God, was inconsequential. That is, as in Quamino's memoir, life for Boen begins when he is first called out of the darkness and into the light, which he describes as "a flaming sword [that] passed through me."[30]

William Allinson's portrayal of Quamino as saintly and meek gives credence to the provocative argument made by George Fredrickson that many leading white abolitionists during the 1840s and 1850s embraced an ideology he terms "romantic racialism." These opponents of slavery credited blacks with being naturally religious, moral, affectionate, musical, and above all, docile. The romantic racialists, according to Fredrickson, tended to see blacks more as emblems for social change than as real, complex human beings.

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[30] *Anecdotes and Memoirs of William Boen, A Coloured Man Who Lived and Died Near Mount Holly, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: John Richards, 1834), esp. pp. 4-6 (quotations, pp. 6 and 5).

Disillusioned by slavery, expansionism, and the vulgar materialism of their age, white social reformers lauded the idealized black as "a symbol of something that seemed tragically lacking in white American civilization." Moreover, Fredrickson suggests that they used romantic racialism as a propaganda tool, most effectively demonstrated in Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which assured white northerners that abolition posed no danger to public safety. Clearly, William Allinson's commentary on Quamino's gentle demeanor fits neatly within the romantic racialist paradigm Fredrickson has difficulty substantiating for a period in which blacks increasingly favored the use of violence in the abolition of slavery.[31]

It is understandable, therefore, that the reader is unable to compose a complete mental picture of Quamino's physicality, although the *Memoir* includes a generic sketch of him when he was an elderly blind man. Some real indication of Quamino's skin-tone, weight, and height would nuance our understanding of his life as a black male under northern bondage and his ability to assert masculine authority. As noted, Schenk had Quamino witness public executions which were to serve as an edification of sorts, that is, were to deter him from rebelling. Quamino's physicality may have been so imposing that Schenk believed it was necessary to instill the tractable youth with fear. For reasons mentioned above, William Allinson thought better of informing his white readership of the physical power which Quamino appears to have possessed.

II

Due to Allinson's preoccupation with portraying Quamino as a religious and suffering saint, he omits very basic yet important information regarding his subject's existence under

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[31] George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1971), pp. 102-112 (quotation, p. 108). On the increased militancy among black abolitionists in the 1850s which was opposed by their white abolitionist counterparts, see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, ch. 10.

slavery. The following discussion places Quamino in time and place by verifying the specific geographical locations of his enslavement and the names of his owners. Proving the *Memoir's* authenticity and hence reliability as a commentary on slavery in eighteenth-century New Jersey depends upon our verification of these men's existence, especially the Buccaus, under whom, according to the narrative, Quamino spent most of his enslavement (approximately thirty years).[32]

The name "Buccau" is missing from both genealogical sources and eighteenth-century censuses for the "vicinity of Brunswick," that is, the city of New Brunswick, which, until 1850, was divided between Somerset and Middlesex counties.[33] It would appear that "Buccau" was a corrupted form of "Brokaw," a common Dutch last name which has various spellings including "Brocaw," "Broca," and "Brager."[34] Wills, census data, and manumission records indicate that Brokaw family members were slaveholders in Somerset County from at least the late 1750s through the mid-1830s.[35] Indeed, the Brokaws and their Dutch compatriots were Somerset's principal slave- and landowners during the early 1800s, residing mainly in the southern portion of the county where the soil

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[32] The eldest Buccau son sold Quamino (b. 1762) to Smock around 1792, hence Quamino was a Buccau slave for roughly thirty years; Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 4, 9-10.

[33] Allinson posits that, "Shortly after his emancipation, [Quamino] made a visit to his old friends, in the neighbourhood of New Brunswick"; ibid., p. 15.

[34] Thanks to professional genealogist Fred Sisser, III for clarifying the name "Buccau" for the author. Sisser is the writer, compiler, and editor of the highly informative *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 9 vols. (1983-1992). Various spellings of the name "Brokaw" can be found in the *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* index for vols. 1-5 (1983-1987): 10.

[35] For wills, see *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, 1st ser., 32 (1924): 41-42; 39 (1946): 57; 62 (1949): 54; and Somerset County Wills no. 840, New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Archives Section, Trenton (hereafter New Jersey State Archives). For local census data, see "Additional Slaveholders' List in Somerset," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 6 (April 1917): 95, 96, 97; Ratables of the Eastern Precinct, Somerset County, 1784, 1786, 1788, New Jersey State Archives; and "Hillsborough Township 'Census' of 1784," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 2 (June 1984): 102. For manumissions, see "Manumissions of Slaves in Somerset County," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (October 1912): 278, and 2 (January 1913): 48, 50.

was more fertile. So the question, then, is can we place Quamino under Brokaw ownership in southern Somerset County (comprised of Bridgewater and Hillsborough townships and the Eastern and the Western precincts) where the slave population was relatively prolific?[36]

In the *Memoir* Quamino recalls that, "His young master, who, although a professed minister of the gospel, gave no attention to the religious culture of his slaves - his policy being . . . to keep them 'igarent.'"[37] It would appear that this "professed minister" was Abraham Brokaw (1760-1848) who, in 1793, graduated from Queens College (now Rutgers University) in New Brunswick, and was ordained in the Reformed Dutch Church in 1798. But more important to this discussion, Abraham Brokaw - who presumably had accused Quamino one day of conversing with the devil - was the youngest son of Isaac Brokaw whose estate was located in the Eastern Precinct, which included a portion of the city of New Brunswick.[38] Both Isaac Brokaw's will and Quamino's memoir suggest that the patriarch died around 1789, evidence that Isaac Brokaw was Quamino's elder "Buccau."[39]

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[36] Steven B. Frakt, "Patterns of Slave-Holding in Somerset County, N.J." (unpublished seminar paper, Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, 1967), pp. 12-17, 21-26.

[37] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 8.

[38] "The Brokaw-Bragaw Family," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 86 (April 1955): 109-110, and 87 (January 1956): 16-17; Elsie Foster, *Our Brokaw-Bragaw Heritage* (n.p., n.d. [c. 1970]), pp. 15, 45, courtesy of Fred Sisser, III. Isaac Brokaw's residency is verified in Ratables of the Eastern Precinct, 1784, 1786, 1788.

[39] Somerset County Wills no. 840. According to the *Memoir*, the eldest Buccau son became Quamino's owner following the patriarch's death, and "After some years" he sold the bondsman to Smock around 1792. This would confirm that the elder Buccau died around 1789; Allinson, pp. 9-10. Further evidence that Isaac Brokaw died around 1789 is that his name is missing from "Reconstructed 1790 Census of Somerset County," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 7 (June 1990): esp. 134-137, which enumerates those males who were freeholders and tax payers in the county.

Admittedly, the 1784, 1786, and 1788 tax ratables of the Eastern Precinct each list Isaac Brokaw as owning only two slaves.[40] An important point to bear in mind, however, is that a 1778 New Jersey tax law levied a fee only on every male slave over the age of sixteen and excepted women and those who physically were unable to work. This means that "the tax lists do not indicate the numbers of women, children, disabled and superannuated slaves." The inaccuracies or gaps in these records are probably also the result of slaveowners' lying to and bribing of the tax assessor.[41] Hence, the two slaves listed as Isaac Brokaw's property most likely represented only a small portion of his bondspeople.

At first glance, the will of Isaac Brokaw dated May 11, 1789, and proved on August 31, 1789, contains no inventory of Brokaw's possessions, which might have listed his slaves, perhaps by name. The will, however, has two brief and suggestive references pertaining to Brokaw's black people. Brokaw bequeathed to his second wife Catherine "the use of one of my best Negro wenches," thereby implying that he owned two or more female captives. To his youngest son Bergon, he left his stock, farming utensils, household furniture, and "Negroes." The term "Negroes" insinuates that Isaac Brokaw owned several slaves, both females and males.[42] The language in his will again shows that the aforementioned tax ratables were incomplete and that he in fact owned several slaves - including Quamino.

According to the *Memoir*, in 1771, nine-year-old Quamino was hired out by Buccau (Isaac Brokaw) "to a person of the name of Schenk," who utilized the youth as a domestic servant. When Schenk later relocated to Poughkeepsie he took Quamino with him, and subjected the slave to witness public executions.[43] A list of eighteenth-century

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[40] Ratables of the Eastern Precinct, 1784, 1786, 1788.

[41] Frakt, "Slaveholding in Somerset," p. 7 n.2a.

[42] Somerset County Wills no. 840.

[43] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 4.

Poughkeepsie taxpayers mentions only two "Schencks" - John and Paul - for the period 1773-1778, which would seem to indicate that Quamino was owned by either of these men who evidently were first cousins. John was doubtless the son of Hillsborough Township merchant Peter Schenk; and Paul the son of judge Abraham Schenk, who after living in Hillsborough went to Bushwick, New York. Peter and Abraham Schenk were brothers.[44] Mortgage records for Somerset County show that merchant Peter Schenk often did business with the Brokaws during the colonial period. For example, on September 1, 1766, Peter and other brother Hendrick Schenk (d. 1767) gave money to yeoman John Brokaw to buy around eleven acres of land bounded by the lots of Brogun and Isaac . . Brokaw. On March 6, 1769, Peter Schenk gave money to neighbor Brogon Brokaw to purchase six acres of land.[45] In short, this Peter Schenk probably figures in Quamino's life; it may have been through him that either John or Paul Schenck or both acquired Quamino.

Quamino returned to Isaac Brokaw upon his request in 1780. Shortly afterwards, Brokaw again attempted to sell the bondsman thereby causing a rift between them. Upon Brokaw's death around 1789, Quamino became the property of the eldest Buccau son (Caspares Brokaw), who earlier had persuaded his father from selling Quamino to the upper South, and who in 1790 was living in Bedminster, Somerset County. A few years later, Quamino was struck violently by his new Brokaw owner which angered the slave who "immediately" quit his "master." Around 1793 Caspares Brokaw, now apparently a

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[44] Clifford M. Buck, *Tax Lists: Poughkeepsie, Rhinebeck, Northeast* (Salt Point, N.Y.: C.M. Buck, 1982), p. 14; Marguerite Schenck Maires and Gladys Marie Muller, *Johannes Schenck of Bushwick, Long Island, and His Descendants* (Flatbush, L.I.: n.p., 1876), pp. 8-9, 12-13, courtesy of Fred Sisser, III.

[45] "First Book of Mortgages of Somerset County: John Brokaw to Peter Schenk et al.," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 3 (March 1985): 176-177; "First Book of Mortgages of Somerset County: Brogon Brokaw to Peter Schenk," ibid. 7 (September 1990): 162-163.

resident of the Eastern Precinct, sold an obstinate Quamino to his "neighbour" Smock for 106 pounds, ending Quamino's long existence as a Brokaw slave.[46]

According to a 1675-1875 directory of the village Raritan Landing (located on the left bank of the Raritan River, two miles from New Brunswick in Piscataway, Middlesex County), only two Smock persons could have been Caspares Brokaw's Smock neighbor in 1793: either Dennis Smock (1740-1823) or his son, Hendrick Smock. The Smock homestead on the "Great Road up the Raritan" was walking distance from the Middlebush area in the Eastern Precinct.[47] Significantly, Smock, at Quamino's urging, purchased the bondsman's slave wife Sarah from a neighbor. This act of kindness may explain why Quamino chose the surname "Smock" when he became a free man (in 1806).[48]

In 1798, Dennis or Hendrick Smock sold Quamino and Sarah to esteemed New Jersey physician John Griffith (referred to as either "Dr. Griffith" or "Dr. G." in the *Memoir*) for 100 and 50 pounds, respectively. Griffith - who cursed at Quamino because the slave asked to be emancipated when he died - hailed from Boundbrook in Bridgewater, Somerset County, but evidently was dwelling in Rahway, Essex County, New Jersey, when he purchased the married bondspeople. Griffith died in Rahway on August 23, 1805.[49]

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[46] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 9-10. "Reconstructed 1790 Census," p. 123, verifies that "Gasper/Jasper Brokaw" (Caspares Brokaw) was a resident of Bedminster Township. The residency of "Chrispares Brocaw" (again Caspares Brokaw) in the Eastern Precinct is confirmed in James S. Norton, *New Jersey in 1793: An Abstract and Index of the 1793 Militia Census of the State of New Jersey* (Salt Lake City, Ut.: J.S. Norton, 1973), p. 395.

[47] Cornelius C. Vermeule, "Raritan Landing that Was: A Directory of Raritan Landing, 1675-1875," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 54 (April 1936): 197. This speculation in no way suggests that Smocks did not live in Somerset County in 1793. Indeed, James Norton's *New Jersey in 1793* locates George and Folkert Smock living in Bridgewater Township and Rynier Smock living in Hillsborough Township, respectively, that year (pp. 392, 398). However, these individuals lived a good distance from Caspares Brokaw, making it highly unlikely that either man ever owned Quamino.

[48] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 9.

[49] Ibid., pp. 9, 10. *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of New Jersey of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing, 1877), p. 47, mentions that John Griffith was

Thereafter, the two captives came into the possession of the deceased doctor's son, William Griffith, of Burlington County. William Griffith was a prominent lawyer and philanthropist who played an important role in founding and then serving as president of the New Jersey Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery on May 2, 1793. Unlike his father who refused to liberate Quamino, the younger Griffith had Quamino and Sarah freed on September 25, 1806.[50]

In summary, Quamino's life under northern bondage was much more complicated than William Allinson suggests. Quamino endured thralldom in the New York hinterland characterized by a high rate of turnover among business-minded holders, who demonstrated a range of benevolent and hostile behavior which made slavery all the more treacherous for unprotected bondspeople.[51] Because he devotes so much attention to Quamino's saintliness, Allinson, who condemned the institution of slavery, ignores many of its oppressive dimensions. This includes how difficult it was for bondsmen to exercise manhood in the face of capricious white males, the overarching theme in Chapter 5.

III

Andrew Mellick's ten-page account of his ancestors' bondspeople does not possess the same degree of ambiguity regarding when and where they were enslaved as William

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of Boundbrook. Stephen Wickes, *History of Medicine in New Jersey and of its Medical Men, From the Settlement of the Province to A. D. 1800* (Newark, N.J.: M.R. Dennie, 1879), pp. 270-271, places Griffith at his death in Rahway.

[50] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 12-15. For an account of William Griffith, see *Biographical Encyclopaedia*, pp. 47-48. Griffith's *Address of the President of the New-Jersey Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Trenton, N.J.: Sherman and Mershon, 1804) verifies his presidency and the date when the New Jersey Society "became constitutionally organized" (p. 3). For Griffith's recommendations on improving the condition of New Jersey freedpeople, see Marion M. Thompson Wright, *The Education of Negroes in New Jersey* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College of Columbia University, 1941), pp. 64-66.

[51] The issue concerning the high rate of turnover among northern holders will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

Allinson's rendition of Quamino's captivity. He explains that Jacob Kline of New Germantown in Tewksbury, Hunterdon County, sold Yombo - "a Guinea negro" - to his brother-in-law and Mellick's great-grandfather Aaron Malick of adjacent Bedminster, Somerset County, in 1786; and that Dick and Nance arrived at the Malick farmstead with their three children in 1798. They previously had been the slaves of General John Taylor, a resident of Tewksbury and an associate of Malick. Upon Malick's death in 1809, Yombo became the property of John Hastier, who lived in Elizabethtown, Essex County, where the bondsman died several years later. Hastier was probably the owner of Yombo's anonymous slave wife. Whereas Dick, Nance, and their youngest child (born after 1798) remained on the farm, the four other children were taken away to New Germantown and Elizabethtown, respectively.[52] (Indeed, the lives of these slaves were every bit as tenuous as that of Quamino).

On the other hand, *The Story of an Old Farm* is highly racist. Andrew Mellick uses disparaging terms such as "necessarily savage," "barbarians," "sable merchants," and "dusky toilers" to describe enslaved blacks; he refers to Native Americans as "redmen," "savages," and "dusky Indians."[53] He avers that Yombo had a "disposition [which] was not in any agreeable," the cause of his "occasional outbreak." Dick and Nance are lauded as "pious black[s] of sterling parts" who, like their enslaved friends, "endeavor[ed] as far as possible to be 'jes like white folks.'"[54] By Mellick's account, Yombo was nothing more than an irrational slave whose resistance is devoid of political content; and Nance and Dick were passive and imitative Sambos.[55]

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[52] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-604, 608-612 (phrase, p. 603).

[53] Ibid., pp. 224, 607, 608 (slave descriptors); pp. 56, 98, 100, 169, 215 (Native American descriptors).

[54] Ibid., pp. 603, 608 (Yombo); pp. 605, 606 (Dick and Nance).

[55] On slave stereotypes, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1972), ch. 6, and Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), ch. 2.

The racism espoused by Mellick was a manifestation of the marked increase in white supremacist sentiment during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, due partly to the collapse of Reconstruction, the emergence of Social Darwinism, and the Scramble for Africa.[56] As legend has it, "Mellick was an omnivorous reader. There was little in the general range of human knowledge about which he did not possess some information. He liked philosophy. He cared in his later years little for poetry, except of the finest."[57] From this it may be assumed that like many white northerners, the learned Mellick was familiar with the racist literary works about blacks produced by a coterie of influential southern white writers, most notably Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris. These writers developed seven stereotypes regarding African Americans: "The Contented Slave, The Wretched Freedman, The Comic Negro, The Brute Negro, The Tragic Mulatto, The Local Color Negro, and the Exotic Primitive." Though considered by some contemporaries as a friend of blacks, Harris wrote these words for black Uncle Remus: "Hit's [education is] de ruinashun er dis country . . . Put a spellin'-book in a nigger's han's, an right den dar' you loozes a plow-hand." Page, in his *Red Rock* (1898), described the black character Moses as "a hyena in a cage," "a reptile," "a species of worm," and a "wild beast." Surely, all of these important factors - the failure to turn southern blacks into the social and political equals of whites, the theories of biological racism, the conquest of territories ruled by dark races, and the literary works by white southerners which denigrated African Americans - facilitated the acceptance by most northern whites, including Andrew Mellick, of blacks' inherent inferiority and of whites', especially of Anglo-Saxon stock, inherent superiority.[58]

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[56] Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Da Capo, 1997), p. 168, originally published as *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial, 1954).

[57] A. Van Doren Honeyman, "The Author of 'The Story of an Old Farm,'" *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (January 1912): 32.

[58] Quoted in Logan, *Betrayal*, pp. 162-163; see also p. 168.

Late nineteenth-century northern newspapers and magazines also sanctioned both the groundswell of white supremacist sentiment, and Mellick's racist language in *The Story of an Old Farm*. Though they rarely identified white criminals by racial descriptors, newspapers frequently used the terms "colored" or "negro" to verify black law breakers; and employed hostile appellations such as "burly negro," "negro ruffian," "African Annie," "a Wild Western Negro," and even "colored cannibal" to condemn their actions. The adjectives "coon," "darky," "uncle," "pickaninny," and "nigger" or "niggah" were the nomenclature of comics, cartoons, and short stories about African Americans that appeared in the *New York Times* and the like.[59] Not surprisingly, the leading northern literary magazines - *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner's* (renamed *Century* after 1881), *North American Review*, and *Atlantic Monthly* - regularly published fictional pieces, cartoons, and poetry (some of which were produced by prominent white southern writers) that gave credence to the widespread belief that African Americans were comic, inferior, and dishonest.[60]

Prior to his death in 1895, Andrew Mellick had contributed numerous articles to the *Newark Daily Advertiser*, *New York Times*, and various other newspapers about the places which he visited, including Cuba.[61] Mellick's publication record (and earnest search for knowledge) would suggest that he was greatly familiar with the racist diatribes printed in Middle Atlantic newspapers and magazines. Given his close association with them, small wonder that his discussions on black peoples in *The Story of an Old Farm* greatly mirrors theirs.

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[59] Ibid., pp. 217-218. Moreover, northern newspapers usually assumed the guilt of southern blacks who were lynched in the South during the height of this exercise in racial terror; only gradually did they adopt objective language (i.e. "allegedly") when reporting on black crime stories; ibid., pp. 221-223.

[60] Ibid., ch. 13.

[61] Honeyman, "Author," p. 28.

The bigotry in Andrew Mellick's magnum opus, *The Story of an Old Farm*, probably was also influenced by the 1883 book, *Silvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom.* Silvia Dubois was formerly enslaved in Central Jersey, and that similar to late nineteenth-century colonial literature, Cornelius Larison depicts Dubois as a black exotic. Equally important, their colloquy was published in Somerville, Somerset County, located just several miles west of Plainfield in Essex County where Mellick resided from 1885 until his death. The voracious reader and author of *The Story of an Old Farm* had easy access to Larison's racialist rendition of Silvia Dubois's life.

Interestingly enough, during the latter half of the 1800s, a large portion of European popular and intellectual studies including novels, travel writings, journalistic accounts, and ethnographies perpetuated the hegemonic divide between West and East (i.e. Occident and Orient, civilization and savagery). By the end of the nineteenth century when Andrew Mellick was composing *The Story of an Old Farm*, the tendency among whites on both sides of the Atlantic to racialize and essentialize non-Western subjects had become standard currency in everyday discourse.[62] This would seem to explain why Mellick was such "a great admirer" of the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson who, as Judith Walkowitz has convincingly demonstrated, described his East London subjects as a kind of racialized other.[63] Like Cornelius Larison's account of Silvia Dubois, Mellick's discussion of his ancestors' slaves reflects the dominant racist paradigm of the era found not only in the literature of the United States, but also of Europe.

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[62] See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994; orig. pub. 1978), pp. 2-9, 35-36, and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage, 1989; orig. pub. 1987), pp. 80-81.

[63] On Andrew Mellick's interest in Robert Louis Stevenson, see Honeyman, "Author," p. 32. Presumably, Mellick received a "pleasant letter" from Stevenson when he was living on the island of Samoa. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 38-41, 206-207.

IV

Mellick contends that upon their arrival to New Jersey, slaves "soon outgrew their savagery, and, affiliating in their sympathies with their work and the lives of their masters, in a very few years became an attached portion of the domestic life of the Jersey people." Particularly in Somerset County, he maintains, bondspeople "soon fell under the sway of kindly influences, and became almost portions of their owners' families. They were comfortably clad; when sick, well cared for; and even to this day old residents tell pleasant tales of the affection existing between our forefathers and the old-time family and farm servants."[64]

Mellick obviously bought into white paternalistic ideology, especially since he is describing his own family. As pointed out by A. Van Doren Honeyman, who was both editor of the *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* and a proofreader of *The Story of an Old Farm*, "On every page, not the faults but the virtues of our ancestors are brought out in pleasing pictures . . . who made American Independence possible and American Christianity a certainty."[65] Given his immense pride regarding his patriotic, Christian, and heroic ancestors who helped make America great, it is easy to discern why Mellick would write that, "slavery on the 'Old Farm' was not altogether an unmitigated evil. For a number of years much happiness in their mutual relations came to both bond and free."[66] In Mellick's mind, his ancestors and their compatriots were too honorable of men to have treated the backwards, uncivilized blacks unjustly.

Mellick was echoing the paternalistic sentiment of numerous other white Central New Jerseyans during the post-Civil War era, many of whom undoubtedly assumed the

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[64] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 224-225 (quotations, p. 225).

[65] Honeyman, "Author," pp. 30-31 (quotation, p. 30).

[66] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 608.

superiority of the North over the South, particularly in race relations.[67] A work which surely influenced his was Abraham Messler's *Centennial History of Somerset County*, published in 1878, eleven years prior to *The Story of an Old Farm*. Like Mellick's study, Messler's book lauds the greatness of Somerset County's white male citizens. As he chauvinistically writes, "For intelligence, culture and refinement, its inhabitants are excelled nowhere. It has given the State and Nation some of their noblest men, at the bar, on the bench and in the pulpit. Society is nowhere better ordered, properly more secure, or comfort and happiness more generally diffused."[68] Correspondingly, in his slim chapter on slavery in Somerset County, Messler contends that although slaves and owners did not eat, sleep, or work together, frequent the same places of amusement, or wear the same grade of clothing, "it would not be true to state that both were not comfortable in every essential particular necessary to the well being of the individual man." The end result, he added, "was a great deal of harmony of action between them; even in the most instances, a mutual and zealous co-operation in business and in social necessities in all the important matters of life, and also so much amity and attachment in all actions, that serious collisions seldom occurred." He gives as partial evidence the "few" bondspeople who abandoned their owners to seek refuge in the British armies during the Revolutionary War. As Andrew Mellick would later opine, Somerset slaves, Messler avers, were the beneficiaries of a gentle captivity still recalled by the local whites.[69]

This biased interpretation of Somerset slavery as amiable and beneficial was most forcefully articulated in obituaries of and short articles on former captives in Central Jersey

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[67] On regional ideologies, see William L. Van Deburg, *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 69-76. See also Logan, *Betrayal*, p. 224.

[68] Abraham Messler, *Centennial History of Somerset County* (Somerville, N.J.: C. M. Jameson, 1878), p. 41. On the life of Abraham Messler, see Remsen Varick Messler, comp. and ed., *A History or Genealogical Record of the Messler (Metselaer) Family* (Chicago: Lakeside, 1903), pp. 44-45.

[69] Messler, *Centennial History*, ch. 10 (quotations, pp. 127-128).

during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These overlooked sources (which often testify to the high turnover rate among northern holders) form a one-dimensional composite of extremely old blacks who were devout Christians, well-respected by the local whites, able to live comfortably due to the charity of their former owners, still deeply interested in white family affairs, and apathetic about the Emancipation Proclamation.[70] The image of ex-bondspeople, a number of whom supposedly were healthy centenarians, that emerges from this body of literature supports the paternalistic ideology espoused by writers like Abraham Messler and Andrew Mellick. Only slaves who were favorably treated could have lived to be one hundred years old. The emphasis on their old age renders them exotic curiosities of sorts, which, as alluded to earlier, was typical of commentaries on blacks found in northern newspapers. For example, in a newspaper story published around 1868, the former Somerset County slave, Bob, age seventy-five, was "considered rather a curiosity for the oddity of his remarks and his quaint, original remarks." The piece alleged that Bob lived "'happy as a king,' unmindful of the Emancipation Proclamation or the great revolution we are passing through in regard to his race."[71]

Among the most representative of these accounts is the 1887 obituary of Mary C. Jackson who was born in Lebanon Township, Hunterdon County, in 1798, "and given, at the age of 15, as a wedding present to her master's daughter in 1804, by whom she was taught to read and write." Her owner's 1860 will provided that upon his death "she should be kept by his four surviving children in turn. By this plan she changed her home every year." Like all bonded peoples, Jackson was perceived by whites as movable property. But rather than making this distinction, her obituary posits that she was privileged in

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[70] See, for example, *New Brunswick Fredonian*, April 12, 1864; *Somerset Unionist* (Somerville), May 29, 1873; *Somerset Messenger* (Somerville), July 7, 1886; *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), February 19, 1885, August 7, 1887, March 1, 1888, October 9, 1902; and *Newark Sunday News*, April 14, 1901. All of these newspapers and others to be cited in this chapter are courtesy of Fred Sisser, III.

[71] Unidentifiable newspaper article. Attached to this account is an obituary of a former slave woman who resided at Potterstown, Hunterdon County, dated 1868.

receiving an education and in having several homes. Upon the abolition of United States slavery in 1865, the piece contends, "Aunt Mary refused to accept her freedom, saying she was too old to bother about such nonsense." In its opinion, "She undoubtedly chose wisely, as she had the best homes among the children, who all used her very kindly and allowed her to do about as she wished."[72]

Though Jackson may have chosen wisely, this was not necessarily because of her owners' benevolence. More specifically, like many of her indigent free black compatriots in Central Jersey where work was not always forthcoming, it would have been difficult for her to survive without the economic assistance of whites. As evidence, in September 1885, Silvia Dubois was reported to have been on a "begging tour" throughout Somerset County with her daughter.[73] Likewise, numerous old and physically disadvantaged blacks were supported by the poor houses of their respective townships.[74] After her second husband died, alleged centenarian Nancy Van Pelt was forced to work "around the neighborhood" of Harlingen in Montgomery Township, Somerset County. The "old lady" made this revealing comment to a local newspaper reporter who visited her in 1886, "Here I am, boss, now look at me. I'm a little busy to-day, but come in" (she was cleaning kitchen closets). Such a remark (if it is indeed true), rather than serving as proof of a well-preserved ex-slave who "might live 20 years more," is telling evidence of a free black woman who was living precariously and therefore adopted a kind of conformist language for her day-to-day survival - as did Mary Jackson.[75]

Clearly, Andrew Mellick wrote *The Story of an Old Farm* partly within the context of an entrenched local dogma that deemed blacks as inferior, exotic, and the wards of

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[72] *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), August 7, 1887.

[73] *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), September 3, 1885.

[74] See, for example, *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), July 18, 1901, October 9, 1902; *Hunterdon Democrat* (Flemington), May 9, 1883; and *Hunterdon Republican* (Flemington), May 31, 1905.

[75] *Somerset Messenger* (Somerville), July 7, 1886.

merciful whites. Similar to many writers of his time, Mellick was undoubtedly conflicted about his ancestors' ownership of slaves. In her 1906-1907 reminiscences of her childhood in Mapleton, Middlesex County, near Princeton, Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom remarked that, "Grandpa was a righteous man - unless his owning slaves was charged against him in the 'Book of Life' - we have many unconscious sins to answer for, in the day of reckoning." Yet like Mellick, she added, "But as I remember, he was very good to them."[76] By referring to their ancestors as noble, Mellick, Malcom, and other whites were able, in varying degrees, to ease their troubled consciences about the slaves in their families. Because racial bondage was such an important part of their history, it seemed only logical to them that the "niggers" got as much out of the peculiar institution as did whites.

CONCLUSION

The writings of William Allinson and Andrew Mellick are problematic in that they are written from clear ideological perspectives which obscure the masculine selves of Yombo, Dick, and Quamino. Part of Allinson's mission in Quamino's memoir was to emphasize the harshness of northern slavery within the context of his subject's life as a suffering and ultimately triumphant black saint, whereas Mellick uses his ancestor's slaves in *The Story of an Old Farm* to further demonstrate the paternalistic nature of slavery in Somerset County. Both of their agendas, which were typical of nineteenth-century writing, make it difficult for the reader to fully comprehend the lives and struggles of the three bondsmen therein.

But despite their shortcomings as scholarly literatures, the works by William Allinson and Andrew Mellick provide us with the framework necessary for unraveling

[76] Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom, "As I Remember Scenes from my Childhood" [1906-1907], in *The Princeton Recollector* 4 (January 1979): 1, 6.

some of the experiences of the three bondsmen and their families otherwise buried in historical obscurity. Antiquated treatments like theirs offer insights that traditional source materials such as wills, diaries, and census data cannot. The key then, as in this study's following four chapters, is to use these different records together, with critical reading, in such a way which increases our understanding of the diversity of individual experiences under slavery.

CHAPTER 2

POWERFUL AND RIGHTEOUS: THE TRANSATLANTIC SURVIVAL AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE OF A "BIG MAN" AND HIS FAMILY

Reverend John Bodine Thompson made an intriguing remark in his 1894 address commemorating the 175th anniversary of the Reformed Dutch Church of Readington Township in Hunterdon County, New Jersey:

> Those [slaves] who came [to New Jersey] from the coast of Guinea [i.e. southern West Africa] were regarded as the most valuable, because of their superior endowments, both mental and physical. "Guinea Negroes" brought more on the open market. Among these were a man who had been the chief of his tribe, with his wife, who now shared his slavery as she shared his rule in the land of their fathers. These became the property of Jacob Kline . . . [S]lavery is bitter at the best, and it is no wonder that these Africans were fearfully homesick. Every endeavor was made to cheer and comfort them - save, of course, that of setting them free, which, probably, was never thought of. The result was, that when all hope was gone, they sought and found together the only freedom possible for them. The spot is still pointed out, on Kline's brook, a mile directly north of this place, where stood the cedar tree upon which, one morning, the master found only the lifeless bodies of those who refused to remain as slaves in a strange land.

Thompson's speech, focusing on the Hunterdon church's "members of African descent," was printed a week later in a local newspaper and is important because it provides a rare glimpse of native West Africans who lived and died under bondage in New Jersey.[1] At the same time, the minister left several critical questions unanswered: What was the ethnicity of this presumably noble West African couple? Where exactly in "Guinea" did they "rule"? What factors led to their enslavement? How were they able to survive the wrenching

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[1] John Bodine Thompson, "Readington Negroes," in *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), October 25, 1894, courtesy of Fred Sisser, III. The history of the Reformed Dutch Church of Readington is discussed in James P. Snell, comp., *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881), pp. 496-497.

voyage(s) to the New World, and when did they arrive in New Jersey? And finally, why did they choose to take their own lives in such a horrific manner?

This chapter makes an effort to explore these inquiries and thereby bring into sharper relief the two captives' ambiguous lives and, moreover, dimensions of the nebulous manifestation of West African thought - namely, religious beliefs - in Central Jersey during the eighteenth century. The couple's suicide suggests strongly the ideological conflict between enslaved West Africans' concepts of the supernatural and the white hegemony that ruled them. In a sense, this argument is an extension of that made by William Piersen in his provocative 1977 article, where he contends that "in certain instances, West Africans considered suicide an admirable act" sanctioned by their religiosity.[2] Furthermore, the chapter provides important clues as to husband and wife's survival of the elusive experience of the middle passage which, as shall be proposed here, is linked to their Sierra Leonian origins.

Reverend Thompson's thought-provoking commentary on "Readington Negroes" has an important dual function. On the one hand, it is a vital piece of slavery-related local history literature that omits valuable information about the Guinea blacks acquired by Jacob Kline. On the other, it serves as a complement to Andrew Mellick's 1899 family narrative of Somerset County, which verifies, indirectly, that the African couple had a disfigured son named Yombo who lived most of his life as a slave in Central Jersey. Both Thompson's speech and Mellick's popular book, *The Story of an Old Farm*, downplay the often antagonistic relationship between owners and captives, yet form a unique late nineteenth-century window into the transcontinental saga of this prestigious African family turned common New Jersey slaves.[3] Moreover, these two literary works nuance Graham

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[2] William D. Piersen, "White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression, and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide Among New Slaves," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (April 1977): 147-159 (quotation, p. 151).

[3] Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889), p. 648.

Hodges's discussion of slave culture among Africans and African Americans in New York and East New Jersey, from 1613 to 1863, which he portrays as forged by hooligans. That is, Hodges situates the cultural lives of bondspeople within the context of clandestine meetings, theft, conspiracy, the organization of dances and shooting matches, and the frequenting of taverns.[4] Yombo and his parents deepen our knowledge about the sense of identity and cultural resistance of enslaved peoples in eighteenth-century New Jersey.

I

It is of no small consequence that our three subjects were survivors of the African enslavement process to the New World. This brutal method of human displacement typically occurred in three distinct stages: (1) the capture of Africans usually by other Africans involved in the slave trade, (2) the forced migration of the captives to the West African coast, and their subsequent confinement in barracoons, or slave factories, so that European merchants could evaluate, purchase, and consign them by branding, and (3) the journey of the black cargoes across the Atlantic known as the middle passage, which frequently included a brief stopover in the West Indies where they were "seasoned" or initiated into racial bondage. Perhaps the most traumatic leg of the coerced exodus, these voyages (generally eight weeks long) to the North American colonies (and the Caribbean archipelago) severed completely African peoples from the complex system of customs, relationships, taboos, and religious ceremonies that ordered their lives. Viewed by their European adversaries as inherently libidinous and savage, the naked prisoners were often raped, beaten, and whipped. Moreover, they were relegated to cramped quarters in filthy vessels ravaged by infectious diseases which claimed numerous black lives - repulsive conditions exacerbated by lengthy delays in the transoceanic journey due to storms and

[4] Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 38-40, 80, 134-136.

calms. Even under the most favorable circumstances, the middle passage was a horrifying experience that former slaves never forgot completely.[5]

For example, Phillis, the daughter of an African king who during her youth was kidnapped in Africa and later purchased from a slave vessel by Cornelius DeHart (d. 1769) of Six-Mile Run in present-day Franklin Township, Somerset County, remembered

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[5] On Africans' participation of in the slave trade, see Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. ch. 5, and John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; orig. pub. 1992), esp. chs. 3-4. For informative general discussions on the middle passage, see Daniel P. Mannix and Malcom Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York: Viking, 1971; orig. pub. 1962), ch. 5; James Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: Norton, 1981), ch. 12; Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 6; and Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), ch. 21. On the association of Africans with unrestrained sexuality, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 32-40. Studies on the mid-passage that focus on the issue of slave mortality include: Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 229-238; Raymond L. Cohn and Richard A. Jensen, "The Determinants of Slave Mortality Rates on the Middle Passage," *Explorations in Economic History* 19 (July 1982): 269-282; David Eltis, "Mortality and Voyage Length in the Middle Passage: New Evidence from the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 44 (June 1984): 301-338; Raymond L. Cohn, "Death of Slaves in the Middle Passage," ibid. 45 (September 1985): 685-692; Richard H. Steckel and Richard A. Jensen, "New Evidence on the Causes of Slave and Crew Mortality in the Atlantic Slave Trade," ibid. 46 (March 1986): 57-77; and David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 36-48. For the best accounts of the enslavement process by Africans who experienced it, see Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, A Native of Africa* [1787], in *Black Atlantic Writers of the 18th Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas*, eds. Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 132-135; Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* [1789], in ibid., pp. 178-191; and Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America* [1798], in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter (Boston: Beacon, 1971), pp. 542-545. For accessible descriptions by white contemporaries, see, for example, William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: Frank Cass, 1967; orig. pub. 1704), pp. 363a-365a; William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade* (London: Frank Cass, 1971; orig. pub. 1734), pp. 157-191; Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 1973; orig. pub. 1788), pp. 12-36; and Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London: Frank Cass, 1967; orig. pub. 1839), ch. 2.

distinctly "that on the voyage to America she was often terribly frightened by some of the crew attempting to feel her hands, she supposing that it was done for the purpose of ascertaining whether she was in good condition for slaughtering, and her carcass to be eaten, as the neighboring tribes of cannibals did in Africa, to avoid which she fasted to cause leanness, so as to disappoint them in their expectations, and thereby preserve her life."[6] Phillis's briefly described ordeal, one of the few commentaries about the middle passage left by a black woman, reminds us not only of African females' fear of callous and sexually depraved white crewmen recruited from the margins of European society, but also of Africans' general anxiety as to white cannibalism, a belief particularly prevalent in the interior of Africa.[7]

While historians have debated intensely the number of Africans brought to the Americas, they have given comparatively little attention to how the captives endured the middle passage.[8] Cedric Robinson emphasizes that the human cargoes aboard slave ships "contained African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality." In other words, the captives

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[6] For Phillis, see Snell, *Hunterdon and Somerset*, p. 104. Ralph Voorhees provided Snell with Phillis's story, which also can be found in Voorhees's "Franklin Township Historical Notes," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 5 (January 1916): 28-29. For similar commentary regarding a New England slave woman, Belinda, captured in Africa, see Sharon M. Harris, ed., *American Women Writers to 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 253-255. Cornelius DeHart's death is verified in Albert L. Stokes, "The DeHart Family," *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 60 (January 1965): 6.

