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THE NEW YORK AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND:
Unearthing the African Presence in Colonial New York

Volume 3

Historical Perspectives of the African Burial Ground: *New York Blacks and the Diaspora*

Editor: Edna Greene Medford

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New York Blacks and the Diaspora

Edna Greene Medford
Editor

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Foreword

In 1991, during the excavation phase for the construction of the Federal Building now seen at 290 Broadway, New York City, a cemetery was uncovered containing human remains of Africans—most were enslaved, some free—who existed, worked, and died under inhumane conditions in colonial New York. This discovery, the largest bioarchaeological site of its kind, sparked heightened public awareness of African heritage in the northern states of colonial America. An outcome of this awareness was the public's desire for amending and correcting the history of colonial New York during that period to reflect more accurately the lives and culture of these forgotten Africans and people of African descent and their contributions and roles in economic development. Several initiatives, supported by the General Services Administration on behalf of the American people, were launched to accomplish this goal.

The initiative to conduct historical and scientific studies of the remains and artifacts excavated at the site was entrusted to Howard University. There, Dr. Michael L. Blakey, now at the College of William and Mary, designed and implemented a comprehensive, interdisciplinary research program—the New York African Burial Ground Project—to address questions in three main areas: history, archaeology, and skeletal biology. As scientific director of the project, he assembled an international team of scholars, professionals, graduate and undergraduate students, technical staff members, and cultural specialists for various parts of the study.

The New York African Burial Ground: Unearthing the African Presence in Colonial New York serves as the culminating work of this project, reporting the research findings. This multivolume series covers broadly a contextualized historical perspective, essentials of the archaeological discoveries, and descriptions of the skeletal biology of the unearthed human remains. Each volume documents and validates the lives of African Americans' ancestors who lived and worked in colonial New York. Included in this work are thorough descriptions of the burials excavated, complete with drawings, figures, and tables, as well as a comprehensive appendix of the artifacts found within the burials.

Through the years of this project, membership of the research team changed, but the goal of the project remained constant, that of ensuring that the story of the origins, life, and death of the enslaved Africans of colonial New York would not be absent from the annals of world history.

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Editorial Method

For the sake of consistency and because this was primarily an archaeological project, all three technical volumes of this series, *The New York African Burial Ground: Unearthing the African Presence in Colonial New York*, were edited according to the conventions of the same style manuals: the style guide of the Society for American Archaeology and *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition.

Acknowledgments

The history component of the African Burial Ground Project has benefited from the expertise of a host of people. Deserving special recognition are Emilyn Brown, Jean Howson, and Lisa King. Ms. Brown conducted major portions of the New York-based research. Dr. Howson spent countless hours combing archival records when the work of the history component first began. And Dr. King, now deceased, offered advice on various technical issues and was instrumental in establishing the history component database.

A number of students contributed to this report in myriad ways. Mr. Habib Warmack, one of our graduate student researchers, joined the ancestors in 2001. The memory of his optimism and enthusiasm inspired us as we moved toward completion of this report.

Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, director of Public Education and Information for the African Burial Ground Project, generously shared materials and ideas. The African Burial Ground team, under the direction of Dr. Michael Blakey, suggested likely sources of interest and offered invaluable critical observations.

The history team wishes to thank as well the expert panel of peer reviewers, the Advisory Review Board (ARB), for their comments, observations, and recommendations, which were provided for several drafts of the report. Their input led us to expand our initial focus and to produce a more comprehensive study of New York Africans. We also benefited from the careful review of our report by Professors Sheila Walker of Spelman College and Trevor Hall of Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica.

Howard University Associate Provost Joseph P. Reidy worked tirelessly to outline the scope of work for the history component at the very beginning of the team's involvement in the African Burial Ground Project. His pivotal role in drafting a proposal that reflected the recommendations of the research design, and his continued support and encouragement throughout the several years of this study are recognized with appreciation.

Indeed, many individuals have contributed to the completion of our research and preparation of the History Final Report. We would like to express appreciation to Ms. Alma Kemp for her conscientious efforts in assisting with word processing for the final document and for assisting in problem-solving. In addition, we are especially grateful to Ms. Regina Drake, Dean James A. Donaldson, and Dr. O. Jackson Cole for copyediting of the final document.

The history research team reserves its highest regard for the African people who populated colonial New York and whose lives we have attempted to reconstruct in this final report. Their dignity and humanity in the face of oppression remain their greatest legacy. The team's sincere hope is that through its research these New York Africans have been provided the voice that was denied to them in life.

Introduction

Purpose and Goals

The unearthing of the colonial cemetery known historically as the "Negroes Burying Ground" in Lower Manhattan in 1991 has given both scholars and the general public the opportunity to study and comprehend the broad dimensions of the African American experience. The African Burial Ground and the human remains contained within it provide a unique vantage point from which to view New York City's Africans and their descendants over two centuries. As the final resting place for thousands of enslaved and free black people who lived and labored in the city from roughly 1627 until the end of the eighteenth century, the cemetery offers insight into physical stressors, ethnic identity, cultural continuities, and assimilation. Each burial in and of itself tells an individual story. When considered collectively, however, in combination with archival evidence, these burials enable us to reconstruct a forgotten community and reveal the centrality of a marginalized people.

Guided by the 1991 research design, the New York African Burial Ground Project history researchers pursued two goals. First, they attempted to place the biological and anthropological findings from the cemetery into a historical context, suggesting explanations for certain physical characteristics present in the skeletal remains. Their second task has been to provide a broader understanding of the lives of enslaved and free people in colonial New York. Hence, historical research has addressed issues beyond those specific to the burial ground population.

Methodology

The primary focus of this study is the world of enslaved New York Africans in the second half of the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries. Although documentary evidence first mentions the presence of a burial ground used specifically by African peoples in 1712, patterns of black settlement point to an earlier date of origin for the cemetery. The study also recognizes that many enslaved New Yorkers were born in Africa or had lived and labored in the Caribbean; a much smaller percentage had sojourned in one of the sister colonies of the British North American mainland. Because these individuals brought with them certain experiences that doubtless shaped their responses to the conditions and circumstances they encountered in colonial New York, the scholars who contributed to this volume conducted their research from a diasporic perspective. In keeping with this approach, the team of historians consisted of scholars with expertise not only in the experiences of African peoples and their descendants in America, but in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century West Africa, West Central Africa, and the Caribbean as well.

The tasks undertaken by the researchers reflected issues relevant to diaspora studies. The Africanist researchers investigated primarily the question of origins and have focused specifically on attempting to determine what ethnic groups would have been likely victims of enslavement and, subsequently, transported to the Americas in general and to New York in particular. In this regard, they studied the relationships between Europeans and Africans as well as interactions among various ethnic groups on the

continent. They traced the trade routes that dealers in enslaved people followed and researched social customs and practices, labor regimen, diet, disease, and other aspects of living conditions among ethnic groups in West and West Central Africa.

The Caribbean research centered on similar areas of study. It involved the analysis of plantation logs and journals, medical and death records, official colonial documents, and personal papers that illuminate the experiences of African peoples in the West Indies. Study of the conditions and experiences of enslaved people in that area was crucial because of the nature of the trade between the islands and colonial New York during much of the period in which the African Burial Ground was in use.

The New York–based research focused on cultural practices; living conditions; resistance; the variety and methods of labor from an age, gender, and seasonal perspective; and other factors that would place the burial ground population in a historical context. The wide range of documentary evidence that was consulted includes municipal and colonial office records, court cases (both criminal and civil), laws, medical logs, diaries and other personal papers, wills, and newspaper advertisements that announce sales of enslaved people and offer a glimpse of the persistence of African peoples in their resistance to slavery.

The historical data are linked through a database that generally consists of detailed notes of both primary and secondary sources. This has permitted the team to manage a large number of documents and more easily take advantage of opportunities for comparative study. The database is available on CD-ROM.

Whenever possible, the team of historians has employed the term "enslaved," rather than "slave," as recognition that New York Africans saw themselves as human beings, not as someone's property. The terms "African American" and "African" are used interchangeably for the eighteenth century. The use of one rather than the other is not intended to imply degree of acculturation.

Attribution and Interpretations

Five members of the research team contributed to the writing of the history report, with each author providing data and interpretation for nearly every chapter. Although this integrative approach precludes attribution of any one chapter to a single individual, each member of the team had primary responsibility for his or her area of expertise. Hence, Drs. Linda Heywood and John Thornton took the lead in those sections pertaining primarily to West Central Africa and West Africa, respectively. Dr. Selwyn H. H. Carrington was the principal researcher and interpreter of the sections relevant to the West Indies. Ms. Emilyn Brown and the editor assumed chief responsibility for the sections pertaining specifically to colonial New York. The editor performed the task of integrating the various diasporic pieces. In certain instances, team members found it difficult to reach consensus on a particular subject. On such occasions, the editor, believing that a more comprehensive discussion was warranted, supplemented the data that had been furnished by the principal researcher or offered additional perspectives. Every effort was made, however, to refrain from altering the views of the researcher responsible for that particular topic. The unabridged reports submitted by each researcher are available in the history component database.

An Overview

African peoples—both at home and in the Americas—witnessed profound change and adjustment in their lives during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As slavery provided the means by which men and nations grew rich, powerful, and dominant over each other, those persons whose lives were thus altered pressed to assert their connection to the human family. As they did so, they drew on lessons learned from individual experiences as well as on the collective memories that had been passed down through the centuries.

Although slavery has been regarded by some as a singularly human, although morally repugnant experience, others have emphasized that by its very nature, it reduced people to property. The irony of the inhumanity of men and women reverberates through the ages, perhaps no more so than in the plots of land set aside as the final resting place for those who championed freedom in its most basic forms. It is in this context that we place the men, women, and children who lived and labored in colonial New York, some of whose remains still imprint the soil. Their resolve—at once both extraordinary and mundane—knew parallels in societies throughout the Americas. In the place that was New Amsterdam, and later became known as New York, they fashioned an existence shaped as much by global economic and political interests as by local ones. And they found ways to keep their

humanity at the forefront, always through a stubborn determination to reject any limitation on their exercise of those rights reserved to humankind. It is this resoluteness that the history component addresses in the following pages.

The history of the African presence in colonial New York begins with Europe and the African homeland. Trade relationships forged in an era of European exploration were expanded and perverted in the wake of American "discovery" and conquest. Europe's desire for cheap, plentiful, and compliant labor to aid in its exploitation of the lands in the western hemisphere coincided with and exacerbated the political instability in much of western and West Central Africa during this period. European men and nations seeking personal and state gain found accomplices among certain African leaders and individuals who were motivated by their own aggrandizement. As a consequence, millions were consigned to the horrors of the Middle Passage and chattel slavery in the Americas.

In colonial New York, African peoples faced their new reality and resolved not simply to survive but to structure a life for themselves in the midst of exploitation and repression. The lives they created were molded and remodeled as waves of development and expansion swept over the colony. That growth and transition are manifested at several stages in the history of colonial New York: the Dutch period, English conquest, the age of commerce and trade, the maturation of the society by mid-eighteenth century, and readjustment in the post–Revolutionary War era.

During the first stage of colonial development, the African experience was shaped by the peculiar needs of a frontier environment. The clearing of land, the erection of public spaces, the feeding of the inhabitants—all occupied the attention of the administrative body, the Dutch West India Company. Hence, it was the company's labor force of enslaved Africans who carved some semblance of a civilization out of the wilderness. During this phase, African peoples occupied an unequal position in the colony as a matter of custom rather than by statutory pronouncement. Taking advantage of economic instabilities and physical mobility, black men and women pressed for greater autonomy in their daily lives and sought to establish a sense of community among the small and diverse population of African-born and African-descended people.

By the time the English seized New Amsterdam (and the New Netherland colony) and renamed it after the Duke of York in 1664, some enslaved people had won a measure of freedom. Most, however, remained in bondage, and the new masters of the colony hastened to codify their servile status and implement measures to control black men and women. Laws that regulated movement and activities during nonlaboring hours and that sought to ensure that white men would be protected from the competition of Africans skilled in the trades were passed. Beginning in the late-seventeenth century, the English also had augmented the numbers of enslaved laborers primarily through a provisions trade with the West Indies but also with direct shipments from western Africa. A less extensive illegal trade with East Coast pirates added numbers and diversity to the core groups from the west.

When the new century dawned, the little hamlet had been transformed into a bustling, thriving port town of approximately 5,000 inhabitants, at least 700 of whom (14 percent) were of African origin or descent. The city's population—black and white—was as diverse as were the industries that fueled its economy. Growing prosperity created the desire for more domestic labor, and greater numbers of African women came to characterize the early-eighteenth-century demographic pattern. Aside from supplying the basic needs of the household, these women were employed at spinning, weaving, sewing, and brewing. They also bore the added burdens of childbirth and rearing, usually without a co-residential mate. As the economy matured, demographic patterns and the varieties of labor experiences changed. Greater numbers of black men were imported as well, and although they continued to constitute the bulk of unskilled labor, they were increasingly used in the trades, despite laws prohibiting this practice. Hence, industries such as coopering, shipbuilding, general carpentry, sailmaking, and blacksmithing—skills essential to the local economy—made use of the talents of black men.

By mid-century, however, the growing number of black males began to pose a serious problem for the city. Marronage, temporary absences, and acts of daily resistance became increasingly troublesome. An earlier emphasis on importations of Africans from the West Indies had led New Yorkers to claim victimization from the practice of "dumping" refuse laborers and those who had been judged incorrigible. Whereas women performed their labors in relative isolation, men—many of them benefiting from the practice of hiring out—roamed the streets unsupervised and caroused until late into the night at drinking estab-

lishments and unauthorized places. Late-night forays evolved into criminal activity, as black men formed groups whose aim, on the surface, appeared to be to unburden New Yorkers of their material wealth but which actually formed the basis of an underground economy for uncompensated labor. These men further threatened the supremacy of the white majority by forging illicit alliances with certain white men and women who themselves harbored resentments against the increasingly stratified society. After a series of burglaries and fires set in the late winter of 1741 convinced the populace that there was an imminent uprising of enslaved people, New Yorkers decided to shift to an emphasis on child importations and direct shipments from Africa. These unseasoned workers (that is, those unfamiliar with the language and labor regimen) required a level of training unnecessary for enslaved laborers obtained from the islands, but New Yorkers felt the risk of continued troubles was too great. This new influx of African-born laborers facilitated a continuing connection to an African cultural heritage. That heritage was illuminated in the cultural practices apparent on the docks during off-times and at more formal gatherings such as the Pinkster celebrations that originated in Dutch observances of the Pentecost but which, by the eighteenth century, had been shaped by decidedly African characteristics.

When, in 1776, the colony joined its sisters in declaring independence from "British tyranny," white New Yorkers had had more than a century and a half to develop their distrust of African laborers. Their concerns relative to the loyalty of enslaved people, in many instances, proved warranted. As they had throughout their history in the Americas, men and women of color followed the path that offered the greatest promise for freedom. Those who had fought on the losing side left when the British evacuated the city and hoped that freedom could be realized in Canada.[1]

The post–Revolutionary War period witnessed a new intensity in the struggle of people of African descent to assert their humanity and secure their rights. The growing free black community strengthened preexisting institutions and founded new ones. The drive to abolish slavery, although painfully slow, finally achieved its goal in the next half-century. In the meantime, pride in heritage found expression in organizations that took the appellation "African." African peoples exercised a political voice in the form of petitions to end repeated abuses—including the desecration of their burial ground—and they sought to establish a new final resting place for their revered dead. This late-eighteenth-century activism had less to do with the revolutionary rhetoric of the previous era than it did a continuation of the resolve of African peoples to remind white New Yorkers that they were entitled to the same respect and dignity accorded to all people. It was this persistence that defined their experience in colonial New York for more than two centuries.

[1] The freedom promised proved illusory. British failure to provide land grants in Canada condemned their black allies to perpetual economic dependence. After suffering from the harsh Canadian environment and a fading hope that true freedom could be achieved in their new home, a group of blacks petitioned to be allowed to settle in Africa under the auspices of the recently established British colony in what would become Sierra Leone. For discussion of their disillusionment with Canada, see Winks (1971) and Wilson (1976).

Chapter 1

New York's First Black Institution: The African Burial Ground

by Edna Greene Medford and Emilyn L. Brown

Introduction

When the archaeological team at the New York African Burial Ground disinterred the remains of the woman later designated as Burial 340 in 1991, the waist beads and hourglass-shaped, filed incisors that had adorned her in life remained to define her culturally more than two centuries after death. Nearby, in Burial 254, a young child reposed in its final resting place with a silver earring strung like a pendant around its tiny neck. The man whose bones imprinted the soil in Burial 101 had been laid to rest in a simple coffin, but someone had painstakingly fashioned a heart-shaped object on its lid with brass tacks. And in Burial 25, a young woman's broken body—face shattered, wrist fractured, and rib cage penetrated by a still-present musket ball—provided evidence of the violence that pervaded colonial New York (for discussion of the characteristics of individual burials, see Volume 1 of this series, *Skeletal Biology of the New York African Burial Ground* [Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2009]).

These four representatives of the community of African and African-descended peoples in the city, rendered anonymous as a consequence of their enslavement, remind us that even among those designated property, humanity prevailed. For in death (as in life) their membership in the human family resonated. The careful laying to rest of remains in a sacred spot such as the African Burial Ground underscores the resolve of African peoples to maintain a sense of dignity and to honor cherished customs, even in the midst of extraordinary assaults on their humanity.

Burial in the Common

As did other African peoples, both in the diaspora and on the continent, New York Africans found meaning in their lives through participation in long-established rituals handed down from one generation to the next. Although their enslavement limited their ability to continue such practices openly, they nevertheless found ways to keep some aspects of these rituals alive. Rituals associated with death and burial were especially significant and provided a way in which a people from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences could forge a common identity.

Prior to the arrival of the British, New York Africans had access to few sites where they could bury their dead. Doubtless, a small number found a final resting place at the Stuyvesant bowery (or farm) where they had labored. Others may have been laid to rest in the common burying ground at Bowling Green, the city's first public cemetery, which had been in use from approximately 1649 to 1673 (New York State Archives, Albany, Liber Patents 2:20; New York State Archives, Albany, Liber Deeds 12:85, 12:90, 13:102). A second burial ground served the New York community during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, but by 1697 its acquisition as private property by Trinity Church led to the denial of burials to Africans. The ban, as presented in the Trinity Church Vestry Minutes of October 25, 1697, stipulated that

> no Negroes be buried within the bounds & Limitts of the church yard of Trinity Church, that is to say, in the rear of the present burying place & that no person or Negro whatsoever, do presume . . . to break up any ground for the burying of his Negro, as they will answer it at their peril [cited in Stokes 1967:4:403].

Given this ban, it is likely that a separate site existed for African people before the end of the century.

Although the first documentary evidence for the existence of the African Burial Ground appears to be the 1712 statement made by Chaplain John Sharpe (1881:355) that the Africans were "buried in the

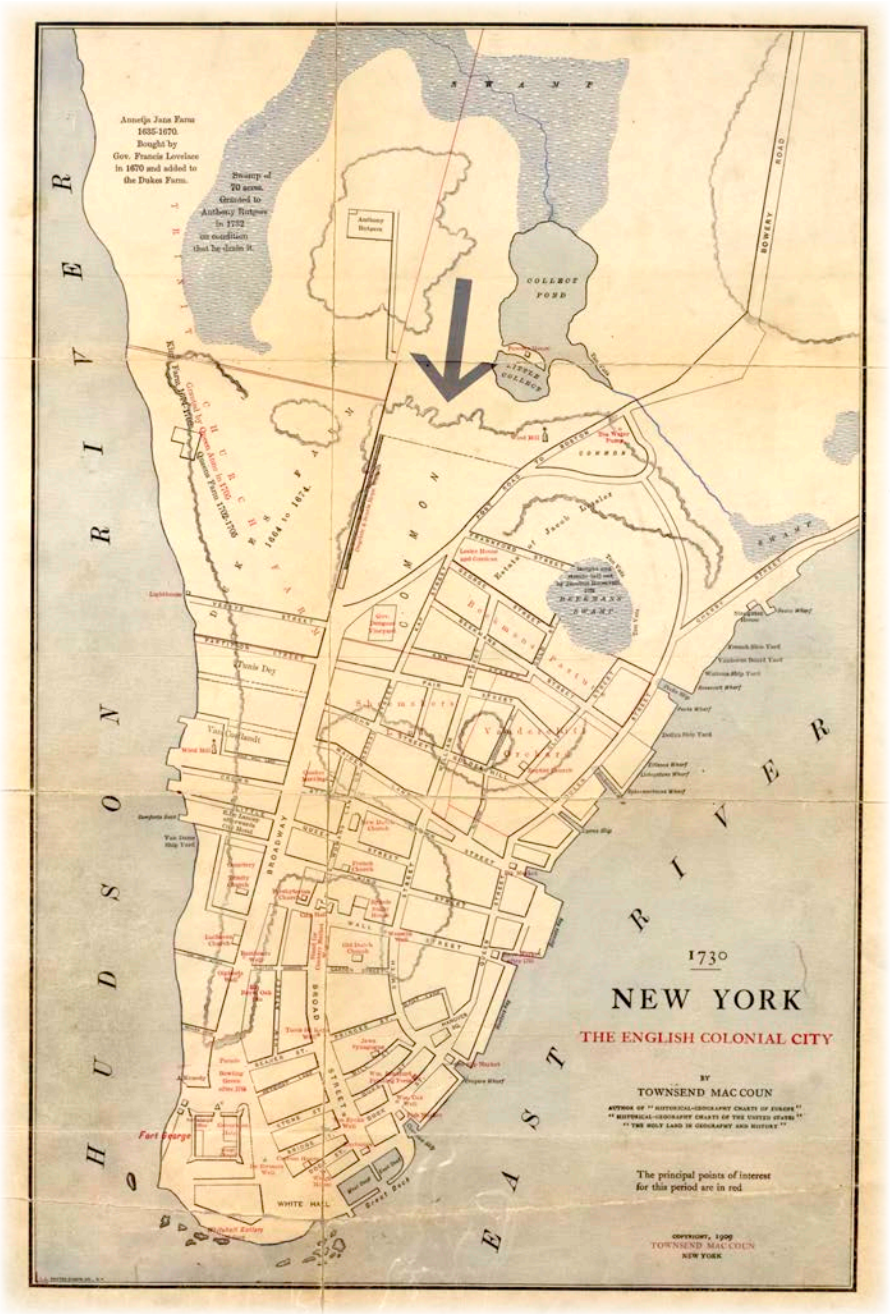

Figure 1. Map of New York in 1730 by Townsend MacCoun, showing the Collect Pond and the Common, which lay northeast and south of the burial ground, respectively. The African Burial Ground, which does not appear on the map, is represented by the arrow (courtesy of the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations).