[7] For a brief discussion of the experiences of black women aboard slave ships, see Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985), pp. 63-64. On Africans' fear of white cannibalism, see Piersen, "White Cannibals," p. 148.

[8] The landmark book regarding the overall volume of the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans is Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). Curtin's estimate of 9,566,100 African arrivals in the Americas from 1451 to 1870 (p. 268) has elicited two types of critical responses from scholars: upward revision of different sectors of the slave trade by some, and complete rejection by others - notably J. E. Inikori and James Rawley - who argue that Curtin's global calculation for African imports into the Americas is exceedingly low. For reviews of the debates, see Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis," *Journal of African History* 23 (1982): 473-501, and "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: A Review of the Literature," ibid. 30 (1989): 365-394.

were real human-beings and not "intellectual isolates or deculturated Blacks - men, women, and children separated from their previous universe."[9] Correspondingly, there can be little doubt that religious faith played a prominent role in western Africans' survival of the voyage(s) to the North American colonies. Religion was (and remains) immensely important in the lives of most West African peoples; it explained their place in the universe and their kinship with nature; it regulated their sexual relationships, marital responsibilities, and ceremonies of passage through puberty; and it dictated the roles of women, men, and children in the community and society at large. For the majority of ethnic groups in western Africa, religion symbolized a system of social control, a source of therapy, and a reliable mode of organization. In short, religion there (as elsewhere) was not simply an intellectual abstraction, but rather was crucial to every day life.[10] Thus Jacob Kline's bondspeoples' ability to withstand the middle passage probably was aided by their strong religious faith - namely, belief in a supreme being, spiritual ancestors, predestination, and life after death. Evidently, it continued to bolster their self-esteem and courage, served as their defense against personal degradation, and helped to keep alive their desire to be free in New Jersey, where slaves in the eighteenth century were subjected to broken families at

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[9] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; orig. pub. 1983), pp. 121-122.

[10] The literature on West African religious beliefs and practices is vast and complex. The following instructive sources were consulted for this discussion: Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples* (London: Epworth, 1969; orig. pub. 1949); idem, *African Traditional Religion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1970; orig. pub. 1954); Merran McCulloch, *The Peoples of Sierra Leone Protectorate* (London: International African Institute, 1950); Kenneth Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone: A West African People in Transition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951); W. T. Harris and Harry Sawyerr, *The Springs of Mende Belief and Conduct: A Discussion of the Influence of the Belief in the Supernatural among the Mende* (Freetown, Sierra Leone: University Press/Oxford University Press, 1968); John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1970; orig. pub. 1969); idem, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: S.P.C.K. Holy Trinity Church, 1970); Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1970); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Thornton, *Africa and Africans*.

their owners' whims, rural isolation, and brutal treatment ranging from beatings to public burnings.[11]

Religious or spiritual linkages in the long, fascinating history of African-American spatial movement justify further an analysis of the middle passage in the context of West African religious beliefs and practices. A salient commonality of the major occurrences of black geographical mobility is that the participants - whether slaves escaping at the time of the Revolutionary and Civil wars, millenarian-minded southern "Exodusters" fleeing to Kansas after Reconstruction, or poor and disfranchised tenant farmers (sharecroppers) quitting "Jim Crow" for the industrial North during and after World War II - looked to their notion of God for strength and protection throughout their precarious journeys.[12] Therefore, exploring the utility of African religions aboard slave ships has not only methodological value, but also facilitates understanding of the bridge of African-American spiritual consciousness from slavery through the twentieth century.

Prior to the 1998 publication of Michael Gomez's seminal study *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, in which he argues that the horrific nature of the middle passage played a prominent role in undermining the ethnic separateness of captive Africans, scholars of American slavery, especially those focusing on northern bondage, had generally failed to allot serious attention to the transatlantic component of the enslavement process. The two

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[11] On broken families and rural isolation, see especially Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 88-93, 134-138, and Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1997), pp. 17, 43-44, 77-79, 155-156, 187. On cruel punishments, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 52-53, 65-66, 90-91, 116, 179-180. For suggestive evidence on the physical brutality endured by slaves, see idem, *Rural North*, pp. 60, 123, 177.

[12] See idem, *Root and Branch*, pp. 139-140 n.1; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 56, in conjunction with Susie King Taylor, *Reminisces of My Life: A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs*, eds. Patricia W. Romero and Willie Lee Rose (New York: Markus Wiener, 1992; orig. pub. 1902), pp. 31-33; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1977), ch. 15; and Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), ch. 3.

notable exceptions are John Blassingame and Nathan Huggins. Blassingame, in his 1972 book *The Slave Community*, was among the first historians to discuss the middle passage as a tragic ordeal in southern slaves' long struggle against white oppression. Although Blassingame readily acknowledges that Africans brought some of their "cultural baggage" to the New World and that it played a critical role in their acculturation, he, like Gomez, does not explain explicitly the utility of African religious beliefs as they pertain to black survival aboard slave ships. Huggins's eloquent 1977 work, *Black Odyssey*, analyzes the captives on shipboard from a psychological perspective, and concludes that they were fatalists who believed they had been abandoned by the spirits which on the African continent had made their lives whole. Huggins is unwilling to concede the importance of African religious beliefs during the middle passage which served a variety of purposes, and were not just a source of mere "emotional suppleness" (as one historian puts it) for the slaves.[13]

The middle passage has received scant attention in American slavery historiography primarily because it is difficult to analyze. For the most part the white seamen, and not the African captives themselves, discuss the middle passage's horrific and temporal natures. Not only has the credibility of the principal African testifier Olaudah Equiano been called into question, but also rarely, if ever, was commentary by black women recorded (Phillis's account being one of the few exceptions).[14] Equally problematic, although "records of

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[13] Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 13-14, 145-167. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1972), pp. 7-11, 17-18, 20. Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The African-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York: Vintage, 1990; orig. pub. 1977), pp. 38-54. For phrase, see Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991; orig. pub. 1981), p. 75 n.4.

[14] The validity of Olaudah Equiano's famous and frequently cited 1789 narrative is challenged in Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 20 (December 1999): 96-105. Carretta suggests that Equiano was a native of South Carolina rather than of Africa. Equiano's "rhetorical ethos -," writes Carretta, "his authority to speak as a victim and eye-

slave ships mention points of embarkation," they are usually vague regarding "the original homelands of the human cargo. On this side of the Atlantic, the ethnic names supplied by slave merchants and owners to newly arrived Africans were confused and inexact."[15] As a result, these muted African personages, the vanguard of African-American culture, do not possess an easily recoverable historical identity. However, by examining black survival of the middle passage in relation to African religions, we are able look at the bondspeople belonging to Jacob Kline and other slaves in meaningful human terms.

II

The anonymity of our adult African subjects requires us to verify their enslavement in the Somerset County area. In his *The Story of an Old Farm*, Andrew Mellick explains that in 1786 his great-grandfather Aaron Malick of Bedminster Township, Somerset County, who heretofore had never owned slaves because of his Quaker wife's antislavery disposition, purchased an African-born bondsman from his brother-in-law Johan Jacob Klein or Jacob Kline (1714-1789) of adjacent New Germantown, Hunterdon County, to work on his farm and in his tannery. The name of Aaron Malick's African purchase was Yombo, who Malick's great-grandson writes was "a Guinea Negro, having been brought from Africa when a boy, where, as he claimed, his father was a 'big man.'"[16] No doubt Yombo's father was the very same former African "chief" who hanged himself on "Kline's brook" along with his wife, Yombo's mother.

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witness of slavery in Africa, the West Indies, North America, Europe and the Middle East - was dependent on the African nativity he claimed"; ibid., p. 97.

[15] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 7.

[16] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-603, 648 (quotation, p. 603). For additional information on Jacob Kline, see Snell, *Hunterdon and Somerset*, p. 506, and Kline's 1789 will and inventory found in Recorded Wills, West Jersey, reel no. 522730 (1789-1795), pp. 15-19, New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Archives Section, Trenton (hereafter New Jersey State Archives). His will can also be located in *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser. 6 (1939): 237-238.

Yombo was seventy years old upon Aaron Malick's death in 1809, hence the slave was born in Guinea around the year 1739.[17] Yombo's vague contention that he was a "boy" when taken from Africa sheds little light, however, on the year he and his parents were brought to the New World. Conversely, his ambiguous reference to his nameless father as a "big man" in the vast territory of Guinea implies that he was rather young, perhaps no older than age ten, during their momentous journey. Also suggestive of this point is that Andrew Mellick, who vividly describes Yombo as "stout, coal black, club-footed and very bow-legged" with "rings [hanging] from his ears," does not mention whether the "perverse" and "treacherous" bondsman had any bodily mutilations such as "tribal marks" (Mellick's words), which in many West African societies symbolize the transition from childhood to adulthood. The attentive and racist author would not have missed the opportunity to confer an aspect of African culture with which he was familiar (not knowledgeable), and thereby enhance further Yombo's presumably "conspicuous" or exotic presence on Aaron Malick's homestead.[18] We may assume, then, that our three African personages touched down in New Jersey during the period 1744-1749, when Yombo was between five and ten years old.

Yombo and his family's mid-eighteenth-century North American landing corresponds with the influx of African and West Indian slaves to New Jersey to help satisfy the colony's desire for workers which had been left unfulfilled by natural black reproduction. The slave labor force was boosted by both the Spanish government's decision, in 1714, to allow English slavetraders access to its Caribbean colonies, and by the ensuing rapid expansion of their slave trading operations on the west coast of Africa.

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[17] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 611.

[18] Ibid., pp. 223 ("tribal marks"), 603 (Yombo's physicality). On rites of passage ceremonies, see, for example, McCulloch, *Peoples of Sierra Leone*, pp. 29-35; Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, pp. 119-130; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 158-173; and Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 80-82, 85-87. See also Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 40-42.

This increased trade in humans made more slaves, including our subjects, available to whites in and around New Jersey. Significantly, more than six hundred slaves from Africa and the West Indies were recorded (in an incomplete and thus inaccurate importation schedule) to have landed at Perth Amboy between 1718 and 1757. This figure appears to represent only a portion of the total number of captives brought to New Jersey's principal slave port.[19] Again, Yombo and his parents surely would have come to New Jersey during the period 1744-1749, when the colonials had an insatiable demand for slave labor power that the black population was unable to accommodate.

When the African family landed in the Jersey colony by 1750, Jacob Kline and his business partner, Johannes Moelich, together owned a large farm and tannery in Readington Township consisting of several hundred acres which seemingly required them to seek extra help. It would be many years before Kline's five sons - John William (b. 1750), Jacob (b. 1751), Aaron (b. 1760), Peter (b. 1771), and David (birth unknown) - were able to assist their father in running these vast business enterprises that were carried on in the Kline family for more than seven decades. In addition to being a father, husband, tanner, currier, and agriculturist, Jacob Kline was a public official in Hunterdon County, and as early as 1749 a trustee of Zion Lutheran Church in New Germantown.[20] Like many New Jersey farmowners during the colonial period, the ever busy Kline purchased the three African slaves to address the pressing labor needs both inside and outside of his burgeoning home.[21]

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[19] Hodges, *Root and Branch*, p. 77; Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1932), 3: 510-512.

[20] Melick, *Old Farm*, pp. 75-76, 631, 648; Snell, *Hunterdon and Somerset*, p. 506; Recorded Wills, no. 522730, pp. 15-19. Jacob Kline's will attests that he was the father of five sons, whereas Andrew Mellick's *The Story of an Old Farm* lists only four.

[21] For a summary on the importance of slave labor in the eighteenth-century North, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 55-57, 182-183.

According to Andrew Mellick, in 1752 Johannes Moelich made a special trip to Perth Amboy, Middlesex County, to retrieve a possible letter "from the old country." During Moelich's visit, Mellick explains, he probably took notice of the New Jersey capital's diverse population comprised of "the expatriated Irish, Dutch, Germans, and English," "the sturdy yeomanry," "the gentry, richly dressed in all the magnificence of the times," and lastly, "the Negroes," many of whom "were freshly imported, bearing their tribal marks, and exhibiting their native characteristics, as if still inhabiting the wilds of Guinea." If Moelich had witnessed this human spectacle - namely, the stolen Africans - then so did his business partner Jacob Kline, who, as a justice of the peace in Hunterdon County, was required to be in Perth Amboy for the annual gathering of state officials known as "court days."[22] What does this all suggest? Kline went to the slave barracks on the corner of Smith and Water streets to buy Yombo and his parents, the place where whites in Somerset and Hunterdon counties generally purchased their bondspeople.[23]

Although it is probable that the Kline slaves entered New Jersey through Perth Amboy, because of the faceless nature of the city's Customs House records on black imports during the period 1718-1757, we will never know the exact ship which brought them to the colony - and thereby gain greater insight into their lives. Twenty-one of the reported twenty-seven slave ships which docked there at this time had come directly from the Caribbean, thus suggesting that both Andrew Mellick and John Thompson failed to mention that our three protagonists may have been held briefly in the West Indies prior to arriving in New Jersey.[24]

Yombo's first name provides important clues as to the specific area in "Guinea" (which in the eighteenth century encompassed the vast region roughly between the Senegal

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[22] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 156, 216, 223, 224, 648.

[23] James H. Levitt, *For Want of Trade: Shipping and the New Jersey Ports, 1680-1783* (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Society, 1981), pp. 96, 106, 117-118.

[24] Donnan, *Documents*, 3: 510-512.

River and Angola) where the enslaved family lived originally.[25] Yombo closely resembles the name "Yamboo" which has been identified among the Mende, Bobangi, and Hausa peoples. The fact that both the Hausa and Bobangi were located outside of Guinea proper in present-day northern Nigeria-southern Niger and central Zaire, respectively, eliminates the possibility of the family belonging to either ethnic group. Therefore, our "Yombo" probably is kindred to the Mende "Yamboo," pronounced "yambu," "yambo," "lambo," and "jambo."[26] Correspondingly, in Mende society women often times were rulers as well as holders of high offices and less authoritative political positions.[27] As Michael Gomez writes, Sierra Leonians "came to North America from small-scale polities with egalitarian tendencies as far as gender was concerned, in contrast to the large, centralized Gold Coast states, where women were not as prominent."[28] The implication here as inspired by John Thompson's speech is that Yombo's anonymous mother was, or could have been politically powerful. According to this suggestive body of evidence, the Africans enslaved under Jacob Kline were probably Mande-speaking Mendes who resided in proximity to Sierra Leone.

Near the middle of the sixteenth century, the "Manes," an inland warlike group which seemingly included the Mende, invaded Sierra Leone several times, producing a major source of slaves for the Atlantic slave trade in the defeated "Sapes." These

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[25] This definition of "Guinea" is based upon Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (London: Frank Cass, 1968; orig. pub. 1771), p. 1, and James Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Father: A Study of the Atlantic Slave Traders, 1441-1807* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p. 38. By contrast, Philip Curtin defines "Guinea" as a much smaller region extending from the Senegal River to Sierra Leone; *Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 128.

[26] Newbell Niles Puckett, collector, *Black Names in America: Origins and Usage*, ed. Murray Heller (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1975), p. 463.

[27] Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 2, 3. On the politicization of women during the colonial era, see Carol P. Hoffer, "Mende and Sherbro Women in High Office," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6 (1972): 151-164.

[28] Gomez, *Country Marks*, p. 88.

multiethnic invasions created a new configuration of political units governed by kings and chiefs. Disputes over boundaries brought the Mane leaders into constant conflict with one another, as well as with any of the original rulers who were able to resist them; and thereby helped to establish warfare as a principal activity and institution in Sierra Leone. The losers, probably including Yombo and various members of his family, were thrust into bondage.[29] Indeed, numerous slaves brought to New York-New Jersey were refugees from the political turmoil in eighteenth-century Africa precipitated by the expanding frontier of slavery.[30] In her journal kept from 1810 to 1811, Rachel Van Dyke of New Brunswick, New Jersey, indicated that the old and anonymous family slave "remember[ed] that the people were all fighting and the town was on fire when she was carried away" from Guinea as a youth. There was "one black man she will never forget. He tore all her gold ornaments from her, and when she cried boxed her ears."[31]

III

Andrew Mellick contends that the West Africans who were "stolen" and forcibly shipped to New Jersey "were physically powerful and good workers, but without much power of reasoning or of controlling their undisciplined imaginations."[32] Notwithstanding Mellick's trite racism discussed in Chapter 1, his comment is important because it testifies, indirectly,

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[29] Portuguese sources refer to these two coastal populations as "Manes" and "Sapes." Walter Rodney persuasively argues that the Mende are descendants of the Mane, although there is no documentary evidence of the former's existence in Sierra Leone until the eighteenth century; *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (New York: Monthly Review, 1982; orig. pub. 1970), pp. 41, 30-31, 102-103.

[30] Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 80-81 n.48.

[31] Lucia McMahon and Deborah Schriver, eds., *To Read My Heart: The Journal of Rachel Van Dyke, 1810-1811* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 44. Not surprisingly, there is no mention in the journal of the bondswoman's transatlantic experience.

[32] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 224.

to newly arrived Africans' ability to maintain their sense of humanity despite being subjected to the pernicious Atlantic slave trade. Mellick's fortuitous insight begs the question: Why were Yombo's parents and many of their compatriots not demoralized completely by the middle passage? Consideration of West African religious beliefs and customs facilitates our understanding of this elusive issue.

Any analysis of the thought processes of Africans aboard slave ships requires not only imagination, but also some general understanding of both the make up of vessels and how the captives were confined as regards to gender. Partly because of economic necessity and partly because of their desire to earn a profit, northern merchants who participated in the slave trade usually employed relatively small, cheaply built, and often times unseaworthy crafts which they staffed with as few sailors as possible. That is, these largely small-time investors tended to own and/or own shares in sloops, brigantines, and schooners - rarely a large ship like the "Guineamen" from Liverpool, England - that were both inexpensive and less difficult to manage with a small crew.[33]

The captain and personnel of "Yankee" slavers (and others) made the existence of the African captives practically unbearable. Once brought shipboard, crewmen coerced these emotionally traumatized prisoners, who despaired of ever seeing their country again, into hot and poorly ventilated holds only a few feet high between decks to prevent them - namely, adult males who initially had been chained together in twos and then stowed "spoon fashion" - from seizing the vessel. Women and children, conversely, remained unfettered yet separated from the men, and therefore their protection and influence, by deliberately constructed partitions. Shipboard security was often based on the chauvinistic belief that the physically weaker females represented little if any real threat to the armed crew's safety. For example, Captain William Snelgrave writing in 1727, explains that,

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[33] On the North American dimensions of the slave trade, see Mannix and Cowley, *Black Cargoes*, ch. 7; James G. Lydon, "New York and the Slave Trade, 1700 to 1774," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (April 1978): 388-391; and Rawley, *Transatlantic Slave Trade*, chs. 14-15. Rawley also provides a corrective of the size of Liverpool slavers which were smaller than is typically believed; ibid., pp. 197-198.

"When we purchase the Negroes, we couple the sturdy Men together, with Irons; but we suffer the Women and Children to go freely about; And soon we after sail'd from the Coast, we undo all the Men irons."[34] Some paranoid skippers, however, kept the men shackled the entire voyage. Despite their possession of numerous weapons (pistols, knives, and cutlasses), whites feared greatly the angry and despondent African males in these incommodious compartments who lay naked, thirsty, hungry, and diseased on bare wooden planks, and who were subjected to the violent motions of the rolling ship which caused skin to rub off prominent parts of their bodies.[35]

Clearly, adult males had a great need for divine intervention and consolation. Correspondingly, though religion had a tremendous impact on the thinking of West Africans, it was often men's business. In numerous traditional or pre-colonial West African societies, men comprised the priesthood and were reputed as those who possessed magical and other such powers. Indeed, the religious life of society typically was placed under the aegis of the group, namely, the eldest or family patriarch. This role was usually passed down to the eldest son. According to the creed of many West African religious systems, man, while not the king of all creation, was placed in the center of the world by God - a position symbolic of his strength and marriage to the divinity.[36] So it is highly unlikely that "big" and spiritually endowed men such as Yombo's father would have descended into the frightening hold, which many captives possibly perceived as entering "a world of bad spirits," without their cosmologies that defined their sacred place in the

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[34] Snelgrave, *Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, p. 163. See also Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell, eds., *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton), 1750-1754*, with Newton's "Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade" (London: Epworth, 1962), pp. 80, 103, 105, and Falconbridge, *Account of the Slave Trade*, pp. 19-20.

[35] On use of weapons, see Snelgrave, *Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, pp. 165-167. On conditions, see Falconbridge, *Account of the Slave Trade*, pp. 19, 21, 24-25, 27-28.

[36] Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, p. 31.

universe.[37] Because these individuals had little else to sustain themselves, we may suppose that their views of the supernatural continued to resonate in their traumatized minds while crossing the seemingly infinite Atlantic.

While many Western observers (that is, people of "white," European descent) were well-aware of the religious devotion of African males living on the Guinea coast, they frequently dismissed it as "fetishism," a misnomer as pointed out by several scholars of religion in West Africa. A term of Portuguese origin derived from the Latin word *factitus*, meaning "magically artful," fetishism was used widely by ensuing Western encroachers to describe religion and worship on the African continent. That is to say, Westerners often wrongly perceived the charms, amulets, and incantations utilized by African peoples - similar to those of the Portuguese themselves - as constituting the whole of West African belief systems. For example, William Smith, who surveyed the Guinea Coast in 1726-1727 for the Royal African Company (a slave trading firm in England), referred to the largest sect in Gambia as "Pagans" who had "no Religion at all," but instead worshipped a "Fittish" (e.g. "a Lion's tail . . . a Bird's Feather") which they believed "defend them from all Danger's." In Smith's Eurocentric opinion, such adoration was completely nonsensical.[38]

This summary in no way proposes, however, that the negative statements made by William Smith and other Western commentators about the manners and customs of their African counterparts are devoid of intellectual value.[39] To the contrary, some reveal,

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[37] Olaudah Equiano explains that upon being brought aboard his slaver, "I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I was sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to eat me"; *Interesting Narrative*, in *Black Atlantic Writers*, Potkay and Burr, p. 185.

[38] For works that argue against fetishism as representing the core of African religious beliefs, see, for example, Parrinder, *West African Religion*, pp. 8-10, and *African Traditional Religion*, pp. 15-17. William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London: Frank Cass, 1967; orig. pub. 1744), pp. 26-27. For a listing of additional Western accounts, see the "Bibliography" in Rodney, *Upper Guinea Coast*, pp. 273-275.

[39] Similarly, as noted by Geoffrey Parrinder, "It is not so much that the old writers were all of them bad observers. Indeed some of them did make good use of the unique

indirectly, an acute sense of black empowerment through allegedly idolatrous and heathenish beliefs transported across the Atlantic. Smith's sarcastic remark that, "generally speaking, a Negro's taking [or subscribing to] the Fittish in Guinea may as sincerely be relied on as the Oath of a Christian in Europe," bespeaks his understanding of Africans' religious devotion which manifested itself aboard slavers, and rendered black males an even greater threat to their oppressors.[40] John Newton, in his 1750-1754 account of his participation in the Atlantic slave trade, made reference to a slave plot in which the men captives sought "to poyson the water in the scuttle casks upon deck . . . with their country fetishes, as they call them, or talismans." By tainting this vital resource, they hoped "to kill all who drank it." Newton downplayed the rebels' plan of action by stating mockingly that they intended "to charm us to death."[41] Whether he cared to admit it or not, these "Pagan" beliefs instilled slaves with a sense of guardianship, and thereby cunning and daring, which put every white man's life in serious jeopardy. As pointed out by missionary Joseph Corry who visited the Windward Coast (Sierra Leone) in 1805-1806, not only did blacks there place great trust in "their fetish, as an antidote against evil," but also believed that "forgiveness of injuries [to be] incompatible with the nature of man; and [hence] a spirit of retaliation is very prevalent and hereditary [among them], descending in succession from father to son."[42]

Still, it cannot be denied that African men had a difficult time maintaining a level of vengeful spiritual cognizance while in chains, physically naked, and stripped of their

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opportunities they had of seeing rites that have now practically disappeared. But the rather depreciatory language which they often used, and the semi-humorous attitude many of them took up, has infected succeeding generations"; *African Traditional Religion*, p. 13.

[40] Smith, *New Voyage to Guinea*, p. 27.

[41] Martin and Spurrell, *John Newton*, p. 56. For a corresponding account, see John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and The West Indies in His Majesty's Ships*, The Swallow and Weymouth (London: Frank Cass, 1970; orig. pub. 1735), pp. 57-58.

[42] Joseph Corry, *Observations Upon the Windward Coast of Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1968; orig. pub. 1807), pp. 61, 63.

sources of personal protection. Could it be that enslaving persons, including the sardonic John Newton, were at least subconsciously aware of this as well? Certainly, it behooved both captain and crew to have some understanding of the philosophies which fueled their black passengers' militant consciousness. As evidence, William Snelgrave had the head of a male slave who killed one of his crewmen "cut off" and tossed into the ocean, because "many of the Blacks believe, that if they are put to death and not dismembred, they shall return again to their own Country, after they are thrown overboard."[43]

All this is not to say that African women were devoid of religious or spiritual sentience. Apparently, like the men, women's hardships shipboard, particularly sexual exploitation, caused them to turn to their sources of strength and safekeeping. Though "religion in Africa is principally a man's affair, its reason for being is woman, guardian of life and link between the living and the dead, between the past and the future."[44] Also, women, especially in western Africa, frequently were sacred specialists such as diviners and mediums (individuals who act as intermediaries between human beings and the supernatural worlds of ancestors, deities, rivers, and the bush), and had secret societies of their own (as among Sierra Leonians) that functioned along religious lines.[45] In short, African women, including Yombo's high-ranking mother no doubt, were religious persons who became cognizant of their own self-worth.

So despite their sufferings aboard slave ships, females were not always completely immobilized psychologically. Indeed, some whites were as concerned about the women

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[43] Snelgrave added that, "but neither the Person that was executed, nor his Countrymen of Cormantee (as I understood afterwards,) were so weak as to believe any such thing; tho' many I had on board from other Countries had that Opinion"; *Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, p. 184.

[44] Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, p. 31.

[45] For diviners, see M. J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People* (London: Clarendon, 1937), pp. 100-109; Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, pp. 100-104; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 224-233; and Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, pp. 83-85. On secret societies, see Parrinder, *West African Religion*, ch. 12; McCulloch, *Peoples of Sierra Leone*, pp. 29-34; Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, pp. 12-14; Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone*, pp. 10-11; and Gomez, *Country Marks*, pp. 94-99 n.31.

rebelling as they were the men. In his 1734 letter written to Captain Samuel Rhodes, Samuel Waldo, the owner of Rhodes's ship, implored that, "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."[46] In 1721 the English slaver *Robert* almost fell victim to Waldo's astute observation. An anonymous black woman, using the freedom of movement allowed her on the ship's deck, assisted another African captive named Tomba in staging a rebellion. She was to inform Tomba of the best time to strike against the whites. One night she did just this and Tomba, along with three or four other male conspirators, promptly murdered several crew members with the weapons she provided them. Their success, however, was short lived. The noise from their killings awoke the other whites shipboard, who after an intense struggle with the African insurgents, suppressed their uprising. For her participation in the bloody altercation, the woman informant was brutally "hoisted up by the Thumbs, whipp'd, and slashed . . . with Knives, before the other Slaves till she died."[47] While she certainly understood fully the consequences of an unsuccessful rebellion, she may have reasoned that it was worth risking her life for freedom. Her religious disposition perhaps played an important role in fostering her rebelliousness. Indeed, several scholars have argued, convincingly, the connection between religiosity and slave resistance.[48]

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[46] Quoted in Donnan, *Documents*, 2: 266.

[47] Tomba was struck with a "Hand-spike" by the ship's Captain Harding but not killed because of the slave's high market value. Captain Harding also spared the lives of two other rebels of some financial worth, having them whipped instead. On the other hand, Harding sentenced "three others, Abettors, but not Actors . . . to cruel Deaths; making them first eat the Heart and Liver of one of them killed." See Atkins, *Voyage to Guinea*, pp. 41-42, 71-73. Similarly, former Fanti slave Quobna Ottobah Cugoano recalls that during his passage to the island of Grenada, "the women and boys . . . were to burn the ship, with the approbation and groans of the rest; though that was prevented, the discovery was likewise a cruel bloody scene"; *Thoughts and Sentiments*, in *Black Atlantic Writers*, Potkay and Burr, p. 135.

[48] David Gaspar has effectively shown how Akan religious ceremonies emboldened bondsmen to rebel in eighteenth-century Antigua. Similarly, Carolyn Fick posits that

Not every slave, however, was as gallant as Tomba and his female counterpart. There can be little doubt that Africans' fear of white violence deterred many of them from resisting oppression while aboard ship. According to Olaudah Equiano, the whites on his slaver behaved in a savage manner that was completely alien to him. Their barbarity seemingly influenced how he and his compatriots conducted themselves.[49] William Snelgrave attributed slave passivity to "kindly" treatment and "a good Watch" against their insurgency.[50] Snelgrave and his slave trading contemporaries were unwilling to see the African cargoes as thinking, feeling human beings who realized the futility in confronting the armed and organized Westerners, and thereby called on their own personal resources for survival.

Still, this explication fails to bespeak fully the amenable disposition of the captives. The middle passage, as noted, represented a death of sorts for slaves as it signaled their complete separation from their prior existence. So we can hardly imagine that this traumatic realization was reconciled easily or quickly, but instead involved a complex range of emotions including denial, anger, depression, acceptance, and, most significantly, hope. Arguably, the emotional and physical energies of many soon to be North American

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voodoo empowered slaves to resist in Saint Domingue by serving as both a unifying and spiritual force in their daily lives. Joao Reis likewise discusses the role of Allah and/or Yoruba Gods, *orisha*, in fueling the resistance of slaves in Bahia. Reis contends that Islam united slaves across ethnic and legal boundaries, as well as across the rural/urban divide which was imperative to the success of their 1835 revolt. Robin Kelley argues that the belief that God is on one's side increases the probability that an oppressed individual or group will resist. James Scott emphasizes the integral role religion played in fostering a rebellious consciousness among slaves. See David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 244-246; Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 44-45, 94, 137, 244; Joao Jose Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 112-115, 118-128; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 43; and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 115-117.

[49] Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, p. 187.

[50] Snelgrave, *Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, p. 168.

bondspeople were spent grappling with the reality of their symbolic death.[51] Surely, then, it was partly because many captives believed in a supreme being that governed all events which enabled them to endure such an ordeal and emerge from it somewhat whole, psychologically. In the words of John Matthews, who was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy and resident of Sierra Leone during the period 1785-1787, the black inhabitants there "acknowledge and profess their belief in a God, who, they say dwells above them, and made and governs all things," adding that, "If any circumstance of joy or distress happen they very cooly say God sent it them (unless they fancy it was caused by witchcraft)."[52] This conceptualization of God as both gracious and just may to some extent explain why Yombo's parents were able to survive the passage, and then decide to end their lives in Central Jersey when it became evident to them that their enslavement was permanent.

IV

Although Reverend Thompson is probably correct in mentioning that many New Jersey slaveowners and, by implication, Jacob Kline, required their slaves to be natives of Guinea, this was not necessarily because of "Guinea Negroes'" purported "superior endowment, both mental and physical" as he suggests. In the aftermath of the New York City slave conspiracy of 1712 in which twenty-three captives were convicted of killing nine whites and wounding seven others, the legislators of New York and New Jersey, in 1714, passed duties "discriminating against West Indian blacks in favor of Africans." Middle Atlantic whites interested in slave labor "preferred to purchase slaves directly from Africa"

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[51] For the basis of this idea, see Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 38-138.

[52] John Matthews, *A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone* (London: Frank Cass, 1966; orig. pub. 1788), p. 65.

whom they perceived were less dangerous or barbaric than their West Indian counterparts (though both colonies relied heavily on black imports from the Caribbean).[53]

Perhaps to the chagrin of Mid-Atlantic slaveowners, bonded males in North America who had been leaders or of high status in Africa often refused to work for any white person, and thereby received punishment to change their resolve.[54] This would imply that Yombo's father had made known his disapproval as regards his degraded status under Jacob Kline. Conversely, this interpretation ignores his sense of survival. Reverend Thompson's comment that he and his wife committed suicide after "Every endeavor was made to cheer and comfort them" indicates that the husband had modified any aberrant behavior on his part which might have precluded the couple from gaining any concessions, and gave credence to the dominant society's perception of him as extremely dangerous.

As Bertram Wyatt-Brown has pointed out in his essay on male slave psychology, bondsmen "were considered the most troublesome, and therefore on them fell the greater demands for signals of full compliance."[55] According to the bedrock of eighteenth-century white racial beliefs influenced largely by the writing of English slavetraders a century earlier, black people possessed inferior (i.e. sexually aggressive and savage) natures that needed to be controlled rigidly. Black men were characterized as having a rapacious desire for white women and therefore were condemned as a direct threat to the white race if left unrestrained.[56] The male-dominated New Jersey General Assembly fueled this myth by

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[53] For an in-depth discussion on the slave uprising, see Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 45 (January 1961): 43-74. Also see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 64-68, and Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1969; orig. pub. 1943), pp. 172-173. On slave preferences, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 77-79 (quotations, p. 77).

[54] See Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, p. 17; Piersen, "White Cannibals," pp. 151-152; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *American Historical Review* 93 (December 1988): 1228-1229.

[55] Wyatt-Brown, "Mask of Obedience," p. 1229.

[56] Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 24-28, 32-40, 109-110, 150-163.

making the rape of a white female by a black male punishable by castration in a 1704 act which never became an official law. Although in the 1713 slave code corporal punishment replaced castration for rape, the racist view of black males as posing a real danger to all segments of white society had been espoused effectively. This message was further professed, indirectly, in the 1768 decree regulating slave behavior which provided that blacks found guilty of arson, murder, or physical assault (of whites) were to be executed without the benefit of clergymen.[57]

Undoubtedly, the 1734 slave conspiracy near Somerville, Somerset County, in which a body of captives are said to have planned to murder their male owners and ravish their mistresses, also played an important role in the early, negative image whites had of bondsmen (and women) as dangerous and beast-like. One white contemporary who followed the court proceedings referred acidly to the rebels in the *New York Gazette* as "these barbarous monsters." He most likely approved greatly of the punishments meted out following the inquisitions. Two of the several hundred slaves arrested were hanged, another had an ear cut off, and many others were flogged.[58]

Arguably, the actual violent crimes perpetrated by enslaved males against members of the ruling race played a significant role in sustaining the former's alleged brutishness. The following two examples in Somerset County are suggestive of this point. In 1739 the bondsman belonging to Robert Hopper, of Rocky Hill, butchered a white child with an ax because its mother (Hooper's overseer's wife), whom he failed to kill, ordered him to build

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[57] For slave codes, see especially Marion Thompson Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 28 (April 1943): 165-166, 167-168, 171, and James C. Connolly, "Slavery in Colonial New Jersey and the Causes Operating Against its Extension," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 14 (January 1929): 196, 199.

[58] *New York Gazette*, March 25, 1734. For the executions, see *Weekly Rehearsal* (Philadelphia), February 11, 1734. For discussion of the conspiracy, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 89-90.

a fire.[59] In 1752 Jacob Van Neste of North Branch, bounded southwest by Readington Township, was executed by the ax of his own male captive who was described as big and athletic and considered dangerous, because he had helped himself to some of the slave's tobacco or personal property. Subsequent to his confession, the slave (and Hooper's) was sentenced to a public burning. Yet to the astonishment of the white press, "He stood the Fire with the greatest Intrepidity," saying "they had taken the Root but left the Branches." In other words, there were many more black insurgents like himself.[60]

Given the hostile, indeed, brutal relationship between enslaved males and whites during the colonial period, Yombo's father - who seemingly was also thick-set and very dark-skinned, and hence a physical threat to the safety of whites - doubtlessly treaded cautiously around Jacob Kline and folk of his kind. Alex Bontemps, who characterizes the institution of slavery as a concerted assault on bondspeoples' sense of self, elucidates eloquently upon the dilemma each bondsperson faced of being required to adopt the servile identity of a "Negro" in order to survive in a hostile white world without becoming one. Yombo's distinguished father, we may assume, too was confronted with this "truly savage paradox."[61]

The bondsman's sense of frustration can be discerned from the events mentioned above in 1734, 1739, and 1752. The Somerville uprising was concealed from whites until a drunken male slave, emboldened by his intoxicated condition, told a white man named Rennels, "That he was as good a Man as himself, and that in a little Time he should be

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[59] *Boston Weekly News Letter*, January 18-25, 1739. See also Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 90-91.

[60] As regards the murder and public burning, see, respectively, *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, December 25, 1752, and *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), January 9, 1753. See also Abraham Messler, *Centennial History of Somerset County* (Somerville, N.J.: C. M. Jameson, 1878), pp. 128-129; Snell, *Hunterdon and Somerset*, p. 759; Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 226; and Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 134-136. According to legend, "the effect upon the slaves present [at the execution] was so great that they did not eat any meat for a long time afterwards"; Messler, *Centennial History*, p. 129.

[61] Alex Bontemps, *The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery in the Colonial South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. ix.

convinced of it." Rennels referred to his black antagonist as a "great Raskal," for the bondsman had breached the code of silence and consent typical of all power relations. As evident by its emphasis on the word "Man," the editorship of the *New York Gazette* was similarly aghast by the slave's "freedom and Independence," or sense of manhood, that made every proud black male a danger to whites.[62] Considering New Jersey's severe slave code aimed specifically at black men, one might easily conclude that the murders committed by the captives belonging to Robert Hooper and Jacob Van Neste were rather senseless crimes. More accurately, however, these homicides suggest the two men's inability to find constructive outlets for expressing their hostile feelings.[63] Put yet another way, their violent acts represent desperate retaliations against whites' constant violation of the slaves' masculine sensibilities which they were required to modify if not forsake completely. Hence, it comes as no surprise that Yombo's father would eventually cast off the mask of deference he wore daily in the presence of whites and attempt to liberate himself from bondage, that is, reclaim his manhood probably characterized by (in pre-colonial West Africa) physical prowess, husbandhood, and fatherhood. Under slavery, as Daniel Black has pointed out, it was nearly impossible for black men to assert themselves as warriors, husbands, and fathers - a reality which undoubtedly fueled their indignation.[64]

Yombo's mother was perhaps no more reconciled to bondage than her husband. Indeed, she is a compelling reminder of black women's rebellious consciousness which manifested itself in gender-specific acts of resistance including abortion and infanticide,

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[62] *New York Gazette*, March 25, 1734. On power relations, see Scott, *Arts of Resistance*, p. 8.

[63] See David Abrahamsen, *The Murdering Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 29-30.

[64] Daniel P. Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery* (New York: Garland, 1997), chs. 2 and 3.

feigning pregnancy, and poisoning; and in unisex forms such as malingering, carelessness, thievery, running away, insurrection plots, and mistreatment of the owner's property.[65]

As implied here, her and her husband's suicide was a joint agreement made between relatively equal partners. Like the Somerville conspiracy, it was probably after several discussions in their "Negro-quarters" located at a distance from the mainhouse that the couple agreed to their strategy of resistance, which was "kept so private amongst themselves, that there was not the least appearance or suspicion of it," that is, until Jacob Kline found them hanging from his "cedar tree."[66] In other words, their death was the result of a process of intimate deliberation and preparation totally unbeknownst to Kline who failed to realize fully, if at all, the extent of his slaves' cerebral capabilities.[67]

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[65] See especially Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History* 27 (October 1942): 388-419; Darlene Clark Hine and Kate Wittenstein, "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex," in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, ed. Filomina Chioma Steady (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 289-300; Elizabeth 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, 1986), pp. 144-165; idem, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), ch. 6; and Betty Wood, "Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815," *Historical Journal* 30 (1987): 603-622.

[66] *New York Gazette*, March 25, 1734 (quotation). Generally, the separation of "Negro-quarters" or "negro houses" from the owner's home was related to slaves' proclivity to steal. See Susan E. Klepp, "Seasoning and Society: Racial Differences in Mortality in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (July 1994): 485 n.40. As part of his attempt to appease our subjects, Jacob Kline may have provided them with similar low and crudely constructed housing accommodations, which afforded them a modicum of privacy and independence.

[67] By emphasizing the arts of resistance paradigm outlined by James Scott, we can read the suicide of Yombo's parents as a public declaration of the "hidden transcript," which Scott defines as those acts, plots, etc. that take place outside the sphere of the power holders as represented here by Jacob Kline; *Arts of Resistance*, pp. 4-5, 202, 203, 206-212.

V

To Kline no doubt, the couple's premeditated death epitomized African peoples' innate savagery "little understood by the Jersey people."[68] He and other whites assumed that such actions by their Africans (Kwa, Ewe, Fanti, Mandingoes, Fulas, Wolofs, Jolas, Aja, Yoruba, Nupe, and Hausa) in the first half of the eighteenth century were grounded in barbarism, rather than in their religious-oriented consciousness.[69] William Piersen agues that though "suicide is a cardinal sin in Christian theology, for most African immigrants, suicide was basically a personal concern." Suicide for slaves "was a reaffirmation of faith - a form of religious martyrdom."[70] This point is seemingly exemplified in the following two suicides in Somerset County. In 1754 the female slave Jeane of South Branch resident Abraham Duboys hanged herself in her owner's barn. Two years later, Dine, a captive belonging to Daniel Hanery of Bedminster, took her own life by hanging herself from an oak tree. As the respective "Inquisitions" or court hearings tell it, the suicides of Jeane and Dine, perhaps native West Africans, were "instagated by the devil."[71] More convincingly, however, like the Kline captives, the women's self-murders were abetted by their African-centered cosmology, and not by white Christian men's conception of the devil which, in reference to them, implies racial barbarity and inferiority.[72] That is, similar to other West

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[68] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 224.

[69] On the ethnicity of New Jersey slaves, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, p. 80 n.46.

[70] Piersen, "White Cannibals," p. 151.

[71] Inquisitions on the Dead (1688-1798), 4 vols., 3: 372, 380, New Jersey State Archives.

[72] The names "Jeane" and "Dine" are both present in the Mende lexicon of names. Jeane is a probable English corruption of "Jena" (pronounced Jen) meaning "a small bird," and Dine a diminutive form of "Dinna" meaning "a broad-leaved plant that grows in swamps." Hence, the two women may have been from the same African group as Yombo and his parents. See Puckett, *Black Names*, pp. 379, 398. As pointed out by Gary B. Nash, slaves were frequently given English names "in a shortened or diminutive form, as if to connote [their] half-person status" under bondage; *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 81.

African-born slaves who committed suicide, the two bondswomen (and possibly the Kline captives) believed that their souls transmigrated back to Africa, manifesting themselves in other entities. Hence, spirit migration was closely associated with reincarnation, a concept which parallels the Christian notion of immortality. In a sense, then, suicide was a heroic form of slave resistance, as it allowed for possible regeneration.[73]

As indicated, "many if not most of the populations of Sierra Leone posited the existence of a high god or creator."[74] For the Mende, this entity is referred to as *Ngewo*, the architect of the universe and the all-seeing, all-knowing father-protector.[75] In their view, God "predetermines the life of each person, and that this cannot or should not be changed." Thus "if God has made a person poor, that person should not desire to be rich."[76] To be sure, Yombo's parents did not conceive of bondage under Jacob Kline or any white person as their predetermined fate. By refusing to grant husband and wife the status befitting their previous high station in Africa, Kline, it would appear, had left the couple with no other choice but to end their lives in the earthly world for the place occupied by the righteous (which the Mende refer to as *dadagole-hun*, or heaven), where the ancestors resided and where they could live as they did during their natural or human existence - namely, like rulers.[77]

Evidently, the cedar tree upon which the slaves hanged themselves, together with the adjoining brook, also constituted integral components of their cosmology. Among

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[73] Piersen, "White Cannibals," p. 151; Gomez, *Country Marks*, p. 120; Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 69 n.30.

[74] Gomez, *Country Marks*, p. 94 n.28.

[75] See especially McCulloch, *Peoples of Sierra Leone*, pp. 39-40; Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, pp. 217-218, 227; and Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief and Conduct*, p. 65.

[76] Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, p. 54.

[77] Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief and Conduct*, pp. 30, 31, 32, 89, 136-137 (heaven), passim (*Ngewo*). Conversely, "the wicked go to the place where they till the soil with their elbows and so suffer extreme hunger" (i.e. *ngombi-me-hun*, "the place of eating knees," which is obviously equivalent to the Christian notion of hell); ibid., p. 89.

many African peoples, all aspects of nature can be discerned as a place of divine worship. This is particularly the case with respect to trees, which Africans believe represent the complete bonding of nature (air, rain, sun), and are involved directly with "time" since they develop according to seasonal rhythms or cycles (a periodic process similar to the concept of prolongation by which Africans understand their own existence). Like the almighty, trees are symbolic of "power, wealth, uprightness, and everlastingness." In other words, trees were regarded by Africans as having supernatural powers that could be evoked through prayer and regular offerings of food.[78] So it was probably by way of the tree on Jacob Kline's property that his captives appealed to the ancestors to deliver them from bondage. Correspondingly, Africans associate the still water of ponds and lakes "with the origin and creation of man and the world."[79] For this reason the captives may have perceived the brook of their owner as a conduit to the ancestors.

Whereas whites viewed the Africans' suicide as an abominable crime illustrative of their lack of Christian civility, to their son no doubt, it exhibited their true greatness. For adult Yombo continued to refer to his deceased father as a "big man," as an individual worthy of his respect and admiration. Such filial veneration is hardly indicative of a person who was ashamed of his father for taking his own life in a state of emotional distress. Rather, it leads us to believe that Yombo was proud his father controlled his own destiny. This is not to suggest, however, that Yombo, who most likely had been a boy at the time of his parents' earthly demise, was unaffected by it. Then, too, Yombo may not have grieved very long because, spiritually speaking, his parents had never left him.

Many ethnic groups in western Africa including the Mende, as insinuated above, believe firmly in the existence of dead ancestors (living dead) who appear to them in dreams, who hover around where they dwell, and who they consider to be the general link

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[78] Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, pp. 4, 27-28 (quotations, pp. 27, 28); Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief and Conduct*, pp. 47-48.

[79] Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, p. 21.

between human beings and the supernatural world. As members of a particular family or descent group, dead ancestors retain a continuous interest in family matters and expect a share of the affection accorded older living family members. Unlike faraway *Ngewo* who is regarded as being distant from the everyday problems of man/woman, the ancestors, it is believed, "understand the stress and strain of human life, because they themselves had experienced them"; and thereby are "the more effective agents in determining the well-being or distress which effect the tribe or the clan or the family." Specifically, it is through the ancestors that people seek the desired goals in life. As slaves, Yombo's parents could provide him with little if any protection against the vicissitudes of bondage. However, as spiritual intermediaries evoked through prayers and offerings of food, they possibly could address more effectively his tribulations.[80] The spiritual power and guidance conferred upon him through his parents helps to explain why Yombo was such a proud bondsman who remained an African in his philosophical orientation (evidenced by the slave's wearing of earrings and speaking a "jargon peculiar to himself"), at a time when many of his northern and southern compatriots had become highly acculturated by the end of the eighteenth century.[81]

When did his parents end their lives? The will of Jacob Kline dated June 10, 1785, helps us to unravel this mystery. In his will, Kline left his "Negroe Boy and Negroe Wench," the patriarch's only slaves, to wife Fronica Gertraut.[82] When considering that

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[80] Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief and Conduct*, esp. ch. 2 (quotations, pp. 13, 14); McCulloch, *Peoples of Sierra Leone*, pp. 39-42; Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, pp. 218-221; Parrinder, *West African Religion*, ch. 11; idem, *African Traditional Religion*, ch. 5, passim; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 107-118.

[81] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603 (quotation). "The experience of acculturation," writes Gerald Mullin, "means that as slaves came to know varieties of whites and their ways, they acquired occupational skills, fluent English, and a distinctive, 'sensible' manner in speaking situations," none of these attributes of which Yombo seemed to possess; *Flight and Rebellion*, p. 37. For a lucid statement on northern slaves' adoption of white cultural norms, see Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 28.

[82] Recorded Wills, no. 522730, p. 15.

Kline sold Yombo to father-in-law Aaron Melick in 1785 (and not in 1786 as stated by Andrew Mellick), and that slave families in New Jersey frequently were broken up in this manner, the bondspeople mentioned in Kline's will apparently were Yombo's wife and son.[83] Hence, Yombo's parents committed suicide during the period 1744-1785. It is doubtful, however, that the couple endured a prolonged period of undignified scrimping and deferential behavior just to achieve racially circumscribed freedom.[84] Newly arrived African slaves to the New World tended to have little interest in establishing precedents and customs to improve their servile condition, but would rather risk all to return to the world they had lost through escape, insurrection, and suicide.[85] By all indications, the former African rulers belonging to Jacob Kline hanged themselves within just a few years of their American arrival.

Consequently, Yombo was left to fend for himself as a young boy, which partly explains why he retreated into his private African world. That is to say, Yombo's resolute Africanity in memory, appearance, language, and religious disposition became his primary means of survival in the rural, brutal, and predominantly white world of eighteenth-century Central Jersey. Whereas Aaron Melick's married slave couple Dick and Nance "were devout Christians and regular attendants at church,"[86] Yombo appears to have abstained from white religious services and, instead, clung to his native African religion based upon a

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[83] "Bedminster Township Ratable of 1785," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 4 (March 1986): 264, shows that Aaron Malick owned one slave who undoubtedly was Yombo.

[84] For example, the New Jersey slave code of 1713 prohibited free blacks from owning property, and thus virtually nullified their economic opportunities. See Wright, "New Jersey Laws," p. 167, and Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 67, 70.

[85] Piersen, "White Cannibals," pp. 151-153; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, ch. 2; Mullin, *Africa in America*, pp. 14, 31, 33, 69, 86-87; Gomez, *Country Marks*, pp. 116-124, 127-128, 131; Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 45 (January 1961): 46-49; Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85 (February 1980): 52-53.

[86] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 606.

non-European oriented supreme being and watchful ancestors who reminded him daily of his self-worth, who condemned his enslavement as most Protestant sects did not.[87] Correspondingly, Yombo, "who was a master-hand at tanning, currying and finishing leather," often attempted to steal "finely-finished calf-skins" from Mellick with the hope of improving his fortunes at Elizabethtown in Essex County (North Jersey), where lived his wife.[88] Yombo's frequent thievery bespeaks his disdain for bondage, which was incongruent to his African-centered consciousness that seemingly comforted his parents during the unforgettable middle passage and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The transcontinental enslavement of Yombo and his family is a fascinating story which testifies to the need of historians to pay greater attention to nineteenth-century sources. Yombo's parents are compelling evidence that enslaved Africans in colonial New Jersey were defined not by the white hegemony which sought to render them mere economic commodities, but rather by their own cultural sensibilities which instilled within them the courage to control, albeit minimally, their own destiny. The couple's suicide was an affirmation to both Jacob Kline and Yombo of their humanity and sense of dignity - a statement deeply ingrained in the consciousness of their son. Hence, their spirit forever remained with Yombo, constantly reminding the deformed slave of both his own self-worth and the significance of his African past (though, admittedly, he probably did not remember much or any of it). In a way, Yombo's thievery was a tribute to his deceased parents who continued to influence and guide his life. Yombo would never become the

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[87] Indeed, "some [whites] declared slavery a grand Christian adventure, a boon to brutes and heathens who should be grateful for opportunities to study and practice saintly virtues"; Hodges, *Rural North*, p. xiii; see also pp. xiv, 25-32, 67-80.

[88] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-603.

obsequious and humble servant his owners desired, for the memory of his parents' greatness and heroism would not allow it.

The other significant contribution Andrew Mellick and John Thompson make is that they insinuate the ability of captured Africans to survive the unmistakably dreadful middle passage. Their nineteenth-century commentaries about "Negroes" from Guinea were critical to the attempt here to examine this slippery phase of the enslavement process from the viewpoint of the captives themselves, to the argument that African religious beliefs played a major role in fostering black consciousness and/or survival aboard slave ships and in transplanting this consciousness to the New World. Religion consumed African peoples' very existence; Africans viewed themselves in relation to the universe and their God, the creator and knower of all things. Is it likely, then, that enslaved men and women would have dismissed their "fetishes" and other divine resources during the frightening transatlantic journeys, which in turn nurtured their consciousness, their potential to endure and resist?

To be sure, the methodological approach presented here regarding how seemingly innumerable and nameless Africans were able to withstand the middle passage is based upon a high degree of speculation. The prerequisite for most scholarly investigations, however, is a mainspring of intellectual presumption. It is principally through the writings of Europeans that we learn about the religious devotion of African peoples living on the "Guinea Coast," and the subsequent manifestation of their spiritually driven resistance and survival aboard slaving vessels. Their invaluable testimonials allow us to pose questions and answers which could not have been done otherwise. At the same time, however, these racist dialogues are to be scrutinized very carefully. William Snelgrave and his slave trading counterparts felt compelled to talk openly about their benevolence towards the presumably heathenish and backwards Africans, thereby justifying their involvement in such a barbarous and exploitative enterprise - the enslavement of black "human beings" for economic profit. Surely, though, there are other viable explanations as to why several

million Africans made it to the North American mainland despite incredible odds, and were able to maintain their sense of humanity and self-respect in their new environments where other forms of racial oppression awaited them.

CHAPTER 3

THE MAKING OF A MALCONTENT: "OLD YOMBO"

Yombo (c.1739-c.1819) is perhaps the most intriguing of the many persons, black and white, to appear in Andrew Mellick's *The Story of an Old Farm.* The West African-born captive, whose "disposition was not in any sense agreeable," was owned briefly by Mellick's great-grandfather Aaron Malick (b. 1725) of Bedminster, Somerset County. Shortly after Malick's death in April 1809, Yombo became the property of John Hastier, a resident of Elizabethtown in Essex County. As Andrew Mellick dramatically puts it, "Nothing more was heard of [Yombo] by the Bedminster people, excepting that several years afterwards word came from Elizabethtown - 'Old Yombo is dead.'"[1] This statement is fascinating because it testifies to the life of a slave who had made an unforgettable impression on the white people who encountered him. Indeed, not every slave's death elicited a message or telegram which was sent to his former owners with whom he had lost all contact. The phrase "Old Yombo is dead" connotes a sense of incredulity that this black, evil manifestation of sorts, who incessantly had challenged the authority of whites, actually or finally died. This chapter attempts to examine why Yombo was long remembered by the local whites, arguing that his obstinate persona was a creation of his circumstances, and not a manifestation of his innate "disagreeable" nature as implied by Andrew Mellick.

Around 1786 Aaron Malick purchased Yombo from his brother-in-law Jacob Kline (1714-1789) of New Germantown, Hunterdon County, because Malick was in dire need of

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[1] Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889), pp. 603, 608, 611, 612, 632 (quotations, pp. 603, 612).

labor power on his Bedminster farmstead. Yombo did not fail in making his presence known while enslaved under old man Malick. In addition to initially frightening the sire's grandchildren with his deformed foot, bow-legs, and dark skin, Yombo was a thief whose "perverseness always displayed itself when he was not under the immediate eye of his owner and master." Yet "being an excellent workman his peculiarities were passed over, and for many years he was a conspicuous feature of life at the homestead." Yombo's conspicuity and peculiarities as defined by the white world of Aaron Malick's rural domicile were due largely to the bondsman's West African "exotic" origins. Still, Andrew Mellick seems to doubt Yombo's affirmation that his father was a man of prominence in West Africa, referring to it as a "claim" made by the "Guinea negro." By denying the illiterate "darkey" - whose "language was a mixture of poor English and a jargon peculiar to himself" - a legitimate past or history, Mellick is able to justify his great-grandfather's exploitation and subjugation of him.[2] Clearly, however, Yombo's parents were the former West African rulers belonging to Jacob Kline, who shortly after their arrival to New Jersey around 1749, hanged themselves from a tree when Yombo was a mere youth.[3]

Significantly, Yombo represents the vast segment of New Jersey bondspeople who in contrast to fugitives relied primarily upon long-term, less confrontational survival strategies such as theft and masculine-based obstinacy which provided them, respectively, with a modicum of retribution against and personal protection from slaveholders.[4] For

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[2] Ibid., pp. 602-603, 648 (quotations, p. 603). Prasenjit Duara argues that historically European imperialists have depicted the putative backward and primitive dark-skinned races as having no history in order to justify their colonization. Similarly, according to Paul Gilroy, the power of racism is based upon the ability to embed blacks in the present, while erasing and denying the past. See Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 22-23, and Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 5-8.

[3] See Chapter 2.

[4] On slave theft, see Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 50-51, 89, 115, 133-134, 179.

reasons often indiscernible to inquiring historians, not all slaves were able to respond to oppression as assertively as runaways, who, unsurprisingly, have become central if not heroic figures in American slavery scholarship.

According to the historiography on fugitive slaves, the typical runaway was a young man in his teens, twenties or thirties.[5] Shane White, in his study of slavery in the New York City area including Somerset County and its environs, has pointed out that "the responsibilities for looking after young children almost invariably devolved on the mother, a factor that must have inhibited many women from even attempting to runaway." This family responsibility, he further explains, "also affected the behavior of those daring enough to attempt escape with their children. Such females were much more likely to run away to visit than to try and pass as free."[6] As indicated by Gerald Mullin with respect to eighteenth-century Virginia, it would have been extremely difficult for a black female to live, work, and pass as free in a society where women generally did not move about alone.[7] Likewise, it was much more common to see male slaves in Central Jersey at this

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[5] On the age factor, see Daniel E. Meaders, "South Carolina Fugitives as Viewed Through Local Colonial Newspapers with Emphasis on Runaway Notices 1732-1801," *Journal of Negro History* 60 (April 1975): 292; Philip D. Morgan, "Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance for Slave Culture," *Slavery and Abolition* 6 (December 1985): 72-73; Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 122-124; and John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 210-213. For related commentary, see Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 40; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, reprint (New York: Norton, 1975; orig. pub. 1974), p. 241; Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 376; 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), pp. 13, 175 n.10; and Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, eds., *"Pretends to Be Free": Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey* (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 43.

[6] White, *Somewhat More Independent*, p. 137. See also Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, pp. 103-104.

[7] Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, p. 104.

time away from the farm or plantation than females who usually were relegated to household chores.[8]

Because of his lame foot, Yombo was bound largely to his owners' estates and thereby to a degree was reduced to the female slave condition. Unable to exercise satisfactorily his manhood with his feet, Yombo, as shall be argued here, did so through his blackness which he enhanced deliberately, his refusal to adopt Christianity, and his ability to steal - all of which, it would appear, contributed to his unpleasant or mean persona that he used to keep whites at a distance. Like his deceased father, Yombo was inhibited from asserting fully his manhood as a father, husband, and warrior (fundamental components of manhood in pre-colonial West Africa), and thus sought ways to redeem himself.

Though Yombo's construction of "resistant masculinity" was practiced mainly within the confines of Jacob Kline's and Aaron Malick's rural properties, this does not mean that his geographical surroundings had neither any bearing on his life and thought processes, nor encouraged him to incorporate temporary flight or truancy into his arsenal of resistance.[9] To be sure, like their owners, slaves' lives were shaped to some extent by the larger physical world in which they lived. With the exception of Gerald Mullin's study of Virginia runaways, examinations of slavery tend to ignore the important connection between slave consciousness and geography. As Mullin argues, the "vast and relatively uninhabited [North Carolina] region, clogged with muddy creeks and rivers provided a welcome cover for slaves hurrying out of the populous [Virginia] tidewater." These escapees, he avers, "ran down the banks of the great inland rivers, the Staunton, Blackwater, and Nottoway, to the Roanoke and Meherrin-Chowan rivers and thus into the

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[8] Henry Scofield Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896), p. 55.

[9] For phrase, see Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity*, vol. 1 *"Manhood Rights": The Construction of Black Male History and Manhood, 1750-1870* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 1.

eastern piedmont counties of Bute and Halifax." Mullin also posits that fugitives made a practice of dealing with white watermen and hid themselves in towns of all sizes, particularly those situated on navigable water.[10] This chapter has adapted Mullin's keen insights in order to help us better understand Yombo's complex and ambiguous life under slavery in Central Jersey.

Although Andrew Mellick never mentioned whether Yombo ever attempted to escape, the author, to protect the good name of his slaveholding ancestors, may have purposely withheld information about the totality of Yombo's rebelliousness because this would have suggested the existence of real racial antagonism between Yombo and his owners, Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick. In Mellick's opinion, slaves in Somerset County were treated exceptionally well.[11] By emphasizing only the beneficence of slaveowners, Mellick diffuses and delegitimizes Yombo's belligerent behavior. As a result, Yombo emerges from Mellick's voluminous narrative as an ungrateful, child-like servant who neither had any reason to ever escape, nor any need to be cognizant of his physical surroundings.

I

Central Jersey where Yombo was enslaved lay mainly in the Piedmont, a physiographic region characterized by numerous streams, brooks, and rivers, the largest of these being the Raritan River and its North and South Branches, the Passaic River, and the Millstone River. In fact, the Raritan River is more than one hundred miles of timbered length - and

[10] Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, pp. 111-119 (quotations, p. 112). For a similar discussion in the context of slavery in the Middle Atlantic region, see Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, pp. 11-12.

[11] On Andrew Mellick's paternalist sentiment, see Chapter 1.

could serve as a potential ally to runaway slaves.[12] Rolling hills like the Long Hills and Sourland or Rocky Mountain also typify the Piedmont; they provided the local residents with secure hiding places from the British during the Revolutionary War.[13] It is probable, therefore, that captives in Central Jersey utilized the conspicuous Sourland hills as a temporary haven from the brutalities and rigors of servitude. Indeed, bondspeople often

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[12] The Raritan River is discussed meticulously in Thomas F. Gordon, *Gazetteer of the State of New Jersey* (Cottonport, La.: Polyanthos, 1973; orig. pub. 1834), pp. 224-225. See also James Cawley and Margaret Cawley, *Exploring the Little Rivers of New Jersey*, 3d. ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971; orig. pub. 1942), p. 88.

New Jersey falls into five physiographic regions: (1) the Ridge and Valley, or Valley, (2) the Highlands, (3) the Piedmont, (4) the Inner Coastal Plain, and (5) the Outer Coastal Plain. To a great extent, these regions run in a northeast-southwest direction.

Furthest north and occupying nearly seven percent of New Jersey's total land area is the Ridge and Valley. This section is part of the greater Ridge and Valley geologic province that extends from the St. Lawrence River in Canada to Alabama; it consists mostly of the broad Kittatiny Valley and the narrow-upper Delaware Valley. They are separated by New Jersey's most prominent mountain range, the flat topped Kittatiny, which is around five miles wide, stretches 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 the state.

Located south and east of the Valley in the northcentral part of New Jersey, the Highlands is ten to twenty-five miles wide, encompasses about twelve percent of the state's total land area, and has a general elevation of 1,000 feet. Whereas the Highlands's southern end is relatively smooth, it is quite rugged in the north. This rough area is known as the Ramapo Mountains and they lie on Bergen County's northern border.

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 make up the New Jersey Piedmont: a dissected plateau which gradually slopes away from the Highlands to the north and west and occupies about twenty-one percent of New Jersey's land. Most of this plateau is a lowland of rounded hills separated by parallel and wide valleys. The Piedmont is not as mountainous as the Highlands or the Valley. In some areas, however, its surface is broken by ridges elevated several hundred feet above the general surface.

The Inner and Outer Coastal plains are located south of the Piedmont, and account for nearly sixty percent of the land in New Jersey. The primary distinction between these two land divisions is the materials outcropping at the surface. That is, the Inner region has the greater amount of clay, whereas the Outer is covered by porous sand and represents the larger part of the Plain. Unlike the aforementioned physiographic areas, elevations in the Plain only range from 100 to 500 feet. 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), pp. 2-8, and Frank S. Kelland and Marilyn C. Kelland, *New Jersey, Garden or Suburb? A Geography of New Jersey* (Dubuque, Ia: Kendall/Hunt, 1978), pp. 9, 11, 16, 18-19.

[13] "Basking Ridge in Revolutionary Days: Extracts from a Lady's Published Recollections," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (January 1912): 35; Jacob Magill, "Somerset Traditions Gathered Forty Years Ago," ibid., 2 (January 1913): 25.

absconded to the Ramapo Mountains in Bergen County (North Jersey), located in the Highlands physiographic region, where they encountered Native Americans, deserting Hessian soldiers, and Tory refugees.[14] As another advantage to runaways, the Piedmont region is situated in close proximity to the Hudson and Delaware rivers; more specifically, slaves could utilize these highly exploitable bodies of water for escaping to nearby New York City and Philadelphia, both of which offered anonymity and social intercourse with other blacks in a vibrant urban context.[15]

The fact that Yombo and his Central Jersey compatriots typically lived on farms near wooded hills and a body of water associated with the Raritan River must have rendered them keenly aware of the utility of these opulent geographical surroundings. In numerous advertisements for the sale or lease of land in the Somerset County area during the 1700s, the sellers, many of whom undoubtedly were slaveowners, tried to enhance the attraction or value of the said properties by emphasizing, among other amenities, their dense forestry, lush meadows and orchards, and close proximity to important roads and navigable waterways. In 1773, for example, Roluff Vandine of Somerset gave notice about the sale of his "very well watered and timbered" plantation located "about four miles from New Brunswick, up Raritan river, two miles above Raritan landing." The house on this property, he indicated, "stands on a small hill, not far from Rariton river, [and] the King's road [which] leads between the river and house." Not surprisingly, three years previously, this same "Roelof Van Dike" had informed the public that his bondsman Arch had run away, and probably "gone some back way to Albany [New York], to meet some yellow free Negroes, which went by water at about the same time." With so many

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[14] Federal Writer's Project, New Jersey, "The Underground Railroad in New Jersey," bulletin no. 9 (1939-1940). See also David Steven Cohen, *The Ramapo Mountain People* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974), p. 12.

[15] For excellent discussions on early black life in New York City and Philadelphia, see, respectively, Hodges, *Root and Branch*, chs. 4-5, and Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), chs. 1-3.

tempting and easily exploitable geographical resources at hand, it is no wonder that Arch also had absconded earlier in 1767, but was captured "below Philadelphia" attempting to board "some vessel."[16]

Enslaved peoples' utilization of the physical environment against their owners can be discerned, moreover, through the failed 1734 "Negro" conspiracy in Somerset County along the Raritan River. According to the *New York Gazette* (March 25, 1734), as "soon as the Season was advanced that they could lie in the Woods," the rebels planned to massacre the whites, destroy their farmsteads and animals, and then use their best horses to escape to the French and Native American outposts in the far West.[17] As they had realized, flight was better suited for the springtime because it "brought a rebirth of plenty in forest and field." Runaways in the Middle Atlantic region tended to forsake escaping during the frigid winter months of December, January, and February which afforded them "little opportunity to harvest the bounties of nature."[18]

There is no doubt that freedom-minded slaves in Central Jersey, including the physically handicapped yet resistant Yombo, were conscious too of the region's role as a bridge or pathway to New York City and Philadelphia. Among the most important of the crudely constructed thoroughfares connecting Somerset County and its environs to these urban areas was the Old York Road, which extended from Elizabethtown (North Jersey) all the way to Philadelphia. It is certain that this and other roadways were employed not only

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[16] For Roluff Vandine, see *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, August 5, 1773. For Arch, see *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), October 8, 1770. For additional property advertisements pertaining to eighteenth-century Central Jersey, see, for example, *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), January 29, 1756, April 6, 1758; *New York Mercury*, October 6, 1760; *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, January 27, 1772; *New Jersey Journal* (Chatham), April 30, 1783; *Political Intelligencer* (New Brunswick), January 20, 1784; *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), March 30, 1784; and *Federal Post* (Trenton), October 21, 1788.

[17] *New York Gazette*, March 25, 1734, in conjunction with *Weekly Rehearsal* (Philadelphia), February 11, 1734. For a discussion of the plot and the brutal punishments meted out to the conspirators, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 89-90.

[18] Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, p. 11 n.30.

by whites to expedite their commerce and travel via stage wagon and horseback,[19] but became also guideposts for bondspeople on the move. Interestingly, according to his Hunterdon County owner, Tom, who ran away in 1779, supposedly had "gone the York road" to join the British.[20] Since Yombo had a "slave wife living at Elizabethtown" with whom he visited using Aaron Malick's horse and carriage, he likewise probably knew of such invaluable roadways - empowering sources of knowledge he possibly could exploit to his advantage.[21]

Water travel, which played the more important role in everyday transportation in early Central Jersey, must have entered into or shaped Yombo's consciousness as well. Before they were removed by the Europeans in the mid-1700s, the Naraticong "Indians" of Somerset County had erected villages along the shores of the Raritan River, which constituted their favorite water passage to travel by canoe.[22] As evidenced by Roluff Vandine's previously mentioned 1773 property advertisement, whites likewise built their homes along the Raritan for traveling purposes. This point can be discerned too by the mid-eighteenth-century European traveler who remarked that the "the banks of the [Raritan] river [were] covered with gentleman's houses."[23] In 1753 Edward Antill, who lived in the New Brunswick area, advertised for sale his "profitable Plantation" which he described as

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[19] Wheaton J. Lane, *From Indian Trail to Iron Horse: Travel and Transportation in New Jersey, 1620-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), pp. 51, 77-96. As pointed out by Andrew Mellick, "It was many years before there were any decent roads in New Jersey," adding that, "Between 1765 and 1768 numerous unsuccessful efforts were made to float a lottery for raising money to improve the highways across the province"; *Old Farm*, p. 231. For similar commentary, see Peter Kalm, *Peter Kalm's Travels in North America: The English Version of 1770*, ed. Adolph B. Benson (New York: Dover, 1987; orig. pub. 1770), p. 222.

[20] *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), March 24, 1779.

[21] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[22] Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., "The Indians of Central New Jersey," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (January 1912): 19; Cawley and Cawley, *Little Rivers*, p. 88.

[23] Quoted in Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Burnaby's Travels through North America* (New York: A. Wessels, 1904; orig. pub. 1775), p. 55.

"commodiously situated on Raritan River" where "the Boats to and from New-York, &c, almost daily passing before the Door."[24] "The Dutch," writes Peter Wacker, "nearly always planned major settlements on navigable waterways. Overland travel was difficult, and most contact and trade was by water." As a result, "the initial settlement and major streets of urban places focused on the docking area."[25] So it comes as no surprise that holders transported their slaves via the region's waterways. For example, "Yombo was transferred from the Hunterdon tannery on the Rockaway river to the Bedminster tannery on the Peapack brook." Since he worked in tanneries which were situated along waterways, there is no doubt that Yombo was responsible for handling freight aboard boats, an activity that perhaps reminded him that boats represented conduits to possible freedom.[26] Interestingly, Cato, who was held in bondage at Raritan Landing near New Brunswick (a Dutch settlement), was experienced at the "loading and unloading of boats" - mundane labor which certainly played an important role in his decision to escape, in 1763.[27]

Captives too were adept at handling small ships. During the Revolutionary War, the bondsman Samuel Sutphin (b. 1747) of Readington, Somerset County, who had

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[24] *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, September 10, 1753.

[25] Peter O. Wacker, "The Dutch Culture Area in the Northeast, 1609-1800," *New Jersey History* 104 (Spring/Summer 1986): 12. See also Charles W. Parker, "Old Somerset," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 56 (October 1938): 272, and Lane, *Indian Trail*, p. 64.