Common," other factors also point to the possibility that the property had become sacred ground for New York Africans well before this time. A community of African peoples had begun to form at least as early as the 1640s, when the Dutch granted conditional freedom to a group of black men and women. The burial ground that was identified by Sharpe was near lands granted initially to members of that earlier group. David Valentine (1860:567), nineteenth-century city clerk and compiler of New York City history, described the site as a "desolate, unappropriated spot, descending with a gentle declivity towards a ravine which led to the Kalkhook [in English, Collect or Fresh Water] pond" (see Figures 1 and 2). Such a site—located as it was outside the town but within a mile of the southern tip of Manhattan—would have

Figure 2. Partial view of the Maerschalck Map (1755), indicating "Negros Burial Ground" (courtesy of the New York Historical Society, Call No. NS4 M31.1.32).

met the needs and preferences of the African population without attracting the displeasure of New York's whites.[1] The cemetery would have served as one of the first institutions over which the early New York African population had relative control.

Despite its significance to them, New York Africans never gained title to the burial ground. The site (whether already containing the cemetery or not) would have been part of lands granted in 1673 to Cornelius Van Borsum. The grant was issued on behalf of Van Borsum's wife, Sarah Roelof, in recognition of her services as an interpreter in negotiations between Native Americans and Dutch officials. Roelof's death in 1693 began a long-standing dispute between her heirs and city officials that was not resolved until the late eighteenth century (Foote et al. 1993:11–12; Stokes 1967:6:82–83, 123). Extant records provide no explanation for the origins of the use of the land for a black cemetery and give no indication of why the African community was permitted throughout the eighteenth century to appropriate the land as a burial ground. Apparently, the land's remoteness for much of the period it was in use and its lack of commercial value until well into the eighteenth century discouraged any challenge to New York Africans simply taking over the site for their own use.

Eventually, lack of title to the land disadvantaged Africans. Keeping their burial ground sacred posed a challenge, as it bordered the Common, which supported cattle grazing in the Dutch period and, during eighteenth-century British rule, served as a site for executions, public events, and the city's first almshouse with its own cemetery (Edwards and Kelcey

[1] The following discussion is intended to be a brief review of the history of the site. A comprehensive site history appears in Chapter 2 (Howson et al. 2009) of Volume 2 of this series, *The Archaeology of the New York African Burial Ground* (Perry et al. 2009).

Engineers 1990; Foote et al. 1993). Although commercial development of the land did not take place until the late eighteenth century, the owners leased portions of the grant for the establishment of a pottery works, and tanneries, breweries, and other businesses dotted the area near the cemetery. The British interred deceased prisoners of war at the southern end of the site during the American Revolution. A few years later, grave-robbing medical students seeking "material" on which to practice their skills desecrated the site. In the 1790s, after years of overuse, the burial ground closed. In preparation for development, the site was filled over and subdivided into lots (Foote et al. 1993:68–134).

Over the years, New York transformed from town to city to bustling metropolis. Yet graphic reminders of the African colonial presence resurfaced when construction crews unearthed human remains at the site. The 1991–1992 disinterment and the confluence of events that ultimately led to the establishment of the African Burial Ground Project provided the avenue by which Africans and African-descended people, long dead, could provide clues to their experiences in the colonial city.

Chapter 2

The Quest for Labor: From Privateering to "Legitimate" Trade

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

The men, women, and children who were laid to rest in the burial ground were part of the African odyssey that began as a consequence of European rivalries and their expansion in the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Initially, Dutch interests centered on an illicit trade with Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and along certain stretches of the South American coast. Depending on the area, the Dutch swapped salt, pelts, sugar, tobacco, and wood for European goods (Goslinga 1971:55).

Concomitantly, privateering proved lucrative, as the Dutch (along with England and France) attacked Spanish and Portuguese ships. By 1621, the Dutch elected to expand their presence into North America by establishing a trading post in the Hudson River Valley under the auspices of the West India Company (hereafter referred to as "the Company"). The object of initial interest was the very profitable fur trade, which they conducted with local native groups. Eventually, however, that early interest in the fur trade evolved into a commitment to colonization. Despite the establishment of a permanent settlement in the area, the village remained small in both physical size and population in its first decade of existence and crept slowly northward in the following decades.

Native Inhabitants

The site that the Dutch occupied in 1624 was a forested area that had been inhabited for centuries by a native people known as the Lenape. The group had established at least two seasonal camps in the vicinity—one at the southern tip of Manhattan, which was called Kapsee, and the other a short distance away, known as Werpoes.[1] Other villages dotted the landscape on either side of the island. The Lenape routinely evacuated these sites during the colder months and returned to them when conditions permitted. As one observer declared later in the century, the Lenape lived "very rudely and rovingly, shifting from place to place, according to their exigencies, and gains of fishing and fowling and hunting, never confining their rambling humors in any settled Mansions" (Burrows and Wallace 1999:6).

With the arrival of the Dutch, the Lenape way of life underwent irrevocable transformation. In exchange for pelts, the Dutch offered to the native inhabitants a variety of common European goods, including knives, axes, hoes, blankets, brass kettles, combs, guns, and alcohol (Burrows and Wallace 1999:12, 24). A new disease environment, technology, and newly forged trade relationships challenged the independence and self-sufficiency that the native people had enjoyed before the Dutch entered their world.[2]

From Trading Post to Settlement

New Amsterdam's transition from a place to facilitate the trade in furs to a permanent settlement was neither immediate nor easy; the Company's firm hold (it owned the land and livestock and, later, the enslaved African laborers) discouraged colonists who preferred to labor for themselves. Growth of the settlement was aided somewhat by the arrival of Walloons (French Protestants) in the first couple of years of its existence,

[1] This Lenape site was located near Kalch-hook (Collect or Fresh Water) Pond (Foote et al. 1993:1, 6).

[2] For a discussion of these earliest inhabitants of Manhattan Island and the changes they experienced as a consequence of the Dutch arrival, see also Foote et al.'s discussion (1993:1–3).

but the area remained sparsely populated. In 1626, the fewer than 300 residents could boast only of a town that had an unimpressive fort, just over two dozen cabins, and a gristmill (Burrows and Wallace 1999:24). A succession of directors proved unpopular and ineffective in bringing stability and prosperity to the settlement. A dozen years after its establishment, the population had increased by no more than 100 people, and there had been only modest additions to building construction (Burrows and Wallace 1999:30).

Critical to the development of the site as a permanent settlement was the establishment of farms where laborers could grow cereal grains and vegetables and raise livestock. The Company leased these farms to its own officials and to private individuals whose cultivation of the land fed the local inhabitants (Singleton 1909:16–17; see also Page 1997; Rink 1986). But adequate food production was hampered by the paucity of laborers. Sporadic immigration inclined the Company to accept laborers from wherever it could find them, hence enhancing the settlement's diversity but providing no long-term solution to a growing and increasingly critical problem.

African Arrival

Shortly after settling New Amsterdam, the Company had availed itself of the opportunity to ease its labor shortage through the acquisition of 11 African men. The specific date and circumstances of their arrival remain points of conjecture, although many historians have accepted as plausible the date 1626, as the African petitioners for freedom in 1644 claimed that they had been in the colony for 18–19 years.[3] Records of Dutch privateering raids, however, suggest a later date. On January 13, 1627, the *Bruynvis*, a vessel in the service of the Company that raided Spanish and Portuguese shipping in the Caribbean, left the Dutch port of Amsterdam on a privateering venture. Upon arriving in the Caribbean, it assisted in the capture of a Portuguese bark whose cargo consisted of tobacco and 150 captives. The only extant documentation regarding its activities noted that the tobacco was taken, but the privateers "let the rest of the people go" (Laet 1931–1937:1:21). Before its return across the Atlantic at the end of the year, the *Bruynvis* swung north to the colony of New Netherland (Nationaal Archief [National Archive of the Netherlands], The Hague [NAN], Oude West Indische Compagnie [OWIC], Minutes of Zealand Chamber, Inv. No. 20, fol. 119v).

The release of captured Africans from Portuguese and Spanish prizes in the early 1600s reflected Dutch prohibition on involvement in the slave trade (Donnan 1969:3:410; see also Emmer 1972:728).[4] But release of the cargo would not have precluded seizure of the crew. The Portuguese were known to have employed Luso-Africans onboard their ships. Privateers would have been eager to make use of any seamen they encountered, including those of African descent.[5] Although extant records do not permit us to conclude that the *Bruynvis* did indeed introduce the first Africans to New Amsterdam, the privateer may have released the human cargo, seized part or all of the crew, impressed them into service, and later transported them to the Company in New Amsterdam. We do know that 3 years later, the *Bruynvis* transported 50 enslaved people to Pavonia (New Jersey) who had been captured in a prize (King 2004:5; Stokes 1967:6:501).

Whether or not the 11 men arrived in New Amsterdam on board the *Bruynvis*, their names suggest familiarity with the larger Atlantic world. According to extant sources, the men likely were those who received conditional freedom in 1644: Paulo Angola, Groot (Big) Manuel, Cleyn (Little) Manuel, Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, Simon Congo, Anthony Portugis, Gracia, Peter Santome, Jan Francisco, Cleyn Antony, and Jan Fort Orange (O'Callaghan 1868:36). Within a few years, 3 African women (including 1 named Mayken) arrived, essentially to perform the drudge work that characterized seventeenth-century domestic labor.[6]

These early imports inured primarily to the benefit of the Company, which owned the laborers. Private ownership did not become immediately commonplace, despite individual and collective entreaties from colonists and Company promises to resolve the incessant labor shortage by importing enslaved Africans for their use. As early as 1629, the Company pledged to "endeavor to supply the colonists with as many

[3] In challenging the 1626 date, Robert Swan (1993:75–82) has suggested a later arrival but places it before August 11, 1628, when Domine Jonas Michaëlius, the first pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church, made reference to Africans in the settlement of New Amsterdam.

[4] Donnan (1969:3:410) indicates that the Dutch did not know what to do with these captives. She cites three instances in which such cargoes were let go in the period from 1624 to 1631.

[5] For a discussion of black participation on board privateers and other ships during this era, see King (2004); see also Bolster (1997).

[6] On April 19, 1663, Mayken, an ill and elderly black woman, "having served as a slave since the year 1628," petitioned the Company for and was granted her freedom (see O'Callaghan 1865–1866:2:246).

blacks as it possibly can" (Donnan 1969:3:410). And sometime between 1630 and 1635, under its "New Project of Freedoms and Exemptions," it indicated that it would "allot to each Patroon twelve Black men and women out of the prizes in which Negroes shall be found" (Brodhead 1853–1887:1:99).

In the ensuing years, privateers in the service of the Company continued to supply New Amsterdam with captives whom Portuguese suppliers in Africa sent to the Spanish Indies to fulfill their *asiento* contract, or license to supply enslaved African laborers. Virtually all of those arriving in this manner during the Dutch period came from West Central Africa.[7] Although the Company did substantial trade with West Africa from its inception in 1621, shipping lists reveal that no captives were among the Company's purchases between 1624 and 1636.[8] The Company decided to initiate the direct purchase of enslaved laborers in the latter year, and the earliest voyages organized for this purpose went out in 1638 to Soyo (Kingdom of Kongo).[9] The first West African voyages did not begin until 1639, when various Dutch ships loaded 688 enslaved people purchased in Allada to send to Brazil (NAN, OWIC, Jan Maurits an Nassau to XIX, 22 October 1639, Inv. No. 8, fol. 252). Shortly after the Dutch occupied parts of Brazil (specifically Pernambuco)[10] in 1644, the Board of Accounts on New Netherland indicated that

> for the advancement of the cultivation of the land, it would not be unwise to allow, at the request of the patroons, Colonists and other farmers, the introduction from Brazil of as many Negroes as they would be disposed to pay for at a fair price . . . which Negroes would accomplish more work for the masters and at a less expense than from servants, who must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises [Brodhead 1853–1887:1:154].

Shortly thereafter, the *Tamandare* arrived in New Amsterdam from Brazil with a cargo of enslaved laborers of unknown number. Apparently, it did not fulfill the needs of the residents of New Amsterdam, as the Directors wrote: "We have seen that more negroes could be advantageously employed and sold there [than] the ship *Tamandare* has brought. We shall take care, that [in future] a greater number of negroes be taken there" (Gehring 2000:5).

After the Portuguese recaptured Pernambuco in 1654, New Amsterdam became a more significant participant in the trade in enslaved people. It benefited from connections with Curaçao, which now served as the center of the Dutch trade. Furthermore, the colonists in New Netherland received permission to sail to the coast of Africa, "to procure there as many negroes as they might be willing to employ" (Gehring 2003:47; New Netherland Council 1974:314). In this manner, Jan Sweerts and Dirck Pietersen Wittepaert requested and received authorization to sail their ship, the *Wittepaert*, to Africa and return with human cargo (Gehring 2003:47). The following year, the *Wittepaert* returned to New Amsterdam by way of Curaçao with a cargo too large to be readily absorbed by the settlement. The surplus laborers' reexport to other markets, where labor-starved planters eagerly snapped them up, led the Council of New Netherland to impose a tax equal to 10 percent of the value of reexported laborers (O'Callaghan 1868:191).

Initially, trade to Africa was restricted to Angola, as in 1650 the New Netherland colony was specifically precluded from participating in the trade of "Guinea," a generic term for the West African region (Brodhead 1853–1887:1:364). A standard contract developed at the time authorizing trade directly with Africa stipulated that the license "does not permit [the captain] to trade on the Gold Coast, and that he shall not come any further west than Ardre or at the most Popo; under penalty of forfeiting the aforesaid ship and its cargo" (Gehring 2000:134–135). Not until near the end of the period of Dutch control of New Netherland did the colony's directors propose that it be allowed to trade on the Gold Coast and westward to Allada and Popo. Hence, West Central Africans would constitute the group most involved in shaping the character of the African presence in New Amsterdam.

[7] In a detailed chronicle of the privateering activities of the Company between 1624 and 1636, Laet (1931–1937) indicated that all of the nine slave-bearing ships that have a provenance (three are listed without a provenance) were from Angola. The total number of enslaved people taken from such ships during this period was 2,356. According to Vilar (1977), West Central Africans made up about 70 percent of the *asiento* trade between 1616 and 1640, and for 5 of those years, they accounted for 100 percent of the captives in the trade.

[8] The records of 104 voyages to all parts of Africa are held at the Universitetsbiblioteket Uppsala, Sweden (Manuscript L 123, fols. 59–65).

[9] The decision was recorded in the minutes of the Zealand Chamber of the West India Company (NAN, OWIC, Meeting of 26 July 1636, Inv. No. 22, fol. 369; see also NAN, OWIC, Meeting of 2 November 1637, Inv. No. 22, fol. 763).

[10] The Dutch had captured Bahia for a short time in 1624–1625 and took Pernambuco from the Portuguese in 1629 but did not attempt serious occupation until 1644.

Chapter 3

West Central Africa and the Origins of New Amsterdam's Black Population

by Linda Heywood and John Thornton

Introduction

The principal area that provided enslaved Africans to New Amsterdam stretched over 720 miles along the Atlantic from the port of Mpinda in the north, Luanda in the center, and Benguela in the south and then inland for approximately 240 miles. The area includes a wide range of ecosystems, from rain forests in the north (where annual rainfall hovers between 63 and 79 inches a year and temperatures average 77 and 81˚F) to savanna plateau (with a temperate climate; temperatures can fall as low as 64˚F). The region also encompasses some of Africa's major rivers, including the Zaire (navigable for more than 1,000 miles), the Kasai (600 miles), the Kwanza (576 miles), and the Cunene (567 miles). It is in this region that the modern-day provinces developed: Zaire, Uige, Bengo, Cabinda, and parts of Kwanza Sul and Kwanza North in Angola and the coastal regions of the Republic of Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo (Tvedten 1997:3–7; Vansina 1990).

Political Structure

During the seventeenth century, this West Central Africa region encompassed varying political structures, ranging from the Kingdom of Kongo, with its capital at São Salvador some 200 miles from Mpinda, to small semiautonomous polities to the southeast of Kongo and bordering the Mbundu kingdom of Ndongo (Figure 3). By the early 1600s, when enslaved Central Africans made up the majority of Africans exported to New York and the rest of the Americas, the two major states in the region—Kongo and Ndongo—exhibited distinct signs of Portuguese influence that had been evolving since 1483. Strengthened by military alliances with the Portuguese, Kongo had become a more centralized and larger state. Its growth had prompted its ruler, Alvaro IV, to declare himself in 1631 "king of the most ancient kingdom of Kongo, Angola, Matamba, Ocanga, Cunde, Sonso, and lord of all the Ambundu" (Brásio 1952–1988:3:199–200). Although the statement is an exaggeration, Kongo kings did have control over lands beginning to the north of the Zaire River down to the Dande. In addition, Kongo exercised authority over Luanda Island, a region that produced the valuable *nzimbu* shells that were used as the major currency throughout the kingdom.[1]

To the north of Kongo lay several small states—Kakongo and Ngoyo at the coast and Vungu some distance in the interior. Loango, the largest coastal state north of the Zaire River, was approximately the size of Ndongo in the seventeenth century. Its capital city, Buali, lay where the modern state of Disoso now stands.

The most important of the conquest states in Central Africa were the Portuguese Reino de Angola (established in 1575 in the region between the Bengo and the Kwango) and Reino de Benguela (established in the early 1600s and located to the south of Luanda). Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Portuguese in Angola incorporated areas formerly under the control of Ndongo and Kongo; from the coastal settlement of Benguela, they made inroads into the several Imbangala and Ovimbundu polities.

[1] For one of the most comprehensive works on the kingdom, see Saccardo (1982–1983); see also Thornton (1985).

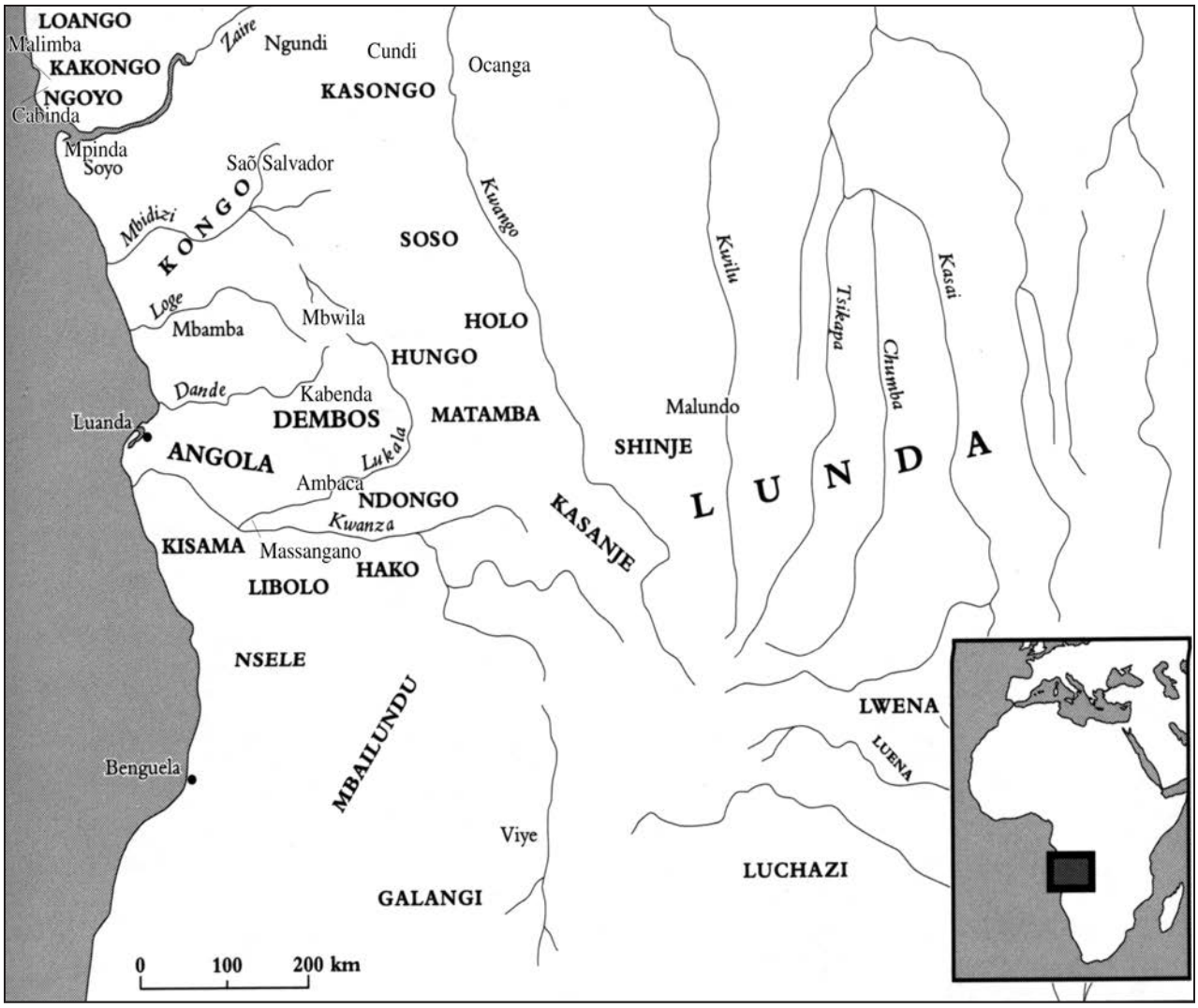

Figure 3. West Central Africa, Kongo-Angola region. (Adapted from *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800,* John Thornton, ©1999, UCL Press. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.)