[26] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[27] For Cato, see *Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), October 13, 1763. Raritan Landing was located on the left bank of the Raritan River, two miles above New Brunwick in Piscataway, Middlesex County. Lying on the right bank of the Raritan River, New Brunswick was one of the few sites of deepwater navigation on the Raritan River. In the eighteenth century sloops typically lined the waterfront at New Brunwsick awaiting wheat, flour, and other products from Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren counties. See Samuel Smith, *The History of the Colony of Nova-Caesaria, or New-Jersey*, 2d ed. (Trenton, N.J.: William Sharp, 1877; orig. pub. 1765), pp. 492, 499, 500. In 1748 the Swedish naturalist, Peter Kalm, remarked that "I have seen vessels from New Brunswick, laden with wheat which lay loose on board, with flour packed up in barrels, and also great quantities of linseed" en route to New York; *Peter Kalm's Travels*, pp. 135-136.

enlisted in the militia in the place of his owner, successfully piloted a company of soldiers "to a fording place over the S[outh] branch" of the Raritan River.[28] As a result, slaves surreptitiously used boats for their own benefit. To cite an instance, in 1737 Cesar, a slave of Gloucester in South Jersey, "took a boat and went to Philadelphia." In 1761 Elias Wood of Elizabethtown suspected that his bondsman Robin "has taken a Canoe," and, similar to Cesar's owner, cautioned "All Masters of Vessels and others" against "carrying off said Servant." These desperate warnings - also made by holders in Central Jersey - reveal whites' fear of slaves' ability to exploit the common modes of water transportation, for these effectively had become "weapons of the weak."[29]

Holders' alarm, it should be emphasized, concerned not only enslaved fugitives' possible boarding of vessels in the New Jersey interior, but also of those locally-based crafts, particularly ferries, that traveled across the Hudson and Delaware rivers to and from New York and Pennsylvania, respectively. "In comparison to its size, New Jersey probably had more ferries in operation than any other region or colony in America, approximately fifty being in active use in the middle of the eighteenth century." Ferries,

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[28] Sutphin agreed to serve in the place of Caspar Berger, who had purchased the slave from Guisbert Bogart for that purpose, under the condition that he be freed afterwards. Following the war, Sutphin, who was wounded in battle, demanded that Berger free him. Instead, the duplicitous Berger sold him to another owner. For Sutphin's Revolutionary War account, see especially Larry R. Gerlach, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution, 1763-1783: A Documentary History* (Trenton, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), pp. 354-360 (quotation, p. 356). See also Clement Alexander Price, ed. and comp., *Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey* (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Society, 1980), pp. 63-67. These footnoted versions are based upon the account found in Revolutionary War Pension Applications in the National Archives, no. 10321, The David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pa. (hereafter Pension Application no. 10321).

[29] For Cesar and Robin, see, respectively, *American Weekly Mercury* (Philadelphia), November 10, 1737, and *New York Gazette* (Weyman's), October 13, 1761. For similar warnings, see *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), September 10, 1761; *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, November 3, 1774; and *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), August 7, 1786. For phrase "weapons of the weak," see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). The crux of Scott's argument, which has implications for black slaves, is that open, collective rebellion is not the only form of peasant political action. Rather, everyday acts of resistance - what he terms "weapons of the weak" - constitute peasants' safest, most effective, and hence primary means of resistance.

which were sometimes connected with stage lines and taverns, "multiplied in number until the Revolution." These "canoes, scows, flatboats, wherries, skiffs, bateaux, and sloops" provided runaways with convenient and seemingly cheap passage to the New York City and Philadelphia areas.[30] As a case in point, in 1769 Somerset slaves Ben and Jack, who had a pass signed by "a justice of the peace in the county," used "the Ferry at Bordentown [in South Jersey]" to cross into Pennsylvania, and then "went the post road to Philadelphia" with the intention "to push to sea."[31]

Like Ben and Jack, Yombo may have learned that despite his bad foot, he was not in a completely powerless position in relation to his owners, Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick. In fact, numerous examples exist of physically disadvantaged bondsmen who absconded. In July 1766, for example, Cuff escaped from Jonathan Clawson of Woodbridge, Middlesex County, although he "has a scar on his right great Toe and the Ends of several other of his Toes are cut off." Clawson advertised that Cuff slipped away again in June 1768. Similarly, in June 1776, Ben, whose "left leg [was] considerably larger than the other, with a scar in the same," fled Tewksbury, Hunterdon County, resident John Taylor. Later that year in October, Ben departed from Thomas Scott of Bethlehem, Hunterdon County. In July 1777 Scott again reported that Ben deserted him, making note as well of the bondsman's elopement the previous June.[32]

Clearly, these notices reveal two slaves' determination to be free men. Equally important, yet less discernible, they indicate that Central Jersey - home to the Raritan River and its tributaries, rolling mountains, thick forests, swamps, and various means of

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[30] Lane, *Indian Trail*, pp. 42-46 (quotations, pp. 44, 46).

[31] *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 29, 1769.

[32] For Cuff, see *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, July 3, 1766, and *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), June 13, 1768. For Ben, see *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 19, 1776, July 9, 1777, and *Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), October 30, 1776. For additional examples of physically challenged slaves in New Jersey who escaped, see *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), April 24, 1779, and *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), December 27, 1780. John Taylor was an associate of Aaron Malick; Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 603-604.

transportation linked to the metropolises across the Hudson and Delaware rivers - was not ideal for keeping recalcitrant bondspeople in captivity. Surely Cuff and Ben, whose physical disabilities put them at an even greater disadvantage in terms of running away in Central Jersey where fugitives were frequently "taken up," became acutely aware of the allies they had in the local and surrounding geography.[33] It is revealing that the pair tended to escape during the summer months when the geography was in full bloom and thereby more conducive to flight.

II

Despite the fact that there is no hard evidence (namely, a newspaper advertisement) of Yombo ever escaping from either Jacob Kline or Aaron Malick, this does not mean that he never broke away from them, if only temporarily. Yombo's thievery, his parent's suicide, and Andrew Mellick's provocative yet vague contention that the bondsman had "an occasional outbreak . . . which was met by a few earnest words of reproof from Aaron, who even in extreme old age retained the spirit of mastery," suggests strongly that like rebellious slaves in general, Yombo adopted multiple strategies of resistance which may have included flight.[34] By dismissing the greater implications of Yombo's outward discontent, which he reduces to emotional reactions devoid of political content or meaning, Mellick portrays Yombo as an "empirical person" rather than as an individual whose reason constituted the basis of his resistance. The author uses seemingly innocuous terminology,

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[33] A discussion regarding the dangers of slave flight can be found in part four of this chapter.

[34] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 608. On the dynamism of slave resistance, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 188-189. Correspondingly, in 1838 the Hunterdon County owner of the slave, Catherine, described the runaway as "a noted liar, and will steal everything she can lay her hands on; and to say the least, this is the fair side of her character." Quoted in Hubert G. Schmidt, "Slavery and Attitudes on Slavery, Hunterdon County, New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 58 (July 1940): 167.

"an occasional outbreak," to equate his exotic subject's recalcitrance with natural phenomenon. This mirrors the historical scholarship severely criticized by subaltern scholars which posits that the revolts of oppressed groups including peasants and slaves "break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics." That is to say, "when the proverbial clod of earth turns, this is a matter to be explained in terms of natural history."[35] In describing how Yombo disturbed the peace on Aaron Malick's farmstead in the context of him having such a low state of civilization, Andrew Mellick effectively diminishes Yombo's defiance.

Again, for Mellick to actually have stated that Yombo absconded, or made an occasional break from his ancestors' authority, would have implied a much more contentious relationship between owners and slave, thereby undermining his paternalistic depiction of bondage in Central Jersey. As Mellick was probably aware, slaves who attempted to escape conveyed to whites that they had no right to the fugitive's person. By stealing themselves, if just for a few hours, slaves - many of whom used temporary escape or truancy as a strategy to negotiate with their owners - were reclaiming ownership of their bodies.[36]

As "a master-hand at tanning, currying and finishing leather," much of Yombo's time (and energy) was spent producing valuable merchandise for Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick's personal and economic aggrandizement.[37] Besides appropriating the bondsman's time through the deployment of workday schedules, the in-laws subjected him to deferential rituals (such as seeking Malick's permission to visit his wife), calendars (such

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[35] Scholars of subaltern studies would classify such phraseology as "an occasional outbreak" as "the prose of counter-insurgency," meaning any elite language that implicitly strips the actions of subaltern groups of political and/or moral validity. See Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 45-84 (quotation, p. 46).

[36] On the negotiations of power between slaves and owners in New York with implications for New Jersey, see White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 106-113.

[37] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-603.

as the beginning and ending of the harvest season), and decrees (such as curfews). More exactly, Kline and Malick sought to dominate Yombo by manipulating his utilization of time, both private and public. As it related to slaveowners, time was a construct of social control.[38]

Silvia Dubois, who grew up as a slave, initially in the Somerset County area during the 1790s, puts into perspective slaves' subjugation to rituals and curfews. She explained that her owner "used to let me go to frolics and balls and to have good times away from home, with other black folks, whenever I wanted to . . . But when he told me I must come home from a ball at a certain time, when the time came, the jig was out. I knew I must go; it wouldn't do to disappoint Minical Dubois." Dubois also provides important insight regarding how the lives of blacks were dictated by the calendars of slaveholders. White people, she maintains, "didn't no more keep the date of a young nigger than they did of a calf or a colt; the young niggers were born in the Fall or in the Spring, in the Summer or in the Winter, in cabbage time or when cherries were ripe, when they were planting corn or when they were husking corn, and that's all the way they talked about a nigger's age."[39] Similarly, Samuel Sutphin's recollection of his participation in the Revolutionary War is replete with phrases such as "the season of plant seed sowing," "hay and harvest season," "About corn planting in the same year," and "after corn planting."[40] In short, slaves in Central Jersey were forever mindful of the planting and harvest seasons. They generally were more cognizant of these times of the year than they were of their actual dates of birth - telling testimony of whites' incessant appropriation of their time.

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[38] Likewise, posits Mechal Sobel, "Use of time was at the heart of owners' criticisms of slaves: they wanted slaves to change their perception of time and work"; *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987), p. 30.

[39] Jared C. Lobdell, ed., *Silvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*, by C. W. Larison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; orig. pub. 1883), pp. 67, 76.

[40] See note 28.

Endemic to the plight of all oppressed peoples, Yombo and his compatriots had only a few options which they could exercise to respond to these time seizures. They could voluntarily acquiesce to them, acknowledging their owners' alleged right to their time reinforced by the hegemonic order (i.e. white over black). They could consent in form only, compelled to do so by the way in which their time was seized (namely, by force or coercion), but not necessarily agreeing with holders' claim to it. Or they could resist, overtly and covertly, the seizure of their time.[41] The dictates of bondage required that slaves utilize all three options for their day-to-day survival. That is, certain situations called for slaves to respond or act accordingly. Undoubtedly, however, Yombo was partial to the third option - resistance. For the prideful and cantankerous bondsman, time arguably was related to personal autonomy, to his ability to control the uses or functions of his body. Thus, like his owners Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick, Yombo's understanding of time had political connotations. Yombo perceived time as a valuable commodity to be contested.[42]

Flight was the most effective means by which Yombo, and slaves in general, could undermine whites' monopolization of their lives and, by implication, of their time. Runaways deprived slaveholders not only of their invaluable labor power, but also appropriated the latter's time by causing them to worry about the successful return of their properties. Hence, the mere threat of flight enabled slaves to wield power over their owners. In 1793 the "trusty" bondswoman Hannah of Flemington, Hunterdon County, boldly and with a smile told her mistress's niece, "Do go, Miss Polly, and see Mrs. Hill, but if don't come back tomorrow, I will run away."[43]

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[41] These insights are drawn from Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 2, which creatively explores the struggles over "time" between the "people" and the "state" in Romania during the 1980s.

[42] For a related discussion, see Sobel, *World They Made Together*, pp. 31-33.

[43] Quoted in Schmidt, "Hunterdon County," pp. 165-166.

Some captives were beyond making idle threats, and appear to have incorporated flight into the slave-owner relationship. According to David Demarest, the slave Tom belonging to his grandfather Peter Demarest (b. circa 1685) of Bergen County, "would run away and stay for weeks until his clothes were worn out, and he felt a longing for the comforts of his master's kitchen. Then he would return and go to work and continue in it until another freedom-seeking fit would overmaster him." On one occasion Demarest had Tom "arrested and put in gaol in Hackensack." Afterward, "the old gentleman went to see him and greatly enjoyed his expressions of penitence and promise of good behavior in all time to come, if his Master would only let him out and take him home with him, which of course was done, it was a foregone conclusion."[44] In any event, Demarest conceded to Tom escaping intermittently, taking into account that the bondsman's flirtations with freedom made him somewhat more responsive to the old man's dictates. Demarest had Tom incarcerated when he abused their social contract, which was similar to the one made between Yombo and Aaron Malick who excused his captive's "peculiarities" because he was a good worker.

Whereas Tom would absent himself for weeks at a time, Yombo, as was characteristic of most enslaved truants, probably tended to "hid out" in the woods and returned to Aaron Malick's farmstead during the evening for food and shelter. Typically, truancy represented "inward [slave] rebelliousness: it was sporadic, and it was directed toward the plantation or quarter." Truants of this kind "had no intention of leaving the immediate neighborhood and attempting to permanently change their status"; they were "so common that most [holders] either did not make [them] a matter of record, or simply referred to [them] in a random manner in their correspondence."[45] Owners generally

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[44] Quoted in Irving S. Kull, "Slavery in New Jersey," in *New Jersey: A History*, ed.-in-chief Irving S. Kull, 6 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, 1930-1932), 2: 731. For date, see Francis Bazley Lee, *Genealogical and Memorial History of the State of New Jersey*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1910), 1: 149.

[45] Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, pp. 55-56. Though these assertions about slave truancy pertain specifically to eighteenth-century Virginia, it is clear that they can also be applied to

refrained from punishing these truants as severely as Peter Demarest corrected Tom, who was whipped repeatedly on his legs for going beyond the bounds of acceptable truancy. Rather, they were more likely to reprove harshly their truants who had only briefly, albeit effectively, stolen back some of their time.[46]

Andrew Mellick proudly writes that, "It was Aaron's custom to permit [Yombo] occasionally to visit [his wife], for that purpose putting money in his pocket and lending him a horse and chair." Yet despite "his master's goodness the darkey was treacherous, and, when all ready to start on the journey, Aaron was always particular to look under the seat of the chair, where he not infrequently found a wallet stuffed with finely finished calf-skins, with which Yombo had hoped to improve his fortunes at Elizabethtown."[47] Of course, Mellick perceives this "custom" of his great-grandfather as being representative solely of his "goodness" as a slaveowner, rather than as a concession prompted in part by Yombo's rebelliousness - a manifestation of his desire to reconnect with his beloved, perhaps the only person who truly understood him, with whom he could be his real self. As observed by William Moraley, an indentured servant in New Jersey during the early 1700s, "Masters make [slaves] some amends, by suffering them to marry, which makes them easier, and often prevents their running away."[48] Aaron Malick and his slaveholding counterparts realized that had they not appeased their male captives, that is, allowed them to exercise their manhood through conjugal visits or marriage, these discontented persons had more than enough allies in the geography to make their existence intolerable. It was in

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Central New Jersey at this time. See also Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, pp. 98-99.

[46] Kull, " Slavery in New Jersey," p. 731; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, p. 98.

[47] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[48] Susan E. Klepp and Billy G. Smith, eds., *The Infortunate: The Voyage and Adventures of William Moraley, an Indentured Servant* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992; orig. pub. 1743), p. 94.

holders' best interest to permit bondsmen to be with those who made life under slavery worth living.

III

Yombo was perhaps a more active truant under his first owner, Jacob Kline, whose refusal to free his parents led to their suicide, an incident which not only left Yombo to survive on his own as a child, but also seemingly and consistently fueled his discontent. This may have been especially the case during the Revolutionary War which disturbed the social order throughout New Jersey. As a result of the British military occupation of New York (1776-1783) and New Brunswick (1776-1777) Central Jersey was invaded by detachments of British, Hessian, and Continental soldiers who frequently violated the local inhabitants' physical persons, homes, and rich agricultural stores. In addition to these depradations, there were pitched battles between the "rebels" and British soldiers.[49] In the midst of this turmoil, slaves, whose political consciousness was heightened by revolutionary discourse, became increasingly openly rebellious, that is, were more prone to insolence, subterfuge, and truancy.[50]

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[49] For depredations, see "Somerset County Losses in the Revolution," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (October 1912): 279-286, a list of claimants for damage and losses incurred by the British troops; "Somerset Losses by Continentals in the Revolution: From the Records at Trenton," ibid., 3 (October 1914): 256-261, and 4 (August 1915): 132-134; "'Inhabitants of Bridgewater . . . Suffered to a Very Great Degree,'" *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 1 (March 1983): 12-15, a petition to the New Jersey legislature by farmers of the Middlebrook, Somerset County, area asking "restitution" for losses and damages resulting from the Continental Army's occupancy there in May and June 1777; and Leonard Lundin, *Cockpit of the Revolution: The War for Independence in New Jersey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), pp. 244-246, 410, 411-413, 416-417. On battles, see Lundin, *Cockpit of the Revolution*, pp. 308, 316-320, 324, which also discusses the British capture of New York and evacuation of New Brunswick, pp. 134-135, 321. On the British evacuation of New York which involved the controversial issue of "Negro" removal, see Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1961), pp. 167-172.

[50] On the politicization of slaves during the Revolution, see ibid., ch. 3; Benjamin Quarles, "The Revolutionary War as a Black Declaration of Independence," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman

The petition submitted to the New Jersey General Assembly, in 1786, requesting that the slave Prime (who had served in the revolutionary army as a wagon-driver after escaping from the family of his Princeton and Tory owner, Absalom Bainbridge, in British-held Long Island) be freed from a public claimant is telling of slaves' political acumen. As the document argues, "there was something very inconsistent in [whites] contending for Liberty under an appeal to Heaven, and the same time selling for Amount to the Publick, the Bodies and Service of human Beings into perpetual bondage." Thus it advocated for Prime's liberation by the "Legislature, entitled to that Liberty to defend, secure and perpetuate which the Fields of America have been dyed in the Blood of her Citizens." Although the writing of Prime's successful petition may have been mostly the work of white abolitionists, this in no way suggests that his thoughts are absent in the piece. Indeed, some bondspeople were quite capable of expressing themselves through script.[51]

Even slaves who clearly lacked the rudiments of education became politicized by the Revolution. For instance, in his 1834 deposition for a war pension, former slave Samuel Sutphin, who signed his testimony with an "X" signifying his inability to read or write, remarked that "fighting for the white man's freedom" while in bondage warranted him financial support from the government.[52] Whites' exclusive demand for freedom did not

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(Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), pp. 283-301; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, pp. 140-163; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 43-52, 54-59; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 49-53, 224-232; and Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), pp. 3, 6, 11-12, 61-63.

[51] George Fishman, "**Communication**: Taking a Stand for Freedom in Revolutionary New Jersey: Prime's Petition of 1786," *Science and Society* 56 (Fall 1992): 353-356 (quotations, p. 355). For an account of Dr. Absalom Bainbridge, see E. Alfred Jones, *The Loyalists of New Jersey: Their Memorials, Petitions, Claims, Etc., From English Records* (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Society, 1927), pp. 15-16. In the eighteenth century, Princeton was located partly in Somerset County, and party in Middlesex County. On early black illiteracy, see introduction.

[52] Testimony in support of Samuel Sutphin's claim for a Pension: Letter written for Sutphin by Nicholas C. Jobs, May, 26, 1834, in Pension Application no. 10321.

fall on unlettered deaf black ears, but was in fact adopted by illiterate slaves seeking to ameliorate their sufferings.[53]

The political consciousness of bondspeople in Central Jersey (and elsewhere) during the Revolutionary War is best reflected in the number who ran away, and sought refuge behind "enemy" lines. In 1777, for instance, Harry Myers absconded from his Raritan (Somerville), Somerset County, owner when the British troops evacuated New Brunswick. Myers was among the estimated 4,000 slaves who were part of the British military evacuation of New York in 1783. In 1778 Tom, a slave of Hopewell, Hunterdon County, was suspected of heading "towards the army, having an inclination to serve in it, or wait upon an officer." Two years later, Toney, who was held captive in Hillsborough, Somerset County, "endeavor[ed] to go over to the enemy." The determined bondsman was later captured near Piscataway Town in Middlesex County and taken to Tunison's Tavern (Somerville) where he again escaped. In 1782 the Middlebush, Somerset County, owner of a "mulatto wench, about fifteen years of age . . . supposed she went off with the French troops."[54]

Many fugitives belonged to men serving in the revolutionary army, who thereby were hindered in their ability to keep a close watch over their restive properties. In 1775 the bondsman Tom fled from Jacob Holcomb, a resident of Amwell, Hunterdon County, and Lieutenant in the Third Regiment, in Hunterdon. The aforementioned Tewksbury

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[53] On the exclusivity issue, see Jack P. Greene, *All Men Are Created Equal: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976). Greene argues that republican political theory sanctioned the exclusion of blacks as well as women from political equality so as long as each group were perceived as lacking the independence and civic competence necessary for virtue.

[54] Graham Hodges has indicated that "the British parade through Bergen, Essex, Somerset, and Middlesex counties . . . resulted in the flight of over fifty slaves in December 1776 alone"; *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1997), p. 95. For Harry Myers, see Inspection Roll of Negroes Removed from New York City by British Forces During the Evacuation of 1783, New Jersey State Archives. For estimate, see Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), p. 42. For Tom, Toney, and mulatto wench, see *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), August 26, 1778, February 16, 1780, November 20, 1782.

resident John Taylor, whose physically lame slave Ben deserted him in 1776, was "an active militia officer in the war, closing his service as colonel of a regiment of state troops." In 1779 Tone and Charles, captives belonging to Somerset County private Cornelius Van Horn of Readington, Hunterdon County, eloped together with the intention of heading to Staten Island. Hillsborough resident Peter Dumont was a private in the First Battalion, in Somerset County, when his previously noted slave Toney escaped in 1780. Three years later the enslaved duo Elimas and Ben departed Amwell residents John LaQuear and Teunis Quick, the latter of whom also was a private in the Somerset militia.[55]

Like the aforementioned slave Prime, bondspeople who escaped from officers and privates in the revolutionary army realized fully the contradiction in their owners' contention for liberty sanctioned by God, and simultaneous ownership of the bodies and time of other human beings. William Moraley explains, "I have often heard [slaves] say, they did not think God made them Slaves, any more than other Men, and wondered that Christians . . . should use them so barbarously."[56] Fugitive slaves advertised by persons serving on the Continental side - the foremost representatives of the rebels' cause - illuminate the risks whites frequently incurred for their racial ownership of, and tyranny over, black people. Therefore, it is of no small consequence that Jacob Kline's two sons, John and Jacob, were enrolled in the New Jersey militia during the war.[57] Yombo probably was exposed to a fair share of talk about the "white man's freedom," which would have done little to quell his discontent.

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[55] For Tom, see *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, July 24, 1775. For Tone and Charles and Elimas and Ben, see *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), September 8, 1779, February 12, 1783. The military status of owners can be found in William S. Stryker, comp., *Official Register of the Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War* (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing, 1967), pp. 343 (John Taylor), 427 (Jacob Holcomb), 581 (Peter Dumont), 727 (Teunis or "Tunis" Quick), 799 (Cornelius Van Horn). For quotation regarding John Taylor, see Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[56] Klepp and Smith, *The Infortunate*, p. 96.

[57] For John and Jacob Kline, see Stryker, *Official Register*, p. 656.

The court docket of judge Jacob Van Noorstrand, whose circuit covered a large portion of the Somerset County area, also discloses slaves' political astuteness for it mentions numerous instances of slave subterfuge and insolence there from 1765 to 1784. Slaves (mostly males) brought before him were convicted of, and condemned to be whipped for, such crimes as "Theft of a horse to ride in the night"; "being from home of their masters after nine at night and above 5 miles from home"; "stealing of fowls"; "insult and presumption to assault a white man"; "running out after 9 at night"; "being from master's house 3 nights after 9 o'clock, and taking 2 horses & riding them abroad"; "assault and insult"; "theft & insolence"; and "insolency, assault & battery & breaking Sabbath."[58]

Needless to say, whites in Central Jersey were distressed greatly by this upsurge of black politicization and resistance. In 1775 an alarmed Somerset County Patriot lamented that, "the story of the Negroes may be depended upon, so far at least to them arming or attempting to form themselves."[59]

In short, Yombo lived during a turbulent time which afforded slaves in Central Jersey with unprecedented opportunities to subvert whites' appropriation of their time. Is it possible that the incorrigible bondsman was in no way affected by either revolutionary discourse or the black insurgency in his midst while enslaved under the elderly Jacob Kline (in 1776 Kline was age sixty-two, whereas Yombo was around age thirty-six)? How likely is it that Yombo never broke curfew, never absented himself for hours, or even maybe for days at a time during the Revolutionary War? The combination of geographical allies like the Raritan River and social upheaval made truancy, if not indefinite escape, all

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[58] For theft of a horse . . . , see Dorothy A. Stratford, "The Docket of Jacob Van Noorstrand," *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 42 (September 1967): 99. For being from home of their masters . . . and stealing of fowls, see ibid., 43 (January 1968): 17, 20. For insult and presumption . . . running out after 9 at night . . . and being from master's house 3 nights . . . , see ibid., 43 (May 1968): 62, 63, 67. For assault and insult and theft and insolence, see ibid., 44 (January 1969): 43, 44. For insolency, assault and battery . . . , see ibid., 44 (May 1969): 84.

[59] Quoted in Hodges, *Rural North*, p. 93.

the more alluring to slaves prone to "outbreaks." Perhaps as a consequence of all this, Kline was more than willing to sell Yombo, a highly skilled worker, to Aaron Malick who "was sorely pressed for help." Evidently, Kline, who was not wanting for money, could no longer bear Yombo's unrelenting recalcitrance. Upon Malick's death in 1809, Kline purchased his brother-in-law's "negro boy" Joe (b. 1800) for the large sum of $120.[60] Kline bought a slave whom he could more effectively control, that is, who had not lived through the Revolution with its empowering effects.

IV

Why is it probable that Yombo did not attempt to escape indefinitely? Simply put, it was dangerous for enslaved and free blacks alike to exercise mobility in New Jersey during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. William Moraley contends that it was useless for bondspeople there "to attempt an Escape, tho' they often endeavour it."[61] Indeed, the New Jersey slave law of 1716 permitted citizens to whip both slaves from neighboring colonies who entered the province without the consent of their owners and resident bondspeople found five miles from their owners' homes without a written pass.[62] As has been shown in the case of Peter Demarest's slave Tom, truants and fugitives potentially could receive more brutal punishment back at the plantation. Holders, argues Moraley, tended to be especially cruel when punishing their captured properties, even to the point of killing them. Yet they "suffer no Punishment" in doing so, for there was "no Law" against the murdering of slaves.[63]

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[60] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-603, 605, 611.

[61] Klepp and Smith, *The Infortunate*, p. 94.

[62] James C. Connolly, "Slavery in Colonial New Jersey and the Causes Operating Against its Extension," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 14 (January 1929): 196-197.

[63] Klepp and Smith, *The Infortunate*, p. 94.

Evidence abounds of fugitive slaves who were incarcerated in eighteenth-century Central Jersey. In 1770, for example, Thomas Savin of Cecil County, Maryland, retrieved his slave Pen from the jail in Somerset County. The pregnant mulatto slave Sarah (alias Rachael), who in 1778 escaped from Trenton Ferry in Hunterdon County with her small son Bob, was captured easily and incarcerated in the same place as Pen. In 1779 "a certain Negro Boy named James, who says he belongs to Theophilus Hunt at Morrissania, in [New] York State," was "taken up and brought to the gaol at New-Brunswick." That same year Godfrey Rhineheart of New Germantown advertised his capture of "a young Negro man, who says his name is Peter." According to Rhineheart, who probably knew Yombo personally, Peter "speaks and understands very little English, and appears to have been but a short time in America," attributes which raised the white man's suspicion of his status as a runaway. Thereafter, citizen Rhineheart took the Negro to the "Trenton goal." Likewise, in 1780 James Stevens (probably an alias), who claimed to be the property of Marylander John Stevens, was delivered to Hunterdon County "Gaoler" Peter Hulick.[64]

As these arrests clearly testify, slave flight in Central Jersey was an extremely risky venture. Despite the social dislocation in the region precipitated by the Revolutionary War, whites were forever mindful of apprehending illegally roving slaves. The armed conflict may have heightened their sense of civic duty in this matter, thereby making truancy all the more important to malcontent bondspeople who desired actual freedom.

New Jersey whites also worried over the mobility of free blacks, hence an act was passed in 1786 stipulating that no manumitted black person was to leave his/her county

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[64] For Pen, see *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), January 18, 1770. While on their way back to Cecil County, Pen escaped from Thomas Savin in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. For Sarah, see *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, 2d ser., 2 (1903): 511, 573 (hereafter *New Jersey Archives*). For young James and Peter, see *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), November 9, 1779, December 22, 1779. For James Stevens, see *New Jersey Journal* (Chatham), November 15, 1780. The conclusion that Godfrey Rhineheart knew Yombo is based upon the small size of New Germantown which, in 1833, contained "about 30 dwellings, 1 tavern, 3 stores, 1 Lutheran, 1 Methodist, and a Presbyterian, church and an academy"; Gordon, *Gazetteer of New Jersey*, p. 197.

without a signed certificate from two justices of the peace of that county or township.[65] Recalled Silvia Dubois, "in those days the negroes were all slaves, and they were sent nowhere, nor allowed to go anywhere without a pass."[66] Pass or no pass, free blacks traveling in New Jersey were required to exercise extreme caution. When James Still was en route to Philadelphia after being released from his indenture in Burlington County in 1833, he had about "ten dollars' worth of clothing, and nine dollars and fifty cents in money, and without home or friends, my condition was a sad one." Hence, "I suspected that I might be taken for a runaway." He then reasoned that "as I had my indentures, I thought that to show [whites] would be sufficient proof of my honesty."[67] But there was no guarantee.

During her trek from Flagtown in Somerset County to New Brunswick where lived her mother Dorcas Compton, newly freed Silvia Dubois, with pass in tow, was confronted by a white man who inquired about her owner and destination. Dubois presumably replied, "that's none of your business. I'm free. I go where I please." After realizing he could not overpower this physically imposing woman, "he moseyed off," telling Dubois he was going to have her "arrested as soon as he could find a magistrate." According to Dubois, "he didn't arrest me - not a bit." Our heroine may have failed to mention that to avoid any possible trouble, she quickly proceeded on to New Brunswick. As Dubois was well-aware, "anybody had [the] authority to arrest vagrant negroes. They got paid for arresting them and charges for their keeping till their master redeemed them."[68] In the words of one scholar, "we can only imagine with horror what it must have been like for a free black to be imprisoned on suspicion of being a slave, to languish in jail while

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[65] Marion Thompson Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 28 (April 1943): 174-175.

[66] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 69.

[67] James Still, *Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still, 1812-1885* (Medford, N.J.: Medford Historical Society, 1971; orig. pub. 1877), pp. 40-42 (quotations, pp. 41-42).

[68] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 69, 70.

advertisements were placed to see if any master came forward to claim his 'property,' and if no 'master' showed up, to be sold into bondage, nonetheless, until the 'free' black worked off the costs of his incarceration."[69]

Constables represented another serious threat to mobile blacks. James Still recalled the first time he saw a constable as a boy around 1814: "His name was Israel Small. He was riding on horseback in pursuit of some one of the Milligan family, who lived opposite to us, and so impressed was I by the terror of the law, that I did not know at the time but in the constable was vested all power on earth."[70] In 1778 there were four constables alone in the Eastern Precinct, Somerset County; ten years later the county had a total of fourteen constables.[71] It seems clear that these conspicuous and mobile white symbols of the law - who according to Silvia Dubois tended to act brutally towards unruly blacks during festive occasions like General Training - deterred many slaves, in particular women and the physically disabled, from becoming real runaways.[72]

Whites were not the sole enemies of fugitive slaves, for blacks constituted potential foes as well. Given their miserable circumstances, it is no wonder that constant disunity existed among bonded peoples in Central Jersey during the eighteenth century, manifesting itself in myriad ways. In 1760 the male slave belonging to Woodbridge resident Moses Bishop warned him that the irate bondsman York was fast approaching the holder with a drawn sword in the one hand, and a pistol in the other.[73] Seven years later the captive

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[69] Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 23.

[70] Still, *Early Recollections*, pp. 14-15.

[71] "Eastern Precinct (Franklin Township) Officials of 1778," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 3 (March 1985): 174; "Constables in 1788," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 8 (April 1919): 150.

[72] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 74-75. General Training centered around the drilling of the local militia; it will be more fully discussed in Chapter 4.

[73] Attorney General, Papers Relating to Blanchard's Negro (1760), New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Archives Section,

Harry of Bridgewater, Somerset County, confessed to breaking the head of his compatriot Jupiter with "a square block weighing 5-6 pounds." Tone was accused by his Bridgewater owner, Matthew Ten Eyck, in 1771, "for stealing bacon & tobacco from his other negro, Symon."[74] In 1788 young Sam, a Bedminster slave, confessed that the bondswoman Dine had poisoned her mistress years earlier, even though she assisted him in avenging the beating he received from owner Richard McDonald for stealing a gun of his which Sam sold. Consequently, Dine was executed for the role she played in the burning of McDonald's barn property.[75]

Well-aware that slaves were not beyond acting in their own self-interest to the detriment of other bondspeople, holders in New Jersey typically offered a modest monetary reward to "Whoever" was either able to recapture their fugitive properties or could provide relevant information as regards their unknown whereabouts. Some rewards were rather lucrative. In 1780 John Denton of Princeton offered a $1,000 bounty for the apprehension of his slave Cesar. Denton believed that Cesar "has been advised to go away" and was ready to pay $6,000 for "any substantial evidence" which led to the "full conviction" of a white person and $500 for that of a black person. Indeed, a number of owners promised rewards ranging from $100 to $500 for the seizure of absconding slaves.[76] These large

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Trenton. York was quickly overtaken by a group of white citizens and later sent home by owner, John Blanchard.

[74] Stratford, "Jacob Van Noorstrand," 43 (January 1968): 16 (Harry), and 43 (May 1968): 65-66 (Tone).

[75] For the details of the incident, see *Federal Post* (Trenton), October 21, 1788. According to the *Federal Post* on October 17 of that year, "a negro woman . . . and a negro man . . . were executed at Raritan." The identities of young Sam, Dine, and elder Sam (the third conspirator) are revealed in "Minutes of the Somerset County Court of General Quarter Sessions: October Term 1788," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 6 (September 1988): 58. The "Minutes" state that the three slaves were sentenced to be "hanged by the neck until [they] be dead." It is unclear, however, whether young Sam was ever hanged.

[76] For Cesar, see *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), November 15, 1780. For similar examples of owners offering large rewards for fugitives, see *New Jersey Journal* (Chatham), February 2, 1780; *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 14, 1780; and *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), September 8, 1779, February 16, 1780, November 15, 1780, May 9, 1781.

sums of money would have enticed any despairing and destitute bondsperson to personally apprehend or disclose the whereabouts of a fellow captive on the run.

How large a cash reward would Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick have offered for Yombo had he attempted to escape indefinitely? In 1780 the previously discussed Reolof Van Dike of Somerset County advertised the sale of his "Likely hearty Negro Man, about 26 or 27 years of age, [who] understands all sorts of farming business, and is a very good tanner . . . for 130 [pounds]."[77] By this notice, Yombo, a reputed tanner in his own right, was worth at least this much. So any real flight by him probably would have elicited a relatively high reward for his recapture, thereby diminishing even further his chances of getting away.

As a runaway, Yombo was disadvantaged too by his own illiteracy, for he could neither forge a pass nor possessed the verbal agility of acculturated slaves. Without these two critical attributes, it was nearly impossible for a runaway to pass as a free black in eighteenth-century New Jersey. Herein lies the reason behind the capture of many unacculturated slaves like the aforementioned youths Peter and James. Unlike their young Morris County compatriot Robbin (alias Levi or Leave) who escaped in 1780, they were unable to "frame a smooth story from rough materials." In other words, they were not adept at "fast talking" the white man. Fugitives described by holders as being a "Smooth Tongued Fellow" - as was the "Negro man Bood" of Maidenhead (Lawrenceville), in 1763 - exuded a certain confidence which lent greater legitimacy to their movement. Coupled with a written pass in hand, a symbol of white civilization, escapees who spoke relatively decent English could potentially deceive even the most suspicious whites.[78]

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[77] *New Jersey Archives*, 2d ser., 5 (1917): 83.

[78] For Robbin, see *New Jersey Journal* (Chatham), May 7, 1780. For Bood, see *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, May 26, 1763. For another "smooth-tongu'd Fellow," see *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, June 14, 1756. Maidenhead was located in Hunterdon (now Mercer) County. For the basis of these insights, see Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion.*

Of course, we cannot assume that Yombo considered all of the factors discussed above in determining whether or not he should escape slavery altogether. Still, it would be inconceivable to portray him as completely unaware of his limitations - physical, social, and cultural-linguistic. To do so is to perpetuate Andrew Mellick's depiction of Yombo as an exotic, helpless captive who was ruled by his emotions rather than his intellect.

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Unable to escape his enslavement, Yombo was forced to develop strategies which would enable him to contest, albeit cautiously, whites' unceasing demands and intrusions.[79] Yombo was among many enslaved males who were well-aware that their "disagreeable" dispositions afforded them personal space from the dictates of whites. Interestingly, the unnamed bondsman who in 1752 murdered his owner Jacob Van Neste of Branchburg, Somerset County, with an ax for taking some of his tobacco, "was large and athletic, and for a long time had been considered dangerous."[80] The fact that he was perceived as dangerous suggests that he exploited or accentuated his imposing physicality in order to keep whites at a distance.[81] That is, his mean attitude enhanced the potency of his large and

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[79] Similarly, as pointed out by Alex Bontemps, "In a society in which any action committed by a black person against any white person could be interpreted as defiance and thereby led to swift and certain retribution, survivors of enslavement had to become keenly aware of the limit beyond which their behavior would be seen as defiant"; *The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery in the Colonial South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 120.

[80] For the murder of Jacob Van Neste, see *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, December 25, 1752; Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 226 (quotation); Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 134-135; and James P. Snell, comp., *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881), p. 759. The defiant bondsman "stood the Fire with the greatest Intrepidity," reported the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), January 9, 1753.

[81] Bondspeople tended to pay great attention to their appearance. For example, Dick, a runaway from Woodbridge, was "a well-looking, well built fellow" who "takes uncommon Pains with his short wooly Hair"; *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, June 18, 1770. Additional examples of slaves in Central Jersey who were conscious of their appearance can be found in *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia),

powerful frame. Likewise, Hunterdon County slave Harry Compton - who was Silvia Dubois's grandfather - in addition to being "very stout, and very strong," "had a vicious tendency" that compelled whites and blacks alike to approach him with discretion and perhaps even deference. According to local legend, Compton "was the strongest Negro that ever lived," and "could put any man upon the ground, white or black."[82] His meanness only added to his fearsome reputation. Shortly after Matthew Woodward of Basking Ridge, Somerset County, purchased the young slave Nathan Woodward from Simon Wyckoff of Readington, Hunterdon County, Nathan gave Woodward "a severe drubbing," making the owner "timid in giving Nate orders." Unable to control the angry boy, Woodward sold him to another Basking Ridge resident for "a yoke of oxen."[83] Because of his unpleasant personality, like the Van Neste slave and Harry Compton, Woodward was able to exercise some control over his life.

The historiography of slavery in New York-New Jersey would suggest that the "dangerous" character of these three bondsmen is reflective solely of the particular conditions of thralldom in the region (namely, small holdings and the high rate of turnover among slaveowners) which placed immense physical demands upon bondspeople, and had a negative impact on slave family formation.[84] Furthermore, their hostile dispositions, real or imagined, formed the basis of their day-to-day survival. By invoking fear in whites, they were able to assert a degree of authority regarding their time and space.

October 13, 1763; *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), October 8, 1770; and *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), May 12, 1779. For an excellent discussion of the stylistic behavior of slaves in the New York area, see White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 195-200.

[82] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 30 (vicious tendency), 94 (strength and local legend).

[83] *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), July 18, 1901. See also *Newark Sunday News*, April 14, 1901, which provides additional minor details of Nathan Woodward's life. Thanks to Fred Sisser, III for these sources.

[84] See especially White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 88-93, and Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 16-21, 155-156.

To be sure, whites did not take these challenges to their supremacy lightly. Jacob Van Neste violated his large bondsman's supply of tobacco because he was unable to completely dominate him. So the wealthy, prestigious, and seemingly incensed owner consciously struck at the slave's manhood by dipping into his most prized possession, and paid for this transgression with his life.

Though Yombo had a "stout" physique, his club-foot detracted from his physical potency.[85] His body appears not to have engendered the same fear in whites as did that of Jacob Van Neste's slave, Harry Compton, or, for that matter, Nathan Woodward who apparently had no physical disabilities. To compensate for this bodily shortcoming which put the bondsman at even greater risk for being brutalized and manipulated by whites, Yombo sought alternative methods to enhance his meaness. One of these tactics was his thievery. As was characteristic of bondspeople, Yombo's petty larceny under Aaron Malick had moral implications; that is, it was based on the grounds that the leather goods which Malick claimed for himself were in fact produced from Yombo's time and labor, thereby entitling the slave to them as well. For Yombo, theft simultaneously was a means of exacting justice and enhancing his survival. In other words, looting became the basis of Yombo's "moral economy."[86]

Moral retribution, however, was only one aspect of Yombo's stealing. Arguably, it also became a useful strategy for putting his owners on the defensive, by heightening their concern about what he possibly would do next. The fact that Aaron Malick would always check under the seat of the carriage chair for stolen goods before Yombo drove it to visit his wife in Elizabethtown, is a telling indicator of how Yombo's looting came to preoccupy much of Malick's time. In addition to mitigating his owners' authority, Yombo's thievery

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[85] For physical descriptor, see Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[86] See Alex Lichtenstein, "'That Disposition to Theft, with which they have been Branded': Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," *Journal of Social History* 21 (Spring 1988): 413-440, and Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), pp. 41, 43.

lent credence to his perception among whites as a mean and incorrigible slave who needed to be watched closely, if just from a distance.

Yombo's "coal black" skin color as described by Andrew Mellick was another marker of his contrived meanness.[87] By the eighteenth century, Europeans had become more inclined to equate human "blackness" with "gloom, evil, baseness, wretchedness, and misfortune" (i.e. a lack or absence of civilization).[88] In his 1780 announcement for the recapture of the aforementioned "smooth" talking bondsman Robbin, Noah Marsh speculated that Robbin was "secreted by some evil minded persons, whose hearts are as black as the fugitives face." Marsh conceived of Robbin's black face as synonymous with evil, and by extension was the reason why he was both "lazy" and "artful."[89] When a small white boy living near Frenchtown in Hunterdon County saw a black person (man) for the first time, he ran home and excitedly told his mother how he "had seen the devil himself down in the meadow by the goose's nest." Surely, the association of blackness with evil had been inculcated in the boy prior to this incident.[90]

In spite of the many negative connotations surrounding blackness in white colonial thought, Yombo willingly embraced his. While bondspeople, North and South, were becoming increasingly acculturated during the end of the eighteenth century, Yombo accentuated his blackness or Africanness by seldom wearing a hat which, in turn, made him seem all the more an outsider in rural Central Jersey.[91] In making himself appear

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[87] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[88] See especially David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 447-449 (quotation, p. 447), and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 56-60.

[89] See note 78.

[90] Quoted in Schmidt, "Hunterdon County," p. 153.

[91] On the effects of acculturation, see, for example, Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, p. 37, and Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 28.

different even from the modest population of slaves and free blacks in the area, Yombo perpetuated the notion that he was peculiar and treacherous.[92] Put yet another way, Yombo's conspicuous blackness - which he enhanced further through his donning of earrings, constant tobacco chewing, and refusal to speak intelligible English - effectively projected the image of a devious, calculating, and mean slave who could not be trusted fully.[93] Hence, Yombo's color became an invaluable asset to his day-to-day survival, for it helped in compelling whites to deal with him as little as possible.

Yombo's refusal to embrace Christianity similarly enhanced his mean persona. Holders generally welcomed their slaves' attendance of white church services which usually were characterized by racial clientage or paternalism.[94] For example, Aaron Malick's wife, Charlotte, was pleased to learn that their newly-acquired slave couple Dick and Nance (purchased in 1798), were devout Christians who regularly went to church. In her childhood memoir Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom proudly referred to the family slaves as "a godly set" who worshipped at their owners' religious home, Kingston Presbyterian Church near Princeton. It is probable that these and many other slaves in Central Jersey became Christians partly to gain the favor of whites. "When nearing the age of manhood," Quamino, who was enslaved in the New Brunswick area, decided to become "steady in his attendance upon religious meetings walking several miles through all kinds of weather." By Quamino's own admission, he was motivated to do all this because the slave "liked to have the name of being a good boy."[95]

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[92] Census data on the black population in eighteenth-century New Jersey can be found conveniently in Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), Appendix (pp. 213-214).

[93] For description, see Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603.

[94] On clientage, see, for example, Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White* (New York: Palgrave, 2002; orig. pub. 1993), p. 3.

[95] For Dick and Nance, see Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 604-605 (quotation, p. 605). For "godly set," see Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom, "As I Remember Scenes from my Childhood" [1906-1907], in *The Princeton Recollector* 4 (January 1979): 11. For

Yombo would have none of this. He had no desire to prove to whites that he was a "good boy." By showing not only disinterest in but also perhaps utter contempt for white peoples' religion - through which holders attempted to "civilize" slaves - Yombo in effect portrayed himself as threatening to white folk.[96] In the eyes of his owners and neighbors Yombo was a dark-skinned, thieving heathen who was to be approached with a measure of caution, if not fear.

All this is not to portray Yombo as an areligious person. His devout parents' premeditated self-hanging from a tree adjacent to the brook on Jacob Kline's property hints at Yombo's African-based religiosity centered around both respecting nature and paying tribute to his dead ancestors - not Jesus Christ.[97] From this, we may deduce that Yombo practiced a kind of oppositional religion based partly upon the denunciation of white hegemony in general, and racial bondage in particular. Yombo's adulation of his father testifies that his religious orientation did not condemn suicide as a means of self-liberation for bondspeople, which directly contradicted Christianity's conception of suicide as an abominable act. As has been shown in Chapter 2, the court hearings regarding the two Somerset County bondswomen who killed themselves in 1754 and 1756, respectively, deemed their actions as the devil's work. To be sure, Jacob Kline and Aaron Mellick, both of whom were Lutheran, viewed the suicide of Yombo's parents in similar terms.[98] By implication, then, Yombo was a child of the devil who practiced the devil's religion - an image he did nothing to reverse.

Quamino, see William J. Allinson, *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist* (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1851), p. 6.

[96] On the Christianization of putatively backwards slaves in Somerest County, see Abraham Messler, *Centennial History of Somerset County* (Somerville, N.J.: C. M. Jameson, 1878), pp. 130-131.

[97] See Chapter 2.

[98] Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick were active members of Zion Lutheran Church in New Germantown; Mellick, *Old Farm*, esp. pp. 632, 648.

As a final point, Yombo's mean persona invested him with the power to convert physical space within the Malick household into his own, namely "the seat by the fireplace in the outer kitchen."[99] Silvia Dubois recalled that "the niggers had no other light, and no other fire than [the kitchen fire] - they had to stay in the kitchen - this was their part of the house, and here they had good times, too. The white folks were in another part of the house."[100] Yombo used his conspicuous physicality and "evil" disposition to accentuate his throne as it were by the outer kitchen fire. This represented Yombo's personal space, and no one, black or white, dared to enter it without his permission lest they suffer his wrath.

CONCLUSION

For all the credit he deserves for introducing us to Yombo, Andrew Mellick is compelled to portray him as nothing more than a child-like black man whose strange actions were devoid of real meaning. Yombo's anger is alluded to but never discussed explicitly by Mellick, because this would have undermined his claim that his ancestors practiced paternalism. Thus Mellick depicts the physically challenged bondsman not as a truly threatening presence in eighteenth-century Central Jersey, but rather as a slave who was periodically irrational. In a real sense, Yombo serves as an element of amusement in *The Story of an Old Farm*. His presence adds "color" to Mellick's long and often times convoluted narrative of local "white" history. This chapter has built upon Mellick's allusions in order to recover the defiant persona Yombo had constructed for himself and restore his memory as a rational, even powerful agent in a racially hostile society.

But in doing so, like Andrew Mellick, the piece presents Yombo in narrow terms, as a man lacking personal depth. This singular interpretation is due largely to the fact that

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[99] Ibid., p. 612.

[100] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 80.

we have no real understanding of Yombo's behavior outside of the Old Farm, away from white scrutiny. That is to say, it is unclear of the kind of relationship he had with his wife and children, if there were any. Because Yombo periodically would make the trek from Bedminster to Elizabethtown to see her - at his request or demand, no doubt - suggests that theirs was a marriage of love, a bond grounded in mutual caring and understanding. Indeed, "abroad marriages" were not easy on slaves; they involved not knowing the daily welfare of one's mate who could be brutalized or sold without him/her ever learning about it. Hence, abroad marriages added to the burdens of bondspeople. Yet Yombo and his wife attempted to stay together, testimony not only of their love and devotion to each other, but also of Yombo's other personality as a warm, gentle, and protective husband. So he probably was not the complete rebel that both Andrew Mellick and myself portray him to be; he was an individual of multiple dimensions.

And yet Yombo was a malcontent bondsman, an issue deserving of scholarly inquiry. Andrew Mellick omits what was undoubtedly the most significant contributing factor to Yombo's rebelliousness - his parents' suicide. Though we cannot say for certain whether or not Mellick did this purposely, it is interesting that he did know about Yombo's African father of whom the slave was immensely proud. This point, coupled with the many other important facts Mellick brings to our attention regarding his ancestors' slaves, insinuates that Mellick was hiding something. Without the suicide incident, the reader is encumbered greatly in trying to make sense of Yombo's constant "treachery." He or she is left to believe that maybe Yombo was uncivilized and irrational. By not mentioning the suicide, Mellick, either consciously or unconsciously, strips Yombo of all agency, of a major part of his history. Consequently, Yombo has no reason to be angry, politically conscious during the Revolutionary War, aware of his surroundings which were conducive to flight, or leery of how whites sought to use up his time, thereby hindering his ability to see his wife more often.

Awareness of the geography was not limited just to those slaves who dared to escape bondage completely. The slave trade, internal migration with and death of owners, "hiring out," and the routinization of working in an agricultural setting forced all bondspeople to know intimately the physical environment and its utility. Surely, then, Yombo became as cognizant of the usefulness of his natural surroundings as his compatriots whom we know for certain ran away. Indeed, how could he not have been conscious of the ubiquitous Raritan River, the rolling mountains, lush meadows, and thick forests that accompanied his outdoor movements, of the Delaware and Hudson rivers which framed the physical contours of his captivity in Central Jersey. He was perhaps especially familiar with the Hudson as it bordered Elizabethtown where his wife was enslaved. Yombo knew very well these topographical allies, and seemingly used them, particularly when he had one of his "outbreaks," to gain a degree of leverage over Jacob Kline and Aaron Malick who consistently appropriated his time.

Time was not an abstraction for slaves, but something very real in their lives. For bondspeople, having time of their own became as vital to their day-to-day survival as stealing, praying, and visiting loved ones. Time, both that which they seized themselves and was allotted by holders, allowed Yombo and enslaved persons in general to retain a sense of their humanity. As a result, slaves vigorously contested the appropriation of their time - most clearly evident at the time of the Revolutionary upheaval - often using truancy to disrupt the continuity of time on the farmstead. Not every captive was physically and emotionally equipped, or sufficiently literate to abscond in Central Jersey where constables and citizens such as Godfrey Rhineheart were forever watchful of capturing runaway slaves. This harsh reality served as reinforcement to slaves that time was too valuable a commodity to be taken lightly.

Time was gendered. Chapter 2 discussed how Black men, more so than black women, were perceived by whites as potential threats. As such, it behooved every bonded male to reappropriate some measure of his time. By manipulating the negative images

whites had of them, Yombo and his menacing counterparts effectively invoked a sense of trepidation in whites which forced the latter to be somewhat respectful in how they approached and commanded these putatively dangerous men. From the perspective of Yombo, Nathan Woodward, Harry Compton, and other incorrigible males, it was more advantageous to be somewhat feared than loved by the local whites.

In the final analysis, like bondsmen throughout the African diaspora, Yombo was a product of his circumstances under thralldom. His anger, his defiance, his meanness were all manifestations of the oppressive nature of Central Jersey slavery. Rather than allow whites to dominate him without paying any retribution, Yombo used their own fears about his body, color, and culture to terrorize them; and thereby enhanced his survival. As whites had done to him, Yombo added an element of danger and uncertainty to their daily existence. Thus it is no surprise that the local whites never forget about "Old Yombo." Even in death, he had won their full attention.

CHAPTER 4

FORGING MANHOOD AT THE TRAVAILS OF A WOMAN: "BLACK DICK AND NANCE"

While Yombo represents perhaps the single most fascinating character in Andrew Mellick's *The Story of an Old Farm*, Dick and Nance are equally compelling as an enslaved couple. Mellick provides the following engaging passage as regards their initial arrival to the Bedminster, Somerset County, farmstead of his great-grandfather, Aaron Malick, "in the spring of 1798." He writes:

> In fancy we see these colored people as they reach their new home, and stand a little abashed and nervous while receiving welcome from their new mistresses. Dick is of a good dark color, heavy-set and dignified in appearance, courteous and quiet in demeanor, while Nance does the talking and laughing for the family through thick lips which partially cover a full set of white teeth. She is lighter in color than her husband, and very short - not to say fat. You know where her waist is because you see her apron strings, but with that feminine badge removed, to locate her zone would be like establishing the equator - a matter of calculation rather than visual certainty. Her breadth affords a good cover for her three frightened children, who peer shyly from behind her ample skirts at the new "white folks," at the same time taking curious note of Daniel's flock who form a background to their mother and grandmother . . . A few pleasant words, emphasized by cookies, soon calm their agitation, and it is not long before parents and youngsters are at their ease and taking kindly to their new surroundings.[1]

This comment, as well as many others made by Mellick concerning slaves, is flagrantly racist and shows how greatly his thinking reflected the literary tradition of the late nineteenth-century which tended to racialize or essentialize "dark" peoples. But despite its negative, reductionist depiction of Nance and Dick, the above quotation illuminates,

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[1] Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889), pp. 604-605. Daniel Melick was the second oldest son of Aaron and Charlotte Malick's five children. He was the only sibling still living at home during the time of Nance and Dick's purchase by the Malick family; ibid., pp. 564-565, 604.

indirectly, the unique burdens of bondswomen and -men in the rural North during the late eighteenth century.[2]

This chapter seeks to unravel the complex gender dynamics of Dick and Nance's marriage, which serves as an important reminder that the daily lives of bondspeople in the New York hinterland were precarious, often devoid of adult black interaction, and consumed with hard, dangerous work entailing numerous responsibilities. It suggests, moreover, how some enslaved males asserted their masculinity at the expense of their female partners, which, in turn, added to the burdens of bondswomen. In her celebrated 1861 narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs pointedly observed that, although enslaved females and enslaved males shared a common oppression, women suffered in acutely different ways.[3] As evidenced by Nance's enslavement, the sufferings

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[2] Andrew Mellick's racialization of Dick and Nance is most grossly reflected in one of the subheadings in his book, "Black Dick and Nance"; *Old Farm*, p. 605. Though Mellick could have easily devised a subheading devoid of any sexual innuendoes, instead he reinforces Dick's blackness by reducing him to a sexual object - that is, as a black "dick" or penis. For a discussion of the tendency among Europeans to reduce non-European colonial subjects and the lands in which they inhabited to sexual genitalia, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-4, 40-44, 52-56, 108-114. Similarly, according to Mary Louise Pratt, European travel writers often "produced" the various non-white peoples whom they encountered as bodies and appendages, if not genitalia; *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. pp. 51-53.

[3] Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987; orig. pub. 1861), p. 77. This and other insights by Harriet Jacobs, who was enslaved in North Carolina, have gained currency in the emergent literature on southern slave women. It is easy to assume, then, that the unique sufferings of American slave women was endemic only to females in the plantation South. However, northern slave women, recipients of significantly less exposure in historical writing, endured similar and, in some respects, greater hardships. Some of the best discussions on southern slave women can be found in Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic, 1985); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). For northern slave women, see Debra L. Newman, "Black Women in the Era of the American Revolution in Pennsylvania," *Journal of Negro History* 61 (July 1976): 276-289; Jean R. Soderlund, "Black Women in Colonial Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 107 (January 1983): 49-68; Kenneth E. Marshall, "Work, Family and Day-to-Day Survival on an Old Farm:

of females were related partly to the particular hardships of their male counterparts who represented a potentially greater threat to white society, and who could exercise their masculinity only in limited ways.

Dick and Nance's first known owner was General John Taylor of Tewksbury, Hunterdon County, who "offered Dick and his family to Aaron [Malick]" after "he had become financially embarrassed, and finding it necessary to sell some of his slaves."[4] In this respect, the captives were more fortunate than many others, for numerous New Jersey slaveowners had little compunction about severing black family ties.[5] It is difficult to approximate how long Dick's family was held in bondage under Taylor. Even so, it seems reasonable to assume that they spent some years in Tewksbury prior to their arrival in northern Somerset County.

When Nance and Dick appeared at Aaron Malick's Bedminster farm and tannery in 1798, she was probably at least twenty-seven-years-old (if she had her first child at twenty) and may have had some European ancestry, as evidenced by her lighter skin color. Nance became responsible for the domestic chores and servicing the whites, while Dick managed the farm on his own. The enslaved couple had five children: Dianah, born August 9, 1791; Sam, born September 1794; Dick, born December 22, 1796; Joe, born March 4, 1800; and Ann, born March 4, 1806. The family remained intact until Aaron Malick's death in 1809. The four older children were sold to four separate owners; they were to serve as indentured

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Nance Melick, a Rural Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-century New Jersey Slave Woman," *Slavery and Abolition* 19 (December 1998): 22-45; and Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth, A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996), which discusses the rural New York female captive Isabella (later Sojourner Truth).

[4] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 603. *Hunterdon County, New Jersey Taxpayers, 1778-1797* (Miami, Fla.: T. L. C. Genealogy, 1990), p. 174, locates John Taylor in Tewksbury.

[5] In 1782, for example, Samuel Minor of Middlesex County advertised for sale a twenty-six-year-old slave woman and her boy of eight and girl of two "either together or separate, as best suit the purchasers"; *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), November 20, 1782. Two years later, Nathaniel Hunt, also of Middlesex, publicized the sale of his twenty-five-year-old female captive "with or without a male child"; *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), February 24, 1784.

servants for terms ranging from seven years for eighteen-year-old Dianah to nineteen years for nine-year-old Joe. Dick, Nance, and baby Ann remained on the farm.[6] Andrew Mellick does not mention it, but manumission records for Somerset County indicate that Nance and Dick were later sold to different Bedminster owners. Nance would finally be manumitted in 1821, when she was at least fifty-one-years-old. Dick was not freed until 1824.[7] The fate of baby Ann is unknown.

I

Shane White's innovative study of the demise of slavery and the meaning of black freedom in New York City during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and Graham Hodges's excellent chronological account of the lives of blacks in Monmouth County, New Jersey, from 1665 to 1865 are indispensable to our understanding of Nance and Dick who were enslaved within New York City's orbit yet lived a rural existence like their compatriots in Monmouth County. White and Hodges effectively demonstrate that slavery in their respective areas of study was a harsh institution, in some respects worse than southern bondage. The small size of slaveholdings (on average about two captives), the frequent dispersal of slaves among white relatives (Hodges), and the high turnover of holders (White), were detrimental to black family formation.[8] The modest holdings and

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[6] The birth dates of Nance and Dick's five children can be found in the will of Aaron Malick; see *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, 1st ser., 40 (1947): 228 (hereafter *New Jersey Archives*). See also Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 605, 608, 610, 611. There is a discrepancy between Aaron Malick's will and Andrew Mellick's book regarding the name of one of the male children. The book mentions a "Ben" (b. 1796) but the will does not. This Ben was born the same year as Dick, which suggests that Mellick confused the boy's name. Indeed, upon the slave family's break-up in 1809, Mellick does not mention the sale of a Ben. Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 605, 611.

[7] "Manumissions of Slaves in Somerset County," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (October 1912): 278, 279.

[8] Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 88-93; Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth*

cruel parceling of bondspeople also impeded the development of black culture by forcing (in varying degrees) assimilation or adoption of European culture. This isolation was especially hard to overcome in the hinterland, where northern slaves were most prevalent. White writes that on a day-to-day basis rural slaves "came into contact with a much smaller number of compatriots than did their urban counterparts, which inevitably limited development of the networks that were so extensive and important for city slaves." As pointed out by Hodges, "the most common condition for Monmouth's slaves was to live and work in ethnic isolation."[9]

The 1790 census, though incomplete, helps us to contextualize Dick and Nance's meager social existence under their first owner, John Taylor of Tewksbury. It reported only 326 total blacks (268 slave and 58 free) for the townships of Lebanon, Readington, and Tewksbury combined. Apparently, this tabulation was reasonably accurate: the more comprehensive 1810 census gives a total of 365 blacks for the three Hunterdon County townships. In Tewksbury that year, there were 126 blacks (66 slave and 60 free) out of a total population of 1,308. Black people represented just 9.6 percent of Tewksbury's population; there were only four black persons (women, men, and children) per square mile.[10]

County, New Jersey, 1665-1865 (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1997), pp. 16-21, 155-156. Similarly, as Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund have shown regarding Pennsylvania, the northern bonded family was, at best, a fragile entity; *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 9, 27-29, 38-40, 76, 127. For additional confirmation on the small size of northern slaveholdings, see Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), p. 38.

[9] White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 93, 134-138 (quotation, p. 93); Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 17, 43-44, 77-79, 187 (quotation, p. 17).

[10] U.S. Census Bureau, *A Century of Population Growth from the First Census of the United States to the Twelfth, 1790-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), p. 195; U.S. Census Office, *Third Census of the United States, 1810* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1811), p. 30. The census of 1800 was damaged in a fire. It was not until 1820 that the censuses began differentiating slaves by either age or gender. Tewksbury was (and is) 31.80 square miles. See Frank S. Kelland and Marilyn C. Kelland, *New Jersey, Garden or Suburb? A Geography of New Jersey* (Dubuque, Ia: Kendall/Hunt, 1978), Appendix C (p. 213).

One of the many tragedies of United States slavery (particularly endemic to the North) was the frequent movement of bondspeople from one isolated area to another. The lack of black comradeship Nance and Dick experienced in Tewksbury may have only slightly improved in neighboring Bedminster Township. According to the 1790 census, there were just 173 blacks (169 slave and 4 free) out of a total population of 1,197 in their future home. Only 14.4 percent of Bedminster's population was black; there were just 5.3 blacks per square mile. Bedminster's reputed black population in 1790 had not changed much by 1810: the slave population was 161; no free blacks were recorded, an indication, perhaps, of a hostile environment for black people.[11] The four free black persons in 1790 took advantage of their freedom by going elsewhere, probably to nearby New York City where they could interact with other blacks within the context of a dynamic black culture.[12]

The "ethnic isolation" experienced by our two protagonists in Tewksbury and Bedminster was not representative of all New Jersey bondspeople, however. By 1790 what was then known as East Jersey represented a major center of slaves in the North and, according to Peter Wacker, there could be found especially dense areas of blacks in "eastern Bergen County, central Somerset with some adjoining townships in Hunterdon and Middlesex, and northern Monmouth County."[13] Slaves in these rural areas at the end of the eighteenth century had more opportunities than in previous years to establish networks amongst themselves as well as more stable relationships with black people generally. But these were still difficult tasks.

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[11] U.S. Census Bureau, *Century of Population Growth*, p. 196; U.S. Census Office, *Third Census*, p. 29a. Bedminster was 32.50 square miles; Kelland and Kelland, *Garden or Suburb*, Appendix C (p. 219). This figure includes present-day Peapack-Gladstone Borough.

[12] See note 20.

[13] 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. 195.

By comparison, bondspeople in West Jersey (where slavery was a relatively minor institution) generally lived lonelier lives. To illustrate, in 1790, Sussex County, roughly 890 square miles, had a meager 504 total blacks (439 slave and 65 free); or 0.5 blacks per square mile. Burlington County was equally large around 870 square miles. However, its total black population that year was a paltry 825 (227 slave and 598 free). There too was less than one black person per square mile here. This absence of black population density also characterized the smaller counties in 1790. Cape May County, for example, about 250 square miles, had a total black population of 155 (141 slave and 14 free); that is, less than one black person per square mile. This was also the case in Cumberland County: some 520 square miles, 258 total blacks (120 slave and 138 free). The 1810 census reported that the black population in Sussex had increased to 747 (or 32.5 percent); in Burlington to 1,039 (or 20.6 percent); in Cape May to 192 (or 19.3 percent); and in Cumberland to 589 (or 56.2 percent).[14] These percentages, in terms of the number of blacks per square mile, do not reflect significant change in the black population in either county.

Clearly, this evidence supports Shane White's and Graham Hodges's view of slave isolation. As was typical of rural northern slaves during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Dick and Nance lived without the daily support of an extended black community, which was so crucial to the survival of bonded peoples in the plantation South and urban North.[15] Since they lived on the periphery of both Hunterdon and Somerset

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[14] U.S. Census Bureau, *Century of Population Growth*, pp. 195, 196; U.S. Census Office, *Third Census*, p. 32; Kelland and Kelland, *Garden or Suburb*, Appendix C (pp. 209, 211, 219, 220). Not all of West Jersey was characterized by low density in the black population during this time period. For example, as Peter Wacker has indicated, a "cluster of blacks [resided] in western Salem County"; *Land and People*, p. 195. Sussex County in 1790 included present-day Warren County. Burlington, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem counties comprise present-day South Jersey.

[15] With respect to southern slavery - namely, the Chesapeake - see, for example, Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 317-420.

counties' denser black populaces, the pair may have been even more isolated than many of their rural northern counterparts.[16]

What does the above data mean in terms of gender? For Nance, it indicates that she did not have access to the type of dynamic female slave camaraderie which, Deborah Gray White convincingly argues, characterized southern plantations. According to White, if slave women "seemed exceptionally strong it was partly because they often functioned in groups and derived strength from numbers."[17] This was not the experience of most northern bondswomen. Yet there were exceptions.

In her memoir describing her childhood in Mapleton, Middlesex County, near Princeton, Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom recalls that when the female slaves belonging to her grandfather completed their work, "each day in the Winter, they went to their spinning wheels, kept in the kitchen."[18] Posits Deborah Gray White, "female slave domestic work sealed the bonds of womanhood forged in the fields and other work places."[19] Nance, however, was not afforded this interactive work experience which became critical to the social and psychic well-being of bondswomen, North and South. Given the scarcity of black womenfolk in Bedminster, she probably had to depend on both Charlotte Malick and the younger mistress, Margaret Melick, for some semblance of friendship; and perhaps for family security, too.

Dick was also affected by rural isolation. Activities including the drinking of alcohol, gambling with dice, and fiddling and dancing were the social norm among enslaved males in eighteenth-century New York City. This vibrant underground black

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[16] As noted, dense areas of blacks could be found in central Somerset County, which included some adjoining townships in Hunterdon County. However, Bedminster and Tewksbury were located in northern Somerset and Hunterdon counties, respectively.

[17] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, ch. 4 (quotation, p. 119).

[18] Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom, "As I Remember Scenes from my Childhood" [1906-1907], in *The Princeton Recollector* 4 (January 1979): 12.

[19] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, p. 122.

culture, which often manifested in black-owned taverns and dance houses, is suggestive of an environment that enabled bondsmen to exercise their manhood among other black males.[20] Bondsmen could not fully behave as "men" through women alone; they also needed the company and/or comradeship of their own gender.[21] Such an atmosphere facilitating the masculinization of bondsmen was not forthcoming in either Tewksbury or Bedminster. That is to say, Dick and his rural male compatriots had limited available opportunities to assert their masculinity outside of their families and wives.

Moreover, there was no guarantee that enslaved males (and females) on the same northern farmstead would have enough common interests to forge meaningful friendships. This would appear to have been the case concerning Dick and Yombo, the cantankerous African-born bondsman purchased by Aaron Malick in 1786. Dick and Yombo had different personalities, family obligations, strategies for dealing with whites, as well as separate work spaces on the Malick plantation (Dick was a general farmer and Yombo a tanner). Evidently, the two captives tended to cross paths only in the outer kitchen and, even there, Yombo occupied a special area by the fireplace that became his personal domain, of which Dick was surely cognizant.[22] So there seemingly was little if any real social interaction between them. Indeed, a church-going family man like Dick, whom whites considered a "'most likely nigger,'" that is, "an exemplary, pious black of sterling parts,"[23] would have been cautious of associating himself with a non-Christian slave like

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[20] White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 179, 180-181; Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 48-49, 52, 89, 93-96, 115-116.

[21] Regarding this point, the author profited greatly from Charters Wynn, *The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 56-57, 78-86, 90-94. Wynn discusses how the predominantly male migrant communities in the Donbass-Dnepr region in the late nineteenth century allowed the miners to engage in overtly masculine activities (i.e. alcohol consumption, soliciting of prostitutes, gambling, and fist fights) which facilitated their masculinization.

[22] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602-603, 605, 611-612.

[23] Ibid., p. 604.

Yombo, whose "disposition was not in any sense agreeable," and was prone to "an occasional outbreak."[24] On the other hand, the rebellious Yombo may well have had little respect for how Dick, who also probably was born in Africa, lived his life as an accommodating Christian "nigger."

II

How did Nance and Dick survive their isolation and precarious family life? Andrew Mellick would suggest that their complaisant behavior was largely a consequence of the especially "kindly" treatment afforded slaves in Somerset County.[25] Another consideration is that they had no other choice but to behave in this manner. There can be little doubt that out of necessity, allies for northern slave women came in the form of white women, with whom they had intimate and regular contact in the household, and thereby gave the most loyal service. For example, Nance was Charlotte Malick's "devoted attendant, cook, and skilful housekeeper"; and was later "equally faithful" to Margaret Melick.[26] Some slave women went to great lengths to demonstrate their devotion to the white mistress. In 1769 an anonymous female captive of Burlington County attempted to rescue her mistress after the latter was shot and brutally beaten by her jealous husband.[27] (Domestic violence knew no racial boundaries either.) Nance may have had genuine feelings for her mistresses because, according to Mellick, her display of grief at Charlotte Malick's death on March 13, 1802, "was as deep and sincere as that of any other member of the household."[28] By Mellick's comment, Nance was grieving solely out of love for Malick. But is it possible

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[24] Ibid., pp. 603, 608.

[25] Ibid., p. 225.

[26] Ibid., p. 606.

[27] *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser., 26 (1904): 526-527.

[28] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 605-606 (quotation, p. 606).

that her sorrow was more a consequence of the bondswoman losing her semblance of well-earned family protection?[29] As yet to be shown, Malick was particularly fond of Nance's family, evidence not only of the bond that manifested between the two women, but also of the matron's role as the slave family's principal protector.

But even if Nance were able to have a relationship with either of her mistresses, there is no reason to believe that it would have been based upon racial equality. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has pointed out, although "gender ascribed white and black women to a common sphere within the household," they were separated by "race and class."[30] Andrew Mellick explains that Charlotte Malick, a descendent of a Quaker family which disproved of the institution of slavery, initially was against her husband's decision to buy Nance's family. Subsequently, her "affections soon went out to these worthy bondspeople, causing her prejudice against slavery to wane daily."[31] Malick's paternalism and/or racism suggests that she was cognizant of who was the slave and who was the mistress in her house. Nance was certainly also aware.

Likewise, it is doubtful that Dick's relationship with the old patriarch and son Daniel Melick, who lived on the family farmstead with "his flock" and became his father's business partner, was characterized by racial equality.[32] Despite his good reputation among whites, as a sexually virile and thickly built black man, Dick constituted a potential physical threat to his owners' safety. Indeed, he represented a greater possible danger to them than Yombo, whose club foot and bow legs (due perhaps to rickets) mitigated his physical

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[29] Interestingly, upon the death of her Mapleton, Middlesex County, mistress Lydia Van Dyke in 1840, the bondswoman Peggy, in addition to receiving her freedom, inherited all of Van Dyke's "parlor furniture . . . $700.00 to build a 'shack' and some silver, to recompense her for her faithful service." It is probable that Peggy was not "faithful" to her mistress out of sheer complicity. That is, she expected some type of "recompense" for her efforts. See Malcom, "Scenes from my Childhood," p. 13.

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

[31] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 602, 604, 605 (quotation, p. 605).

[32] Ibid., p. 564.

potency.[33] Insight into whites' awareness of, or perhaps preoccupation with Dick's body may be gained from the comment Hunterdon County lawyer Charles Bartles made about the bondsman Cuffy Barnet (d. 1844). Barnet's "physical developments" (i.e. "broad" shoulders, "heavy and muscular" arms and legs, "brawny and rigid" fists "like a mass of flinty stones," and "monstrous feet" reminiscent of those belonging to the oxen he was driving when the attorney spotted him) reminded Bartles "of what may have been the appearance of the athletic Hercules when he returned from his completed task of cleansing the stables of the thrice one thousand oxen of Augeas."[34] Would the whites on the "Old Farm" have been any less aware of Dick's "physical developments" than either their white contemporaries or Andrew Mellick? Surely, then, the "quiet" and "courteous" bondsman treaded around the Malick men as lightly as he would have any pair of adult white males who wielded power over him and his precious family. With the existence of such tensions between them, racial egalitarianism was nearly impossible. Still, all three men doubtlessly realized that the prosperity of the Malick farmstead depended largely upon their getting along, if only in a superficial manner.

So we must seriously question the commonly held belief among whites that Dick "'was a most likely nigger.'" "In all societies," comments Winthrop Jordan, "men tend to extrapolate from social status to actual inherent character, to impute to individuals characteristics suited to their social roles."[35] According to John Blassingame, because of the high "distortion in people's perception, observation, and interpretation of the behavior of other individuals," scholars should be careful of relying "solely upon their reports,"

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[33] Ibid., p. 603.

[34] Quoted in "A Former Lamington 'Black Saint,'" *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 8 (October 1919): 321-322. For additional corroborating evidence of whites' preoccupation with the physicality of black males in Central Jersey, see Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 226. On whites' perceptions of blackness, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 447-449, and McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 50-56.

[35] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 179.

adding that "prior experiences, situational factors, cultural frames of reference, and selective inattention all influence perception of individual behavior."[36] Being racist lends even more distortion to Andrew Mellick's and others' accounts of Dick and his wife. In short, those whites who claimed to have known Dick's true character were probably greatly misinformed. His quiet demeanor may have been a mask he wore around whites for the purpose of protecting both himself and his family from any potential danger.