The Acquisition of Central African Captives in the Seventeenth Century

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, purchase and warfare were the main methods of acquiring enslaved people for export. Warfare included Portuguese wars of conquest and slave raiding in areas whose local rulers owed allegiance to either Kongo or Ndongo, civil wars in the Kingdom of the Kongo, and general banditry. For example, during the period from 1615 to 1670, a great many Mbundu were captured in a cycle of wars between the Portuguese, who had taken control of parts of the kingdom of Ndongo, and the still-independent provinces. These wars were a continuation of those the Portuguese undertook beginning in 1575 that were intended to carve out an area of settlement from the eastern and southern regions of the Ndongo kingdom. The Portuguese also engaged in these wars specifically to fulfill the *asiento* contract. In addition, they used captives to supply their colony of Brazil.

Initially, the Portuguese acquired enslaved laborers by recruiting Africans and by forcing trading alliances on conquered representatives of Ndongo and Kongo. The Portuguese quest for territory and captives began in earnest in the latter part of the 1500s and continued until 1800. Around 1600, they made alliances with the Imbangalas (who originated south of the Kwanza River), whose systematic raiding had virtually depopulated entire provinces by the end of the sixteenth century. In fact, Portuguese merchants

received some of their first Central African captives from the Imbangalas.

Portuguese military activities expanded as the seventeenth century advanced. By the 1630s, Portuguese armies fighting against the Ndongo kingdom, Kongo, and areas subordinate to these kingdoms included the *guerra preta* (African soldiers gathered as tribute from Mbundu local representatives who had been forced to become Portuguese allies), Imbangalas, and a variety of African groups who joined the Portuguese forces out of self-interest. In addition, Portuguese settlers who were required to join in official campaigns supplied their own force of enslaved African soldiers, whose numbers sometimes ranged in the thousands.[2] At times, Jesuits and other missionary groups—who kept as many as 10,000 enslaved laborers on the plantations they managed along the Bengo River—also supplied enslaved soldiers to fight in Portuguese campaigns.[3] In this complex political and military environment, the Portuguese sacked and destroyed the capital of Ndongo and brought large sections of coastal Ndongo (such as the regions between the Bengo and Dande Rivers) and strategic regions along Ndongo (such as Ambaca) under Portuguese control. These Portuguese/Imbangala armies conducted widespread punitive raids throughout Ndongo territory up to the 1650s.[4]

The raids proved advantageous to the slave-trading governors who were in charge of the colony. For example, Mendes de Vasconcelhos (1617–1621) oversaw the export of some 50,000 captives through Luanda, all enslaved as a result of the campaigns he undertook with the Imbangala against the kingdom of Ndongo (Heintze 1996:120–121). In fact, when the Dutch West India Company (Company) seized Luanda from the Portuguese and gained control of the trade, the Company estimated that it would be able to export 15,000 captives per year, although during the first year, they had exported only 1,500, and the number never reached what they had originally envisioned.[5] These Africans all went to Brazil. Exports from this region of Angola increased after the Portuguese regained control from the Dutch, for by the mid-1650s, nearly 10,500 enslaved Africans were leaving Portuguese Angola, prompting the governor, Sousa Chicorro, to boast in a 1656 letter to King Alfonso VI that this was "something which had never happened in this kingdom" (Esteves 1992:41).

The Portuguese also obtained Mbundu captives for export through the wars of resistance that Queen Njinga (1583–1663), the ruler of Ndongo, led against them and their Mbundu and Imbangala allies. Between 1624 and 1656, Queen Njinga, allied with her own Imbangala bands, local Mbundu allies, and the Dutch for a time, fought against Portuguese territorial expansion into Ndongo. Although she was forced to take refuge in the early 1630s in Matamba (the lands bordering Ndongo), Njinga continued her wars against the Portuguese and their Mbundu allies. These Portuguese/Njinga wars produced numerous refugees and captives for export. Although most of them were of Mbundu ethnic origin, others came from eastern Kongo and from the lands lying east of Matamba.[6]

During the seventeenth century (and throughout the eighteenth as well), captives also came from the several civil wars that took place in the Kingdom of Kongo. For example, between 1615 and the 1640s, seven different kings ruled in the Kongo, and from the 1660s and well into the 1770s, not a year passed without a provincial ruler rising up against central authority. At times, these intrigues did not originate in Kongo but in Portuguese Angola, where governors eagerly exploited Kongo's political divisions. In 1622, for example, a combined Portuguese force of 30,000 Mbundu *guerra preta*, Imbangala, and Portuguese soldiers invaded the Kongo province of Mbamba, killing the Duke, 90 lesser nobles, and thousands of Kongolese soldiers. The Kongolese captives were exported through Luanda and sent to the Americas.[7] Portuguese campaigns against Kongo in 1665 at the Battle at Mbwila also led to the death of António I and the capture of thousands of Kongolese, whom the victorious Portuguese exported as enslaved laborers to the Americas.[8]

Enslaved people leaving Central Africa in the seventeenth century also were acquired through purchase. These purchases were facilitated by African agents (*pombeiros)* who worked on behalf of Portuguese merchants living in Luanda. They accompanied

[2] For a military history of the Portuguese campaigns in Angola during the seventeenth century, see Cardonega (1972).

[3] See discussion of the Jesuit plantations along the Bengo River in a letter from Luis Mendes de Sousa Chicorro to Alfonso VI, 22 November 1658 (Brásio 1952–1988:12:179–180).

[4] For a discussion of the Imbangala/Portuguese alliance, see Thornton (1998a:421–434).

[5] These data are gathered from various sources, including letters of the officials of the Company (Nationaal Archief [National Archive of the Netherlands], The Hague, Oude West Indische Compagnie, Inv. No. 5768) and from the revised version of Eltis et al. (1999).

[6] For the Mbundu wars, see Birmingham (1966).

[7] For the details of this campaign, see the letter from Apostolic Collector to Cardinal Pavilicino (Brásio 1952–1988:15:517).

[8] For the Battle of Mbwila, see Thornton (1985:74–76, 1999:xi, 121–122).

some of the armies and purchased captives after the fighting ended. In addition, the *pombeiros* bought enslaved people at the *ferias*, or slave markets, that were established in Ndongo and Kongo and at their eastern frontiers. During times of peace, in the areas of Kongo and Ndongo that were nearest the coast, African agents traveled to these markets with imported items to purchase captives who might themselves have been victims of wars in the interior regions. Although these captives might have spoken Mbundu or Kongo, they were culturally different from those who were exported as a result of the Portuguese/Ndongo wars of the early seventeenth century or those exported as a result of the Kongo civil wars.

Among the African agents were Luso-Africans, the racially mixed offspring of the Portuguese and local residents. These men played a fundamental role in the building of the Atlantic slave trade in both Central and West Africa. Conceiving themselves as Portuguese, they rejected any identification with African peoples (Peter 2002).

Whether they were victims of Portuguese efforts to fulfill the *asiento* contract with Spain and to provision its own colony of Brazil, or if their captivity was the by-product of internecine wars, this first generation of New York Africans left behind societies central to their lives. As they unwillingly boarded ships for destinations unknown to them, they faced an uncertain future without the support of family and other cherished social institutions. Survival in this new environment would require cooperation with individuals in a similar situation and adaptation to (if not acceptance of) a new order that denied them the rights that free people took for granted.

Chapter 4

Slavery and Freedom in New Amsterdam

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

Given their exposure to Portuguese customs and their acquaintance with the larger Atlantic world,[1] many of the new arrivals from West Central Africa may have found the daily routines in the tiny settlement at New Amsterdam somewhat familiar. Yet transport to and enslavement in America had a profound impact on the population, both physically and culturally. As they performed their labor, African peoples responded to their situation by forming institutions that reflected the influences of an African heritage as well as American realities. Small numbers [2] doubtless hindered the development of a separate cultural identity, but by the end of the Dutch period, New Amsterdam's West Central Africans had established a community that served as a foundation for the varied African groups that would follow.

The Meaning of Slavery during the Dutch Period

Slavery in New Amsterdam developed without clearly defined laws. The African men and women who labored for the West India Company (Company) and for private individuals did so absent many of the proscriptions that slave codes in later years imposed. Hence, enslaved blacks enjoyed certain rights that included ownership of personal and real property as well as the opportunity to have grievances redressed in the courts and through petition. They offered testimony both in matters regarding other enslaved people and in those concerning free men, black and white. Enslaved Africans bore arms when the need to protect the settlement arose, could marry legally, and suffered no prohibitions against the acquisition of literacy (McManus 1966:16–18).[3]

Edgar McManus (1966:16–18) has pointed to these privileges as evidence of the mildness of slavery in New York, an indication of a "spirit of mutual accommodation between masters and slaves."[4] Extant records suggest a more complex picture. If Africans had equal standing in the courts, that fact did not preclude their being seen as distinct enough to warrant a racial designation in the records. White men and women were not identified in this manner. Moreover, black men and women were forced to endure the degradation of being offered for sale at public auction (as Figure 4 illustrates) and hired out to New Amsterdam's residents.[5] The decision of the Company in 1644 to accept the petition of the first group of Africans who had arrived in the settlement with half rather than complete freedom further attests to the inferior standing

[1] Ira Berlin has placed people of similar background in the category of "Atlantic creoles." For a discussion of their influence in the Americas, see Berlin (1996:251–288, 1998).

[2] Robert Swan (1998a:63, 67) has estimated that by the end of the first decade of importation, approximately 50 Africans inhabited New Amsterdam. In the next two decades, the numbers increased slowly, reaching an average annual growth rate of only 13 Africans per year. Yet compared to the overall adult population in the settlement, slaveholding (if not ownership) was widespread, and slavery was firmly rooted in the economy and the society.

[3] In 1635, five African men petitioned the Company for wages owed to them. Although extant records fail to indicate the legal status of these men, there is no evidence to suggest that their petition was seen by the Company as unusual (Stokes 1967:4:82).

[4] McManus sees the willingness on the part of the Dutch to arm Africans during the Indian Wars of 1641–1644 and a relative leniency in punishment for crimes and misbehavior as additional indicators of a different kind of slavery from that which developed under the British in later years.

[5] See "Myndert Lourisen, pltf. [plaintiff] v/s Nicolaes Boot, deft [defendant]" in Fernow (1897:4:354).

Figure 4. Auction of an enslaved man during the Dutch Period (*Harper's Monthly Magazine,* 1895).

of Africans in the society. There can be no mistaking the meaning of a 1638 ordinance that sought to control the behavior of New Amsterdam's free residents by ordering that "each and every one must refrain from Fighting, Adulterous intercourse with Heathens, Blacks, or other Persons, Mutiny, Theft, False Swearing, Calumny and other Immoralities" (O'Callaghan 1868:12). Finally, an ordinance of 1642, intended to deter fighting, stipulated that anyone convicted of drawing a knife would be fined 50 florins and, upon defaulting on this, be required "to work three months with the Negroes in chains" (O'Callaghan 1868:33; see also Higginbotham 1978:110).

Neither did a lack of codification of slavery preclude punishment or sale for some misdeed or for otherwise giving dissatisfaction. In this regard, Peter Stuyvesant and the councilors of New Netherland ordered that a black woman and man—"Negress" Palasse and an unidentified African—be traded "for the maximum profit of the Company" for theft and laziness, respectively (Gehring 1995:267). Lysbeth Anthonissen, "a negro wench" belonging to tavern owner and onetime orphan master Martin Creiger, ran afoul of New Amsterdam authorities with similar results. On February 5, 1664, authorities charged her with burning down her owner's tavern at No. 3 Broadway. Four days later, following confession to the crime and after having received a death sentence, she was taken to the place of public execution. A last-minute pardon saved her from the flames of the stake, but her owner, deciding to rid himself of his troublesome property, offered her for sale at public auction (O'Callaghan 1865–1866:2:258–259).

One of the most serious crimes with which an enslaved person could be charged was murder, but the value of laborers sometimes intervened to temper the punishment. When an enslaved African was murdered by his comrades in 1641, the eight men implicated all confessed to having participated in the crime. Reluctant to lose the labor of all eight men, the authorities required that one of them be chosen by lot to hang. Misfortune fell on Manuel Gerrit de Reus, but when the attempt was made to execute him, the rope broke. The crowd in attendance called for mercy, which led the authorities to pardon the man "subject to future good behavior and willing service" (O'Callaghan 1865–1866:74).[6]

The Employment of Enslaved Labor in New Amsterdam

The 1652 incident involving the Dutch privateer *De Raaf* further illustrates the significance of black labor to New Amsterdam. The vessel brought 44 captives to the town after having acquired them from the captured Spanish ship *St. Anthoni*. Four years later, Jan Gaillardo[7] presented a claim to Dutch authorities for the return of his property. All but 7 of the 44 could be accounted for, even though many of them had changed ownership following their initial sale. A few of the 22 men, 10 women, and 5 children were in the Company's possession, but the rest were privately held by a diverse group of men and women who carried on business in the town. The value placed on such workers in labor-starved New Amsterdam practically

[6] These men received half-free status 2 years later (see discussion below).

[7] Gaillardo's name is referred to variously in historical records as Joan Guillardo Ferrara and Juan Gaillardo.

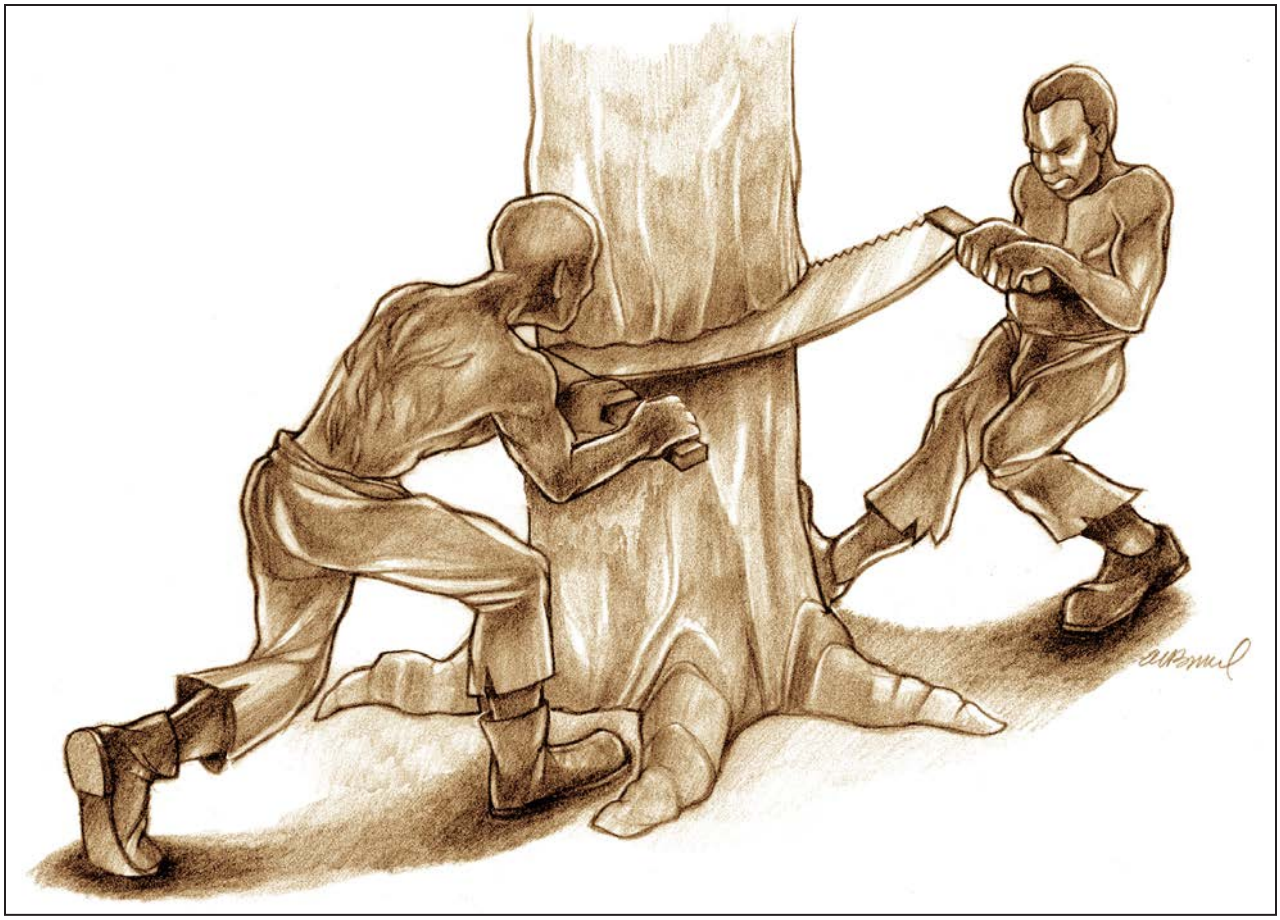

Figure 5. African men were utilized in a variety of labor practices, including felling trees (illustration by Michael Colbert, 2004).

guaranteed that Gaillardo's claims to ownership would go unrecognized (Brodhead 1853–1887:2:23–47).

The Africans who were brought to New Amsterdam had been accustomed to working in a variety of capacities: clearing land in the forests, building and repairing houses, and providing porterage for the transport of salt and iron (ubiquitous at many of the regional markets) or other commodities in production centers. Some of them may have also engaged in a variety of artisan or craft work, including cloth weaving. In New Amsterdam, African men engaged in similarly varied occupations. According to their overseer Jacob Stoffelsen, they participated "in building Fort Amsterdam, which was completed in 1635 . . . in cutting building timber and firewood for the Large House as well as the guardhouse, splitting palisades, clearing land, burning lime and helping to bring in the company's grain in harvest time, together with many other labors" (Brodhead 1853–1887:14:18) (Figure 5). The Africans also provided military service, as Native American attacks posed a constant threat to the settlement. During the period of Dutch rule, Africans were used to construct a wagon road between New Amsterdam and the Haarlem community and labored to erect defenses in preparation for the British invasion of the colony in 1664 (Goodfriend 1978:130–131). The multifaceted use of these laborers is evidenced in director Peter Stuyvesant's 1660 correspondence with the vice-director of the Company at Curaçao:

> The negroes, whom the Lords-Directors ordered to send hither, must be clever and strong men so that they can immediately be put to work here at the Fort or at other places, also if they are fit for it, in the war against the wild barbarians either to pursue them, when they run away or else to carry the soldiers' baggage . . . An important service would be done to the Company, to us and to the country, if among the expected negroes some experienced men, who have been some time in Curaçao, were sent to us [Brodhead 1853–1887:13:142–143].

Africans were expected, as well, to perform the most distasteful tasks associated with town living. In 1664,

the presence of dead hogs littering the street prompted a town official to inquire about their disposal. When one considers the Africans' role in the labor force, it is hardly surprising that the city court instructed him to "send the City's Negroes to collect and bury the same" (Fernow 1897:5:45).

Early directives issued by the Council of New Netherland also alluded to the desire to have Africans supply the labor for cultivation of the soil, as the production of grains and other foodstuffs during the seventeenth century proved essential to the colony's survival (Swan 1998a:35). Indeed, the Company routinely leased to private individuals some of its enslaved laborers for this purpose. At times, it included use of enslaved workers with the rental of bowery lands. In 1638, for instance, Company director Wouten Van Twiller leased one of these farms, along with a half-dozen men, for the purpose of growing tobacco.

The arduous labor that characterized early seventeenth-century agriculture ensured the use of enslaved people. Before crops could be planted, the land had to be cleared of trees and underbrush. This was accomplished by the use of brute strength and teamwork or by borrowing the methods of the indigenous population, which involved felling the trees by girdling them. Farmers prepared the resulting fields for planting by using farm tools that were woefully inadequate for the task. Most made use of the hoe; plows remained scarce for much of the century. Farming implements generally were made of wood, a material that proved to be less durable than New Amsterdam's soil demanded (Hawke 1988:36). Inadequate tools slowed the rate of cultivation and doubtless increased the biomechanical stress suffered by laborers engaged in repetitive, arduous work.

Such strenuous labor likely was performed by all-male gangs,[8] but as the principal agricultural laborers in West Central Africa (to the extent that they planted and tended the crops), enslaved women would have been intimately familiar with farming routines. Women and girls who lived in the Kongo region hoed the fields as adolescents and young wives (Figure 6). They planted and harvested a variety of crops, including corn and vegetables, from which they made *nfundi* (boiled cornmeal from dried corn that was the staple of the Kongolese diet) and *wandu* (a vegetable dish that was most likely made from pigeon peas). The earliest references to women's work in New Amsterdam, however, suggest that women labored as domestics, performing all manner of household chores and taking care of the owner's children. Even in the earliest years of their presence in the town, however, African women pursued interests that conflicted with the desires of those who owned them. In 1628, Domine Jonas Michaëlius, New Amsterdam's first minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and recently widowed, lamented the dearth of good female servants to take care of his household and two young daughters. The Angola women, he alleged, were "thievish, lazy, and useless trash" (Michaëlius 1881:383).