Outside the white household there were other more important avenues for social contact for slaves, especially at church. Nance and Dick were devout Christians who regularly attended church on Sunday. Like many captives, they probably attended their owners' church: Aaron Malick, who was of German extraction, became an active member of both Zion Lutheran Church in New Germantown (Oldwick), Hunterdon County, and of St. Paul Presbyterian Church at Pluckamin, located in Bedminster.[37] As was the custom, the couple had to sit in the "gallery" along with the other black members, among whom were some of the same people they entertained during the Christmas holiday.[38] Despite its racist implications, the gallery may have helped to facilitate a sense of camaraderie among blacks, as well as soothed their painful week-long bout with rural isolation.[39] To put it another way, white church services provided Dick, Nance, and many of their compatriots with some needed release from the strictures of bondage. But it was perhaps the happenings outside of church which mattered the most to them and other bondspeople in the eighteenth-century rural North (and South): Sunday church service for slaves were

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[36] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1972), p. 226 n.5.

[37] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 85, 87, 93, 605, 632.

[38] Ibid., pp. 606, 607.

[39] According to Chloe Spear who was formerly enslaved in Boston, she and her friends would past the time in the church gallery "playing, eating nuts, and enjoying other diversions." Quoted in William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 51.

occasions for visiting, sharing news, and picnicking with other blacks. Of equal importance is that on Sundays they would shed their drab, coarse work clothes for their very best attire - and thereby dignify their otherwise lowly appearance.[40]

In a way, Sunday was a one-day holiday for bondspeople. The indentured servant William Moraley commented that on Sundays, slaves' only free day during the week (besides the day they got married), "they banish . . . all Thoughts of the Wretchedness of their Condition."[41] Sundays may have allowed adult female captives like Nance - that is, domestic servants living in sparsely settled backcountry areas - to get from each other what they could not get from their mistresses - unconditional emotional support and social equality. But they would first have to actually congregate, which was no small task in the forested, hilly, rocky soiled, often pathless, and expansive backcountry.[42] The social activities of former Central Jersey slave Silvia Dubois suggest that some bondswomen managed to do so. Dubois fondly recalled going to church regularly and walking "a good way to [camp] meeting - to Pennington, to Princeton, to Hopewell, and to Harlingen," adding that, "I'd walk ten miles to a camp meeting - further, too." Not surprisingly, she was indifferent about returning to her owners. "I guess no nigger," Dubois averred, "was ever so glad to get home."[43] In a similar tone, according to Moraley, at the end of Sunday,

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[40] On activities, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 222. On the importance of clothing in the life of slaves, see note 48.

[41] Susan E. Klepp and Billy G. Smith, eds., *The Infortunate: The Voyage and Adventures of William Moraley, an Indentured Servant* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992; orig. pub. 1743), p. 96.

[42] For first-hand commentary on geography in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century, see Rayner Wickersham Kelsey, ed., *Cazenove Journal, 1794: A Record of the Journey of Theophile Cazenove through New Jersey and Pennsylvania* (Haverford: Pennsylvania History Press, 1922), passim.

[43] Jared C. Lobdell, ed., *Silvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*, by C. W. Larison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; orig. pub. 1883), p. 96. Camp meetings were part of the revivalist movement following the Revolutionary War. Silvia Dubois recalled that camp meetings were interracial affairs, attended by a great number of people, from far and near. She noted that at one camp meeting, "there were four pulpits, a good way apart, and four preachers [probably of

the slaves would "return to their Slavery," that is, back to the realm of their owners' property.[44]

The holiday season was particularly significant for Dick and Nance. To demonstrate his ancestors' benevolence, Andrew Mellick underscores the fact that every year between Christmas and New Year's Day, the two slaves would give a party to which only the "older colored people of respectability were invited." Mellick quips that the "lowly" blacks attempted to behave "most decorously and politely . . . 'jes like white folks.'" The entire feast was under Nance's supervision which, he explains, demonstrated both her competence and generosity as a cook and Aaron Malick's "liberality" as a slaveowner. From this we can deduce that Nance earned high praise and attention at the Christmas parties, that she drew strength from her day of celebrity around her own people. At any rate, she was a major contributor to and organizer of the "colored society" that existed in the area.[45]

The Christmas parties were equally empowering for her husband. As noted, Dick expressed his manhood largely within the context of his familial relations. Significantly, the holiday dinners enabled him to do so in the presence of an outside audience which included other black males. Writes Andrew Mellick, "at the supper, after a lengthy grace fervently uttered by the one [slave] supposed to be the most gifted, even staid Dick Melick, who took upon himself the service of the table, displayed airs quite foreign to his generally modest deportment."[46] This intriguing statement suggests that Dick, who had stood quietly before the Malicks during that first awkward meeting, perceived the dinners as relatively

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different denominations] were preaching all the time. And they hollered, and the folks hollered - good God, how they hollered"; ibid., pp. 96-97. Dubois's recollection is confirmed in Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 252, 262.

[44] Klepp and Smith, *The Infortunate*, p. 96.

[45] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 606.

[46] Ibid.

safe occasions where he could assert himself both verbally and physically. Similar to those patriarchs who traditionally carve and dole out the family turkey on Thanksgiving Day, Dick's "service of the table" signified an exercise in manly authority, that is, it reminded whites and blacks alike of his status as the head of his family. Therefore, the Christmas parties were as much Dick's time to assume center stage in the local "colored society" as they were Nance's - perhaps even more so.

Nance and Dick's spirits were also lifted by the fact that during this holiday week, they could visit other blacks and wear their best attire.[47] Good clothing allowed slaves to distinguish the owner's time from their own, the latter obviously being the more important of the two. Furthermore clean, dignified, and expressive wear (whites generally perceived the latter as comic and distasteful) bolstered slaves' self-esteem and reinforced their self-awareness, in other words, demonstrated their personal pride. Equally significant is that such apparel, particularly the latter, symbolized slaves' rejection of their oppressors' values.[48]

One might assume that given Dick and Nance's isolation in rural Bedminster, they would have made it a point not to cut off any interaction with other blacks, as they did at their annual dinners by limiting invitations to the respectable. But perhaps they did not feel that being in bondage meant having to settle for whatever company that happened to be in their neighborhood. After all, the slaves were Christian, reputable, and mature individuals. Generally, people tend to associate with those who they believe are more like themselves. Should enslaved persons have been any different? It cannot be emphasized enough that "respectability" was not just a European-American concept. Olaudah Equiano, for instance, who presumably was kidnapped from West Africa as a child and sold into racial

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[47] Ibid., pp. 606-607.

[48] White, *Somewhat More Independent*, pp. 194-200; Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 27-28, 30, 31-32, 35; Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 59-60, 152-153, 154. See also Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 223.

bondage, wrote of the barbaric and uncouth behavior of Europeans as compared to the civility of Native Africans.[49] Contrary to what Andrew Mellick would have us believe, Nance and Dick did not necessarily need whites to teach them about civilized behavior. Their elaborate Christmas dinners, an idea they probably borrowed from whites, indicate that they had introduced an element of civility and culture which was African-American based, to the Malick household.[50] Thus it is easy to discern why the couple invited only a certain class of blacks to celebrate the holiday season with them.

In no uncertain terms, northern slaves' conformity to the dominant European-American culture "confirmed rather than challenged the existing order." But on the other hand, white traditions such as dinner parties at Christmas time allowed bondspeople "to express themselves more fully than the narrow boundaries of slavery ordinarily allowed."[51] Dick and Nance's exploitation of these social outlets allowed them to enliven not only their own existence, but also that of their compatriots and owners.

Another event black New Jerseyans eagerly anticipated was General Training. This one-day interracial affair, which usually occurred in June, was supposed to have been when all the troops of the county were drilled. However, General Training came to be considered a grand holiday, frequented with heavy drinking of rum and fighting.[52] As a

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[49] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* [1789], in *Black Atlantic Writers of the 18th Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas*, eds. Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 187.

[50] According to Margaret Van Dyke Malcom, many of the "doings and sayings" of the family slaves were "mixed with our educations"; "Scenes from my Childhood," p. 12. For a provocative study of the mutual influence slaves and whites had on each others lives, see Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). "Wherever blacks lived in eighteenth-century America," argues Sobel, "they affected the collective consciousness, and people in all classes - the elite, the 'middling sort,' the poor, and the slaves - shared values." By 1800 these were a "quasi-English and quasi-African mix"; ibid., p. 233.

[51] Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85 (February 1980): 53-54 (quotation, p. 54).

[52] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 75; Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 578.

scholar of New Jersey history puts it, "training days, in all communities, were parodies on warlike preparations, but in isolated areas . . . they exceeded all orgies known to modern civilization."[53] The scores of people dressed in their Sunday best would march "to the inspiring music of drum, fife, and bugle." Blacks, as one might expect, were relegated to the role of admiring spectators. On the other hand, General Training allowed the lowly and oppressed, black and white alike, to earn some money. More specifically, "booths were set up for the sale of cakes, pies, beer, and rum." When the militia had completed its drills and ceremonies, activities such as gambling and horse racing were arranged for the entertainment of the people.[54] Certainly, from the viewpoint of many of those persons who gambled and consumed excessive amounts of alcohol, General Training symbolized more than a celebration of New Jersey's armed forces. Particularly with respect to bondspeople on small, isolated farms, this and other festivals, as pointed out by Shane White, "helped to break up the work year" and "provided a rare and valued opportunity" for them to get together with other blacks.[55]

Nance and Dick always attended General Training while in Bedminster. They and the children would leave for the Pluckamin grounds (southern Bedminster) by wagon at early morning and return at nightfall. Both Dick's root beer and Nance's ginger cakes (bolivars) were sold at the bawdy affair.[56] Whereas many of their compatriots were set on getting drunk and merrymaking, the business-minded and forward-looking couple was determined to make some money, evidently for the purpose of establishing some semblance of economic independence. Their business acumen contradicts Andrew Mellick's

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[53] Charles S. Boyer, *Old Inns and Taverns in West Jersey* (Camden, N.J.: Camden County Historical Society, 1962), p. 82.

[54] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 578.

[55] Shane White, "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *The Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 16, 18 (quotation, p. 16).

[56] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 607.

contention that slaves in Somerset County basically were in want of nothing.[57] Presumably, after running out of cake and drink, they would take some time to enjoy the festivities. Without going into any detail, Mellick comments how Dick's "spirits [were] lightened by the pleasures he had experienced."[58] Arguably, General Training enabled the "staid" bondsman to briefly escape not only isolation and his demanding position as general farmer on the Malick plantation, but also - to some degree - his role as a responsible and strong family man whose conspicuous color and physicality called for him to behave in an especially deferential manner around whites.[59] To be sure, as a black man he was never totally free of white scrutiny. Mellick, conversely, provides no clues about the importance of General Training in Nance's life. It would appear that General Training was both a welcome and calculated respite from her many chores in Aaron Malick's household, and apparent burdensome role as family mediator with whites.

III

In addition to their often meager social existence, Dick and Nance were forced to assume immensely important labor roles for the Malick family. Whereas Nance was "duly installed in the outer kitchen at the east end of the house," Dick soon "had nearly the entire control of the farm, which he managed with great prudence and intelligence; being always faithful to the interest of his master, he was rewarded with a leniency and trust that few white people in the same situation would have enjoyed."[60] Like many New Jersey slave men, Dick was spared the isolation and restriction of the household and the mistresses' surveillance. Jobs

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[57] Ibid., p. 225.

[58] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 607.

[59] For a similar argument, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *American Historical Review* 93 (December 1988): 1229.

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

as sailors, stage drivers, boatmen, stablemen, and farm managers generally were not considered appropriate for women.[61]

Kitchen or household service did not necessarily mean unrelieved drudgery for slave women. In fact, it might become a real source of power. David Demarest, a New Jersey minister during the mid-nineteenth-century, recalled that the slave Sarah had a tremendous amount of authority in the Bergen County (North Jersey) household of his grandfather, Peter Demarest. "She alone knew," he nostalgically wrote, "what we were to have for our meals. She prepared the meats, gathered and prepared and cooked the vegetables . . . Nobody trespassed on the domain of Sarah. Even grandfather bowed in submission."[62] In the mawkish words of Margaret Van Dyke Malcom, "we all idolized Peggy, my Black Mammy. I never heard Father give her a harsh word, and what I am today, that Christian Negress made me, taught me all my housekeeping tricks."[63] But like her counterpart Sarah, Peggy was yet a slave.

At times it is difficult to distinguish between slave women and men's work. During his journey through northern New Jersey in 1813, American aristocrat Elbridge Gerry, Jr., commented that "every cottage has six or seven slaves [who] assisted in tilling the grounds, but did the most laborious part. Some were employed with clearing the fields of the lesser

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[61] Henry Scofield Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896), p. 55. See also White, *Ar'n' t I a Woman*, pp. 75-76.

[62] Quoted in Irving S. Kull, "Slavery in New Jersey," in *New Jersey: A History*, ed.-in-chief Irving S. Kull, 6 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, 1930-1932), 2: 730. On David Demarest, see John P. Wall, *The Chronicles of New Brunswick, New Jersey* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Thatcher-Anderson, 1931), p. 103.

[63] Malcom, "Scenes from my Childhood," p. 12. For a good discussion of the "Mammy" stereotype which also briefly discusses the more pertinent historiography on the subject, see Cheryl Thurber, "The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology," in *Southern Women: Histories and Identities*, et al. eds. Virginia Bernhard (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), pp. 87-108. Jessie W. Parkhurst has insisted that "the qualities and characteristics attributed to the 'Black Mammy' indicate a first hand and personal knowledge of her, which became standardized and institutionalized by sentiment"; "The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household," *Journal of Negro History* 23 (July 1938): 352-353. See also White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, pp. 46-49.

rocks. Others were entrusted with greater power."[64] Silvia Dubois boasted to her amanuensis that she did all types of physical labor while enslaved.[65] Nevertheless, because of male bias coupled with the absence of a real plantation economy in New Jersey that required both bondsmen and women to toil extensively in the fields, the duties performed by male captives generally afforded them better opportunities than their female counterparts to deal effectively with the stresses and frustrations of being in rural bondage. Despite what David Demarest and Margaret Van Dyke Malcom said respectively about Sarah and Peggy's household authority, there was little opportunity for the majority of domestic servants (usually women) to ever develop autonomy with their mistresses looking over their shoulder, and with no black support. Slaves who labored primarily as farmhands at least had the comfort of the openness of the land, which put a degree of distance between themselves and whites.

Like most other bondswomen, Nance had little choice but to exist as a beast of domestic burden. Initially the care of Aaron and Charlotte Malick and general oversight of the household were daughter-in-law Margaret Melick's responsibility. For Margaret and husband Daniel Melick, Nance's arrival in 1798 must have been a stroke of good fortune. What was apparently perceived as too great a physical burden for the young mistress, a mother of four children at the time,[66] did not apply to Nance, also the mother of several children, and who probably became mostly responsible for everyone's health and nutrition, for clean and pressed clothing, and for the overall dignity of the household, that is, for all the essentials of a well-to-do rural lifestyle. Presumably, her daughter Dianah, as well as

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[64] Claude G. Bowers, *The Diary of Elbridge Gerry, Jr.* (New York: Brentano's [c. 1927]), p. 50.

[65] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 56-57, 58-59, 65. See also Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 49-50, 152, and Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 14-15, 21-22, 126-127.

[66] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 604.

the younger boys, would eventually assist their mother with her chores.[67] But the overall success of this domestic work, which doubtlessly included spinning wool and flax, knitting, and making butter, solely was Nance's responsibility.[68]

The Malick house, like many other larger homes in the eighteenth-century rural North, had two kitchens: the "outer kitchen," which Andrew Mellick comments was Nance's principal station, and the "farm kitchen, or living-room." Mellick refers to the farm kitchen as the mistresses' "kingdom." It had a deep fireplace for all the cooking, and was the center of home activity; that is, it was where "the meals were eaten, friends were entertained, and the spinning done."[69]

By contrast, the outer kitchen was smaller in size and located directly east of a garden, suggesting that Nance's domestic duties extended to this area. Moreover, it had a massive "Dutch oven" for baking. Mellick romanticizes the family oven as the source of proud foods.[70] Evidently he never did much baking. Without question the oven produced a sweltering and stifling heat that caused fatigue, which became even more debilitating during the summer months. In addition, the handling of heavy firewood was required to

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[67] There is plenty of evidence for New Jersey concerning slave children and domestic work. In 1765, for example, Cornelius Polhamus of Hopewell, Hunterdon (now Mercer) County, wanted to sell his "Negro Wench, this Country born, about 15 Years of Age, and understands all Kinds of House-work"; *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser., 24 (1902): 507. In 1778 a Mrs. Ross at Brunswick Landing in Middlesex County advertised for sale, "A Likely, handy NEGRO BOY, about fourteen or fifteen years of age," who was "an excellent house servant, and would suit any gentlemen that wants a waiting-boy"; *New Jersey Archives*, 2d ser., 2 (1903): 188.

[68] See the 1778 newspaper advertisement placed by innkeeper Henry Worly of Somerset County for the sale of his two female slaves; *New Jersey Archives*, 2d ser., 2 (1903): 127-128. As a small child, Margaret Van Dyke Malcom "could milk [a cow], make butter, spin flax into thread as fine as we could sew with, and fine woolen yarn for stockings." "Nearly all this knowledge," she maintains, "I stole from Mammy"; "Scenes from my Childhood," p. 12. See also Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 49-50.

[69] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 18, 240, 242, 605. See also Rosalie Fellows Bailey, *Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses and Families in Northern New Jersey and Southern New York* (New York: Dover, 1968; orig. pub. 1936), pp. 24-26.

[70] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 17.

keep the capacious chamber heated to just the right temperature for proper baking.[71] Certainly, Margaret Melick delighted in relinquishing the outer kitchen to Nance, who spent a large portion of her life baking for both whites and her family (more for whites). It is plausible that the fumes from these fiery ovens had, at some point, affected the enslaved woman's health. As Susan Klepp has pointed out, confinement "for long periods in a drafty, smoky room did no good to people prone to respiratory infections."[72]

The fireplace in the farm kitchen was probably also hazardous to Nance's health. Though the farm kitchen may have been the mistresses' personal domain, Nance undoubtedly did much if not most of the work in it, which required the handling of "warming-pans, flat-irons, skillets, teapots, and other [potentially dangerous] necessities." For Charlotte Malick was getting old (she died at the age of sixty-seven), and Margaret Melick had borne a total of ten children prior to Daniel Melick's second marriage in 1808, to whom she most likely dedicated most of her time.[73] Theophile Cazenove, a Frenchman, who visited New Jersey in the 1790s, observed that not all rural white women were afforded a servant like Nance. "The wives," he wrote, "have the care of the house, and besides they have a number of children, 5, 6, 7, 8. So they have more work than they can do, with no help, except one or two old and dispirited colored women."[74] Considering rural white women's burdensome existence, it is unlikely that the mistresses on the "Old

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[71] David Trumbull Marshall, in his *Recollections of Boyhood Days in Old Metuchen*, reprint (Metuchen, N.J.: Metuchen Regional Historical Society, 1977; orig. pub. circa 1930), provides an apt description of the Dutch oven. He writes that it is "a chamber large enough for a boy to crawl into, made of brick. The chamber is connected with the chimney. To bake in a Dutch oven one builds a fire of wood inside the oven and when the oven is hot the fire is raked out the door and loaves of bread are laid directly on the bricks. When the bread is baked then pies and small cakes are put in" (p. 73).

[72] Susan E. Klepp, "Seasoning and Society: Racial Differences in Mortality in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (July 1994): 486.

[73] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 240, 635 (quotation, p. 240).

[74] Kelsey, *Cazenove Journal*, p. 16.

Farm" would have failed to put Nance, a conscientious servant and dedicated mother and wife, to work in the dangerous and exhausting farm kitchen.

Andrew Mellick reveals that the procedure for washing clothes also entailed an element of danger. First, "a roaring fire was built alongside the wash-house - on the bank of the brook - over which was suspended an iron pot in which the clothes were boiled." After the dirt had finally loosened, "the coarse clothing was put in the pounding barrel and well thumped with a wooden pounder until the dirt was supposed to be eliminated."[75] This strenuous, time-consuming, filthy, and risky job - which was done seasonally - was one that many mistresses probably attempted to avoid, if they could. Indeed laundry work was generally associated with black women in the North.[76] Black women, either because of so few available job opportunities as freewomen or because they were enslaved, had little choice but to submit to laundry work and domestic work in general. They were compelled to endure on a daily basis the deadly fumes, lacerations, burns, bruises, and strained muscles associated with household labor both inside and outside of white people's homes. It may be argued that the numerous, potentially lethal duties of domestic work required an even greater sense of alertness than agricultural labor.

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[75] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 243.

[76] Jacqueline Jones reminds us that agricultural work "represented the chief lot of all [southern] slaves, female and male," adding that, "although women predominated as household workers, few devoted their energies full time to this kind of labor"; *Labor of Love*, p. 22; see also, Fox-Genovese, *Plantation Household*, pp. 172-177, and White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, pp. 114, 120. According to Debra Newman, neither the American Revolution nor the Gradual Abolition Law in Pennsylvania (1799) caused a significant change in black women's occupations. She maintains that the same situation persisted during the mid-nineteenth century. That is, most black women in Pennsylvania were employed as laundresses, seamstresses, and domestic workers; "Black Women in Pennsylvania," p. 284. As indicated by Shane White, "washer" was the major occupation of free black women in New York City, in 1810; *Somewhat More Independent*, p. 164. There can be little doubt that black women in New Jersey suffered the same occupational fate.

IV

Andrew Mellick gives no indication that Nance ever rebelled against all this dirty and dangerous domestic work. And she may not have. Why? The most obvious reason would be that she was afraid of having her family fragmented. Another probable explanation may be the existence of northern white racial violence. It is a misconception that, as a group, northern whites became significantly less brutal towards blacks after the colonial era. Arthur Zilversmit, for example, overstates his case when he argues that, "by the time of the Revolution, most northerners had ceased to regard the Negroes as the treacherous, uncivilized creatures they had once seemed to be, and they slowly modified their treatment of the subject of race."[77] Silvia Dubois, by contrast, recalled a great deal of physical abuse during her years under bondage, explaining that her mistress - who she describes as being "the very devil himself" - once fractured her skull. Even her pregnant mother Dorcas Compton was once cruelly whipped by owner, Dominicus Dubois, because she was unable to hold a hog on the wet, slippery ground.[78] On the one hand, mother and daughter were casualties in the racial assault waged against black people. On the other, they were victims of the harsh nature of northern backcountry life.

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[77] Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 28.

[78] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 54, 55, 64, 66 (quotation, p. 64). Silvia Dubois and Dorcas Compton were among many New Jersey bondswomen who were physically brutalized by their owners during the late eighteenth century. In 1792, for example, a slave woman was reported in the *New Jersey Journal* as having died from "a most barbarous and inhuman whipping." The coroner observed that "a more painful death than she must have suffered can scarcely be possible"; quoted in White, *Somewhat More Independent*, p. 87. In 1799 Amy Reckless of Salem County told the Pennsylvania Abolition Society that her mistress had "knocked two of her front teeth out with [a] brush handle and on other occasions pulled handfulls of hair from her head"; quoted in Billy G. Smith, "Black Women Who Stole Themselves in Eighteenth-Century America" (Paper presented to the Convention of the Organization for American Historians, March 1995), p. 1. Thanks to Susan Klepp for sending the author a copy of Smith's paper. To be sure, female slaves in New York also endured brutal treatment. See Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 14-17.

Significantly, Silvia Dubois commented that only disorderly blacks were treated harshly during General Training and other "big days" in Flemington, the seat of justice of Hunterdon County. After the constables had captured them, she says, "they'd tie 'em right up without judge or jury, and pull off the shirt, and put it right on the bare hide. My God, how they licked 'em - cut the hide all in gashes." She added, "That's the way they used to fix the old slaves - give 'em a holiday to have a little sport, and then if they had any fun, lick 'em till they'd have a sore back till the next holiday come."[79] It was open season on blacks even during a licentious affair like General Training. Surely, this barbarity was not lost on Dick and Nance, who kept a safe distance from those compatriots who became drunk and/or disorderly.

Like many owners, Aaron Malick was intolerant of bondspeoples' contumacity. The purported "outbreaks" of Yombo, Andrew Mellick maintains, elicited sharp words from his great-grandfather, who despite his old age prided himself in being able to confront the unruly bondsman.[80] Of course, one cannot compare Malick's tirades to either Dominicus Dubois's, his wife's, or the constables' sadistic behavior. (It is important to bear in mind, however, that Mellick may have neglected to mention harsher punishments in his romantic, paternalistic reconstruction of the past.) Even so, it would be difficult to argue that the patriarch's verbal condemnations directed at Yombo had absolutely no effect on his slaves. They perhaps served as a painful reminder to Nance and Dick of the real brutality that existed outside Aaron Malick's homestead.

Whites' perception of bondspeople as mere property further illuminates the harsh nature of northern slavery. At the Federal Convention in 1787, William Patterson, governor of New Jersey, stated unequivocally that, "[I can] regard negro slaves in no light but property. They are not free agents, have no personal liberty, no faculty of acquiring property, but on the contrary are themselves property, and like other property entirely at the

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[79] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 74-75.

[80] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 608.

will of the Master."[81] As evidenced by the unscrupulous exportation of New Jersey blacks to plantations in Louisiana in 1818, the governor did not stand alone on his pitiless position.[82]

Northern slaves were also equated with beasts. In his famed abolitionist tract of 1715, John Hepburn, a New Jersey Quaker, wrote that holders would give their slaves names such as "Toby, Mando, Mingo, Jack, Hector and Hagar, and such like Names they give their Dogs and Horses."[83] Moreover, the names of slaves often reflected holders' biblical and classical knowledge and origins or places where they did business.[84] This degrading practice, as demonstrated in manumission records for Somerset County, existed well into the nineteenth century.[85] By naming slaves after animals, biblical figures, and the like, whites had reinforced their domination over black peoples' lives. The same hegemonic message was conveyed to those captives who bore their owner's last name, just as Nance and Dick were given the surname Melick; and who were given a new first name, for example, Nance's husband's name "Ballod" apparently was changed to Dick.[86] "Ballod" approximates the name "Balla" found among the Hausa, Mende, Bangi, Bobangi, Poto, and Ngombe peoples of Africa.[87] This would imply that Dick was denied full use of

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

[82] Frances D. Pingeon, "An Abominable Business: The New Jersey Slave Trade, 1818," *New Jersey History* 109 (Fall/Winter 1991): 15-35.

[83] John Hepburn, *The American Defence* [1715], in *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America*, ed. Roger Bruns (New York: Chelsea House, 1977), p. 19.

[84] Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 80-81.

[85] "Manumissions of Slaves in Somerset County" (1912), pp. 275-279; (1913), pp. 46-51.

[86] For the name "Ballod," see Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 602.

[87] Newbell Niles Puckett, collector, *Black Names in America: Origins and Usage*, ed. Murray Heller (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1975), pp. 356-357.

a key element of his African identity and manhood.[88] In the interest of his family's security, he may have embraced the name Dick which made him appear less African or dangerous to whites. That is to say, the bondsman willingly sacrificed a means of his power and possession for Nance and the children.

Although there were probably variations in the treatment of slaves, the fact of the matter was that all bondspeople were disposable chattel, and so were Dick and Nance and their children. Interestingly enough, Aaron Malick's will referred to them as "Inventory" along with "'old' & 'new' bark house, hides & skins."[89] More revealing is their emotional response to the death of Malick on April 7, 1809. As Andrew Mellick solemnly explains, "then Dick and his family knew what trouble was. Not only did they honestly grieve at the lost of a good master, but they sorrowed because they knew they must be sold, and possibly separated." He furthered that the weeks between Malick's death and "the auction, or vendue . . . proved a serious time to both whites and blacks, and the hours wore heavily on, though only too fast when the thought of separation and the loss of a happy home confronted the poor slaves."[90] Whether Malick was a "good master" or that his slaves lived in a "happy home" is a matter of perspective. In no uncertain terms, however, the events involving the black family's break-up are indicative of slaves living precariously, of parents who had earlier explained to their innocent children the brutal realities of being in bondage, of the lack of control that captives had over the most basic of human relationships.[91]

As a mother, Nance was particularly devastated by the pending separation. "Slave mothers," posits Wilma King, "lived and prospered only to the extent that their children did. They shared each others triumphs and defeats. Their lives were so firmly interlocked

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[88] See Daniel P. Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery* (New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 69-71.

[89] See note 6.

[90] Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 608, 610.

[91] See Nell Painter's compelling discussion of Isabella's (Sojourner Truth's) slave family in rural New York; *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 11-13.

that they did not behave as individuals with singular purposes."[92] Not surprisingly, then, while at Perth Amboy, Middlesex County, in 1797, William Dunlap, who was a member of the New York Manumission Society, made the following observation of a female slave who was disjoined from her child. "The Mother by her cries," he lamented, "has made the town re-echo & has continued her exclamations for two hours incessantly & still continued them."[93] Even if Nance's grief had not manifested itself as overtly as this woman's, we can hardly imagine that she was any less emotionally traumatized by the harsh realization that she possibly would lose her children.

Dick, as Andrew Mellick suggests, also became much aggrieved by this painful reality. Though it is certain that the bondsman's anguish largely reflected his own parental instinct, another factor unmistakably came into play as well - his inability as the head of his family to protect it. As noted, Dick had made great personal sacrifices for Nance and their children. But despite his efforts, he was essentially powerless to defend what he obviously thought belonged to him. If nothing else had ever troubled his masculine conscience (and this is doubtful), the idea of his "flock" being parceled out like mere inanimate objects must have tortured it beyond repair.[94]

V

At the same time that northern slavery oppressed blacks physically as well as psychologically, the institution was not impregnable. Rather than providing for the total emancipation of slaves, the New Jersey legislature instead enacted several comparatively

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[92] Wilma King, "'Suffer with Them Till Death': Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America," in *More Than Chattel*, Gaspar and Hine, pp. 147-168 (quotation, p. 161).

[93] *Diary of William Dunlap*, 3 vols. (New York: Printed for the New York Historical Society, 1929-1932), 1: 18.

[94] See Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood*, pp. 111-124.

beneficial laws for slaves (and owners) during the post-revolutionary era. One measure in the law of 1788, for example, required holders to have their slaves taught how to read before the age of twenty-one, with a penalty of five pounds for non-compliance.[95] This may explain, in part, why Aaron Malick paid for two months of Joe's schooling.[96] Arthur Zilversmit has argued that the law of 1788 "made the relationship of master and slave more like that of master and apprentice." As apprentices - who were given "the same procedural rights in courts of law as white men" [97] - enslaved New Jerseyans could further strengthen the bargaining power they already had as invaluable skilled workers.

Andrew Mellick was probably correct in believing that the sale of Joe and his three other siblings as indentured servants was the result of an earlier compromise made between Aaron Malick and their parents. Malick's estate could ill afford the expense of four manumissions. New Jersey holders were required by law to give security for manumitted bondspeople, which was a strong deterrent against immediate emancipation.[98] On the other hand, Nance and Dick, both of whom were invaluable and faithful servants, would naturally want their children freed. The problem, however, is that the freed children would have been forced to live in abject poverty. It would seem, then, that this situation called for a resolution between the two parties - indentured servitude for the children.

The negotiating may not have ended here. The law of 1788 also prohibited the export of slaves without their consent or that of their guardian.[99] According to the law, Dick and Nance had some say regarding their children's new addresses, which were in

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[95] *Acts of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton, N.J.: Printed by Isaac Collins, 1788), pp. 486-488. See also Arthur Zilversmit, "Liberty and Property: New Jersey and the Abolition of Slavery," *New Jersey History* 88 (Winter 1970): 220-221.

[96] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 608.

[97] Zilversmit, "Liberty and Property," p. 221.

[98] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 610; Marion Thompson Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 28 (April 1943): 168.

[99] See note 95.

New Germantown, Hunterdon County, and Elizabethtown, Essex County, respectively, and relatively close to that of the parents. Of course, because Nance and Dick were slaves, whites would have the ultimate say. Even so, was it simply a coincidence that the four children were purchased by men whom the couple had already known?[100]

The wedded pair did not possess nearly the same bargaining power regarding the future of their youngest child, Ann. The New Jersey gradual abolition law of 1804 provided that slave children born after July 4th of that year, were to be apprenticed to their mother's owner until they reached the age of twenty-five if a male and twenty-one if a female. The owner was required to maintain the child for one year, after which the child could be abandoned to the local overseer of the poor, who frequently boarded the youth with the same holder who had abandoned her/him in the first place. In effect, the law of 1804 had curtailed the rights of slaves and strengthened that of owners.[101] But perhaps the most damning evidence of the decrease in Dick and Nance's negotiating power are manumission records for Somerset County, which do not report a single Ann being freed between 1805 and 1844.[102] This evidence suggests that Ann, who was born in 1806, was either dead or in some form of bondage when Nance had been freed in 1821.

The condition of Ann's siblings was also less than perfect. Life as an indentured servant could also be rather perilous. As William Moraley bitterly recalls, "the Condition of bought Servants is very hard," adding that, "upon Complaint made to a Magistrate against the Master for Nonperformance, the Master is generally heard before the Servant, and it is ten to one if he does not get his Licks for his Pains, as I have experienced upon the like Occasion, to my Cost."[103] His commentary apparently also holds true for the late

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[100] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 611.

[101] *Acts of the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton, N.J.: Printed by Wilson and Blackwell, 1804), pp. 251-253. See also Zilversmit, "Liberty and Property," p. 223, and Hodges, *Rural North*, pp. 135-136.

[102] See note 85.

[103] Klepp and Smith, *The Infortunate*, p. 96.

eighteenth century, when numerous white indentured servants had run away evidently because of maltreatment or dissatisfaction, or both.[104] In short, indentured servitude did not guarantee an easier, more comfortable life for Nance and Dick's children who belonged to a supposedly inferior race.

VI

There are two possible reasons why Nance may have played a major, if not the lead role in discussing the children's future as well as other family business with Aaron Malick. First, she possessed stronger emotional and social ties with the children; and second, it was more risky for slave men than women to be assertive in the company of whites, especially white males, whose power they most threatened. To be sure, many male captives like Mingo, of South Jersey, suffered indignities for openly confronting white men. Mingo was whipped for going public regarding his owner's rape of his wife.[105] Although Andrew Mellick's engrossing description of that first encounter between our two protagonists and the Malick family seems to be devoid of any real evidence (he again remarks, "In fancy we see these colored people as they reach their new home . . . "), at the same time, the biased and racist author openly acknowledges the anxiety that undoubtedly occurred between new owners and slaves (especially among the latter), which would indicate that his story was not based upon total fiction but a germ of observed truth. Mellick unwittingly shows that bondsmen recognized their own vulnerability and the far greater leverage that their wives had in

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[104] For examples, see Harry B. Weiss and Grace M. Weiss, *An Introduction to Crime and Punishment in Colonial New Jersey* (Trenton, N.J.: Past Times Press, 1960), pp. 71-72 n.6.

[105] Frances D. Pingeon, *Blacks in the Revolutionary Era.* New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience, 14 (Trenton, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1975), p.10. Generally, slave men were probably more daring in their relationships with white women. Cuffy Barnet, a slave in Hunterdon County, once threatened to leave his widowed mistress if his slave wife, Amber, could not live with him. He got his request. See "'Black Saint,'" p. 321.

relation to white male authority, and thereby consented to their wives doing the talking with whites.[106]

All this is not to suggest that Dick had no say regarding important family issues. As mentioned earlier, one of his and Nance's sons was also named Dick. In his seminal study of the black family from slavery to freedom, Herbert Gutman has convincingly argued that children named after slave fathers strongly disputes the frequent and negative assertions made against them that they were inattentive, absent fathers.[107] Slave naming practices are strong evidence that slave fathers played an active role in decisions affecting the family. Moreover, they indicate that many family decisions under slavery were the product of the private agreements between black women and men.

But at the same time that Nance and Dick's marriage may be called a partnership, a closer look at General Training indicates it was not based upon total gender equality. Dick's root beer was sold for two cents a glass, whereas Nance's ginger cakes were priced at a penny each. Because they set these prices themselves would logically suggest that Dick was considered the family breadwinner, and that Nance's financial contributions were secondary. Yet this difference in price may have been attributed to a higher cost in making a barrel of root bear. What happened after General Training, however, says something entirely different. Apparently, Dick would take all the money, filling his pockets "with big copper pennies." The happy bondsman "would now have pocket-money for all his needs for months to come, and some to drop in the black bag each Sunday morning at church

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[106] Correspondingly, peasant women historically have been the primary negotiators with government officials, even as late as the 1930s Soviet countryside. See, for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 65-70, and Lynne Viola, "Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization," *Russian Review* 45 (January 1986): 23-42.

[107] Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), pp. 189-191, 307, 346. Gutman writes a great deal about the significance and roles of slave fathers (passim). See also Blassingame, *Slave Community*, pp. 172-173, 178-179.

when the deacon passed it in the gallery, which Dick always did with a most reverential bow."[108]

Arguably, donations to the white church were another way in which black men under slavery (and freedom) could demonstrate their manhood in the presence of whites (and blacks) without serious repercussions.[109] Once again, whites were threatened by black men's mere potential to be dangerous. Displays of economic manly dignity from the segregated gallery did not engender such heightened sensitivity. Given the rareness and obvious importance of such masculine exhibitions, we can surmise that they were often done at black women's expense. By putting money in the "black bag," Dick and his male counterparts were confirming their patriarchal hegemony.

At any rate, Dick was in charge of the family's meager financial earnings. If Nance needed any money during those "months to come," she had to go through him. Like so many other black and white women who worked as hard as their spouses in what were perhaps more dangerous domestic settings, Nance was at the mercy of Dick's masculine dictates.[110]

The dynamics of Dick and Nance's marriage may have been influenced by gender relations in Africa. Socioeconomic practices there were brought over to the New World and reinforced by slavery. The double duty of mother and laborer (outside the house) was nothing new to African slave women. It would be easy to equate African women's substantial economic responsibilities and autonomy as real power. However, as Claire Robertson reminds us, "in Africa even daily subsistence decisions - when to plant, what to plant, how much grain or other staple to dole out - were often controlled by men, although

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[108] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 607.

[109] In 1802 Robert Aaron, a free black, left $250 to the Dutch Reformed Church in Bedminster. One of his executors was Daniel Melick; *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser., 39 (1946): 7.

[110] See Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 20-23.

the division into 'women's' crops and 'men's' crops sometimes mitigated that control." Be that as it may, "patriarchal rather than matriarchal authority was the dominant norm." In the final analysis says Robertson, "we have had to discard romantic notions of egalitarian precolonial Africa, even while recognizing that colonialism created or vastly exacerbated existing economic inequalities in African societies."[111] Although in terms of economic power black women and men were equal under American slavery, older African-American men like Dick still may have embraced patriarchal ideology. If so, then Nance was oppressed on all fronts, that is, by race, by class, and by gender.

CONCLUSION

Despite Andrew Mellick's racism and family biases, he has provided the skeleton necessary for us to unravel some of the experiences of an enslaved couple otherwise buried in obscurity. Because of his account of our two personages, it might be argued that both Shane White and Graham Hodges have revealed only part of the story of rural slaves. Unlike many of their rural and urban compatriots, for more than a decade Dick and Nance were able to live as husband and wife with their children. Moreover, they were able to forge an alternative culture of survival which seemingly built upon the sustenance provided by their marriage. Thus, despite overwhelming circumstances, the slaves had managed to create a meaningful social life for themselves, perhaps as meaningful as that of many urban slaves. They did not merely imitate the behavior of whites during their Christmas parties. They were largely expressing their own sense of humanity or heritage, and demonstrating

[111] Claire Robertson, "Africa into the Americas? Slavery and Women, the Family, and the Gender Division of Labor," in *More than Chattel*, Gaspar and Hine, pp. 3-40 (quotation, p. 12).

skills they had cultivated which, in turn, made bondage more bearable but certainly not acceptable.[112]

This is not to make light of their tenuous existence. Indeed, Nance and Dick survived a range of rather difficult experiences, the worse being the eventual sale of at least four of their five children. Perhaps most admirable about the couple is how they survived - by appearing docile while working together to protect the family. Certainly, it was difficult for them to have to smile and grin in the face of whites. For despite their willingness to both work hard and demean themselves, their family could be and was fragmented in an instant. This must have been a bitter reality, especially when the disaster of separation finally occurred.

The slave couple's survival for a decade of the vicissitudes of slave family life was no doubt attributable not only to constant communication on both their parts, but also to their willingness to compromise and comfort one another. As a black man, Dick was under extreme pressure to maintain both his dignity and manhood. We can only guess that Nance was cognizant of this fact and did what she could to ease her husband's burdens - even at her own personal expense.

They were a remarkable couple indeed.

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[112] See White, "'It Was a Proud Day,"' pp. 21-24.

CHAPTER 5

QUAMINO BECOMES "A MAN"

To be sure, Yombo and Dick are not the only examples of slave manhood. The purpose here is to further address this gap in northern slavery historiography by examining the captive experience of Quamino Buccau or Brokaw (1762-1850) within the context of his 1851 narrative, *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist.*[1] More precisely, this chapter analyzes Quamino's traumatic childhood, the important role that both Christianity and sobriety played in his survival as an adult bondsman, and his gradual attainment of manhood - critical issues which have received little or no attention in the burgeoning field of slavery studies north of the Mason-Dixon line.

Indeed, Quamino's obscure biography written by white abolitionist William Allinson enables us to probe more deeply into the emergent manhood of bonded males, North and South. Similar to Frederick Douglass's widely known 1855 autobiography, the *Memoir* suggests that manhood was not inherent in the consciousness of all bondsmen, but rather was often acquired through unwanted conflict with white males who did everything within their power to dominate black males physically as well as psychologically.[2] According to the former Maryland slave, he first felt like "A MAN" following a fight he

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[1] William J. Allinson, *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist* (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1851). For verification of dates and names of people which appear in this discussion, see Chapter 1.

[2] On physical and psychological oppression, see Daniel P. Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery* (New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 110-112, passim.

had with a sadistic slavebreaker. "I was no longer a servile coward," writes Douglass proudly, "my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence."[3]

In Quamino's case, manhood was partly and less dramatically achieved by him quitting one of his Brokaw owners for violently striking him. Hence, his narrative provides the counterpoint to Douglass's, which may give the impression that all bonded males obtained manhood by aggressively standing up to white brutality. By Quamino's narrative, though manhood for slaves was something they all *earned*, it need not be done through violence. It testifies to the manifestation of comparatively passive yet equally empowering routes to black "manly independence." So Douglass's path to manhood was not representative of all bondsmen, for there were other paths as well. In this context, Quamino's recorded life story is as important as that of his famous black abolitionist counterpart.

I

The decision of Quamino's first owner Isaac Brokaw of the Eastern Precinct (Franklin Township), Somerset County, in 1771, to hire out the nine-year-old slave to either John or Paul Schenck, also of Somerset, marked the pivotal event in his childhood.[4] Prior to this fateful business transaction, Quamino had lived, though certainly not a charmed life, one that was significantly better than many other enslaved youths in eighteenth-century Central Jersey. That is, despite being held captive in the New York hinterland where an extremely high rate of turnover existed among holders,[5] Quamino was very much rich in family. He had both parents, four siblings (a brother and three sisters), as well as friends in the New

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[3] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Dover, 1969; orig. pub. 1855), ch. 27 (quotations, pp. 246, 247).

[4] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 4.

[5] See, for example, Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), p. 90.

Brunswick area. Moreover, he was Isaac Brokaw's "only young cub" or pet slave. Then, seemingly in an instant, Quamino was stripped of these human relations and forcibly removed by Schenck to distant Poughkeepsie, New York - some one hundred miles away from the Eastern Precinct - where "wild varmints" and other frightening occurrences in the frontier awaited the youth.[6]

Quamino and his family had reason to be concerned with his relocation, for transplanted slaves were even more susceptible to gross mistreatment. The tragic life of the Readington, Hunterdon County, slave Phillis is demonstrative of this point. During the period 1809-1829, Phillis's owner Henry Post sold an entire corn crop to save his irresponsible brother from the consequences of his "drunken frolic," which had left Post's household in a state of financial distress. To alleviate the crisis, Post hired out Phillis, described as an "efficient lady's maid, seamstress, and nurse," to a man probably of Cranbury, Middlesex County, under the expressed agreement that she be returned to Post in one year. As the end of the year approached, Phillis's mistress Martha or Mattie (Anderson) began to worry about the slave who had been given to her as a present from her father. After he borrowed enough money from his neighbors to make up the price, Post went in pursuit of Phillis and eventually found her in Monmouth County (South Jersey), some twenty-six miles southwest of Readington. The physically delicate woman was crippled upon his arrival. Not only had she been forced to work an entire season as a field hand, but was brutally whipped. This deadly combination of hard labor and barbarous treatment caused her body to become permanently crooked. Unable to lie in a bed, Phillis

[6] As William Allinson expresses it, "not a week elapsed without [Quamino] seeing wild bears swimming across the noble Hudson," a phenomenon he appears not to have experienced in Central Jersey; *Memoir*, p. 4; see also p. 6. The ensuing discussion of Quamino's formative years has profited greatly from Wilma King's excellent study of enslaved youth in the nineteenth-century American South, where she argues that the brutal forces of bondage robbed blacks of their childhood; *Stolen Childhood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

spent the rest of her life confined to a large cradle specially made for her.[7] Such was the horror that possibly awaited a slave who became someone else's property in a distant area, away from the protection of his/her parents. We can only imagine, then, that Quamino and his family felt a tremendous amount of trepidation about his imminent departure to upstate New York where he would have to fend for himself.

There can be little doubt that the youth became quite depressed in his new surroundings. Silvia Dubois, who was held captive in Central Jersey during the 1790s, provides us with some perspective. As a teenager, Dubois was forced to relocate with her owners to rural Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, leaving behind her mother and siblings. Significantly, she recalled feeling a "little glum" one day and hence was in no mood for cleaning her owners' barroom as the mistress had ordered. Thereupon, the mistress scolded Dubois, who then "sauced her." The brutal mistress responded by striking Dubois with her hand. Dubois supposedly hit her back. "The first whack," Dubois explains, "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, and I hurt her so badly that all [the white people] were frightened out of their wits." Realizing that "it wouldn't do to stay there," Dubois fled to Chenago, New York, "and there went to work." Cognizant of the seemingly unending tension between his wife and headstrong slave, Minical Dubois, who was absent at the time of their alleged altercation, freed the bondswoman shortly afterwards.[8]

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[7] John Bodine Thompson, "Readington Negroes," in *Unionist Gazette* (Somerville), October 25, 1894. See also John B. Bodine papers, Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University. The period 1809-1829 reflects when Henry and Martha Post were married and the year Martha died. See James P. Snell, comp., *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881), p. 489.

[8] Jared C. Lobdell, ed., *Silvia Dubois, A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*, by C. W. Larison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; orig. pub. 1883), pp. 56, 65-66 (quotations, pp. 65, 66).

In addition to demonstrating the hostility between black and white women in the rural Middle Atlantic, Silvia Dubois's reminiscences reveals how bondspeople were susceptible to feeling depressed which, in turn, affected their work performance. Though Dubois was a strong-minded individual, like many if not most of her transplanted compatriots including Quamino, she experienced moments of loneliness and sadness precipitated no doubt by the loss of contact with family and friends. Quamino, who was neither as old as Dubois at the time of his uprootment nor as physically aggressive and outspoken, would have had an even more difficult time staving off bouts of feeling "glum." This may have at times impeded him in excelling in his work, the only sphere of his young life under bondage he could exercise some degree of control. His image as a dutiful servant was critical because it enabled Quamino to show compliance, that is, maintain the facade of acquiescence possibly taught to him by his parents.[9] Yet this ability to present himself as a diligent bondsman and transcend any instances of despair was seriously challenged in his new environs by the increase in his work responsibilities and value as a competent laborer, his involuntary witnessing of public executions, and the instability in northern society caused by the Revolutionary War.

As noted, while under Isaac Brokaw's ownership, Quamino was more of a pet than a laborer. Running errands was perhaps the slave's most onerous chore. However, he actually had to work for Schenck, who seemingly paid good money for him and demanded an equally good return on his investment. If he were anything like other slaveowners including Daniel Barkelow of the Eastern Precinct, Schenck would have been intolerant of black incompetence and indolence. Barkelow once cursed at "two colored boys" loitering at a distance, whom he had ordered to fetch him and "a colored man" some water. One of the incredulous youths said, "There, did you hear the minister swear!" An ashamed Barkelow apologized to his neighbors, explaining that "the black rascals stayed so long that

[9] Wilma King emphasizes the important role enslaved parents played in inculcating within their children effective survival strategies; *Stolen Childhood*, pp. 67-74.

I got so dry I could not help it. You know that niggers will be niggers, roasted or biled."[10] According to Silvia Dubois, unmindful slaves were shown no mercy by their owners. "Them old masters," she attests, "when they got mad, had no mercy on a nigger - they'd cut a nigger all up in a hurry - cut 'em all up into strings, just leave the life, that's all. I've seen 'em do it, many a time."[11] She, in fact, was brutalized repeatedly by her mistress who would "level me with anything she could get hold of - club, stick of wood, tongs, fire-shovel, knife, axe, hatchet, anything that was handiest - and then she was so damned quick about it too. I tell you, if I intended to sauce her, I made sure to be off always."[12] Surely, Quamino did everything within his power not to raise the ire of Schenck. The young captive was fully aware of the significance of his new labor status and quickly excelled at his work.[13]

As if this were not burdensome enough, Schenck and others attempted to buy Quamino from Isaac Brokaw - testimony of both the youth's submissiveness and increased value as a competent and reliable worker. Though Brokaw declined these offers,[14] Quamino was not immune to being sold. Indeed, every slave's future lay in the balance in New York-New Jersey where the rate of turnover among holders was pronounced. The fact that Quamino was now so far away from his family must have made the probability of being purchased seem even more real. Was it possible for Quamino to experience childhood when everyday his future was in doubt? His days of playful thoughts and childish fun had come to an abrupt end.

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[10] Quoted in Ralph Voorhees, "Franklin Township Historical Notes," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 6 (January 1917): 27.

[11] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 66.

[12] Ibid., p. 64.

[13] For a related argument, see King, *Stolen Childhood*, p. 68.

[14] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 4.

Equally traumatizing were the public executions that Schenck "compelled" Quamino to witness, "with the idea that a salutary lesson would thus be impressed." Part of this edification, which Quamino (as a free man) still found to be "peculiarly distressing," involved a male slave around the age of twenty who had set fire to his owner's "barn and outbuildings," destroying a considerable amount of grain as well as livestock. As our protagonist vividly recalls,

> He was fastened to a stake, and when the pile [of wood] was fired, the dense crowd excluded the air, so that the flames kindled but slowly, and the dreadful screams of the victim were heard at a distance of three miles. His master, who had been fond of him, wept aloud, and called to the Sheriff to put him out of his misery. This officer then drew his sword; but the master, still crying like a child, exclaimed, "Oh, don't run him through!" The Sheriff then caused the crowd to separate, so as to cause a current of air; and when the flame burst out fiercely he called to the sufferer to "swallow the blaze;" which he did, and immediately he sunk dead.[15]

In view of both the rarity of slave arson in Poughkeepsie and the time frame in which Quamino was enslaved there, he most likely was referring to the African belonging to Jacob Van Benchaten who, in 1775, was burned alive publicly for setting fire to Van Benchaten's house and barn.[16] This act of resistance "usually represented retaliation for some private offense or injustice."[17] Evidently, Van Benchaten flagrantly violated his captive's own sense of justice, thereby turning the otherwise amiable slave ("as nice a

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[15] Ibid., pp. 4-5 (quotation, p. 5). The young offender was betrayed by the smoke escaping from his pocket replete with flammables.

[16] There was an "absence of riots, insurrection, and violence" amongst the slaves in Dutchess County, according to Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of an American County* (New York: Hastings House, 1956), p. 125. For the crime and ensuing burning, see A. J. Williams-Myers, *Long Hammering: Essays on the Forging of an African American Presence in the Hudson River Valley to the Early Twentieth Century* (Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 1994), p. 46.

[17] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 615.

coloured man . . . as you would wish to look at," posited Quamino) into a vindictive rebel.[18]

Of course, Quamino never forgot his former compatriot's execution because it epitomized northern slavery's utter barbarity. Alternatively, it served as a grave reminder to Quamino, beginning at a young age, that he could ill afford to allow his frustrations to get the best of him, that he needed to employ less openly resistant strategies when confronted with white injustices and personal tragedies.[19]

Orlando Patterson writes that slavery was principally "a relation of domination," and the use of violence was essential "in creating and maintaining that domination."[20] In the minds of holders, forcing their bondspeople - males in particular - to observe the public executions of fellow captives was simply a matter of routine business. Not even young slaves like Quamino who were well-behaved and diligent in their work were exempt from the northern white man's exercises in racial domination. Indeed, the older and stronger he became, the more of a possible physical threat he posed to Schenck and the "master class" in general. In short, the death rituals were to remind Quamino of his tenuous existence, of his "proper place." He had reached the point in his bodily development where he had to be on constant guard in his interactions with whites.

The Revolutionary War intensified his anxiety. The chaos in Middle Atlantic society caused by the Revolution severed his communication with Isaac Brokaw whom he had visited on several occasions, and who had once visited him.[21] In fact, much military

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[18] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 5.

[19] For similar analyses, see Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History* 27 (October 1942): 388-419; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1972), ch. 8; and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 37-41.

[20] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 2.

[21] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 4.

and military-related activity occurred in Dutchess County. Not only were American forts and troops positioned on either side of the Hudson River, but the citizens there witnessed raids by the British forces, incidents of espionage, and sequestrations. In a letter dated July 19, 1776, from Poughkeepsie, Elizabeth Tappen wrote to her husband Peter, "Almost every Tory in the County was hunted up by the Yankie's & Brought to County Committy, then we had news of the ships moving up the river, Troops flocking in here like swarms of Bees, People that live at the river moving everything away."[22] Like Tappen, Quamino probably became fearful of these local disturbances which had affected his ability to remain in contact with his support system back in Somerset County.

Located in proximity to British-held New York City, Somerset County similarly was occupied by detachments of British, Hessian, and Continental soldiers who frequently plundered the inhabitants and, by extension, altered their lives. For example, Abraham Brokaw, the youngest son of Isaac Brokaw, claimed to have lost two glass panes and two and one-half cords of fire wood from Continental depredations. Like his brothers Caspares and Isaac, Abraham saw extended and varied military service in the revolutionary army. In 1780 Abraham performed four tours of duty at nearby Elizabethtown in Essex County (North Jersey) where he observed "the enemy night and day."[23]

Clearly, the Brokaws were too preoccupied with the Revolution to maintain contact with their slave who "had relinquished the hope of again seeing his former friends."[24]

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[22] Quoted in MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever*, p. 352; see also pp. 362-363.

[23] For plundering, see, for example, "Somerset County Losses in the Revolution," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 1 (October 1912): 279-286; "Somerset Losses by Continentals in the Revolution: From the Records at Trenton," ibid., 3 (October 1914): 256-261, esp. p. 259 (Abraham Brokaw); "'Inhabitants of Bridgewater . . . Suffered to a Very Great Degree,'" *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 1 (March 1983): 12-15; and Leonard Lundin, *Cockpit of the Revolution: The War for Independence in New Jersey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), pp. 244-246, 410, 411-413, 416-417. On the Brokaws, see "The Brokaw-Bragaw Family," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 87 (January 1956): 12, 15, 16-17 (quotation, p. 17), and Elsie Foster, *Our Brokaw-Bragaw Heritage* (n.p., n.d. [c. 1970]), pp. 42, 43, 45.

[24] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 5.

Quamino's loss of hope can be characterized as a "social death," for in his mind the basis of his young life - family nurturance, protection, and socialization - had ended. Argues Orlando Patterson, "the definition of the slave, however recruited, [was] a socially dead person. Alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order."[25] By Patterson's sound reasoning, Quamino and other transplanted slaves experienced not only the social death common to all bondspeople, but also a second death of sorts as they no longer had their familial sources of inner or psychic wholeness.[26]

The fortune of eighteen-year-old Quamino improved dramatically in 1780. That year, after Schenck had conversed with "a stranger" sent by the Brokaw family to retrieve Quamino, he asked the boy "whether he would like to see his father and mother, his master and mistress, his young masters and mistresses, &c." To his "affirmative reply," a disappointed Schenck responded, "Well, your master has sent for you, and this man has come to take you." Upon learning that he was going back home, Quamino's teenage emotions got the better of him. "Overcome with this too sudden announcement," writes William Allinson, "he burst into a violent and uncontrollable fit of crying, and for hours cried aloud as though he had been beaten - unable to answer questions, or to stay his emotions at the kindest efforts to pacify him." To Allinson's inquiry "whether it was joy that affected him," Quamino answered, "It seems so, sir - I don't know, and I didn't know then - it struck me to the heart."[27] In addition to demonstrating how overcome with "joy" he was at the prospect of again seeing his family, Quamino's emotional response puts into perspective the intense feelings of helplessness and fear experienced by slaves who were

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[25] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 5.

[26] For a brief yet cogent discussion of the sources of "inner wholeness" among black women in the nineteenth century, with implications for enslaved peoples, see Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), pp. 8-14.

[27] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 5-6.

torn from their families and native surroundings, not knowing if they would ever return to them.

Quamino's crying also suggests that he had worried endlessly over his family's safety because of the Revolution which also endangered the lives of black folk. As legend has it, a frightened black couple was about to take refuge from the British military invasion of the village of Rocky Hill in the Western Precinct, Somerset County, when the mother, realizing that she had forgotten her child, returned to get it. To this her husband anxiously shouted, "Hanner, never mind de chile." Hanner appears to have recouped the infant.[28] Presumably, moreover, a black woman known as "Old Maumy" or Old Mammy enslaved near Raritan Landing in the Eastern Precinct area was prepared to deal with the British raids led by Lieutenant-General Charles Cornwallis from New Brunswick "with pitchfork and ax and boiling water."[29] More telling is the letter written by a resident of Sussex County, New Jersey, on May 14, 1779-1780, which commented that a band of approximately thirty refugees from British occupied New York landed at Stoney-Point on the Raritan River and then proceeded to Woodbridge in Middlesex County where they captured eight white persons along with "two negroes."[30] It is reasonable to assume, then, that the war chaos in Central Jersey caused Quamino to suffer a tremendous amount of stress while he was held in exile in faraway Poughkeepsie.

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[28] Quoted in Jacob Magill, "Somerset Traditions Gathered Forty Years Ago," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 2 (January 1913; orig. pub. 1870): 25. The Western Precinct is present-day Montgomery Township.

[29] Thompson, "Readington Negroes."

[30] *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, 2d ser., 4 (1914): 406 (hereafter *New Jersey Archives*). Technically, Sussex County is located in the northwestern part of New Jersey.

II

Back in the Eastern Precinct, "when nearing the age of manhood," the roughly twenty-one year old captive became a religious meeting enthusiast, "walking several miles through all kinds of weather" in order to participate because, in his words, "he liked to have the name of being a good boy." Given that slaves frequently attended the church of their owners, we may assume that Quamino is referring to Isaac Brokaw's religious home, the Reformed Dutch Church of the Raritan (Somerville).[31]

It is important to consider that Quamino's "motive for going" to religious meetings was inspired partly because he had become an even greater physical threat to the safety of whites during the societally turbulent Revolutionary War era.[32] Whites' refusal to include blacks in the colonial demand for liberty, the elevated concern for both white men's right to property and social stability stimulated by revolutionary ideology, and the significant increase in slave resistance during the war exacerbated relations between the races.[33] These states of affairs, especially the upsurge of black opposition, did not bode well for adult

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[31] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 6. For Central Jersey slaves attending owners' churches, see, for example, Abraham Messler, *Centennial History of Somerset County* (Somerville, N.J.: C. M. Jameson, 1878), pp. 130-131; Margaret Nevius Van Dyke Malcom, "As I Remember Scenes from my Childhood" [1906-1907], in *The Princeton Recollector* 4 (January 1979): 11; "A Former Lamington 'Black Saint,'" *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 8 (October 1919): 321; and Hubert G. Schmidt, "Slavery and Attitudes on Slavery, Hunterdon County, New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 58 (July 1940): 161-163. The fact that at least eight of Isaac Brokaw's ten children were baptized in the Reformed Dutch Church of the Raritan proves that this was his church home; Foster, *Brokaw-Bragaw Heritage*, p. 15.

[32] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 6.

[33] On racial exclusivity, see Jack P. Greene, *All Men Are Created Equal: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), pp. 28-33. On property rights and social stability, see Arthur Zilversmit, "Liberty and Property: New Jersey and the Abolition of Slavery," *New Jersey History* 88 (Winter 1970): 215-226. On slave resistance in New Jersey during the revolutionary era, see Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1997), pp. 93-95, and Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Quamino who may have realized the significance of his physical presence as a strong and healthy black male on his owner's plantation.

Yet Quamino's outward display of emotion upon hearing of his imminent return to Somerset County indicates that he was a sensitive person who, unlike the proud African Yombo (our protagonist in Chapter 3), was incapable of projecting himself as a mean bondsman for the sake of his survival. Moreover, he lacked the assertiveness of captives who ran away either temporarily or permanently, or who acted violently towards whites. Given the paucity of survival strategies that befitted his non-confrontational personality, it seems only logical that Quamino perceived Christianity as a viable means of protecting himself. He came to realize that whites generally approved of slaves becoming Christians, which from their viewpoint signaled bondspeoples' submissiveness. By extension, then, Christianity served as a means of empowerment, as a way of exercising some control over his otherwise indefensible life.

Thus, while William Allinson goes to great lengths to depict his subject as a non-threatening black man with almost saint-like qualities, in fact, Quamino was rather calculating and perhaps even devious.[34] Certainly, Quamino was no less conscious of his precarious existence as a bondsman in eighteenth-century Central Jersey than his compatriots who deliberately had invented themselves as "disagreeable," if not potentially violent. In a way, Quamino was even more shrewd as he used his owners' religion - which reinforced the hegemonic order - to counter racial oppression.

The pious slave Cuffy Barnet (d. 1844) puts into perspective the degree of respect probably accorded Quamino and other bonded males who utilized Christianity. During Sunday service at Lamington Church in Bedminster, Somerset County, Barnet always sat at the farthest end of the segregated gallery pew located directly above the pulpit. Every black member was aware of Barnet's seat and never failed to yield it to him. He frequently attended the funerals of black communicants and when no ordained minister was present

[34] For an analysis of William Allinson's depiction of Quamino, see Chapter 1.

provided the requisite prayer. But even more important, Barnet was empowered as a kind of lay preacher, supplementing the sermons of the minister to his fellow blacks with suggestions and pragmatic remarks. It is telling that he achieved this high status despite his conspicuous physicality. Charles Bartles, a prominent lawyer of nearby Flemington, Hunterdon County, recalled his initial encounter with Barnet when the slave was driving a team of oxen. As Bartles candidly remarked, "it was not the deep, coarse voice, nor the heavy, rugged hands, nor the brawny back of this pious man which so attracted his attention, but a pair of monstrous feet that kept pace with the bovine pair."[35] Although Bartles, and doubtless other whites, viewed him as a kind of monstrosity, Barnet was regarded as a devout and well-behaved black who was a role model to his fellow African Americans. Barnet's religiosity made him seem less threatening to whites, that is, more human- or child-like. His success as a religious man would have raised the esteem of any enslaved male, especially one like Quamino who had long proven himself a non-troublemaker to the slaveholding class. Even the most hostile and skeptical white citizens would have been compelled to let down their guard, if only slightly, against such a seemingly pious individual.

In the final analysis, Quamino adeptly understood the image of the black man in the white mind, and realized how Christianity could assist him when wearing the mask of subservience - an essential mode of slave survival. He was not unique; other bonded males in Central Jersey realized how Christianity could empower their lives. The fugitive Simon, for example, around age forty, "Pretend[ed] to be a great Doctor and very religious and says he is a Churchman," while another runaway named Gilbert, a forty year old mulatto, "can read very well, pretends to be religious, and sometimes undertakes to preach."[36] For the sake of objectivity, it is important to acknowledge that Simon and Gilbert (and

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[35] "'Black Saint,'" p. 321.

[36] For Simon (of Kingston, Middlesex County), see *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), September 11, 1740. For Gilbert (of Bedminster, Somerset County), see *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), August 7, 1786.

Quamino) may have believed in the power of Christianity, that they were not solely currying favor with whites. As their owners probably realized (and which shall be elaborated upon later), religion often imbued slaves with a great sense of moral indignation that did not make for submissive bondspersons. So it is not surprising that they repudiate the bondsmen's religiosity. Yet, the holders seem to also be saying something else of great importance: that slaves perceived the religion of whites partly as a means of surviving or promoting their own welfare in a racially inhospitable environment.

III

Quamino's strategy to appease whites through religion would have been in vain had he not practiced sobriety. Although the consumption of liquors or spirits (whiskey, rum, gin, and brandy) was a vital part of everyday life in New Jersey and throughout the young Republic, whites as a group were never totally at ease with enslaved peoples' access to this "plentiful drinking."[37] This sentiment was reflected in a 1797 New Jersey law which made it illegal for tavern-keepers and inn-holders to sell "vinous, spirituous, or strong liquors" to servants and slaves without the consent of their owners.[38]

Nevertheless, slaves were active participants in New Jersey's alcohol culture as both producers and drinkers. As testimony of their ability to make "strong liquors," Silvia Dubois proudly mentioned that, "We [blacks] used to make our own brandy, and I always

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[37] For two of the best studies on early American drinking behavior, see W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), esp. pp. 13-14, 16-21, 25-26, 37, 151, and Jessica Kross, "'If you will not drink with me, you must fight with me': The Sociology of Drinking in the Middle Colonies," *Pennsylvania History* 64 (Winter 1997): 28-55. See also Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889), pp. 615-623 (phrase, p. 623). Thanks to Peter Levine for providing the author with a personal copy of Rorabaugh's book.

[38] William Paterson, *Laws of the State of New-Jersey* (Newark, N.J.: Printed by Matthias Day, 1800), p. 238.

helped my master make it, and knew just as well how to do it as anybody."[39] So it comes as no surprise that the slaves in Hunterdon County "were very much in attendance at the many community frolics, where they were allowed to mingle and drink grog with their betters."[40] Recalls Silvia Dubois, "the niggers" were whipped frequently during General Training in Flemington, Hunterdon County, because "they'd get some whiskey, and then they'd get into a kinty-koy, and make a noise perhaps."[41]

From the perspective of the slaveocracy, as regards to bondspeoples, alcohol was a double-edged sword of sorts. On the one hand, alcohol was a means through which owners could demonstrate their paternalism. During mealtimes Garritee or Charity Quick (d. 1822) of the Eastern Precinct would stand in the kitchen doorway holding a flask of apple whiskey, and beckon the family slaves one at a time, beginning with the oldest, so that each could receive a stiff dram of the beverage. Supposedly, the captive would then depart, "hat in hand," thanking her in either Dutch or English.[42] As indicated in Chapter

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[39] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 62. Silvia Dubois even gave the following recipes (p. 68) for making peach and apple brandy, "the best that was ever drunk." As she explained: "You just burn about four pounds of dried peaches until you can rub them to powder in your hands; you must burn 'em in a pot that has a very tight cover on. Then rub 'em fine in your hands, or, if some pieces are too hard for that, pound 'em fine with a hammer. Then put this powder of burnt peaches into a barrel of new apple whiskey, and in four weeks, if you shake the barrel every day, you will have a barrel of peach brandy good enough for anybody. You make apple brandy in almost the same way. You burn about four pounds of apples dried with the skins on. Make them into powder, and put 'em in a barrel of new apple whiskey, and shake the barrel every day for four weeks. In four weeks you have a barrel of apple brandy better than any you ever saw." According to Andrew Mellick, "In the middle states during the last quarter of the eighteenth century many new devices arose for concocting stimulants. In New Jersey the most important of these innovations was the production of applejack from apple pulp, and the distilling of cider-brandy from cider. Peaches, too, were converted into a sweet, rich brandy, and the same strong liquor was made from cherries, plums, persimmons and pears"; *Old Farm*, p. 615.

[40] Schmidt, "Hunterdon County," p. 160. Grog is a mixture of rum and water, and is often flavored with lemon, sugar, and spices.

[41] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, pp. 74-75 (quotation, p. 75). "Kinty-koy" was not an Africanism, but rather a corruption of the Algonquian "kinticoy," a ceremonial dance or festival; ibid., p. 85 n.28.

[42] Ralph Voorhees, "Franklin Township Historical Notes," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 6 (April 1917): 91-92. Likewise, Andrew Mellick writes that the "New Jersey

four, Aaron Malick (d. 1809) of Bedminster allowed his bondspeople to give an annual party during the Christmas season where they served alcohol to their compatriots. This supper demonstrated "the liberality and kind feeling he extended to his slaves," which is further evidenced by his saying, "No, Sah, Sarvunts, if you please," in reference to them.[43]

On the other hand, liquor, which mindful Quamino surely realized, frequently caused slaves to lose their self-control. At times this led to their own demise. In 1794 Tom, a slave of Hillsborough, Somerset County, fell off a steep bank while "very much intoxicated" and thus killed himself.[44] Eight years later the slave Betty Ryder drowned while attempting to cross a brook in Montgomery, Somerset County, "intoxicated with liquor."[45] Alcohol also induced slaves to escape. According to Woodbridge, Middlesex County, resident Isaac Tappen in 1774, his "Indian" looking bondsman Jack repeatedly ran away "by drinking too much, and other misdemeanors."[46] Moreover, in 1783 Jacob Benjamin of Trenton, Hunterdon County (South Jersey), mentioned that George, a forty-two-year-old slave who was "much addicted to liquor," fled "in a drunken fit, leaving his best cloathes behind him."[47]

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farmer who refused each hay or harvest hand a daily portion of one pint of rum was considered a mean man"; *Old Farm*, p. 616.

[43] Ibid., p. 606.

[44] Inquisitions on the Dead, vol. 3 (1688-1798), p. 401, New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Archives Section, Trenton (hereafter New Jersey State Archives).

[45] Somerset County Court of Common Pleas, Inquisitions, box 2, New Jersey State Archives.

[46] *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, March 31, 1774.

[47] *Political Intelligencer and New Jersey Advertiser* (Trenton), November 11, 1783.

Given the manifestation of many New Jersey bondspeoples' dependency on strong drink, which served as one of their primary means of temporarily escaping thralldom,[48] they would do just about anything to acquire it - even steal. To cite an instance, in 1766 the Bridgewater, Somerset County, slave Sam confessed to taking liquor from John Arison's cellar.[49] Indeed, practically every farmer in Somerset County at the turn of the nineteenth century "had his cellar stocked with barrels and hogsheads of cider-spirits."[50] Such easy access to "cider-spirits" and the like did little to curb slaves' thievery of it, a situation which perhaps made it difficult for some owners to dispose of their black properties. In his 1778 advertisement regarding the sale of his "Negro Man about 32 or 35 years of age," Thomas Lowery of Flemington noted that "he has been employed as a house servant for some time past, and is now sold for faults which will not be likely to affect a purchaser who need not intrust a servant with liquor or the laying out of money." Although the captive was "good tempered, ingenious, handy . . . a tolerable cook, and can shave and dress a wig very well," Lowery was willing to sell him "very reasonably." [51]

Worse yet, liquor emboldened slaves against whites. For example, in 1734 near Somerville, Somerset County, an intoxicated bondsman accosted a white man named Rennels on a road, telling him that he would soon learn he was no more a "Man" than himself. Rennels was taken aback by his audacious remark, for the bondsman - whom he called a "great Raskal" - had violated the unwritten code of racial deference. Shortly

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[48] The consumption of alcohol served a similar purpose for slaves elsewhere in the African diaspora. See, for example, Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), p. 36.

[49] Dorothy A. Stratford, "The Docket of Jacob Van Noorstrand," *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 43 (January 1968): 10. Sam was the slave of Abraham Tunison, a resident evidently of Raritan; *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser., 34 (1931): 533.

[50] Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 619. For primary evidence of the pervasiveness of distilled spirits among farmers in Central Jersey, see Somerset County Tax Accounts, 1814-1816, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark.

[51] *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), August 4, 1778.

thereafter, the authorities apprehended the impudent black who later absconded.[52] In 1776 the slave Peter of Salem County (South Jersey) was described by his owner as being "fond of strong liquor, and when drunk very saucy, and talks a great deal of his abilities as a farmer."[53] As it had done for his compatriot who boldly confronted Rennels, liquor gave Peter the courage to verbally reclaim his manhood, which he associated with his special ability for tilling the soil. This can probably also be said of Linden who, in 1767, left owner and Somerset County resident Guisbert Lane. As Lane advertised, Linden "is addicted to strong Liquor and when drunk troublesome."[54] Liquor, it would appear, also prompted some bondsmen to assert themselves through violence. Sam, who belonged to the highly vilified Middlesex-Somerset County area Tory, Bernardus La Grange, pled drunkenness to his assault and insult of John Beekman, a white man, in 1775.[55] Sam may very well have been severely intoxicated, for he attacked Beekman in his own home - something that a slave was unlikely to do sober.

Thus it is understandable that when William Veghte of the Eastern Precinct became interested in buying Enoch Johnson's slave, he insisted that the latter be faithful in his duties and "free of the vice of drunkenness." Johnson assured Veghte that he was all this and more, and Veghte thus paid him $375 for the captive. However, around 1820, Veghte

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[52] See *New York Gazette*, March 25, 1734, in conjunction with *Weekly Rehearsal* (Philadelphia), February 11, 1734.

[53] *Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), September 13, 1776.

[54] *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), May 21, 1767. See also *New York Gazette*, December 25, 1766.