Enslaved Africans would have worked in the various industries set up by the Dutch in New Amsterdam as well. For instance, Michaëlius (1881:385) had reported on brick making in the settlement, albeit of "very poor" quality. The residents had also constructed a gristmill, windmill, and sawmill during the first decade of settlement (Innes 1902; see also Jameson 1909:129). A 1628 "Freedoms and Exemptions" measure attempted to exclude Africans from the trades. But by the late 1650s, Company directors, pressed to solve the problem of securing skilled workers, suggested that the Africans might be taught certain skills useful to the colony's success, including "carpentering, brick-laying, blacksmithing . . . [as] this race . . . has sufficient fitness for it" (Brodhead 1853–1887:14:387). Stuyvesant and the council apparently thought otherwise. They reported back that there were no Africans at New Amsterdam "fit to learn a trade" (Brodhead 1853–1887:14:399). Laws and individual assessments to the contrary, however, Africans were used in whatever ways the colonists felt they could be most useful. By the time the Dutch lost control of the colony, enslaved Africans were held by a variety of persons with diverse occupational skills. It is likely that some of these slaveholders kept their laborers busy at more than unskilled work.

Social and Cultural Foundations of New Amsterdam's African Population

As African labor proved increasingly important to the colony, the number of enslaved people increased. During the period from 1644 to 1664, the population of persons of African descent residing in New Amsterdam more than tripled, increasing from 120

[8] Swan (1998a:52) has suggested that women may not have been exempted from agricultural labor.

Figure 6. Kongo woman at agricultural labor (courtesy of University of Arizona Special Collections, from *Relation historique de l'Ethiopie occidentale; contenant la description des royaumes de Congo, Angolle et Matamba,* by Giovanni Cavazzi, 1732).

to 375. Approximately 70 percent of them possessed the surname "Angola," suggesting ethnic ties generally to the West Central Africa region (Swan 1998b: 27–28).

West Central Africans came from societies with varied and complex social structures. At the top of the social hierarchy stood those of noble birth (the kings and ruling groups). These groups generally lived in the capital cities, some of which resembled contemporary cities in Portugal in function and size. A mid-sixteenth-century observer commenting on one of these capitals suggested that

> they have a lot of order for people of Guinea . . . the principal city is as big as Évora [in Portugal] or a little less, and they have others of good size . . . circled after their manner, by palisades of wood strung together with cords and the wattle and daub houses [*argamassa*] covered with very nice and clean straw mats [Pombo 1944:9–10].

In describing the Kongo capital at São Salvador in the mid-1660s, Olfert Dapper noted that it contained approximately 40,000 people. The king's palace was "surrounded with walls, in such manner that between it and the town remained a great plain in the middle whereof they have erected a beautiful church" (Ogilby 1670:525). Next to the king's palace were "noble men's houses and others fill up the top of the mountain: for

every grandee settles his dwelling as near the court as he may be permitted, and with his retinue takes up as much ground as an ordinary town may be built on" (Ogilby 1670:525). The houses of the Africans, although constructed of thatched materials—in contrast to the clay homes erected by the Portuguese, who settled in a separate part of the city—were described as follows by Dapper: "the common houses stand in good order, and appear very uniform; most of them large, well contrived and fenced" (Ogilby 1670:525).[9]

The non-noble freeborn and dependent groups constituted the bulk of the population in Central Africa and hence provided the majority of captives for the Americas. In Kongo, this group was divided into two social classes: the *mavata* (free villagers) and the *avika* (slaves), whereas in Ndongo, there were three social groupings: the *ana murinda* (free villagers), *ijiko* (state-owned slaves), and *abika* (privately owned slaves).[10] Although captives coming from the polities farther east of the Kwango River originated from societies where similar divisions existed, written accounts of their social divisions before the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are almost nonexistent. In the Umbundu area, the several kingdoms that had emerged by the 1700s also contained complex social divisions that separated people into ruling lineages, free persons, and the enslaved.

The majority of enslaved Central Africans came from regions where agriculture was the major economic activity; hence, most cultural practices, belief systems, and rituals were connected to seasonal patterns. Seventeenth-century observers noted that in Angola, where the Mbundu people lived, the year began in September at the start of the rains rather than in January (Cavazzi 1687:1:48). The agricultural season thus spanned from October to January, when the people planted vegetables, maize, millet, and other crops. In some regions, the people also planted American and European crops, including tobacco, radishes, and onions that some Kongolese had naturalized. The lives of Central Africans who lived in capital towns such as São Salvador and those who lived in the Portuguese city of Luanda were governed by the rhythms of the commercial and administrative activities that typified life in those areas.

Central Africans had a range of social networks as well. The army was the largest such organizer in Kongo. Thus, Kongo men who participated in Kongo's military campaigns (and women who always accompanied the men to war) likely danced the *nsanga* (a war dance) as part of the rituals associated with warfare. Kongolese Christians would have participated in church organizations such as the lay brotherhood (e.g., Our Lady of the Rosary) and would have been familiar with the names and significance of saints (which they connected with their own local spirits, *nkitas* or *simbis*). Indeed, they would carry both a saint's and a Kongolese name and would have participated in public rituals connected with St. James Day (celebrated on July 25 to commemorate Kongo King Afonso's victory over his brother and the ensuing establishment of Christianity in the kingdom). Furthermore, Kongolese would have been familiar with the public performances and rituals that were associated with the feast of All Souls and All Souls Eve. These holy Catholic festivals were associated with the ancestors, and the people kept all-night vigil at their ancestors' graves, where they placed candles and said the rosary (Thornton 1998b:31–32).

Kongo society also retained other institutions that were unique to it. The Kimpasi, for instance, were secret associations formed locally and run by initiates. The enclosures that the initiates established could contain a Christian cross or *nkisis* (statues in human form that had the power to "see" wrongdoers, witches, jealousy, greed, and cruelty). Kimpasi altars also contained claws, horns, nails, and other parts of animals that the Kongolese believed were invested with power (Hilton 1985:26–27; Thornton 1998b:56–58).[11]

We may never know the extent to which these beliefs and practices transferred to and were reshaped in the New Amsterdam environment. It is reasonable to assume, however, that West Central Africans (like all people) held to their traditions to the degree that their bondage and circumstances permitted. Removal from their homelands and enslavement in New Amsterdam would have challenged their ability to define themselves on their own cultural terms but would not have erased influences long embedded in their collective consciousness.

[9] For the original, see Dapper (1676).

[10] For the social groups in Kongo and Ndongo, see Thornton (1985).

[11] The purpose of the Kimpasi was to facilitate communal healing and the ending of conflict.

Forging Familial and Communal Bonds

In addition to influences stemming from their African origins, Africans in New Amsterdam experienced the impact of living among various other groups found in the already ethnically and culturally diverse society, including Dutch, French, German, Belgian, and English populations. Jesuit missionary Father Issac Jogues visited New Amsterdam in 1643 and found in the settlement "men of eighteen different languages" and noted that "besides the Calvinists there are in the colony Catholics, English, Puritans, Lutherans, [and] Anabaptists" (Stokes 1967:4:97).

In this environment, the Africans attempted to forge a common identity based on shared experiences and concerns. The first generations married, reared children, and sought to establish a community that could provide material and emotional support to its members. The social unit that served as the primary foundation for this cohesion was the family. Joyce Goodfriend (1984) has shown that through naming practices, Africans in New Amsterdam reinforced ties between their children and family members, past and present. Baptized children often carried the names of older men and women in the community, and certain European given names—Jan, Domingo, Pieter, Francisco, for instance—were used repeatedly (Goodfriend 1984:102–103). New Amsterdam Africans enjoyed extended family networks and formed bonds with non-kin that expanded the pool of "relatives" even more. And although they answered to European given names (acquired either before arrival in New Amsterdam or shortly thereafter), they often maintained African surnames, even in freedom (Goodfriend 1984:100–101).

Economic factors, demographic realities, and the caprice of owners—deciding to hire out or sell, forcing separations as a consequence of bequests, and individual slaveholding patterns—challenged the ability of enslaved people to enjoy familial connections (Goodfriend 1984:98). Yet a degree of stability developed in the community of African peoples. They stood as witnesses at each other's marriages and as godparents when children born to such unions were baptized (Goodfriend 1984:100).[12] In addition, the community's small size encouraged the reabsorption of orphans, widows, and widowers through marriage and adoption (Goodfriend 1984:100). Hence, when Catalina Van Angola died, her widower, Anthony Van Angola, married Lucie, the widow of Laurens d'Angola. Their marriage on May 5, 1641, held the distinction of being among the first of several marriages between African peoples to be recorded in New Amsterdam's Dutch Reformed Church (Goodfriend 1984:100).[13] When the Angolas' son, Anthony, was christened in August 1643, Dorothy Angola, widow of Paulo D'Angola, stood as godmother. Dorothy and her second husband, Emanuel Peterson, adopted the child when he became orphaned as an infant. In 1661, their petition was instrumental in the young man's receiving a certificate of freedom on his eighteenth birthday (Dickenson 1985a:102).

Structuring a New Cosmology

A shared sacred belief system further connected New Amsterdam's black population. The religious experiences of seventeenth-century Central Africans varied from traditional African practices to those shaped by European influences. As we have seen, many had been exposed to Portuguese religious practices beginning in the late fifteenth century and, as a consequence, had embraced Catholicism. In places such as São Salvador, "divers Jesuits, Mulattos and Black priests" instructed the locals and performed sacred duties (Ogilby 1670:524). By the 1640s, the city supported nearly a dozen churches as well as schools "where youths are brought up and taught the Latin and Portuguese tongues." Although none of the other cities had such a Europeanized appearance as São Salvador, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, significant numbers of Central Africans lived in communities where Christianity; European languages, dress, foodways; and other cultural practices interacted in various ways to create what might be called an Atlantic Creole culture.

By the late seventeenth century, Christianity had become the main indicator of social status in Kongo. Kongo rulers were in constant contact with the papacy, welcomed missionaries, and ensured that the people were baptized and adopted Christian names. They erected churches in central places or built crosses

[12] Goodfriend has estimated that more than 100 children were born to African parents during the Dutch period.

[13] Goodfriend has indicated that between 1639 and 1664, the marriages of 26 couples were recorded in the Dutch Reformed Church.

in villages far removed from the capital, where they welcomed visiting priests and took their babies (and went themselves) for baptism and other sacraments (Saccardo 1982–1983).

Farther south in the Ndongo and Matamba regions, the divisions between Christian and non-Christian were more pronounced, and individual rulers who had come under Portuguese authority were required to undergo baptism and to allow missionaries to baptize the population. In these areas, as in Kongo, people who were baptized carried Iberian and Christian names, dressed in a mixture of European and African clothing, and often spoke Portuguese along with Kimbundu or Kikongo. In addition, the large numbers of West Central Africans who lived in Portuguese-controlled areas such as Luanda, Massangano, Benguela, and elsewhere maintained close contact with Portuguese culture. This was especially so for servants and those enslaved in the homes and businesses, missionary colleges, and government agencies in Luanda and in the forts that the Portuguese had built in the interior.

European secular and religious authorities who traveled to Kongo and Angola during the seventeenth century noted the Catholic practices of the Kongolese and those of Mbundus who had converted to Christianity. A Protestant Dutch trader, Ferdinand van Capelle, indicated that Kongo was "full of wooden crosses, before which people bowed devoutly on their knees. Every noble has his own church at his village with a wooden cross." Rosaries were ubiquitous and people said them, but "without knowing or understanding a word of Portuguese" (Nationaal Archief [National Archive of the Netherlands] The Hague, Oude West Indische Compagnie, Ferdinand van Capelle, "Corte beschrijvinge van de principaelste plaetsen gelegen in Angola te weten Commo, Goby, Maiomba, Loango, Cacongo, Molemboe, Zarry, Sonho, Congo, en aderen omleggende plaetsen," March 1642, No. 46, fol. 5). Catholicism spread as Central African rulers opened their lands to Jesuit, Capuchin, and other missionaries from Italy, Spain, and Portugal. When Antonio da Gaeta visited Matamba in the 1650s at the invitation of Queen Njinga (who had been baptized in Luanda in 1622 and had recently returned to the church), he was able to baptize the principal lords along with 8,000 people because "everyone follows their lords." The baptized also included 1,000 babies born subsequent to his last visit to Matamba. Gaeta noted that although he baptized them, he "doubted their knowledge of faith" (Gaeta 1669:243–246).

Indeed, by the seventeenth century, the Kingdom of Kongo had developed its own patterns of worship and rituals after more than a century and a half of being exposed to Roman Catholicism by the Portuguese. Kongo's form of Christianity had always disturbed missionaries new to the Kingdom, who, in frustration, complained to authorities in Rome that the Kongolese were not true Catholics. A report from the missionary Manuel Bautista Soares in 1619 condemned polygamy and marriages between close relatives, practices favored primarily by the Kongolese nobility. Although the bishop considered these practices outside the limits of consanguinity, they continued to live comfortably with such traditions (Brásio 1952–1988:6: 376). The Kongolese were clearly in charge of spreading their own version of Catholic Christianity in the kingdom, as there was seldom a sufficient number of foreign missionaries, especially in the eighteenth century (Thornton 2002:71–90).

Even among Kongolese Christians, African religious rituals were evident everywhere. Writing in 1659, Bonaventura de Allesano, a Capuchin missionary, complained that there were men and women who met "in special places, decorated with statues of idols where they invoke the devil and where they do sexual mixing without regard to parentage" (Brásio 1952–1988:10:395–397). He also noted "a similar sect of virgins, lodged secretly by notables in hidden places," and that "magicians, enchanters and witches, real or imagined" were fooling people (Brásio 1952–1988:10:395–397). Similarly, Christian Oldendorp noted the contrast between Kongolese who came from the coastal areas and those originating from the interior of the kingdom. Oldendorp (2000–2002:1:445–448) observed that the latter had "a religion that combines heathen superstition and Christian ritual."

Among the Central Africans transported to New Amsterdam—and ultimately interred in the burial ground—were those who retained their own indigenous rituals. Most of them believed in a great God, whom they called Nzambi a Mpungu, and they had icons, which they kept either in houses or in special places constructed in the village. The faithful consulted these icons at times of great insecurity, such as those brought on by war, drought, sickness, and death.[14] The Mondongo that Oldendorp interviewed indicated that in their country, small and large images that people

[14] For a description of these practices as related to Oldendorp by enslaved Central Africans, see Oldendorp (2000–2002:1:437–439; see also Thornton 2002:71–91).

dressed were kept in their houses; these were attended by priests, through whom they spoke. While possessed, the priests provided information concerning wars, drought, health, fertility, and rain to supplicants who paid them for their services (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:438–439; see also Oldendorp 1777).

When they arrived in New Amsterdam, these Central Africans—be they practicing Catholics of sorts or traditional African worshippers—encountered a religious faith that was, if not foreign, then certainly somewhat different from that to which they had been exposed. Although the Angola family and others embraced the faith, some showed reluctance to accept the Calvinist theology of the Dutch Reformed Church. Michaëlius (1881:380) complained that he had "as yet been able to discover hardly a single good point [regarding Native American spirituality], except that they do not speak so jeeringly and so scoffingly of the godlike and glorious majesty of their Creator, as the Africans dare do."

West Central Africans who practiced Catholicism soon discovered that their faith did not bring the benefits they expected. In 1661, a church official instructed that in baptizing Africans, Native Americans, and their children,

> it is necessary that you observe the good rule of the church here in this land, where no one, who is an adult, is admitted to baptism without previous confession of his faith. Accordingly the adult Negroes and Indians must also be previously instructed and make confession of their faith before Holy Baptism may be administered to them. As to their children, the Classis answers, that as long as the parents are actually heathen, although they were baptized in the gross, (by the wholesale, by the Papists), the children may not be baptized, unless the parents pass over to Christianity and abandon heathenism [New York State 1901:508].

Despite such obstacles, however, some of the Africans joined the Dutch Reformed Church or sought early on to have their children baptized in the faith. Church officials surmised that they did so because they believed (mistakenly) that freedom could be secured through acceptance of Christianity (Swan 1998a:60–61).

A Place of Their Own

The sense of community that developed out of common experiences and shared cultural practices was strengthened by the existence of a defined space that New Amsterdam's Africans could claim as their own. On July 13, 1643, Governor Willem Kieft granted a groundbrief of approximately 12 acres to Domingo Antony. The land stretched "from ye Waggon way about W. and by N. to ye ffresh Water or Swamp neare to ye land of Thomas Sanders" (Stokes 1967: 4:73), property known as Smith's Hill farm. On the same day, Kieft granted a parcel of 8 acres to Jochim Antony's (or Antonio's) widow, Catalina (or Katalina). Her land lay "N. of ye Waggon way Stretching amongst ye said Waggon path upon a S.W. lyne till it comes to Domingo Antonioes Land" (Stokes 1967:4:74). By the end of the year, Manuel Trompeter and Marycke, the widow of Lawrence Angola and eventual wife of Domingo Angola, were granted 18 and 6 acres, respectively (Dickenson 1985b:169). There is indication that three other enslaved men—Emanuel Pietersen, Anthony Portugees, and Manuel Gerrit de Reus (the same who had escaped death when the hangman's rope broke)—may have had possession of plots of land at this time as well (Swan 1998b:35).

As early as 1641, African laborers occupied lands that lay north of Smith's Hill farm, which formerly had been in the possession of Wouten Van Twiller, director of New Amsterdam. These lands were conveyed in 1644 or thereafter and were confirmed after the British gained possession of the colony in 1664. In this manner, more than a dozen Africans passed into the landowning class, including Simon Congo (45 acres, date unknown), Pieter Santome (6 acres in 1644), Gratia D'angola (10 acres in 1644), and Cleyn Antonio (6 acres 1644, confirmed in 1667) (Stokes 1967:4:75, 76, 81, 123). East of the Bowery Road and north of Domingo Anthony's property lay the lands of Francisco, Bastiaen, and Antony Congo. The lots were granted by Governor Willem Kieft in 1647 and lay along the public wagon road. Congo and Bastiaen's grants lapsed and were later regranted by Peter Stuyvesant. Francisco's property subsequently became the Van Cortlandt farm (Stokes 1967:4:87).

It is significant that the lands the Africans gained control over in the 1640s were either adjacent to or not far removed (northwest and northeast) from the tract that later would become identified with the Negroes' Burying Ground. Although the property sometimes abutted white-owned farms, the grants given to blacks served primarily as a buffer intended to forestall Native American reprisals against the Dutch. If the African Burial Ground came into existence during this period, the remoteness of the area would have

benefited the Africans in that it provided a shield from the watchful eyes of whites and satisfied the preference of traditionalists among them to bury their dead in *mfinda*, or wild (undeveloped), places.

Burial Rites

Unfortunately, extant records do not permit us to glimpse the mortuary practices followed by the first generations, but they likely embraced those that had been familiar to Central Africans. Those customs ranged from rites associated with Catholic Christianity to those shaped by traditional worship. Among the Kongolese, Christian rites tended to be more pronounced in burial practices than in any other rituals. Kongolese Christians preferred to bury their dead in cemeteries at the churches, which they considered hallowed ground. Those who came from more distant parts of the kingdom and the interior, or ordinary villagers, would have followed practices that included more traditional elements. Culturally biased European observers had great difficulty understanding or appreciating traditional African burial rites. In 1705, for instance, Father Lorenzo da Lucca described in detail the burials that he witnessed in Soyo, one of the most Christian areas of Kongo. In the case of the death of a child, he wrote, all the kinsmen were informed, and they arrived crying. The family encircled the deceased, and the lamentations lasted several days. If the husband died, "the wife goes to the crossroads where a close relative of the husband shaves her hair. Afterwards she jumps and sings and makes other motions as if she were insane" (Cuvelier 1953:138). Da Lucca continued:

> Then she returns to her house and calls a grandnephew with whom she undertakes a new ceremony: she lies on the floor and makes the grand nephew jump over her from one side to the other three times [Cuvelier 1953:138].

As this example suggests, certain traditional funeral practices persisted, even as Catholic Christianity penetrated the Central African region. Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi observed in the 1660s the practice in the Ndongo and Matamba regions of burying the dead far away from the towns and cities (*libatas*). In reference to the ceremony itself, Cavazzi [1687][15] wrote:

> the idolaters of Matamba ordinarily bury the dead in the woods with diverse and superstitious ceremonies. Some dig the hole in such a way that they can put the body on its side so that the face is turned upward towards the main wall. They deem in this way that since the soul has not yet been completely separated from the body, it will spend some time before being able to leave to fresh air. . . others place the body on its knees, inclined backwards. There are some who interr the body richly dressed and adorned . . . . Others are interred completely nude . . .[as was done] in the province of Libolo . . . they consider all the objects of the dead person, they not only keep the worn out and dirty clothes, but if it is in turn covered with leaves, the natives open to the grave in order to dress and preserve it.