[55] For assault, see Dorothy A. Stratford, "The Docket of Jacob Van Noorstrand," *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 44 (January 1969): 43. On Bernardus La Grange, see E. Alfred Jones, *The Loyalists of New Jersey: Their Memorials, Petitions, Claims, Etc., From English Records* (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Society, 1927), pp. 121-123.

took Johnson to court for deceit, because the bondsman Johnson had sold him possessed (in his opinion) a number of faults, among them his addiction "to the habit of Drinking."[56]

In light of all the controversy surrounding bondspeoples' drinking of alcohol, it seems clear that Quamino stayed away from those persons, especially slaves, and situations where intoxicating beverages could be found. Although white ministers could occasionally have too much to drink without forfeiting the respect of their people, this privilege was not enjoyed by pious black males whose skin color and gender automatically rendered them suspicious, if not dangerous.[57] The 1834 memoir of William Boen emphasizes that this poor, illiterate, and devout former Burlington County (South Jersey) slave "obtained the friendship, esteem, and respect of all classes of his fellow-men" in part because of the alcohol-free lifestyle he adopted while in bondage.[58] For Boen to have become intoxicated even occasionally meant risking all the respect he had achieved. Hence, any significant amount of alcoholic consumption by Quamino would have jeopardized what was perhaps his most dependable ally at the time - his well-contrived good Christian image. Quamino was fully aware that he risked all credibility to whites as a sincere Christian had he become intoxicated and lost his self-discipline. Interestingly enough, advertisements regarding the sale of bondspeople in Central Jersey frequently equated their sobriety with honesty.[59] By abstaining from liquor, Quamino assured whites that he was both trustworthy and righteous.

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[56] William Veghte v. Enoch Johnson (c. 1820), courtesy of Fred Sisser, III. The court date probably was around 1820 because it coincides with the construction of the Six Mile Church in Somerset County that William Veghte "was engaged in superintending"; ibid. William Veghte's residency in the Eastern Precinct is confirmed in Donald A. Sinclair, "Somerset County Gravestones: Pleasant Plains Cemetery, Franklin Township," *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 26 (October 1951): 85.

[57] On the drinking of ministers, see Mellick, *Old Farm*, pp. 618-619.

[58] *Anecdotes and Memoirs of William Boen, A Coloured Man Who Lived and Died Near Mount Holly, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: John Richards, 1834), p. 3.

[59] See, for example, *New York Mercury*, March 1, 1756; *New York Journal or General Advertiser*, February 4, 1768; and *New Jersey Journal* (Chatham), July 26, 1780.

IV

Religion acquired greater personal meaning in Quamino's life after his conversion experience around 1783.[60] Like spirit possession in the African-American tradition, its manifestation probably was galvanized by his oppression. Quamino described how when en route to his owner's plantation from "meeting" one Sunday evening, "he had impressions of a striking character; his imagination being evidently much acted upon." There appeared in front of him the illusion of "a new road . . . leading up to the mountain" that he was intent on pursuing. But before he could do so, this illusory road was erased quickly by the loud noise of rambling horses passing him by, leaving him in a state of distress. Early the following morning, before work, the troubled bondsman got on his knees and began to pray. The "Saviour" then presumably spoke to him, saying "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in god, believe also in me." Thereafter explains Quamino, "everything was glorious around me - everything seemed engaged praising God!" By "yielding his whole heart" to God and acquiring the "unspeakable gift" (God's glory), perhaps for the first time in his life, Quamino was instilled with an inviolable sense of conviction.[61] At the very least his self-esteem, courage, and hopes were bolstered. Interestingly, Quamino's favorite biblical verse is followed by "In my Father's house are

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[60] The *Memoir's* discussion of Quamino's conversion experience immediately follows his motive for attending religious services, which suggests that his conversion occurred shortly afterwards.

[61] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 6-7. "Let not your heart be troubled . . . "; John 14:1. On spirit possession, see, for example, Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 56. For additional examples of slave conversion experiences, see Clifton H. Johnson, ed., *God Struck Me Dead: Religious Conversion Experiences and Autobiographies of Ex-slaves* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1969). Johnson explains that the more than forty slave conversion experiences presented in *God Struck Me Dead* "conform to the normal pattern for all such experiences," beginning "with a sense of sin and nonrealization and terminat[ing] with one of cleanliness, certainty, and reintegration, the very three things every Negro was denied in life." Furthers Johnson, "the antebellum slave was not converted to God. He converted God to himself. In the Christian God he found a fixed point, and he needed a fixed point, for both within and outside of himself he could see only vacillation and endless shifting"; ibid., pp., viii, ix.

many mansions" - a promise of equality and inclusion.[62] Later in the same chapter of the book of John, the phrase is repeated in verse 27 with the injunction not to be afraid. As we have seen, Quamino had much to fear as a child and young man. With God in his life, however, he need not be as afraid any longer.[63]

Importantly, Quamino was "extremely illiterate" and thus was unable to read the Bible.[64] This means that he learned his favorite biblical verse in John 14:1 through whites. That is, the basis of Quamino's religious empowerment was rooted partly in the Reformed Dutch Church where blacks sat at the back of the church or in the gallery, and could not approach the communion table until after whites had been served.[65] As he sat quietly in church that fateful Sunday evening reminding whites of his subservience, the words of John 14:1 spoken by the minister compelled him to acknowledge his own humanity. From that time on, Quamino had become a changed being who would soon prove what holders feared most about slaves' exposure to Christianity.

Though William Allinson does not say otherwise, Quamino's Christian sensibility - like the very essence of African-American culture - may have been syncretic in that it encompassed both European and African elements.[66] Indeed, rather than receiving God within the boundaries of a church or community, the bondsman had his revelation in the

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[62] The phrase "Let not your heart be troubled . . . ," noted William Allinson, was "a favourite one with [Quamino]"; *Memoir*, p. 26.

[63] Similarly, Nell Irvin Painter writes that the rural New York bondswoman Isabella (later Sojourner Truth) "freed herself from fear through a discovery of Jesus' love"; *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 22.

[64] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 22.

[65] On segregated services, see Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 138. De Jong points out that the growth of the Dutch Reformed Church "during the eighteenth century was especially evident in the Hackensack, Passaic, and Raritan valleys"; ibid., p. 100. For racist communion practice, see Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 25.

[66] For an excellent review of the study of Africanisms in the United States, see Joseph E. Holloway, "Introduction," in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. ix-xvii.

open air amid trees, rocks, and water ways - symbols of the divinity's presence in African culture.[67] Quamino's first name, which is clearly reflective of his West African roots,[68] also points to the African dimensions in his Christian faith. Interestingly, despite his previous desire to prove his docility to whites by attending "meeting," he did not change his name or embrace a Christian one. To be sure, this would have been the ultimate gesture of his capitulation to white supremacy. However, his name represented a means of his power and possession - something he would not abdicate under any circumstances. Given this logic, then, Quamino never totally relinquished his African cultural heritage, which perhaps shared some religious views with European thought and thus helped to encourage his attraction to Christianity.[69]

Quamino's conversion experience also probably was inspired by the Methodist evangelical movement in Revolutionary North America, for upon receiving his freedom in 1806 he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in Burlington County.[70] Significantly,

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[67] On aspects of nature as places of divine worship, see Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1970), pp. 4, 21, 27-28. For a similar analysis regarding the conversion experience of a Middle Atlantic bondsman, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, captured in Africa, see Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 123-124.

[68] See the discussion in Chapter 1.

[69] As indicated by a noted historian, Africans and Europeans shared some religious views including that humans were once mortal, that the use of magic could kill, and that the spirit lived on after death. An important difference lay, however, in the view of the afterlife. Whereas Europeans consigned the unregenerate to hell, Africans excluded the young, the abnormal, strangers, and slaves from the spirit homeland. In African thought life after death for those not excluded was life among kin. This was a more defined view of heaven than their European counterparts, many of whom dreaded death as a journey into the unknown. See Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 171-177. Similarly, William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), ch. 9, and Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), esp. ch. 10, discuss African cultural transfer to North America.

[70] On Quamino's religious experiences as a free black, see Chapter 1.

Methodism vociferously denounced the institution of slavery, advocated universal salvation and experimental religion, sponsored illiterate black preachers, and provided blacks with moving religious experiences - all of which would have appealed greatly to the bondsman.[71] Itinerant Methodist minister Benjamin Abbott recalled one of the many examples of this interracial spirituality in the form of a love feast held at the Basking Ridge, Somerset County, home of William Alexander or Lord Stirling, in 1773. "The power of the Lord came down in a wonderful manner among the black people," Abbott enthuses, "some cried aloud and others fell to the floor, some praising God, some crying for mercy; after we had concluded, brother S[tirling] went among them, where he continued upwards of an hour, exhorting them to fly to Jesus the ark of safety."[72] Former Basking Ridge slave Nathan "Nate" Woodward (d. 1901) "was always a prominent figure at Methodist revivals," taking "part in the praying and exhorting . . . and would stir an audience by the touching way he sang the old revival hymns."[73] Although Methodism attracted a fair share of racists, numerous bondspeople like Woodward found succor and spiritual inspiration in its relative liberalism, evangelistic oratory, and emotional ecstasy.[74] By contrast, the zealous ministers of the extremely racist Reformed Dutch Church exerted much of their

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[71] On the emergence and decline of the Methodist commitment to black abolition, see Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), ch. 1. On Methodism's appeal to African Americans, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 102-113.

[72] Quoted in Hodges, *Rural North*, p. 77.

[73] *Newark Sunday News*, April 14, 1901.

[74] Quamino noted that some of his fellow white Methodists in Burlington County "regarded him as belonging to an inferior caste"; Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 29. In the words of a noted historian, "blacks preaching to, converting, and even pastoring whites signaled that evangelicalism offered a path to status and authority that was available nowhere else to black men" during the age of the American Revolution. See Albert J. Raboteau, "The Slave Church in the Era of the American Revolution," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), pp. 193-217 (quotation, p. 205).

energies denouncing such amusements as dancing and shooting matches - issues which certainly had little or no relevancy to the enslaved masses.[75] It seems highly unlikely that Quamino's religious conversion was in no way affected by Methodism's powerful attraction to the racially downtrodden.

The day that life became "glorious" for Quamino as a result of him finding God brought about a change in "the youth [which] was conspicuous to all who knew him." He became "diligent in attention to all his duties, but he had no inclination to talk to anyone." The young minister Abraham Brokaw, who "gave no attention to the religious culture of slaves - his policy being, (to use Quamino's word,) to keep them 'igarent,' that they might be more serviceable," was among those who witnessed the transformation in the bondsman's demeanor. Brokaw curiously and in earnest followed Quamino into the family barn, listening to his passionate praying (I did "as well as I could," Quamino averred). Upon their "return to the house, [Brokaw] questioned [Quamino] sharply, saying repeatedly, that to be talking thus when he was alone, he must be talking to the Evil Spirit." An indignant Quamino explained to William Allinson, "I know better than that. I wasn't after the Evil Spirit. I didn't want to have anything to do wid him." Quamino's apparent dispute with Brokaw allowed him to understand "the nature of that peace which is independent of external circumstances" - including hostile owners who fretted over their slaves' adoption of religion and consequent indolence.[76]

The struggle between Quamino and the Brokaws over his newfound religiosity did not end in this dispute with his "young master." "On the first day of the week," remarks William Allinson, Quamino "would get the carriage ready, and when his master had started, he would walk several miles across the fields to meeting, and back." However, "as he was certain to be faulted, and sometimes even cuffed, if not at home in time to take

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[75] On ministers, see De Jong, *Dutch Reformed Church*, pp. 141-143. On the dancing and gambling of blacks in and around New York during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, pp. 93, 95, 207, 212-213, 221-223.

[76] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 7-8.

the horses, on the arrival of the family, he always left the congregation before the completion of the service."[77] The Brokaws appear to have put few if any restraints on Quamino's attending of "meeting" prior to his conversion experience, when his intention solely was to appease them. But with the advent of the bondsman's nascent masculine identity grounded in religious empowerment and devotion, the family became compelled to put a check on his religious autonomy. Quamino no longer appeared at "meeting" to demonstrate his submissiveness. He now went to serve God - his other "master."[78] Given Quamino's refusal to stop going to religious services despite the Brokaws' concerns, it would seem that his new master exerted as great, if not a more powerful presence in his life than his Dutch owners.

V

Around 1789 an unknown white man from Baltimore, Maryland, offered Isaac Brokaw a large sum of money for Quamino. Brokaw, who had earlier declined offers from Schenck and others to buy Quamino when he was a boy, asked the adult bondsman "if he was willing to be sold." Although Quamino "replied in the negative," the matter "was left overnight for consideration."[79] This was the first time (as far as we know) that Quamino openly opposed the patriarch, something that he probably did not relish but was forced to do. His removal to Maryland would have meant not only possible permanent separation from Sarah, whom he married around 1788 and refers to in the *Memoir* as "my woman," but also from his family and friends.[80] Quamino could not consider himself a man by

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[77] Ibid., p. 8.

[78] After his conversion experience under slavery, William Boen believed that "I had two masters"; *Anecdotes and Memoirs*, p. 5.

[79] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 9.

[80] Ibid., pp. 8, 14 ("my woman").

failing to stand his ground on behalf of himself and his loved ones, particularly Sarah. The Brokaw family head had left Quamino with no other choice but to defy him.

By telling Isaac Brokaw that he did not want to go South, Quamino irreparably altered their already tenuous relationship. The bondsman's defiance conveyed to Brokaw that there was a limit to his masked subservience, a limit to how far he would serve the patriarch's economic interests at his expense. In historical terms, Quamino's stance, as it were, breached the etiquette characteristic of all power relations (that is, the code of silence and consent) and carried "the force of a symbolic declaration of war."[81] On a personal level, it communicated to the entire Brokaw family that Quamino was more than movable chattel. For a slave, especially one that had been inculcated intensely with the notion of black capitulation to white power, such an admission, public or private, would have been a significant psychological victory.

Undoubtedly, Isaac Brokaw became perturbed by Quamino's defiance, which was fueled by his sincere religiosity. Quamino was beginning to see himself increasingly as a man, a development that may have given Brokaw additional incentive to dispose of him. Fortunately for Quamino, he had allies within the Brokaw family. The patriarch's wife, Catherine, resolutely opposed sending him to Baltimore, saying "none of my slaves shall go there - that's Ginney." In her mind as well as Quamino's, even the upper South represented a distant and alien territory. But it was the eldest son Caspares Brokaw, who upon "discovering Quamino's unwillingness to be sold," successfully persuaded his father not to sell the bondsman South.[82]

Upon Isaac Brokaw's death around 1789, Quamino and his siblings had "the privilege of choosing an owner among their late master's children; or, if they preferred it, of seeking another purchaser." Quamino chose Caspares Brokaw as "his legal owner" out

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[81] Scott, *Arts of Resistance*, p. 8.

[82] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 9.

of appreciation for having dissuaded his father from selling him to "Ginney."[83] The *Memoir* explains that Quamino's decision was made "to the surprise of all." This response was probably due to either Caspares Brokaw's current residency in Bedminster (some thirteen miles northwest of the Eastern Precinct, a significant distance by late eighteenth-century standards) or seemingly hostile temper, or both. However, Brokaw had saved Quamino from the much more distant South which would have jeopardized his relationship with Sarah, thereby influencing his conscious decision to play the role of the "faithful servant." But despite "some years" of impeccable service, Quamino received an "unreasonable and severe blow" from Brokaw "which so wounded his feelings, that he immediately announced his determination to work for him no longer." Brokaw "reminded him of the choice he had made; and was much affected, on being now, for the first time, informed of the motive of gratitude which had influenced Quamino's selection among his old master's children." Henceforth, Quamino "was allowed to seek a purchaser, and was sold to a neighbour, named Smock" around 1792.[84] Like his father, Caspares Brokaw had proven himself a false friend to Quamino, who retaliated by utilizing a practice (i.e. slave quitting) that had a history in New Jersey.

As Silvia Dubois expresses it, "Under the slave laws of New Jersey, when the slave thought the master too severe, and the slave and the master did not get along harmoniously, the slave had a right to hunt a new master." She explained that her mother, Dorcas Compton, "went in quest of a new master" after Minical Dubois "whipped her with an ox-goad" because she was unable to secure a hog "while he yoked it." Compton found an owner in Richard Baird, who lived in the vicinity of Bridgewater, and who would "send

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[83] Ibid. Evidently, the ability of slaves to choose their own owners upon their previous owner's death was a common practice in Somerset County. In his 1791 will Jacob Van Nostrand of Raritan bequeathed his "Negro man, Tom, and the rest of my blacks to choose their masters"; *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser., 37 (1942): 376. The 1803 will of Bridgewater resident John Brokaw (Isaac Brokaw's third oldest son) granted the "Negro wench, Hannah, to have choice to live where she pleases"; *New Jersey Archives*, 1st ser., 39 (1946): 57.

[84] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 9-10.

things for her and her children to eat when [Minical] Dubois neglected or refused to furnish enough to satisfy their craving stomachs."[85] The determination of Compton and Quamino to quit their abusive owners suggests that, generally speaking, the slave-owner relationship in Central Jersey reflected a kind of compromise or bargain. That is, slaves fulfilled their obligations to holders in return for a recognition of certain rights, which included reasonable standards of discipline. Under this agreement of sorts, slaves felt no reason to be grateful for what was only their due. Thus, when owners violated the rules of their unequal relationship, they had every right to seek a new owner.[86]

Certainly, Quamino and Dorcas Compton considered the dangers involved in slave quitting, for it openly challenged the power of slaveowners. Hence, Caspares Brokaw sought to discourage his disillusioned captive from leaving him. Without his religiosity which instilled within him the belief that he need not be afraid since God was on his side, Quamino, arguably, would not have possessed the inviolable sense of conviction that was necessary for him to renounce the ownership of a seemingly cantankerous man who had befriended him during a critical period in his life.

By extension, Quamino's decision to leave Caspares Brokaw played an important role in the maturation of his religiously-based manhood. In this instance, Quamino even more forcefully breached the etiquette of power relations, for he asserted his humanity to a white person, and more importantly, to a white man, without the support of white allies.

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[85] Lobdell, *Silvia Dubois*, p. 54. This "law" was not mandated in New Jersey. For additional evidence of slave quitting in New York-New Jersey, see "'Black Saint,'" p. 321, and Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, p. 29. Richard Baird is found in "Andrew Leake's Store Ledger: Bridgewater Township, 1756-1758," *Somerset County Genealogical Quarterly* 4 (September 1986): 303.

[86] On paternalism, see especially Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 3-7, 658-660, passim. Despite its prominence in the field of American slavery study, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* has not escaped scholarly criticism. For a forthright assault on Eugene Genovese's paternalism thesis, see Norrece T. Jones, Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), pp. 4-5, 28, 29, 94, 196, 204-205. An opposite view can be found in James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. xi-xii.

Quamino's relationship with Brokaw could never revert to the way it once was because Brokaw's ability to dominate him had become ineffectual - a most empowering realization, to be sure. Hence, Brokaw had no other choice but to allow Quamino "to seek a purchaser."

Why did Caspares Brokaw strike Quamino in the first place? Certainly not because Quamino was recalcitrant or indolent. He was much too cautious to have made such egregious mistakes. Only one explanation seems plausible, that Brokaw found it necessary to remind Quamino, who had God as an ally and master, of his tenuous existence as a bondsman. Brokaw was not the only holder who maliciously asserted his authority over his bondspeople. In 1752 Jacob Van Neste, a prosperous farmer of Branchburg, Somerset County, was brutally murdered by his "large" and "dangerous" bondsman with an ax for taking some of his tobacco - an act he was cognizant violated the captive's masculine sensibilities.[87] Seemingly unable to defeat the slave in a physical confrontation, Van Neste struck at him by defiling his personal property. Evidently, Brokaw became similarly annoyed, if not intimidated by Quamino's faith in God which made him appear haughty and, by implication, threatening. Thus Brokaw attacked him. Despite Quamino's amenable disposition, Brokaw believed that the bondsman - whose religiosity imbued him with the courage and self-respect endemic of manhood - needed to be put and kept in his proper place.

VI

Once again, Quamino's manhood was legitimized through his relationship with Sarah, who was "a woman of piety and worth, and not inferior to her husband - to whom, indeed, she

[87] See especially *New York Gazette and Weekly Post Boy*, December 25, 1752, and Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 226 (physical markers).

was a helper in spiritual as well as in temporal things."[88] Though Sarah may not have necessarily been "inferior" to Quamino, his reference to her as his "woman" or possession suggests that their marriage was not based upon absolute equality. As will be shown, married life brought Quamino as much pain as it did joy, demonstrating, intermittently, his real inability as a man to keep and defend what he believed was rightfully his. Indeed, his life under bondage serves as a window into the difficulties of maintaining black manhood in the face of oppression.

This becomes clearly evident during Quamino's enslavement under Smock who may have resided in Piscataway, Middlesex County. As pointed out by William Allinson, "One Sabbath morning [Quamino] went to see [Sarah], and found that she and her infant had been sold, leaving her little son, a boy nearly four years old." To make matters worse, Sarah "now had a hard mistress." Because of his relative lack of masculine authority, Quamino was left with no other choice but to approach "a neighbor" of his - with "hat in hand" no doubt - and beseech this person to purchase Sarah, which was done. He was forced to do the same in order to persuade Smock to buy her.[89] Sarah's removal, in short, caused Quamino to compromise his masculine posture which had threatened the Brokaws for that of the obsequious "Sambo." Conversely, it shows that by living a virtuous and sober life, by "being a good boy," Quamino was able to establish a rapport with a number of whites whose help he possibly could elicit in times of crisis. These alliances, however, came with a price - his dignity. To be sure, his love for Sarah was boundless.

But for all his foot-shuffling, one if not both of his beloved sons still possibly remained in bondage elsewhere. If so, then this would have been a tremendous blow to Quamino's psyche. Regardless, however, of his children's whereabouts about which the *Memoir* is unclear, like the bondsman Dick in Chapter 3, Quamino must have come to the realization that he and his family were forever at the mercy of the slaveowning class.

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[88] Allinson, *Memoir*, p. 18.

[89] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

The scolding Quamino received from his next owner, John Griffith, of Essex County, who purchased he and Sarah in 1798, was further reminder of this painful reality. At the advisement of friends, Quamino asked "Dr. G." if he could be freed upon his death. The otherwise amiable physician, "losing his self-possession in angry excitement, vented much passionate language" towards presumably "tender-spirited Quamino [who] burst into tears." The contrite slave then pleaded, "I'm sorry I asked - if I had known Master would get into such a passion, I'd never have said a word - oh dear! oh dear!" The incensed Griffith then "walked away, but soon returning, found his servant working faithfully, and weeping the while." Thereupon, he explained to Quamino that "he had made a promise never to give another negro his freedom - that he had done so to one, and had to take him back" because the slave could not support himself. But after pausing for a moment of reflection, doctor confessed, "I see . . . that You would make out if you were free; but I have made a strict promise."[90]

John Griffith's acrimonious response to Quamino's request for freedom indicates that the holder was either offended or threatened by what he perceived as a bold act on the part of his slave. More important, however, it reveals that despite Quamino's achievement of manhood, as a bondsman who no doubt keenly felt the onerous burden of being a responsible family man, he was always vulnerable and thus prone to emotional lapses. In other words, Quamino's masculine-self did not always render him immune from his real or sensitive-self.

However embarrassing his crying may have been, Quamino would not have dwelled on it for too long because his family counted on his strength and resilience. This again becomes apparent during the death of John Griffith in 1805. In the face of this terrifying situation which again jeopardized his and Sarah's relationship, the bondsman persevered with remarkable strength and dignity. William Allinson explains that,

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[90] Ibid., pp. 10-11. For John Griffith's amiable disposition, see Stephen Wickes, *History of Medicine in New Jersey and of its Medical Men, From the Settlement of the Province to A. D. 1800* (Newark, N.J.: M.R. Dennie, 1879), p. 271.

> Quamino was sent to get advertisements printed, and to post and circulate them about the country; and, although he and his wife were included in the list of chattels, and he fully expected to be sold with the rest of the estate, he faithfully executed the commission. He carefully collected all the items of his master's property, in preparation for the sale, with good will doing service, as to the Lord. The vendue having commenced, he and his wife became objects of much attention to the multitude gathered on the occasion, and Quamino was repeatedly asked whether they were to be sold. After the sale had commenced, he was sent on horseback to the Post-Office, and brought a letter from William Griffith, which directed that everything should be sold to the highest bidder, except the horse and carriage, and that with these Quamino was to bring Sarah to Burlington.

With regard to receiving the news that he and Sarah now belonged to William Griffith, Quamino told Allinson, "Oh . . . you don't know how I felt." "His emotions," according to the amanuensis, "appear to have been only those of relief from the doubt as to what was to become of him [and Sarah], and of the gratification that he was to belong to one, who had manifested kindness and sympathy during the seven years of his residence with the old doctor."[91] Prior to receiving this good news, dutiful service and prayer were the only viable means through which Quamino and Sarah could possibly affect their destiny. This harsh reality probably weighed more heavily upon Quamino as the primary protector of their tenuous relationship. In any event, husband and wife lived in horrid suspense until they learned they were to head to Burlington County.

Unlike his father, William Griffith was eager to manumit his bondspeople and asked Quamino one day if he would like to become a free man. Quamino cautiously replied "I don't know, Sir," most likely because of the tongue-lashing he received from the deceased doctor. After quiet contemplation, Griffith stated, "I've made up my mind to give you free."[92]

While he was greatly excited by this news, exclaiming "You give me free, master," Quamino withheld it from his beloved Sarah. "I never told my woman - no, Sir, I kept it

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[91] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 12-13.

[92] Ibid., p.13.

still," he told William Allinson.[93] Despite William Griffith's previous deeds of "kindness and sympathy," Quamino may not have trusted his word completely. The bondsman had been befriended already by white men who later turned on him, so why should he believe that Griffith was any different? Though Griffith was not like those other individuals (as evidenced by his freeing of the two slaves), Quamino could not afford to risk hurting his spouse with potentially inaccurate information of such magnitude. In recalling the rumor that his owner considered emancipating him, William Boen coolly averred, "I did'nt think much about it - did'nt expect there was any thing in it." But added the skeptical Boen, "after awhile, sure enough, he did set me free." Like Quamino, Boen's experiences under slavery probably had taught him, albeit he and his owner got along relatively well together, not to put much stock in white people's paternalism.[94]

Before they could be manumitted officially in 1806, Quamino and Sarah had to go before a committee in William Griffith's office, which was composed of "gentlemen" to whom Quamino gave a deferential bow. Quamino had to prove that he was in good health because according to New Jersey law, owners were required to post a substantial bond to insure against freed slaves becoming public charges. Therefore, to an inquiry regarding his health, he shrewdly remarked, "I feel very well, I tank you, Sir: I feel very well in my limbs." Quamino's linguistic deference and gestures of subordination were hardly mere demonstrations of slavish conformity. They can be seen as a shrewd performance in which he derived some measure of pride at having circumvented successfully white hegemony in the name of his unprotected family ("the conclusion was arrived at that [he and Sarah] would be able to do well for themselves"). In this and other such performances, Quamino was living up to his responsibility as a family man. According to Quamino, he and Sarah

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[93] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[94] *Anecdotes and Memoirs*, p. 4.

stood before the manumission committee "as if we were just married."[95] This indicates that he saw their interview as a marriage ceremony in which he played the role of groom, of a responsible adult who was the head of and protector of his family.

CONCLUSION

The *Memoir of Quamino Buccau* is an important narrative which demonstrates that much can be learned from the individual accounts of former northern slaves, that is, if one is willing to take the time to engage in serious dialogue with them. Perhaps the *Memoir's* greatest attribute is that it forcefully demonstrates the tenuous existence of bondspeople in the eighteenth-century North. From the time he was a child, Quamino's life under slavery was beset with one traumatic, unforeseen incident after another. It testifies that northern bondage during the age of the American Revolution was not a benign institution, but was just as harsh, stressful, and oppressive as its southern counterpart.

The significance of the *Memoir* in illustrating how bondspeople were affected by the Revolutionary War can not be emphasized enough. A number of historians have effectively shown how the conflict significantly made an impact on both southern and northern slaves, by providing many of them with opportunities to escape thralldom.[96] However, this research has failed to capture the full extent of the captives' emotional turmoil. No historian, for example, has explored the anxiety of transplanted slaves such as Quamino who worried endlessly over the status of their loved ones during the war.

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[95] Allinson, *Memoir*, pp. 14-15 (quotations, p. 14). On the manumission law, see Marion Thompson Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 28 (April 1943): 168.

[96] See Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1961), ch. 7, and "Black Declaration of Independence," in *Slavery and Freedom*, Berlin and Hoffman, pp. 283-301; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 47-50; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), ch. 3; and Hodges, *Rural North*, ch. 3, and, *Root and Branch*, ch. 5.

Certainly, while thousands of slaves were absconding to the British lines, thousands more stayed put hoping their precarious families would not suffer further fragmentation. While the Revolution was a turbulent time for white colonials, the *Memoir* is clear in demonstrating that it was even more disruptive for bondspeople who were unable to control their own destinies and those of their families.

It also powerfully illuminates northern slaves' sense of Christian identity. Quamino eventually came to conceive of himself in terms contrary to a chattel slave, due largely to his religious faith. Christianity emerged as a source of strength and comfort in his degraded life which reminded him that he was a child and servant of God, and not the movable brute that whites wanted him to believe. Still, slaveowners were not completely unsuccessful in this regard. Quamino remembered almost nostalgically that he was Isaac Brokaw's "only young cub" - a telling indication of white supremacy's enduring hold on his psyche. Religion, however, provided him with the means to free himself, to some degree, psychologically. Indeed, it became the principal source of tension between he and the Brokaws.

Accordingly, Quamino and Sarah's tenuous union under slavery benefited greatly from his religious empowerment. Though we may assume that Quamino would have defended their marriage had he not received the "Gift," it undoubtedly made him even more assertive when the circumstances demanded that he do so. His religiosity brought forth his "capacity to think, talk, and act quickly" - three fundamental elements of black manhood.[97] Simply put, Quamino's faith in God made it easier for him to be a man for the sake of his family.

Finally, Quamino's memoir provides an alternative expression of non-violent masculine resistance under slavery. Not all male captives were capable of forging their manhood through meanness or physical aggression. Still, surviving day-to-day as a

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[97] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *American Historical Review* 93 (December 1988): 1242.

bondsman required a certain courage and resilience in the face of such malicious, insecure, and unpredictable masculine foes as the Brokaws. Violent confrontation with the Brokaws would not have necessarily improved Quamino's existence, or facilitated the maturation of his manhood. However, by contriving a "good" image for himself through temperance and hard work, and cautiously defying his owners when they infringed upon what he believed were his rights, Quamino was able to become as much a man as themselves. Indeed, given his particular burdens as a bondsman, he probably was more of one.

CONCLUSION

In 1883 former Central Jersey slave Silvia Dubois rightly criticized whites for assuming that black people had no history worth recording. Much of the literature on slavery in this region has done little to counter Dubois's contention. Slaves are frequently depicted in historical works and newspaper accounts as beneficiaries of a benevolent institution which took care of them mind, body, and soul. In other instances, they appear as mere historical afterthoughts, as the addendum in histories about white men.

This disempowering portrayal of Central Jersey bondspeople even resonates in Silvia Dubois's published colloquy with Cornelius Larison. Rather than seeing Dubois as a historical person per se, Larison was more interested in her as a notorious black exotic. Though perhaps not to the same degree as Larison (which is debatable), William Allinson similarly "others" Quamino Buccau (Brokaw) by describing him as a Christ-like figure with an almost superhuman capacity for enduring racial oppression. In Allinson's view, Quamino was representative of that segment of discontented bondspeople who wisely never rose up against their oppressors, but who instead put their trust in God and white abolitionists like himself. Accordingly, Allinson characterizes his ultra-pious black protagonist as being particularly emotional and hence vulnerable, whose honor he (and his compatriots) defended in the mid-nineteenth century. Allinson, it might be argued, saw himself and other abolitionists as the proxies of black manhood in America.

In short, it comes as no surprise that even in print, slaves in the Somerset County area are portrayed as faceless, nameless, and exotic. To use Silvia Dubois's phrase, they are essentially "no account."

To be sure, the racism and/or exoticism of nineteenth-century white males are not the only reasons why bondspeople in eighteenth-century New Jersey and throughout the

Middle Atlantic region generally appear as historical anomalies. Another important factor is the disproportionate database that exists for the South in terms of testimonials of former slaves. Indeed, discussing the lives and identities of northern captives is a daunting task which has no doubt compelled many scholars to focus their attention on more easily recoverable southern bondspeople. The paltry source base extant for northern slavery requires researchers interested in issues of manhood and gender-based resistance and/or survival to seek and employ alternative strategies, that is, to examine highly problematic, white-authored sources like Andrew Mellick's *The Story of an Old Farm* and William Allinson's *Memoir of Quamino Buccau*. Needless to say, not all scholars are comfortable with focusing on such racist and seemingly unenlightening works. The methodological risks seem too great, and the rewards too few.

Interpreting the writings of others is always a risky and vexatious task, especially when the author is a proud descendant of slaveowners, or the self-righteous protector of a degraded race. Imbedded therein are layers of truth and fiction that are not always easily perceivable, thereby forcing the reader to make value judgments and interpretations which may very well obscure what is said in them. This is most problematic, to be sure, a constant source of anxiety I faced while trying to unravel the bondsmen in the *Memoir of Quamino Buccau* and *The Story of an Old Farm.*

Conversely, it was this very same anxiety - differentiating truth from fiction in these two highly intriguing pieces of nineteenth-century literature - which compelled me not to give up trying to make some real sense out of Yombo's, Dick's, and Quamino's ambiguous yet captivating lives under rural northern slavery. This dilemma or anxiety is related directly to the "silences" in the works by William Allinson and Andrew Mellick. Rather than focusing solely on what these "silences" failed to say, I concentrated on what they appear to tell us. In other words, I was able to see them as strengths, and not as weaknesses in the texts. Specifically, what Mellick and Allinson do not say about Yombo, Dick, and Quamino is just as important as what they do say about them. This is especially

true of Allinson who not only knew Quamino personally (they apparently were neighbors), but who also established a brotherhood of sorts with him based upon their religiosity. Yet in the *Memoir*, Allinson, perhaps in part because he knew Quamino intimately, omits numerous important details about his bondage, including the first names of his owners and the exact places of his captivity in Central Jersey. If Allinson was so careless in relaying these basic details, then it stands to reason that his one-dimensional rendition of Quamino as a "tender spirited" Christian devoid of "resistant masculinity" is not completely accurate. More succinctly, Quamino was much more complex than the abolitionist cares to admit.

The same is probably also true of Andrew Mellick with respect to Yombo and Dick. Though Mellick did not know these two bondsmen personally, he was privy to a wealth of information about them, namely his family's oral history. Yet he fails to devote any serious attention to Yombo's African background, the basis of the captive's identity. It seems doubtful that Mellick would have been unaware that Yombo's African parents committed suicide. How could Reverend John Thompson, and not Mellick, have known this? It would appear that Mellick chose not to disclose this point because he did not want to associate his family with the ugly side of slavery. Again, it was the refusal of Jacob Kline (the brother-in-law of Aaron Malick) to free the captives which led to their death. It was a family member of Mellick's who killed Yombo's parents, a part of his proud heritage he surely did not want to disclose. As astutely pointed out by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse."[1]

So it is no wonder why Andrew Mellick dismisses Yombo's African background and portrays him as irrational and uncivilized. By describing him in this manner, which was characteristic of the times, Mellick is able to justify omitting the slave's family history,

[1] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), p. 72.

in particular his parent's suicide. Given this, it is understandable why Mellick characterizes Dick as the good or "likely nigger" on his great-grandfather's plantation. Dick serves not only as Yombo's alter-ego, but as proof, according to Mellick, "that slavery on the 'Old Farm' was not altogether an unmitigated evil."[2] Dick made it easier for Mellick to reconcile his family's slaveowning past, which caused him some embarrassment. For the sake of his family's good name, Mellick needed Dick to be good, as a prime example of what was presumably admirable about slavery in Somerset County.

Thus, like his counterpart William Allinson with respect to Quamino, Mellick had little interest in exploring how Yombo and Dick might have seen themselves as men - as prideful fathers, husbands, and sons capable of exercising self-control and degrees of self-assertion. Mellick concedes that Dick exercised masculine authority through his family, but within the context of Aaron Malick's paternalism. Both he and Allinson were primarily interested in their black subject(s) as mutable propaganda which gave credence to their racial ideologies. This did not include expressing to the world that they were men much like themselves. For numerous, complicated reasons, it was inconceivable to Mellick and Allinson that Yombo, Dick, and Quamino, to quote Kenneth Stampp's famous passage, were "only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less."[3]

Admittedly, like that of Mellick and Allinson, this study is too a product of its time. "History is always produced in a specific historic context," posits Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Historical actors are also narrators, and vice versa."[4] "'Ain't no account'" has been written at a time when scholars no longer argue against Stanley Elkins's Sambo thesis per se, but use it as a point of departure (as I have) for discussing the agency or empowerment of bondspeople. Indeed, I was fortunate enough to have been a research assistant for

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[2] Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., *The Story of an Old Farm; or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, N.J.: Unionist Gazette, 1889), p. 608.

[3] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1989; orig. pub. 1956), p. vii.

[4] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, p. 22.

Darlene Clark Hine's and Earnestine Jenkin's anthology of black manhood in America from slavery through the Civil War. Needless to say, it is inconceivable to me that Yombo, Dick, and Quamino were not the possessors of complex manhood shaped by such important factors as the middle passage, the local geography, the racial brutality in their midst, and the color, health, and size of their bodies. To be sure, I am no less objective than my nineteenth-century white male counterparts. Idealistically, the "truth" about these three bondsmen lay somewhere in between their renditions of them, and mine.

Then again, Silvia Dubois was not necessarily asking for scholars to write the "truth" about black folk. She merely wanted them to be taken seriously as historical actors. This study, its subjectivity aside, earnestly attempted to do this.

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