Of noble burials, Cavazzi (1687:1:84) observed, "the grave (*imbila*) is a deep pit of at least [the depth] of a man's height where they put the dead person, not on his back but lying on the face and body to the right or left so that his spirit will not come out." Once he is placed in the pit, Cavazzi (1687:1:84) continued, "all throw earth on him, beginning with the priest and when it is full they raise up stones in a pyramidal form." In some regions, he indicated, the people built aboveground tombs that sometimes measured several meters in height and were decorated with intricate designs. Funerals often lasted as long as 8 days. Mourners supplied food and drink at the interment and sang songs in honor of the deceased (Cavazzi 1687:1:136). A 1920s ethnographic account for the eastern area confirmed the longevity of these customs. Amandus Johnson saw graves being dug and noted that they were 7–8 feet deep, with a round or rectangular mound above ground, and noted that someone had to carry the corpse down into the grave (University Museum, Philadelphia, Amandus Johnson Papers, "Religion, Customs and Manners of the Bimbero, Massongo, and Others," 1922, Folders 3/8).

Freedom by Degrees

Landownership coincided with the manumission act of 1644 that conferred conditional freedom on a group of men (presumably the original 11 acquired in the 1620s) who had labored for the Company for nearly two decades. The decree came after the men, citing the hardship of feeding their children, petitioned for

[15] Cavazzi left the chapter number blank when writing this. It likely refers to the Araldi Manuscript in Volume 2:219–220, where Njinga's funeral is discussed.

release from the Company's service. Although it put them and their wives at liberty as a reward for their many years of service and granted them land for cultivation, the measure required that the men "shall be bound to pay for the freedom they receive, each man for himself annually . . . thirty skepels of Maize or Wheat, Pease or Beans, and one Fat hog, valued at twenty guilders" (O'Callaghan 1868:36). Moreover, it obligated them to render aid to the Company "by water or on land, where their services are required, on receiving fair wages" (O'Callaghan 1868:36). Failure to meet these requirements would result in "a return back into the said Company's slavery" (O'Callaghan 1868:36–37). Even more disturbing, their children, "at present born or yet to be born," remained enslaved (O'Callaghan 1868:37).[16]

As many have recognized, this granting of "half-freedom" occurred at a time of crisis for the colony. War with Native Americans and the need for production of foodstuffs to feed the colony (as well as its laborers) convinced the Company to set up a buffer zone between the European settlers and Native Americans and to seek a solution to the food shortage (Swan 1998b:34–35).[17] African homesteads would serve as a defensive perimeter, and African men would be enlisted to repel Indian incursions. Whatever the motives of the Dutch officials, African peoples took this opportunity to strengthen their sense of community and to carve out an existence for themselves that circumvented the marginal status that had been thrust upon them.[18]

[16] In 1649, the Remonstrance of New Netherland, a petition to the Dutch government to seize control of the colony from Peter Stuyvesant, complained, among other things, that "there are yet sundry other Negroes in this country, some of whom have been manumitted on account of their long service; but their children continue slaves, contrary to all public law, that anyone born of a free Christian mother should, notwithstanding, be a slave, and obliged so to remain." In answering this complaint, the Company indicated that only three of the children were "in service." One resided on the Stuyvesant bowery, one was at "the Hope," and the third labored for a man who had raised her (Brodhead 1853–1887:1:302, 343).

[17] Swan (1998a) has also suggested that the granting of plots of land to the African laborers was a conscious effort to segregate them from the rest of the population. He contends that Director Kieft likely would have taken this time to create a separate burial ground near this community of black people.

[18] The stipulations governing the emancipation of three women in 1662 sheds further light on Dutch attitudes and practices concerning the granting of freedom to African laborers. In that year, the women petitioned Governor Stuyvesant and the council for release from bondage and were granted freedom on the condition that one of them would perform his housework on a weekly basis (O'Callaghan 1865–1866:2:242).

Chapter 5

Change and Adjustment

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, and Selwyn H. H. Carrington

Introduction

In 1664, when the English seized the colony of New Netherland and renamed it and its most populous town "New York," approximately 700 African and African-descended people lived there. Just over half lived and labored in what formerly was New Amsterdam. Within a few decades, however, a steady importation of enslaved laborers significantly increased these numbers. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the black population colony-wide had risen to 2,000 within an overall population of perhaps 18,000 inhabitants. Approximately 700 blacks, representing a diversity of origins and a new demographic pattern, lived in the city of New York (Lydon 1978:375–394).

In the second half of the seventeenth century, New York Africans experienced other significant changes as well. English rule brought with it greater emphasis on order and control; hence, enslaved laborers and their free counterparts saw numerous proscriptions placed on their lives. Their response reflected a steadfast resolve to counter any challenge to their humanity.

Toward Greater Diversity

Once the English began supplying the African labor force to New York, it drew on its own patterns of slave trading. Although England had begun, as had the Dutch, with privateering ventures, by the 1640s, it became involved in the direct trade with Africa. Barbados merchants were the first among the English to visit Africa for direct trade in captives, and, like the Dutch, they began in the Allada to Calabar corridor in West Africa. New England merchants with Barbadian connections followed suit, and by 1645, they ventured to Senegal and Sierra Leone to obtain people as well (Gragg 1995:65–84).[1] Eventually, the trade to New York included people from all the areas of Africa to which English ships sailed. By 1700, the New York African population consisted of people with diverse origins, including those brought in via the British West Indies or non-British ports in the Caribbean, a few from the direct trade with Africa, a small number from the sister colonies on the British North American mainland, and, of course, native-born New Yorkers.

Before the end of the seventeenth century, New York witnessed the importation of several hundred people from the island of Madagascar as well. The Malagasy had arrived in the 1680s and 1690s via an illegal trade between New York merchants and East African pirates.[2] Prominent merchants in the city presumably had hired the ship *Fortune* to make annual visits to Madagascar for the purpose of acquiring human cargoes. Members of the Philipse family, for instance—especially Frederick and Adolph—were avid participants in this illegal trade. The Philipses routinely furnished the pirates stationed at St. Mary's Bay (Madagascar) with gunpowder and rum in order to carry out their activities (Lydon 1978:376). Elizabeth Donnan (1969:6:440) has indicated that New Yorkers were attracted to the Madagascar trade because an enslaved person purchased in this manner could be acquired for 10 shillings' worth of English goods as compared with the 3–4-pound cost for Africans on the West Coast. Illegal trading in Madagascar per-

[1] Gragg's article's range is wider than the title ("'To Procure Negroes': The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627–1660") suggests.

[2] Virginia Platt (1969:548–577) has suggested that the Madagascar trade took place as early as the 1670s.

sisted sporadically until 1721 when the Privy Council brought the activity to a halt (Platt 1969:576).

Prior to the English Civil War (1642–1649), there had been two companies engaged in the African trade, but Oliver Cromwell's government removed the monopoly. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, however, Charles II chartered a new "exclusive African Company, at the Head of which was the Duke of York," and many other prominent Englishmen (British Library, London [BLL], Long Papers [LP], Additional Manuscript [AM] 38,416, fols. 301–304). When immediate success did not result, Charles constituted a new company in which he and the Duke of York, his brother, held shares (BLL, LP, AM 38,416, fols. 301–304). It is significant that New York's trade with Africa was carried out with the colony's proprietor (and England's future king) intimately involved.

Transition under British Rule

The Duke of York's position as shareholder in the Royal African Company presaged the status New York Africans would endure under English rule. In fact, by the mid-seventeenth century, slavery existed in law or custom throughout the Americas, in the Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Danish colonies as well as in the British West Indies. On the British North American mainland, African peoples were the recipients of disparate treatment long before Virginia passed a law in 1661 codifying slavery. When the English gained control of the Dutch colony in 1664, they drew on their own experiences in the Americas as well as those of other European nations.

Shortly after they arrived, the English codified slavery in the colony through the 1664 Articles of Capitulation, which acknowledged the legitimate claim of Dutch slaveholders to their human property. A year later, Duke's Laws stipulated that "No Christian shall be kept in Bondslavery, villenage or Captivity, Except Such who shall be Judged thereunto by Authority, or such as willingly have sould, or shall sell themselves" (Brodhead 1853–1887:1:86). This law sought to legalize what had already been accepted in custom: the limiting of slavery to non-Christians; in essence, to people of color (Brodhead 1853–1887:1:86). It was not intended that Christianized slaves should be freed.

For the rest of the century, the English sought to circumscribe the lives of free Africans and those who were enslaved. They forbade freedom of movement to the latter by making it illegal to leave one's owner's residence without permission, to congregate in groups of four or more on the streets or at the tea-water pump, or to be entertained in taverns, tippling houses, or any establishments where they could purchase liquor or other goods. An October 1681 proclamation issued by the mayor and alderman expressly forbade residents to "Harbour Intertain or Countenance any Indian or Neger Slaue Whatsoever in their Houses or Otherwise or to sell or Deliver to them any Wine Rumm or other strong Liquor, or receive or take from Such Indian or Neger slaues any mony or other Goods on account Whatsoever" (New York City Common Council 1905:1:86). A year later, another order was issued warning against Africans congregating together and engaging in sports and other activities without a pass (New York Municipal Archives [NYMA], Manuscript Records of the Court of Assizes, fols. 35–36). Apparently, such gatherings were especially troublesome on Sundays, when the owners of enslaved people were occupied with seeking absolution for their sins. The order alluded to

> many Greate Evills and Inconveniencys [committed by] Negros and Indian Slaves their frequent meetings and Gathering themselves together in Greate numbers on the Lords Day and att Other unseasonable times using And Exerciseing Severall Rude and Unlawful sports and pasetimes to the Dishonour of God Profanacon of his holy Day Breach and Disturbance of the Peace and Quiett of His Magesties Subjects many whereof are Likewise Drawed aside and Mislead to be spectators of such their Evill Practices and thereby Diverted from the more Suitable and Pious Duty And Service of the Day [New York City Common Council 1905:1:92].

These gatherings underscore the mobility enjoyed by African men (especially in a city accustomed to the practice of hiring out) as well as reflecting the determination of African peoples to fashion an existence separate and apart from their owners.

Free people suffered proscription of their lives as well. They incurred significant fines if found guilty of selling goods to enslaved people or entertaining them in their homes or places of business or otherwise supporting their unlawful activities (New York City Common Council 1905:1:86, 1:2, 1:132–141, 1:276–277). In 1670, for instance, Domingo and Manuel Angola received a warning from the court, which they were instructed to convey to the rest of the free African population:

> The free Negroes were from time to time entertaining sundry of the servants and Negroes belonging to the Burghers and inhabitants of this City to the great damage of the owners: thereupon they are strictly charged by the Court not to entertain from now henceforth any servants or helps whether Christians or Negroes on pain of forfeiting their freedom in case it were found, that they shall have harboured any servants or helps or others longer than 24 hours; which they were likewise ordered to communicate to other remaining free Negroes [Fernow 1897:6:286].

In addition to attempting to control the social behavior of enslaved people, the English sought to protect white men from black economic competition. In 1683, the Common Council enacted measures that prohibited men of African descent from driving a cart in the city (except brewers' drays) and, in 1686, from loading goods at the bridge, weigh house, or market house (New York City Common Council 1905:1:132–141, 1:180). A measure passed in 1691 forbade "Boys or Negros" from driving carts in the city without a license, presumably even if they were working under the direction of their owners (New York City Common Council 1905:1:219). Such laws were intended not only to protect licensed cart men and porters from competition but also to keep Africans from benefiting from lucrative employment that utilized unskilled labor.

Economic restrictions and social proscriptions weighed heavily on free Africans. Denied equal access to the marketplace, they had few avenues by which to provide for their families. Parents burdened by too many dependents and too meager an income sometimes chose to apprentice their children to local tradesmen and farmers. In this way, boys might receive adequate food and clothing, in addition to training at felt making, farming, barbering, brewing, block making, and coopering. Girls learned to spin, sew, knit, and pursue "any other manner of housewifery" (New York Historical Society [NYHS] 1886:578).

To avoid being identified as indolent, becoming a public charge, or facing corporal punishment for vagrancy, some black men (and Native Americans) entered into indentures as well. Perhaps this was the motivation of Bastian Congo who, in 1696, entered into such a work arrangement. Described as "A free Negro Man Aged twenty Seven Years or thereabouts," he apprenticed himself to the Kip family, owners of a Manhattan farm. The term of service was stipulated as 1 year at the rate of 30 shillings per month (NYHS 1886:570–571).

Despite such economic challenges, Africans pressed to gain some measure of independence. Those who enjoyed free status attempted to hold onto the lands they had been granted during Dutch rule. Generally, they had their groundbriefs confirmed by the incoming English governor, Richard Nicolls. Although some of this property fell into the hands of the silversmith, Garret Onckelbagg, who purchased many of the plots of land originally owned by the blacks who inhabited the northwestern stretch above the Fresh Water (Stokes 1967:4:75, 81), a thriving community of black farmers was still evident when, in 1679, Jasper Danckaerts observed it in his travels through the former Dutch colony. "We went from the city, following the Broadway, over the valley or the Fresh water," Danckaerts (1913:65) wrote, noting that

> upon both sides of this way were many habitations of negroes, mulattoes and whites; These negroes were formerly the proper slaves of the [West India] Company but in consequence of the frequent changes and conquests of the country, they have obtained their freedom and settled themselves down where they have thought proper, and thus on this road, where they have ground enough to live on with their families.

For the rest of the century and into the next, New York Africans would try to repeat the relative success of these earlier black inhabitants. Their efforts would be hindered by the more systematic exploitation imposed by the British as they sought to build the colony according to their own design.

Chapter 6

The Political History of West Africa in the Eighteenth Century

by Linda Heywood and John Thornton

Introduction

The black community of New York in 1679 had been enlarged by imports of enslaved laborers from West Africa. The *Wittepaert's* arrival from the "Bight of Benin" in 1655 likely represented the first cargo of West Africans purchased on the coast and brought directly to New Amsterdam. Although its log provided no information regarding a specific point of departure, the ship could have come from the Allada region or the area around New Calabar, where Dutch factors had been buying enslaved people. Or it may have sailed to both areas, beginning in Allada and ending at New Calabar or even Gabon.[1]

In the late 1650s, the stream of laborers from the direct trade of Allada and Calabar sometimes included West Central Africans purchased on the coast by the factor at Loango, as a few cargoes of people from that port arrived just before the English captured New Amsterdam. One of these shipments came on board the *Gideon* 2 weeks before English takeover and consisted of 291 people transported from Curaçao by way of "Guinea, Angola, and Cayenne" (Brodhead 1853–1887:2:430).[2] But from this point on, West Africans became the largest African group imported into New York.

The regions from which the West Africans originated consisted of five areas: the Senegambia, the Sierra Leone–Liberia region, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Niger Delta. Great political fragmentation plagued these areas throughout much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leaving certain polities vulnerable to attack and their people enslaved.

The Senegambian Region

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Senegambia was divided politically into a number of states (Figure 7).[3] Along the lower Senegal lay the remnants of the older Jolof empire of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Waalo and Jolof were situated on the river itself, and south along the coast lay the states of Kajoor and Bawol.[4] Along the middle and upper Senegal was the remnant of the once powerful empire of the "Great Fulo," which had dominated the Senegal in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

In the later seventeenth century, the empire of the Great Fulo had given way to loosely governed groups of states under rulers bearing the title "Satigi." Futa Tooro, the former core of the empire, formed a state of its own, but it was ravaged during much of this time by a civil war between rival kings, local powers, and the Moors of the southern Sahara desert. Less significant states included Bundu, an Islamic theocracy (Gomez 1992); Gajaaga (Bathily 1989); Gidimakha, Khasso (Cissoko 1986); and Bambuku (Archives Nationales de France, C6/9).[5] These states suffered frequent incur-

[1] See "Ordinance Imposing a Duty on Exported Slaves," in Donnan (1969:6:70). For conditions of Dutch trading in this area, see the Leiden Manuscript, fols. 10–12, in Jones (1995).

[2] Three hundred had sailed—160 men and 140 women—but 9 had died. Eighty-nine of the survivors were suspected of being over 36 years old and were judged "a very poor lot" (see also Donnan 1969:3:433; O'Callaghan 1867).

[3] For a good overview of the history of the region, see Barry (1998) and Curtin (1975). See also the overview by Boulègue and Suret-Canale (1985:503–530).

[4] On the earliest history, see Boulègue (1987), and for the Waalo state and, to some degree, its neighbors as well, see Barry (1972).

[5] For a division into three regional powers and many local "*farines*" (*faren*), which were semi-independent of the kings, see Boucard (1974:254–260).

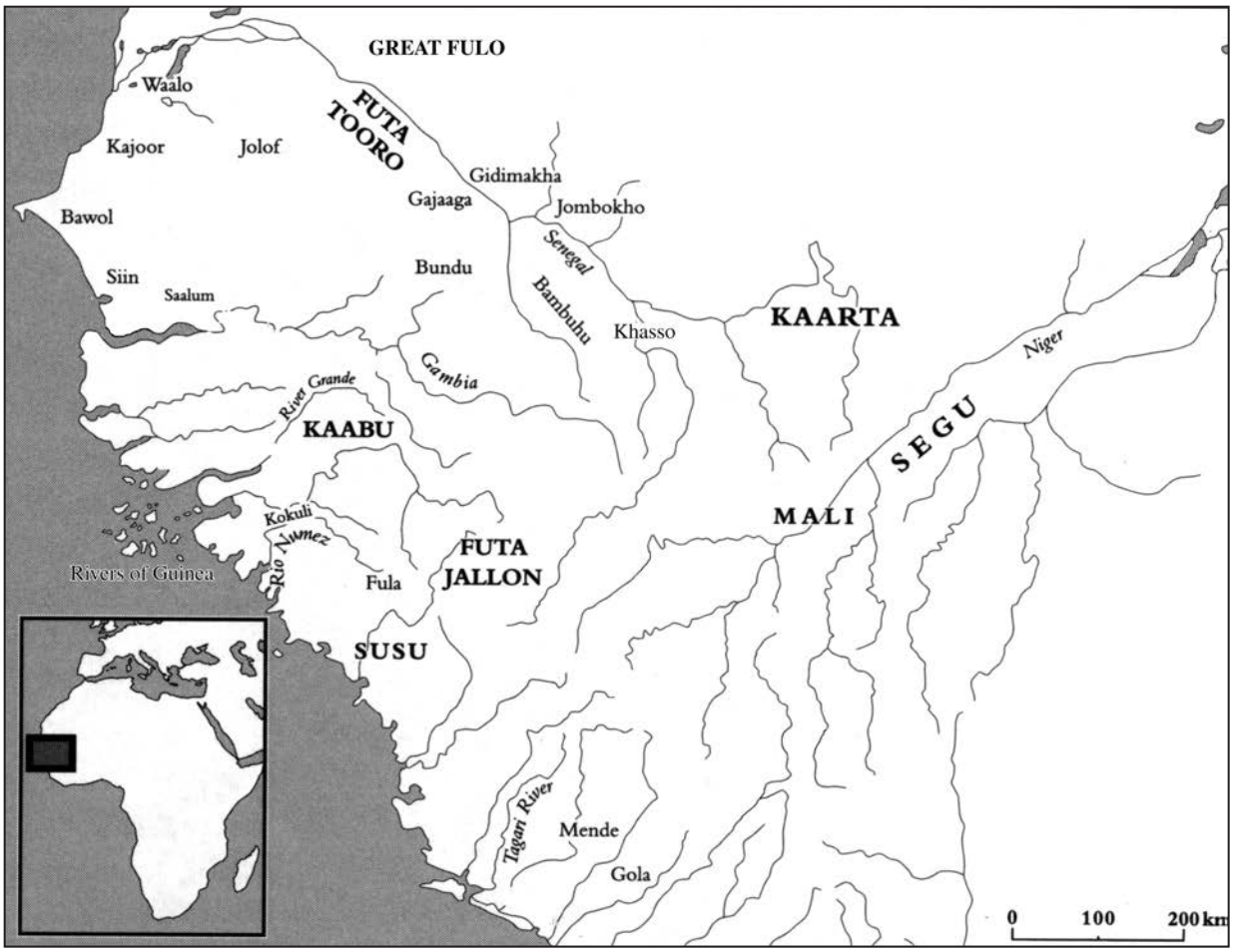

Figure 7. The Senegambia region, West Africa. (Adapted from *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800,* John Thornton, ©1999, UCL Press. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.)

sions from the desert Arabs and the Moroccans (see Searing 1993). These invasions never resulted in firm conquest but often created major political and military upheavals. The Moroccans participated indirectly in Senegambian politics, assisting one or the other side in civil wars but not always acting in concert. Although they frequently joined with indigenous nomadic Arabs from the southern desert, they never managed to control the Senegambians. At best, they exercised a tributary relationship over the Senegal, as they did over Futa Tooro in the last half of the eighteenth century.[6]

Farther east lay the most distant areas of the Empire of Segu, which constituted the dominant power on the upper Niger. The Moroccan conquest of the Niger bend destroyed Songhay's control over the northern part of this area in the early seventeenth century but had failed to extend their power much to the south. The inability of the Moroccans to control the area resulted in separation from the Senegal system of rivers and the Atlantic. The emergence of Segu in the early eighteenth century, however, reestablished political links between the Niger and Upper Senegal. A polity was founded at Kaarta at the western reaches of the Senegal basin, which, by 1750, had become independent. Segu was the only power from the Niger Basin that participated in the Atlantic commercial system, as the Middle Niger states were oriented much more toward the desert for their external trade.[7]

South of the Senegal zone, along the coast, lay the smaller political entities of the fiercely independent Serers, principally Siin and Saalum. To their south, along the Gambia, lay a chain of small Mande states that had been subjected to the Mali Empire in the fifteenth century. The Empire of Kaabu dominated the area known as the "Rivers of Guinea," formed where the smaller

[6] On the desert in general and its relationship with the Sahel states, see Webb (1995).

[7] On Segu, see Roberts (1987) and Djata (1997).

rivers that rose from Futa Jallon flowed into the sea south of the Gambia. Kaabu gained its independence when Mali collapsed in the early seventeenth century. Over the years, it retained considerable authority over the "Rivers of Guinea" but wielded less power in the swampy regions and twisted creeks of the coast.

The political unity that existed in the region during the period of Mali's dominance devolved into political fragmentation when the empire declined. However, the trading networks that had developed during Mali's rule continued to unite the region economically (Enciso 1519:107–109;[8] Fonteneau 1904:fols. 122v–124 [pagination of original]). Those networks centered around the towns of Jakha, located on the Bafing River (an affluent of the Senegal) and Ja in Gajaaga (on the Senegal itself).[9] They helped to integrate the Senegambia, as traders went from one part of the region to another carrying goods and transporting people for sale. The various ethnicities spoke the same language and devoutly followed Islam.

The Sierra Leone–Liberia Region

In the mid-sixteenth century, much of the Sierra Leone–Liberia region was loosely united by the conquest of the Manes. Headquartered in the southern end of the region (around the Cape Mount area of modern Liberia), their kingdom was known in seventeenth-century sources as "Kquoja." It was loosely structured, leaving administration primarily in the hands of the older ruling families or families of Mane origin who settled in older states and continued their law. By the eighteenth century, central administration was nonexistent. However, there were still connections between the ruling families, especially the regional ones developed and maintained by the Poro Society, and by others, such as the Ragbenle and Simo, which had served as interstate adjudicating bodies along the coast before the fifteenth century.[10] Less is known about the interior regions, except that the mountainous areas were briefly integrated into the Empire of Mali in medieval times and had significant populations of Muslims.

The Gold Coast Region

The coast south of the central part of modern Liberia (known variously as the Ivory, Kwa Kwa, Grain, or Pepper Coast) experienced limited involvement in the Atlantic trade. European and American traders stopped along this coast to take in supplies, cloth, water, and on occasion, captives, but the region resisted greater participation in the trade in human beings. This zone extended as far along the coast as the eastern part of modern Côte d'Ivoire or the western boundary of the Gold Coast zone.

The Gold Coast region (Figure 8) became thickly forested as one moved inland a few miles. For most of its length, the people spoke the Akan (or Twi) language, and on the eastern end, the Gã language prevailed. Farther east still, languages such as Ewe predominated. Everywhere along the coast, however, Akan became the lingua franca, sometimes alongside creolized forms of Portuguese and, later, English. These eastern regions served as a refuge for thousands who fled wars in the region farther west, and, beginning in the 1680s, the area became distinctly multilingual and multicultural as refugees arrived from those areas. Later, especially in the early eighteenth century, Fon-speaking refugees from the east fleeing the wars of Dahomian expansion contributed to the polyglot nature of the Volta region.[11]

In the seventeenth century, the Gold Coast was divided into dozens of independent states, each sovereign unto itself, most rarely extending more than about 50 km from the central settlement. Until the last half of the century, Gold Coast states did not participate in the slave trade. In fact, its primary export was gold, and Europeans actually imported captives to this area from other regions to pay for this coveted commodity (Kea 1982).[12]

The political situation in the Gold Coast changed significantly in the eighteenth century. The area expe-

[8] Original is unpaginated; there is pencil pagination of copy in Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Reservados, fol. 717v.

[9] For the overview that follows, see especially Curtin (1975:1:59–91).

[10] The best secondary literature on the early history of the region (although dated) includes Walter Rodney's (1970) *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800*. See also Adam Jones (1983a), *From Slaves to Palm Kernels: A History of the Galinhas Country, 1730–1890* and, for earlier times, "The Kquoja Kingdom: A Forest State in Seventeenth-Century West Africa" (Jones 1983b). P. E. H. Hair has also published long and useful treatises on the earlier history of the region in his annotations to *An Account of Sierra Leone and the Rivers of Guinea of Cape Verde* (Hair and Mota 1977).

[11] For a good review of the problems and challenges of this region, see Greene (1996).

[12] The causes for the shift from gold exports to slave exports and even the bizarre situation of gold imports to pay for captives have been addressed by several scholars. See, for instance, Rodney (1969) for variant interpretations of the transformation.

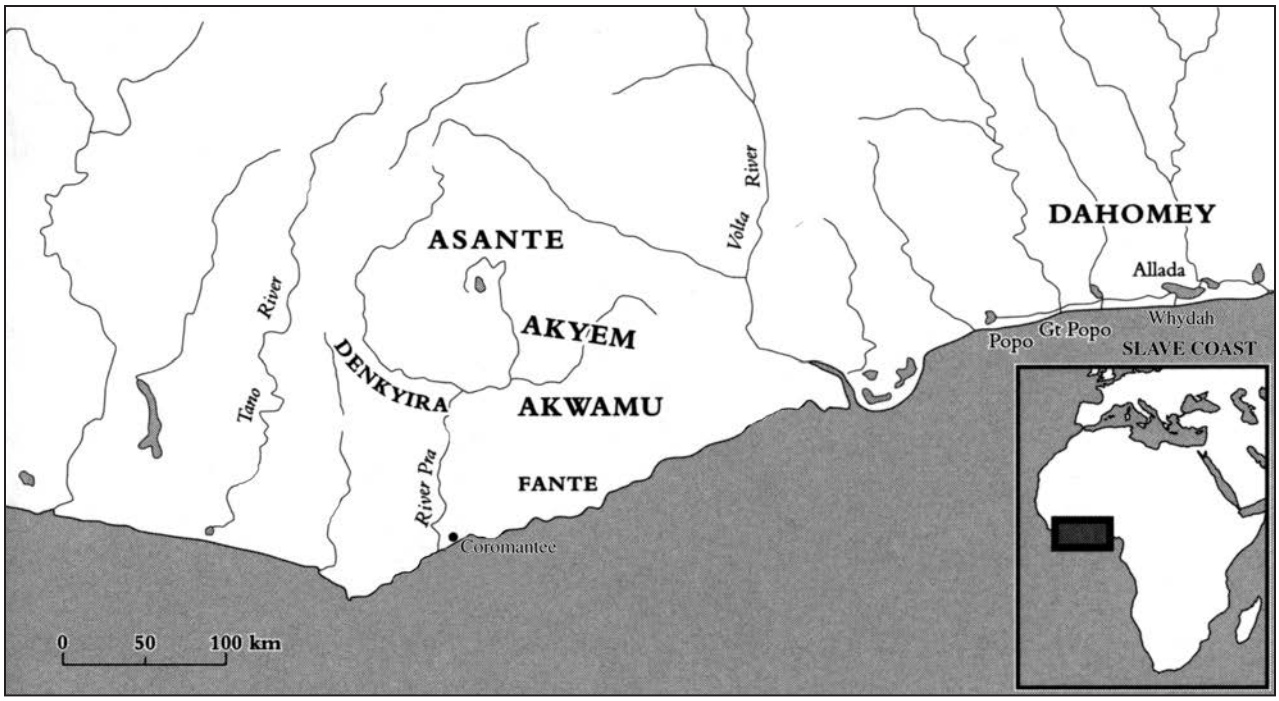

Figure 8. The Gold Coast and Slave Coast, West Africa. (Adapted from *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800,* John Thornton, ©1999, UCL Press. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.)

rienced the rise of stronger confederacies and more centralized governments. Denkyira, Akwamu, Akyem, and Asante all began a process of federation and political consolidation during the first years of the eighteenth century. Asante, which increasingly became the most important state, won notable victories over its neighbors (Denkyira in 1701 and Akyem in 1742), but these victories did not result in appreciable centralization. It was not until the later eighteenth century that Asante also began a more systematic administrative centralization in the aftermath of strong revolts that nearly unhinged the whole state in the 1750s (Fynn 1971).[13]

The construction of great roads through the rain forest, which allowed Asante armies to deploy quickly and prevented smaller armies from holding their ground by blocking strategic paths, marked Asante's centralization (Thornton 1999:72–73). By the end of the century, only Fante, a federation that arose partly in response to the challenge of Asante and partly through its own initiatives, remained as a polity strong enough to challenge Asante authority in the Gold Coast region.

The Bight of Benin Region

The Bight of Benin region was often called the "Slave Coast" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because it was the first region in Lower Guinea from which large numbers of captives were taken for the Atlantic trade. Its central feature was the "Gap of Benin," where a broad swath of the West African savanna reached down to the coast. It bordered on the Volta region on the east, where refugees from wars in the Gap fled, and where, at times, raiders drawn from refugees from the Gold Coast also found their bases. On the west, it ran into the Niger Delta region, a land of dense swamps, heavy forests, and numerous creeks and rivers (Figure 9). In the western portions of the Bight of Benin zone, the language was Ewe, whereas Fon prevailed in the southern zone from the coast until well into the interior. Yoruba was spoken in the eastern parts of the region, spanning from the coast and well into the interior.

In the seventeenth century, the coastal regions were largely integrated into the empire of Benin, whose lands stretched westward as far as Labidan on the Gold Coast. Although Benin's power waned in the early seventeenth century, the empire's lasting heritage was still discussed as active tradition in the Accra region as late as the 1740s. When Benin lost control, local powers such as Allada emerged. Allada dominated the coast in the mid-seventeenth century but began to lose control over outlying areas as the century wore on. Successor states such as Whydah became independent, as did Great Popo.

[13] For the later period, see Wilks (1975).

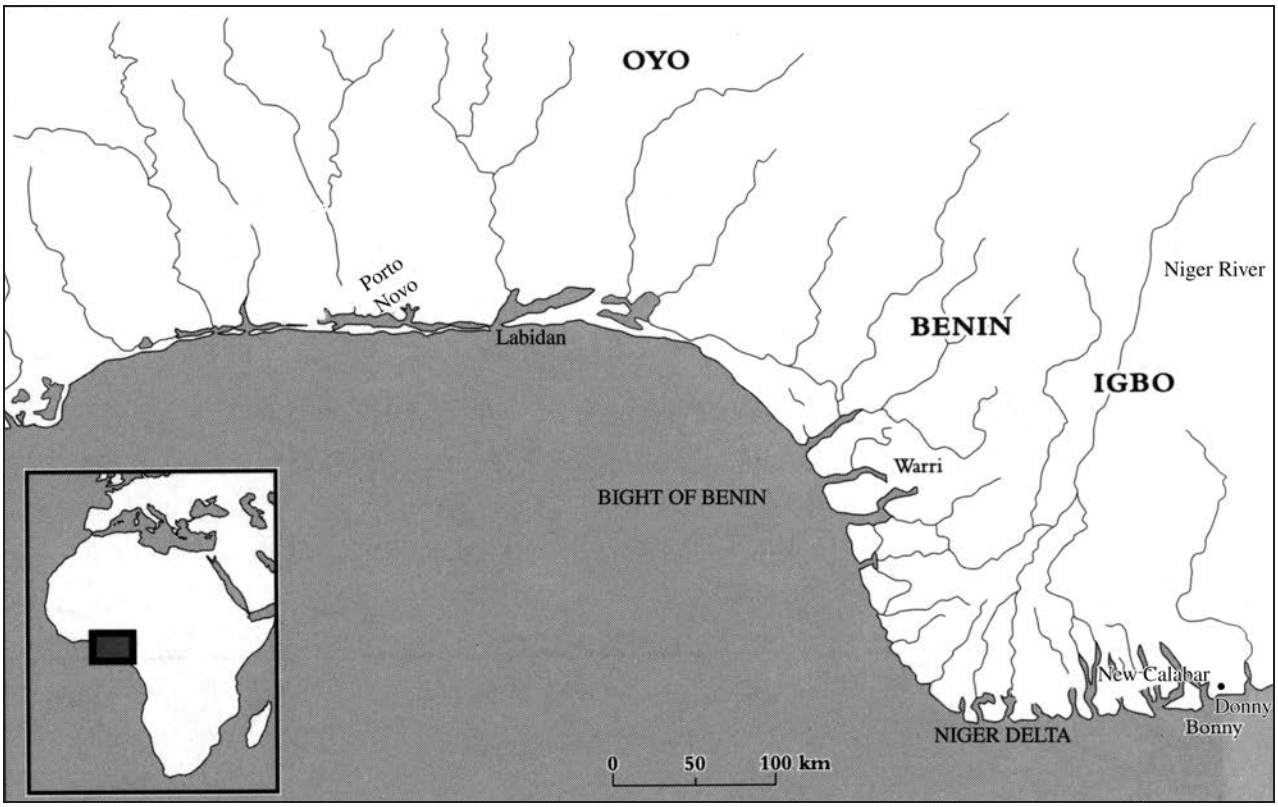

Figure 9. The Bight of Benin and Niger Delta, West Africa. (Adapted from *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800,* John Thornton, ©1999, UCL Press. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.)

This political fragmentation was reshaped by the emergence of the Kingdom of Dahomey in the early eighteenth century. In 1724, Dahomey soldiers entered Allada, forcing its rulers to flee to the lagoon region, where they founded the town that became Porto Novo and remained a formidable foe to Dahomey for the rest of the century. Dahomey never developed sufficient naval resources to make a decisive attack on the rival dynasty. The same pattern was repeated when Dahomey took over Whydah in 1727. Again the rulers fled, this time westward, to found Little Popo, which was also an irritant to Dahomey and, like Porto Novo, was able to muster sufficient waterborne forces to prevent Dahomey from seizing control.

The rulers of Dahomey created a highly centralized kingdom over the eighteenth century. By century's end, Brazilian priest Vicente Ferreira Pires noted a complex administrative structure with many layers extending from local officials to the king. The king had substantial legal powers to distribute land, oversee commerce, and determine who could and could not conduct business in certain commodities (Pires 1957:21–26, 35, 74–77, 98–102, 111–114).[14]

Dahomey's ascendance was checked, however, by the Oyo Empire, whose capital was located far to the north.[15] Oyo gained strength from its great cavalry armies, the consequence of being able to raise horses in their lands. From 1728 to 1747, Oyo armies invaded Dahomey on a regular basis. Although they could not remain in the southern part of the Gap for a whole year because of a disease environment that killed their horses, they were eventually able to demand that Dahomey pay them tribute. Thus, for the rest of the century, Dahomey pursued an independent policy, checked and hedged from time to time by demands from Oyo.[16]

The Niger Delta Region

The coastal waterway ran into the great maze of the Niger Delta, an interconnected set of creeks and rivers that made navigation easy and connected the region widely. The city of Benin dominated the region in the earliest times with a great fleet of war craft that carried

[14] There are less-developed earlier descriptions; for example, see Norris's (1968:89–91 [1789]) account of his visit in 1772.

[15] On Oyo, see Law (1977).

[16] For early periods, see Law (1991); for the later period, Akinjogbin (1967).

armies as far afield as Lagos and throughout the delta. Most of the people of the region claimed some origin in Benin, although not all were a part of its empire. Perhaps the most important of the kingdoms that claimed to owe its origin to Benin was Warri, located south of Benin. Warri was a major port, and canoe men from the country traveled far and wide on trading missions.[17] It was also a Christian state, having been converted by Augustinian missionaries from the Portuguese colony of São Tomé in the late sixteenth century.

On the eastern and northern sections of the Niger Delta lay the vast land of the Igbos, a country that was subdivided into some 45–50 independent villages. City-states controlled the mouths of the major waterways in the delta itself and served as conduits for trade with Europeans from the late fifteenth century onward. Important among them were Elem Kalabari (or New Calabar) at the mouth of the Niger, Ibani (Bonny), and Ndoni (Donny). Old Calabar, on the mouth of the Oil River (which was separate from the Niger system), was also connected by water routes to the points farther west and had its own system of towns that stretched northward up the river.

What we know today of the Igbo country, the principal source of enslaved people from the region, is mostly from what Igbos who had come out as captives can tell us. Alonso de Sandoval's (1956 [1627]) seventeenth-century report, Oldendorp's (2000–2002:1:426–435, see also 1777) mid-eighteenth-century account, and the celebrated reminiscences of Olaudah Equiano (1995 [1789];[18] see also Jones 1968:60–98) all relied on interviews with enslaved people from the Igbo region and, in Equiano's case, from his own experience (augmented, perhaps, by interviews he conducted himself). These accounts give some details of daily life but provide little else about the history of the region, perhaps the most densely inhabited large area in West Africa.

The foregoing discussion suggests that for a variety of reasons West Africa's political history during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was volatile and ever changing. This instability facilitated the human tragedy that resulted in the forcible removal of millions to the Americas, thousands of whom ended up in colonial New York. The nature of the trade in human cargo is the focus of the next chapter.

[17] A good account in the mid-eighteenth century is "Observations sur le royaume de Ouaire à la Côte d'Or en Afrique," by Moreau de St.-Méry (Roussier 1928:352–385).

[18] According to Vincent Caretta (2005) in *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*, evidence suggests that Equiano was born in South Carolina and did not have firsthand knowledge of the Niger Delta Region as he had claimed.

Chapter 7

West Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Trade

by Edna Greene Medford, Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

The transatlantic trade in human beings, established well before its zenith in the eighteenth century, flourished in West Africa's fragmented and unstable political environment. Whereas the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century trade between Africans and Europeans had involved the exchange of a variety of goods (including limited numbers of captives), by the eighteenth century, the exportation of human cargo had become central to that economic relationship. Although it enriched European nations and individuals—and certain African elites—it had profound negative consequences for African ethnic groups and societies.

A Question of Culpability

The degree to which either Africans or Europeans were responsible for the expansion of the trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is a hotly contested subject that continues to provoke debate among scholars of African history. The argument centers on the degree to which Africans were able to exercise agency and the extent to which European nations operating in the area influenced peoples and polities for their own ends.

On one side of the debate is the assertion that European demand for laborers to work plantations in the Americas and the supply of guns and powder led to petty wars between peoples who had committed minor (if any) offenses against the other. This was destructive to the African societies thus involved and to the region of West Africa in general. Moreover, the trade relationship was unequal, as Africans received inferior goods such as unusable pots and kettles, cheap liquor, and beads (Rodney 1972). Loss of population and warfare undertaken for the sole purpose of acquiring captives severely compromised African societies, diverted Africans from more industrious pursuits, and stifled economic development (Rodney 1972). In his study of Senegambia's role in the Atlantic trade, Boubacar Barry (1998) has pointed out its link to international competition for control of the sugar industry. He has argued that in order to satisfy their need for laborers to cultivate sugar, Europeans "imposed the slave trade as a permanent reality, with the complicity of the region's reigning aristocracies," a development he sees as having had long-term implications for European domination of Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Barry 1998:61).

Joseph Inikori (2003:171) has opposed the idea that a "trade" existed at all, because "no commercial transaction takes place between communities which lose their members to enslavement and those who take possession over them." Inikori (2003:182) has argued that the increasing European demand for captives "seriously exposed the politically fragmented communities of Atlantic Africa and the hinterland to capture and export." In an earlier time, such fragmentation did not harm these societies because the demand for African products "had created socioeconomic conditions favoring individuals with entrepreneurial aptitudes for the peaceful production and distribution of goods and services" (Inikori 2003:182). With the increase in the demand for captives, however, banditry grew. Complicating the situation was the habit of bandits to cross political boundaries, thus sparking wars between chiefdoms; the winners of such wars supplied the Europeans with captives. Inikori has argued that the Europeans "intervened in the affairs of these chiefdoms to provoke conflicts that generated export captives" (Inikori 2003:182).

Countering this perspective is the argument that the economic relationship between Europeans and Africans was not coerced but rather reflected the willing participation of African political and commercial leaders. Indeed, Africans controlled the trade and enforced the rules that guided the process of enslavement and sale. Moreover, armed conflict—motivated by primarily African civil, religious, and expansionist interests—facilitated the trade by making an abundance of captives available. These wars were not initiated at the behest or instigation of the Europeans. Finally, the argument suggests that the Africans' own experience with domestic slavery long before the arrival of the European "predisposed" them to hold slaves and trade them, but European demand did not lead to the instability that resulted in the enslavement of increasing numbers of people (Thornton 1998c).

In an effort to provide a broader, more balanced perspective to the issue of African agency, scholars recently have addressed the strategies employed in resistance to the slave trade. *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Diouf 2003) is an example of that effort. This collection of essays argues for a variety of ways in which Africans responded to the trade—defensive and offensive, as well as protective. African peoples took advantage of the topography (be it mountains, lakes, or caves) and made adaptations to their dwellings to protect themselves from attack and capture. Others attacked slaving vessels as they traveled up rivers or engaged in revolts once on board oceangoing ships. Still others engaged directly in the slave trade as a mechanism for strengthening the state and protecting its own people.[1] These studies show that Africans responded to the slave trade in complex, multidimensional ways that varied with societies' individual circumstances and collective abilities.

Europe and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

John Newton (2001:162), British clergyman, ardent spokesman for the abolition of the slave trade, and author of the hymn "Amazing Grace" and other songs of Christian devotion, once described the transatlantic trade as "that unhappy and disgraceful branch of commerce . . . which contradicts the feelings of humanity." Yet Newton himself had served aboard slave ships and had captained three voyages across the Atlantic. This he did despite having embraced Christianity, a conversion that took place after Newton prayed for deliverance from a violent storm while at sea.

During Newton's time, the trade was not only an accepted enterprise but was vital to the economies of Europe and the colonies of the Americas. The commercial expansions of the Portuguese and the Spanish, who established colonies and transported sugar cultivation to the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, intensified in the eighteenth century and led to a heightened demand for enslaved laborers. Meanwhile, other nations—especially Britain and France—had joined to exploit the resources of the Americas (after having engaged for a time in privateering and piracy by preying on Spanish and Portuguese ships). Following the pattern of the Iberian nations, they found value in the land and grew products prized by their countrymen. Sugar plantations in the Caribbean and tobacco, rice, and cotton cultivation on the North American mainland flourished because of laborers imported from Africa.

Each of the European powers developed "spheres of influence" in West Africa and vied with other nations to maintain control of them (Barry 1998:73). These spheres were initially "protected" by chartered companies (the Dutch West India Company and England's Royal African Company, for instance) that held monopolies granted by their own nations but that were only nominally recognized by local states, which were inclined to trade broadly. Early on, the chartered companies established the factory system, a series of forts or "castles" along coastal areas that served a defensive purpose and provided a collection point where trade could be facilitated. The trade in the Gold Coast region was based on this system. Established initially to safeguard shipments of gold, the construction of roughly 60 forts along the Gold Coast by a number of trading companies established a firm European presence in the region.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these monopolies came under serious challenge by free traders (Barry 1998:74). These slavers had always operated in West Africa but had not constituted a major force until this time. The coastal trade in captives between free traders and Africans often consisted of a shipborne trade, especially in the areas of Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and the Niger Delta, where there were no permanent posts.

[1] Joseph Inikori (2003:189) has argued, for instance, that in imposing law and order in their kingdoms, centralized states—Dahomey and Asante, for example—protected their subjects, although outside groups became victims of their slave raiding.

The West African trade in captives also was facilitated by the presence and power of Euro-Africans, who helped to establish and maintain factories in areas such as the Senegambia region. Mixed-race trading families, descended from unions between African women and Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English men, figured prominently in commercial ventures and often dominated social and political life in and around Gorée, Saint Louis, and Fort Saint James. Afro-Portuguese and other mixed-race groups were active in the Southern Rivers area as well (Barry 1998:76–77).

The Process of Enslavement

The methods used to procure laborers for the transatlantic slave trade differed over time and place. In some areas and at certain times, the by-product of civil strife filled the holds of slave ships. At other times and in other places, raids and banditry victimized vulnerable people who were then sold to traders. The insatiable demand of the Europeans for laborers for their newly acquired lands in the Americas and the cooperation of certain African leaders in pursuit of wealth and power compromised legitimate African institutions that had been designed to maintain civil order.

There can be little doubt that war or violent banditry resulted in the enslavement of many. A contemporary observer defined these wars as "for the most part entered into by the parties concerned without any previous injury on either side and for no other motive than to furnish slaves for the Europeans by whom they have been supplied with arms and ammunitions and frequently bribed for the purpose" (British Library, London [BLL], Fair Minute Book [FMB], Additional Manuscript [AM] 21,354, fol. 4). In the Senegambia, for instance, contemporaries observed instances of conflicts they termed "pillages" because the end result was the taking of real property, cattle, and people for sale. In some instances, such pillages reflected certain concrete military and political objectives, but, in others, they amounted to little more than raids designed to capture rural villagers.[2]

Similarly, the long-range pattern of war in the Bight of Benin swelled the numbers available for the Atlantic trade. These wars included the repeated attacks of Oyo on Dahomey until mid-century, attempts by Dahomey to impose a unified government on the Mahi country to its northeast, and the long struggle between Dahomey and the refugee dynasties of Porto Novo and Little Popo. In addition to the large-scale wars were cross-border actions, such as Little Popo's virtually constant raiding of Dahomey.

In this environment, individual kidnappings became a source of concern as well. Contemporary observers reported that man hunters, especially in coastal areas, "lie in wait frequently in the rice fields . . . at the springs of water . . . and in thickness by the sides of creeks . . . [and] in the long grass, by the side of the pathways . . ." (BLL, FMB, AM 21,354, fol. 4). Alexander Falconbridge, a ship's surgeon, claimed that the chief methods of procurement were "kidnapping and crimes." He recounted several instances of kidnapping in his four voyages to the coast of Africa. At Bonny, he witnessed the sale of a woman in the advanced stage of pregnancy who claimed to have been seized in the process of "returning home for a visit." On the same voyage, Falconbridge encountered an elderly man who had been seized with his son while they planted yams in their field (Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons [Great Britain] 1975:72:583–584).

European demand for laborers corrupted and weakened indigenous social and civil institutions. In certain times, enslavement came through the judicial process. With the growth of the transatlantic trade, West Africans experienced an expansion of crimes punishable with slavery. "Acts formerly esteemed innocent," a contemporary observed,

> have been deemed crimes for the sake of inflicting the punishment. New distinctions have also been made in crimes that additional punishment might succeed. The offender in one instance forfeits his own freedom; in a second, that of the male part of his family, together with his own; in a third, the whole family suffers; and in a fourth, the relations of the offender as far as they can be traced. And thus many thousands of innocent persons have been consigned to slavery [BLL, FMB, AM 21,254, fols. 3–4].

West Africans were increasingly charged with crimes such as witchcraft or adultery, which brought the possibility of enslavement, if not death. The latter crime revealed the vulnerability of women, who sometimes found themselves victimized by husbands who sold them into slavery after falsely accusing them.

[2] See letter from Mirabeau to Clarkson, December 21, 1789, in Thesée (1988). Mirabeau's informant was Geoffroy de Villeneuve, who resided in the region in the 1780s. See François de Paris, "Voyage à la Coste d'Affrique dite de Guinée et aux Isles de l'Amérique . . . 1682–1683," in Thilmans (1976:24–25).

Purchasing Captives for the Transatlantic Trade

West Africans offered for sale as a consequence of war, banditry, or the judicial process were secured in local markets that, as the trade developed, could be found well into the interior. In well-established, large markets, Africans dictated the terms and conditions of sale. At Whydah, for instance, traders were required to "satisfie the Customs of the King and the great Men," which at the beginning of the eighteenth century amounted to "about 100 pounds in Guinea value, as the Goods must yield there" (Bosman 1967:363 [1705]). Once this was accomplished, traders had permission to purchase from locals. Before sales could occur, however, the traders were required to buy the enslaved laborers from the king at a price usually set at "one third or one fourth higher than ordinary" (Bosman 1967:363 [1705]). In smaller or less well-established markets, Europeans and Africans might have engaged in different trade practices. John Matthews, an officer in the British Royal Navy, observed that in Sierra Leone ships arriving on the coast sent smaller boats down the rivers. When the boats arrived at a town, the Europeans solicited the "head man" for protection of both goods and persons. In some instances, the trade goods were given to the locals, who transported them into the interior and exchanged for captives (Matthews 2003:184–185). Trade items generally consisted of "European and Indian cotton and linen goods, silk handkerchiefs, coarse blue and red woollen cloths, scarlet cloth in grain, coarse and fine hats, worsted caps, guns, powder, shot, sabres, lead bars, iron bars, . . . copper kettles and pans, iron pots[,] . . . earthen and glass ware[,] . . . beads[,] . . . silver and gold rings . . . and ornaments, paper[,] . . . linen ruffled shirts and caps, British and foreign spirits and tobacco" (Matthews 2003:184). The quantity of each was dependent on the tastes and desires of the locals and was dictated by what Europeans believed would sell.

In some instances, captives destined for sale to the Europeans were ferried from the interior to the coast by way of rivers. In other instances, they were marched over land. Mortality depended on the mode of transport and the distance to reach the coast. Although reliable sources on this leg of the enterprise are scant, historians have estimated that the trek from deep in the interior to the coast would have resulted in significant loss of life, especially among the very young, the infirm, and those wounded in the effort to escape enslavement.

Upon reaching the coast, some captives were held for a time in dungeons or at the forts, where they vied with others for space and fresh air, neither of which was in good supply. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, inadequate food, and apprehension combined to further weaken captives who had already been pushed to the brink of endurance.

The Middle Passage

If enslavement, sale at the markets, and transport to the coast were virtually unbearable experiences, the voyage to the Americas simply prolonged and intensified the agony. Conditions on board ship (including quality and quantity of food and water and sanitation), the behavior of the crew, and weather had direct bearing on the survivability of the captive Africans. Estimates of the rate of mortality during this phase of the transatlantic trade range from 10 to 20 percent, depending on the time and length of the voyage.

The Atlantic crossing was the focus of much of the testimony given at the end of the eighteenth century before a British Parliamentary committee established to investigate the slave trade. Reflecting abolitionist influences as well as pro-slaving sentiment, the evidence is contradictory but nevertheless gives some indication of the nature of the Middle Passage experience. A rather benign view of the Atlantic crossing was offered by James Penny, who had made 11 voyages, usually carrying from 500 to 600 enslaved individuals in ships of 200–300 tons. Penny argued that there was ample room for his human cargo; if mortality was sometimes high, it resulted from the regional and dietary weaknesses of certain African ethnic groups (Great Britain 1975:69:116). His description of conditions onboard ship offers a favorable assessment of the trade. The captives, he argued,

> are comfortably lodged in Rooms fitted up for them, which are washed and fumigated with Vinegar or Lime Juice every Day, and afterwards dried with Fires, in which are thrown occasionally Frankincense and Tobacco—They lie on the bare Boards, but the greatest Princes in their own Country lie on their Mats, with a Log of Wood for their Pillow [Great Britain 1975:69:117].

As for physical restraints, Penny indicated that the men were "fettered when they first come on Board, from prudential Motives—but during the Passage, if

they appear reconciled to their Condition their Fetters are gradually taken off." The women and children were housed in a separate area and were allowed to roam free. Instead of keeping the captives below deck, weather permitting, all were brought on deck in the morning where they were patted dry with cloths if "the least Perspiration [appears] upon their Skins." While on deck, they received "a little Cordial," had their mouths washed with vinegar or lime juice in an effort to prevent scurvy, and were given water to wash their hands and faces. After consuming a warm meal consisting often of their native foods, they were given pipes and tobacco. The rest of the day was spent in amusing themselves with music, dancing, and games of chance. Women were kept occupied with beadwork, which they fashioned into ornaments. Penny contended that after such good treatment, the captives were "perfectly reconciled to their Condition" and were as happy as his crew (Great Britain 1975:69:117).

Several other witnesses corroborated Penny's account of Middle Passage conditions, citing the ample size of the ships for the cargo contained therein and the humane care the captives received. But persuasive contrary views were offered to the committee as well. Alexander Falconbridge and others countered nearly every argument for fair treatment that Penny and the defenders of slaving offered. Falconbridge testified that during the time he was engaged in the slave trade, he transported anywhere from 380 to 420 captives in ships of 300 tons or less, space he deemed inadequate for such a large number of captives. The mortality rate, he indicated, depended on weather; in calm seas, captives were brought into the open air, but during stormy weather, they were confined in the heat and filth below deck (Great Britain 1975:69:120).

Falconbridge spoke at length about the unhealthful conditions aboard ship. Contrary to Penny's observations, he recalled dejected captives whose despondency "continued the whole voyage, and with others till death put a period to their misery" (Great Britain 1975:72:588). Some were so crestfallen that, once on board, they refused to eat. Far from presenting a picture of spacious accommodations below deck, he indicated that captives had

> not so much room as a man has in his coffin . . . I have had occasion very often to go from one side of their rooms to the other . . . I have always taken off my shoes, and notwithstanding I have trod with as much care as I possibly could to prevent pinching them, it has unavoidably happened that I did so" [Great Britain 1975:72:589].

The conditions below deck were such that men fainted or died from suffocation for lack of fresh air (Great Britain 1975:72:589). After being plagued with the flux (or dysentery), it was not uncommon to see the deck "covered with blood and mucus," so much so that it resembled a slaughterhouse (Great Britain 1975:72:590). Although it was customary to wash down the rooms and dry them with fire pans on the ships on which Penny sailed, other ships, he argued, did little more than "scrape the filth off the deck" (Great Britain 1975:72:610). Outbreaks of infectious diseases such as smallpox compromised the health of the Africans even more. A few of those who did not perish were brought to insanity. Falconbridge concluded that men were especially vulnerable to sickness because of "sudden transitions from heat to cold, breathing a putrid atmosphere, wallowing in their own excrement, and being shackled together"—conditions not experienced as greatly by women and children (Great Britain 1975:72:591).

Falconbridge's account of conditions for men on deck did not convey a time of carefree amusement. On the contrary, the men were shackled and forced to jump up and down in their irons as a form of exercise, what Penny and others had euphemistically called "dancing" (Great Britain 1975:72:593). Those who refused to comply were threatened with beatings (Great Britain 1975:72:594).

Other witnesses emphasized similar onboard conditions and treatment. Some captives were so despondent that they committed suicide by hanging, by drowning, and, more frequently, by refusal to take sustenance. In the later cases, the crew usually attempted to force food into the mouth by a variety of means. Isaac Wilson, surgeon on board the *Elizabeth* between May 1788 and December 1789, related an instance of a young man who, having refused to eat, was beaten but to no effect. The surgeon then attempted to use a *speculum oris*, a device for prying open the mouth. All attempts to force-feed him failed, and the man soon died of starvation (Great Britain 1975:72:568).

The onboard treatment of captive women caught the attention of some of those offering testimony to the committee. John Newton reported that far from being insulated from the horrors of the Middle Passage as a consequence of their being allowed to roam free, women and girls were "taken on board a ship,

Table 1. Importations of Central Africans into the Americas, 1601–1800

Years	Total No. of Individuals Imported from Central Africa	Total No. of Individuals Imported to the Atlantic Region	Percentage of Central African Individuals
1601–1650	564,700	608,800	92.8
1651–1675	88,400	223,500	39.6
1676–1700	134,100	516,300	26.0
1701–1725	256,700	956,300	26.8
1726–1750	550,400	1,303,700	42.2
1751–1775	712,000	1,901,200	37.4
1776–1800	813,900	1,906,000	42.7

Note: From Miller (2002:67).

naked, trembling, terrified, perhaps almost exhausted with cold, fatigue, and hunger [and] they are often exposed to the wanton rudeness of white savages . . . in many of our ships, they have been abandoned without restraint to the lawless will of the first comer" (Postma 2003:134).[3]

To the men engaged in slaving, it was a business enterprise that brought them wealth. They invested their resources in the trade in humans just as readily as they did in other ventures. In assessing the power and influence of this enterprise, Robert Harms (2002:xix) has indicated that the "lure of profits" was so "seductive" that the trade "could transform economies, reshape moral sensitivities, refocus state policies, and influenced the rise and fall of kingdoms." The most vulnerable of Africans suffered the consequences of this avarice.

Enslavement, sale, transport to the coast, and the experience of the Middle Passage would represent only the beginnings of the captive West Africans' ordeal. Those who would eventually arrive in New York would have been challenged by countless physical and emotional struggles that would test their will. But their trials also would have made them aware of their ability to endure against all odds and would have provided them with strategies for continued survival. These experiences would steel them for what lay ahead in the lands on the other side of the Atlantic.

Central African Continuities

Although Central Africans played a less prominent role in shaping black life in British North America after the mid-seventeenth century, a continuing trade with the region brought captives to the West Indies, some of whom were, in turn, imported into New York. As Table 1 suggests, the overwhelming Central African origins of the first half of the seventeenth century fell to a quarter by century's end and never rose much above 40 percent throughout the eighteenth century.

Whereas the majority of captives in the seventeenth century were acquired by Portuguese and Dutch traders from near the coast, where the Africans had closer contact with Europeans, those exported during the eighteenth century were purchased in the interior markets of Central Africa and had had less exposure to European culture. These captives came to the coastal markets along three major trade routes: across Kongo to the Mpunda region (located some 200 miles from the Atlantic coast), east of the Kwango to Kongo ports and Luanda, and from the Benguela hinterland. The most important route, as far as the British were concerned, remained the most northerly, which tapped population sources from the Kongo, Teke, Dembos, and Loango hinterland. Some captives also came from as far away as the fertile middle Kwango valley. African traders (Vilis or Mubires) transported the captives to Loango Bay, Malemba, and Cabinda, where British slavers were located. British ships also purchased human commodities that originated from the same middle Kwango source but who had been taken to the Portuguese-controlled port of Luanda. A southern, but less important, route went from central Angola, especially from the Ovimbundu polities of Mbailundu and Viye to Benguela. This region drew captives from the southeast toward the small populations of the lower Kunene (Miller 1989:278).

[3] Excerpt from the journal of John Newton.

In the areas of Kongo, Teke, the Dembos, and Angola, the conditions that had fed the trade during the seventeenth century remained. These included the regularization of the trade and the appearance of specialist traders, such as the Vilis and the Luso-Africans. Furthermore, the increasing reliance of Portuguese Angola on the slave trade as a source of revenues, the presence of bandits and nonattached renegades who raided undefended villages, civil wars (especially in the Kongo kingdom), and the advent of new states (particularly Lunda in the latter part of the eighteenth century) were significant factors that perpetuated eighteenth-century trade in enslaved people.

Although the Dutch and British bought enslaved people primarily at ports north of the mouth of Congo, this northern route also yielded enslaved Africans who came from south of the Loango coast. Some of them originated from southern Kongo as well as regions just north of Loango and were sold to the British at the Congo outlet at Nsulu. One of the enslaved African women that Oldendorp (2000–2002:1:441) interviewed recalled that she came from the nation of Chamba and "knew Loango well." In fact, her homeland was located across the Congo River, north of the province of Sundi in the kingdom of Kongo (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:441). Moreover, small British ships operating as far south as the Dande in the region of the Kongo kingdom brought enslaved Africans who had been diverted there instead of continuing on their route to Luanda (Birmingham 1966:139).

The importations of West Africans and those Central Africans more distant from the coast introduced groups of people who were not only less familiar with European ways but also diverse in their own experiences into the New York African population. These differences influenced the ways individuals reacted to their enslavement as well as shaped their responses to each other.

Chapter 8

Eighteenth-Century Procurement of African Laborers for New York

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

As labor needs escalated in the developing city during the eighteenth century, the African population in New York—enlarged by importations from the aforementioned regions—grew at a steady rate. At its height in the mid-eighteenth century, the population of New York Africans reached just over 20 percent of the city's total. After that time, it dipped slowly and then fell sharply in the wake of the American Revolution (Table 2).

The period of greatest importation of enslaved laborers was between 1715 and 1774, when upward of 6,000 arrived. The trade to the city consisted of two types: a direct trade with Africa (which, although involving few ships, often comprised a sizable number of captives) and smaller shipments (rarely more than 10 individuals) from the West Indies. During the first half of the century, the latter trade supplied the greatest number of enslaved African laborers (Table 3). Collectively, these imports and native-born blacks helped to satisfy the need for manual laborers in the bustling port city and for domestics for an affluent merchant class.

The Provisions Trade and the West Indies

The enslaved Africans imported into New York via the West Indies in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries arrived generally as part of the provisions trade between the islands and the city. The city's—and the colony's—early economic development depended on a union forged between farmers and merchants who provisioned the West Indies, especially in the supplying of foods. A report to the Royal Society in 1692 confirmed: "We are ye chief granary to most of ye West India Islands" (Lodwick 1848:2:244). Toward the end of the seventeenth century, grain exports came into the city from Albany and throughout the Hudson River Valley, Connecticut, Long Island, and New Jersey. In 1705, the colony's governor, Lord Cornbury, noted the significance of the trade relationship with the British Caribbean:

> The Trade of this Province consists chiefly in flower and biskett which is sent to the Islands in the West Indians, in return they bring Rum, Sugar, Molasses, and some times pieces of Eight and Cocoa and Logwood [O'Callaghan 1850:1:485].

Several years later, Cadwallader Colden, a prominent New York physician, observed that

> the Trade to the West Indies is wholly to the advantage of this Province the balance being every where in our favor so that we have money remitted from every place we trade with, but chiefly from Curacoa and Jamaica. . . . The Staple Commodity of the Province is Flower & Bread which is sent to all parts of the West Indies we are allowed to trade with, Besides Wheat, Pipe staves and a little Bees Wax to Madeira, We send likewise a considerable quantity of Pork, Bacon, Hogshead Staves, some Butter & a few Candles to the West Indies [O'Callaghan 1850:1:487].

The link between the development of North American slavery and the Caribbean economy strengthened in the eighteenth century. North American products such as lumber, livestock, and other provisions became indispensable to the maintenance of the sugar

Table 2. Population of New York County, 1698–1800

Year	Total	Black	White	Percent Black
1698	4,937	700	4,237	14.2
1703[a]	4,391	799	3,592	18.2
1712	5,861	975	4,886	16.6
1723	7,248	1,362	5,886	18.8
1731	8,622	1,577	7,045	18.3
1737	10,664	1,719	8,945	16.1
1746	11,717	2,444	9,273	20.9
1749	13,294	2,368	10,926	17.8
1756	13,046	2,278	10,768	17.5
1786	23,614	2,107	21,507	8.9
1790	31,225	3,092[b]	28,133	9.9
1800	57,663	5,867[c]	51,796	10.2

Note: From Foote (1991:78) and White (1991:26).
[a] The 1703 figures are taken from the census of households in New York City.
[b] Includes 1,036 free and 2,056 enslaved blacks.
[c] Includes 3,333 free and 2,534 enslaved blacks.

industry and the economic development of the British Caribbean colonies. Sugar production depended on a sufficient supply of lumber for buildings and other construction as well as for fuel to boil the cane juice. Lumber was also used to make casks or hogsheads with which goods were transported to market.

The farmers of the middle colonies, the fishermen of New England, and the shipowners and merchants of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York all depended on the West Indian trade to fuel their commerce (Pares 1936). Production in the North American colonies was inextricably tied to West Indian demand. New York's exports to the West Indies consisted of bread, flour, beef and pork, hams, and a small quantity of lumber. In 1769, the value of its exports to the British West Indies amounted to approximately 66,324 pounds (Carrington 1988). The West Indies' demand for New York products is evidenced by Table 4, which shows exports for a 3-year period just before the American Revolution.

Many of New York's provisioning ships returned from the West Indies with payments made in small parcels of Africans (Matson 1998:202; see also Public Record Office, Great Britain ca. 1967).[1] By the late 1690s, wholesale merchants Stephen DeLancey, Samuel Vetch, and Philip Schuyler were the leading exporters of wheat, rye, and Indian corn to the Caribbean. These men routinely imported enslaved laborers as a part of their return cargo (Matson 1998:202; see also Public Record Office, Great Britain ca. 1967). Similarly, the Van Cortlandt mercantile family used the provisional trade as the cornerstone of a reexport business in enslaved Africans. In 1698, Jacobus Van Cortlandt complained to a West Indian agent concerning a superannuated individual that

> The Negro Mingo as yet not sold shall be forced at last to sell him at a low price because of his age besides the great quantity of slaves that are come to this place this year [New-York Historical Society, Manuscript Collections, Jacobus Van Cortlandt Journal, August 18, 1698].

New York absorbed a significant number of enslaved laborers from the islands, mostly from the British West Indies (Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, and Bermuda), but some came from other areas, such as the Dutch island of Curaçao, as well. Limited numbers were brought from the Danish island of St. Thomas, from the Dutch island of St. Eustatius, and infrequently from ports on the French island of Hispaniola. The diversity of this trade is reflected in Table 5.

[1] This microform, consisting of the Naval Office shipping lists for New York for the years 1713–1765, was consulted at Widener Library, Harvard University.

Table 3. Africans Imported into New York, 1701–1765

Year	West Indies	Africa
1701	36	—
1702	165	—
1703	16	—
1704	8	—
1705	—	25
1710	—	53
1711	—	55
1712	—	77
1714	53	—
1715	14	38
1716	16	43
1717	61	266
1718	433	70
1719	84	—
1720	66	—
1721	85	117
1722	91	—
1723	98	—
1724	52	—
1725	145	59
1726	144	—
1727	218	—
1728	114	—
1729	194	—
1730	173	—
1731	163	130
1732	138	—
1733	156	100
1734	51	—
1735–1736	134	—
1737	85	—
1738–1739	151	—
1740	56	—
1741	48	—
1742–1743	19	—
1748–1750	13	—
1754	—	65
1763	9	103
1764–1765	35	—

Note: From Donnan (1969, vol. 3).

Among those Africans sold from the West Indies to New York would have been those found guilty of involvement in a revolt. Others who were considered incorrigible were sent away from the islands to the mainland colonies, especially during hard economic times, where, as one planter wrote, "provisions are of little value" (Carrington 2002:261). Planters seeking economic advantage believed that keeping them on the islands led to further indebtedness because such laborers were "not worth taxes and maintenance" (Carrington 2002:261).

Perhaps other enslaved people arrived in New York in the manner presumably attempted by Torbay, a Jamaican runaway. In 1779, the enslaved man's owner advertised for his return, stating that the sometime "fisherman, store-negro, and sailor" had been arrested for theft but had been let go. It was suspected that Torbay had sailed to America, but his owner, Edmund Kelly, offered a reward for his apprehension anyway (*Jamaica Mercury and Kingston Weekly Advertiser,* 1779). When Torbay eluded capture, Kelly placed a second notice, this time indicating that the enslaved man used a number of aliases, including "Foot," and that he had previously attempted to pass himself off as a free man. Recognizing that runaways sometimes made their escape from the islands with the aid of mariners, Kelly offered a sizable reward (5 pounds) and warned all ships' captains to refrain from employing him (*Jamaica Mercury and Kingston Weekly Advertiser,* September 4–11, 1779). Although a slaveholding region, New York may have been appealing to a runaway from the islands because it allowed a certain anonymity and freedom of movement, especially during the period of the American Revolution.

The links between the American and Caribbean colonies developed and expanded as the British Empire grew into an international economy that brought together people from different areas. By the end of the colonial period, the American trade and colonial society were fully interwoven with that of the British West Indies. Jamaican, Barbadian, and other West Indian planters had estates in the American colonies (Carrington 1988). For instance, Thomas Benson of Jamaica owned properties in Philadelphia. Similarly, the Middletons, the Bulls, and the Colletons of South Carolina had estates in Jamaica and Boston. There was considerable intermarrying among the children of West Indian and American families as well. For instance, Samuel Vaughan, a Jamaican assemblyman, married a woman from Boston. Philip Livingston, a merchant and assemblyman from Portland in Jamaica,

Table 4. New York Exports to the West Indies, 1771–1773

Articles	Unit of Measure	1771	1772	1773
Lumber	feet	88,337	538,140	739,319
Shingles	number	141,700	500,813	536,257
Staves	number	952,861	1,124,591	1,124,181
Hoops	number	171,460	83,825	54,975
Corn	bushel	1,765	1,606	1,174
Oats	bushel	1,140	1,445	100
Bread	barrels	12,855	2,969	12,819
Bread	kegs	452	406	360
Beef, pork	barrels	439	911	1,509
Soap, candles	boxes	333	753	448

Note: From Carrington (1988; see also British Library, London, Long Papers, Additional Manuscript 2,431, fol. 170).

was the eldest son of Philip Livingston, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence. He was married to a Jamaican. The Antigua merchant John Spear was the son of William Spear of Baltimore. Eliphalet and Joseph Fitch of Jamaica were formerly from Boston. Hence, there was great interchange of ideas and servants among the colonies. West Indians sent their children to be educated in colleges in Philadelphia, New Jersey, and New York (Carrington 1988:130). The most famous of these was Alexander Hamilton, revolutionary leader of New York and the architect of the new nation's economic program. British colonialism had led to colonies with virtually no boundaries with regard to trade and cultural exchanges.

The Direct Trade with Africa

Using the records of the Naval Office[2] and advertisements in New York newspapers, James Lydon (1978:378) found evidence of 124 ships cleared for travel to Africa and a total of 56 arriving from the African coast between 1715 and 1774. Faulty and incomplete records partly explain the difference between clearances and arrivals, but other factors likely prevailed as well. For instance, the insecurity of the trade, especially during the Seven Years War of 1756–1763, may have caused the loss or diversion of vessels sailing between New York and Africa. In addition, more-lucrative markets in the Caribbean may have drawn some shippers to deliver their cargoes there. Nevertheless, the direct-to-Africa voyages contributed considerably to New York's population. Lydon augmented the Naval Office lists by adding pre-1715 entries, known cases of smuggling, the arrival of others signaled in newspapers but not mentioned in the Naval Office lists, and an estimate of others arriving from ships that entered New York from Africa but did not leave indications of what type of cargo they carried. Using this material, he suggested that some 6,000 Africans entered New York, of which 2,800, or 43 percent, arrived from Africa. This high percentage can be explained by the fact that Africa-bound ships brought in captives in large lots, whereas more numerous ships arriving from the Caribbean brought smaller numbers.

As was the case with the West Indies, the ships arriving from Africa often delivered their cargo to specific New York merchants. For instance, on July 27, 1749, the sloop *Rhode Island* delivered 38 captives to merchant Peter Van Brugh Livingston. The following year (on September 18, 1750), the brig *Revenge* delivered 52 Africans to merchant William Beekman. Between May and August 1751, at least four ships delivered just over 100 enslaved Africans to 3 local merchants in New York. Peter Livingston (who had already accepted delivery of the 38 captives 2 years earlier) received more than three-quarters (79) of the shipments (New York State Archives, Albany, Call No. A3196, Reports of goods imported to New York, Manifest Books 8-4-4, Books 24 [entry 11], 25 [entry 34], 26 [entry 55], 27 [entry 5]).

[2] The Naval Office records have been published in Donnan (1969, vol. 3).

Table 5. Caribbean Islands from Which Enslaved Persons Were Imported into New York, 1727–1765

Year	Antigua	Barbados	Bermuda	Curacao	Jamaica	Hispaniola	Montserrat	Nevis	St. Kitts	St. Eustatius	St. Thomas
1727	9	16	6	9	157	—	—	—	—	15	20
1728	9	12	4	1	86	—	2	—	—	—	—
1729	93	40	8	7	31	—	—	—	1	—	9
1730	50	22	5	11	42	7	—	—	32	—	8
1731	48	44	—	1	47	—	4	3	6	1	7
1732	13	24	2	9	75	1	2	5	—	1	6
1733	16	2	3	—	131	—	—	—	—	—	2
1734	2	8	2	6	25	—	—	5	1	—	1
1735–1736	—	—	1	12	115	—	—	—	1	—	4
1737	9	—	—	16	30	—	3	—	22	—	1
1738–1739	24	3	12	—	88	—	—	—	3	—	16
1740	12	2	3	4	22	—	—	—	11	—	2
1741	7	—	1	2	37	—	—	—	—	—	1
1742–1743	4	—	1	—	5	—	—	—	2	—	—
1748–1750	4	—	—	—	9	—	—	—	—	—	—
1754	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1763	4	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1764–1765	30[a]	5[a]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note: Donnan 1969:3:462–511. The table does not include individuals from the following places or combination of places: Antigua and Bermuda (1), Jamaica and Bermuda (2), St. Lucia (1), St. Thomas and Jamaica (1), Jamaica and Hispaniola (1), Turks Island (1), Spanish Town and St. Thomas (18), Tortola and St. Thomas (4).
[a] These were listed as "New Negroes."

Assessing African Origins and Ethnicity

Records of direct African imports tell us little about regional origins of enslaved people arriving in New York. Most official records list the shipper's origin as "Africa" or "Coast of Africa" or "Guinea," which, in the coastal terminology of the day, had no specific regional meaning. Even when origin is listed, it can be misleading, as was the case with the *Catherine*, which arrived in 1733, supposedly from Angola. The ship's log (New Jersey Historical Society, New Jersey, Ships' Log Collection, Log of the *Catherine*) shows that Angola was only the last stop on a voyage that took the vessel along the whole of the African coast. This likely explains why "Coast of Africa" appears so often in the customs records; it confirms that there was no specific place for which most or all of the cargo originated. Such voyages were typical of the North American ventures, which generally had to accept fewer enslaved people at the Gambia, Gold Coast, or Slave Coast, where the chartered companies and non-English shippers dominated the trade from established factories. They often visited places like the Liberian coast (where the *Catherine* obtained 70 captives), the Niger Delta, or the coast of Loango, which lacked permanent factories and had African rulers that accepted nonexclusive trade agreements.

Given the limitations of extant records, scholars can provide no definitive answer regarding the specific origins of enslaved Africans who arrived in New York in the eighteenth century. They can offer likely sources, however, given what they know in general about American voyages from a few surviving logbooks or other testimony. What can be surmised from these records is that the origins of captives brought to New York varied widely, reflecting the interests of the British and Americans in many different parts of Africa during this period. As there were local variations in the trade in its main outlines, it brought in people from all parts of Africa, but especially from the Gold Coast, Bight of Benin region, and the Bight of Biafra, and fewer from Angola. The early eighteenth century doubtless brought in many from the Gold Coast and Bight of Benin, as between them they accounted for 78 percent of the entries into Jamaica and 83 percent of those into Barbados in that period (see Eltis et al. 1999).

Extant records suggest that more than three dozen ships brought captives to New York directly from the African coast. Of these, six listed Senegambia as their last stop, four mentioned the Gold Coast, and only one (the *Catherine*) specified Angola (see Eltis et al. 1999). It is likely that the six that listed Senegambia only contained captives from that coast, for, having met their requirements, the ships turned and sailed back to New York. The four visiting the Gold Coast may well have also taken on captives in Senegambia, Sierra Leone Coast, and perhaps Cape Mount before moving on and completing their cargo. The *Catherine*, as we know from its log, took on cargo at all those locations, including Angola (New Jersey Historical Society, New Jersey, Ships' Log Collection, Log of the *Catherine*).

Using these indications, one can reasonably conclude that 100 percent of the 569 captives carried on ships identified by Harvard University's Du Bois Institute database that listed Senegambia as their turning point carried only Senegambians. It is also likely that half of the 345 on ships that turned on the Gold Coast were from Senegambia and the other from the Gold Coast. And it can be assumed that half of the 133 enslaved persons shipped from Angola were actually acquired in Senegambia, one-quarter on the Gold Coast, and the last quarter in Angola itself.

Using these known ships as a proxy for the ships that do not identify African origins and augmenting the total number by the shipping discovered or estimated by Lydon, one can estimate the figures presented in Table 6 for New York–based direct trade from Africa.

Although the remaining 57 percent of captives brought to New York in the eighteenth century came from the West Indies, most of them doubtless were born in Africa. Pricing and other considerations would have limited the New York buyers' ability to compete with the staple crop economies of the South for seasoned laborers. Hence, New Yorkers who

Table 6. Direct Trade from Africa to New York

Region/Coast	Percent	Estimated Total
Senegambia	77	2,156
Gold Coast	20	560
Angola	3	84

Note: From Eltis et al. (1999).

acquired small lots of laborers from the local West Indian markets most likely purchased new arrivals. Working with this starting point, it can be assumed that the origins of the remaining people paralleled that of the English trade to the West Indies in the period (Table 7).

Hence, from 1701 to 1730, the period during which English trade was supplied by captives primarily from the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin, the African ethnic groups arriving in New York represented a diverse mixture that included Akan speakers, such as the Ashanti, and other groups—who collectively were mistakenly given the name Coromantee—as well as the Ardra, Yoruba, Adja, Fon, Popo, and Gur (see Kruger 1985:81–85). Between 1740 and 1750, as English trade increased from the Bight of Biafra, the Igbo arrived in larger numbers. Finally, between 1760 and the 1770s, trade to the Ivory Coast brought in Mande people.

Table 7. Importations to New York by Region (Via West Indies)

Region/Coast	Percentage	Estimated Total
Senegambia/Sierra Leone	25	800
Gold Coast	14	448
Bight of Benin	9	288
Bight of Biafara	33	1,056
Angola	19	608

Note: From Eltis et al. (1999).

Chapter 9

The Ubiquity of Work

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

One of the most important aspects of the African Burial Ground population is the information it provides on the manner in which Africans and African-descended people carried out daily labor. The anthropological team working at the burial ground has uncovered a host of physical characteristics that point to possible labor practices. Among them are degenerative bone conditions, such as osteoarthritis and osteophytosis (the buildup of bone around joints, which occurs usually as a function of age), and musculoskeletal stress markers, such as hypertrophy (the buildup of bone where muscles attach to it). Conceding that some of these characteristics are age related or can be prompted by nutrition or infectious diseases, their presence even among the younger members of the population suggest a causal link to occupational stress (see Wilczak et al. 2009 [Chapter 11, Volume 1 of this series]). Such biomechanical stress markers point to arduous labor that involved heavy lifting, bearing substantial weight on the head or shoulders, repetitive bending of the torso or the knees, and dragging ponderous objects. A review of labor practices in Africa, the West Indies, and colonial New York suggests a range of possibilities to explain why these conditions may have been present among the African Burial Ground population.

African Labor Practices

Eighteenth-century Africans performed a variety of labor tasks in their homelands. Throughout West and West Central Africa they engaged primarily in farming and other agricultural pursuits. West Africans cultivated cereal grains such as millet and maize, grew peanuts, and harvested rice along the coastal areas and river valleys (Boucard 1974:267–268; Thilmans 1976).The men prepared the ground for planting by first clearing it of trees, which they cut down and then set ablaze (Winterbottom 1803:46). Rice cultivation was equally laborious, requiring hoeing and transplanting of plants as well as building dikes and other water-management schemes.[1] The most utilized agricultural implement consisted of the short-handled hoe, a tool that caused the laborer to bend over to perform his tasks.[2] West Africans also raised cattle, in some areas transporting them from dryer to moister areas during the dry season and then herding them back. In the Senegambia region, this sort of labor was entrusted to the Fulbe, who specialized in it, but in a few places, like the Serer areas, cattle were kept penned up and managed by the farmers themselves. In this context, one might expect physical stress indicators consistent with such labor to be displayed in otherwise healthy adults.

In parts of the Senegambia region, inhabitants also worked in cloth-making industries[3] (Figure 10), mined gold and iron, and participated in other ferrous-related industries. Those in the Sierra Leone region labored in the logging industry, especially as the European demand for logwood and cam wood grew. The Akan of the Gold Coast area also mined gold or spent considerable time clearing forests in preparation for farming. In the Bight of Benin region, fishing and boat building occupied the attention of the coastal people, whereas peasant farming sustained those farther inland.

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[1] One of the best surveys using sources from the era can be found in Rodney's *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545–1800* (1970:20–25).

[2] For a fine, nuanced description of agricultural labor and land use in the mid-1670s, see Ritchie (1968:320); for the 1680s in Gambia, see Thilmans (1976:23); for Bambuk in 1729, see Curtin and Boulègue (1974:257).

[3] Archaeology confirms the cloth industry through the recovery of spindle whorls in many contexts throughout the region, which are dated throughout the period (McIntosh and Thiaw 2001:26).

Figure 10. African woman spinning in traditional African manner (illustration by Michael Colbert, 2004).

The labor of women was central to West African society. On his visit to the Fula Empire, James Watt found that "neither sex is idle" (Watt 1994:22). Women, he observed, "were employed every where in hoeing the ground which on account of its extreme dryness was very hard" (Watt 1994:22). Similarly, Willem Bosman, a Dutch merchant who traveled to the West African coast in the late seventeenth century, took note of women in Benin "tilling the ground"; they were also responsible for spinning cotton and weaving cloth (Bosman 1967:438 [1705]). Women were also the weavers of mats made from straw. Of course, wives and daughters performed the domestic chores as well, pounding millet and making bread from it, carrying water from the river, and keeping the fire burning all night where their husbands slept (Barbot 1992:90–91). In the local markets, the women vended a variety of products, including fish (which they sold raw, boiled, and fried), sugar cane, palm oil, rice, millet, maize, plantains, yams, and tobacco (Barbot 1992:547). West African women completed their daily chores customarily with their infants strapped to their backs (Barbot 1992:87).

Travelers to West Africa in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries also noted the method of transport of goods. Watt (1994:8) wrote of his encounter with porters in the Fula Empire:

> We passed at least 300 Fulas going to Kocundy, most of them however being heavy laden took but little notice of us. We now saw by their manner of traveling with their heavy burdens, some of which I am told equal 3Cwt. [hundredweight], though rather I doubt it. Many of them however carry more than 1/2 that quantity which is certainly a great load to travel with. These loads consist mainly of rice which they carry to Kocundy and for which they take salt in return. Their loads are made up in a kind of long basket, from 5 to 7 feet in length and from 9 inches to a foot broad, the lower part of which comes as far down as their rump, the upper part 4 or 5 feet above their heads. This they keep steady by means of their bow which is fastened to the top of it, so that the whole weight rests upon the shoulders.

Similarly, Bosman hired the services of porters who seemingly carried goods effortlessly for distances of as much as 3 miles. He observed: "[W]ith a burden of one hundred pounds on their heads they run a sort of continual trot; which is so swift that we Hollanders cannot keep up with them without difficulty, though not loaded with an ounce of weight" (Bosman 1967:342 [1705]).

Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1687:1:312) noted similar methods of transport among men in West Central Africa. He observed, however, that women "fix[ed] a belt on their forehead and they carr[ied] the load extended along their back as far as their kidneys." The process forced them to "[move] slowly with the middle of their body bent almost to the ground; [which was] even worse when they [were] nursing, since they [were] so oppressed and extended that they [could] hardly breathe" (Cavazzi 1687:1:312).

Eighteenth-century West Central Africans also had a complex work experience. Women and girls from the Kongo region would have continued to labor at agricultural work as they had in the seventeenth century. They also extracted salt, produced earthenware, collected the fruit that the family consumed, and spent the rest of their time engaged in child-rearing activities.

Angolans, especially the Imbundus, would have been engaged in cattle raising, as would those from Matamba. Fishing was also a major activity in the latter region. Farther east, West Central Africans would have worked as specialists in securing ivory, beeswax harvesting, copper and iron ore mining, and production of iron goods. As were their sisters in the Kongo and throughout West and West Central Africa, Angolan women were accustomed to agricultural labor.

In the unstable times of the eighteenth century, many men labored in war-related activities as well. The Capuchin missionary Marcellino d'Atri, who passed through southern Kongo in 1702, was surprised to find the place denuded of its male population, who had all been mobilized for war or had fled to avoid being conscripted (Toso 1984:546–553). West Central Africans from the Portuguese Reino de Angola, the Dembos, and other Kimbundu-speaking regions would have had considerable experience in the *guerra preta*. Also involved in war-related activities were porters who transported military hardware and other supplies (guns, gunpowder, provisions, cloth, and the like) for the Portuguese army. Still others worked in labor gangs on Portuguese-owned *arimos*, or plantations, that were spread along the Bengo and Dande Rivers.[4]

In the lesser-known states, such as Soso, Hungu, and Holo (which only appeared in the records in the eighteenth century as suppliers), warfare also shaped the labor experiences of men. For example, wars such as that in 1709 between Matamba and Kahenda—Portugal's leading vassal and strongest supporter in the region—would have occupied the efforts of many, as would have the 1739 war that began when Holo, a former province of Matamba located to its north, declared its independence (Birmingham 1966:142–143; Correia 1937:2:335). Skirmishes and instability along the Portuguese frontier that involved local troops from Portuguese Ambaca and Matamba in 1755 would have sent men who had experience as soldiers into the Atlantic. Manoel Correia Leitão reported for Kasanje that the number of men under arms there and its vassal states exceeded 200,000 (Sebesteyén and Vansina 1999:340–341).

West Indian Labor Practices in the Eighteenth Century

The degree to which Africans destined for colonial New York may have experienced biomechanical stress in the West Indies depended on the period of time they labored there. Some would have been in the islands for mere days before being transshipped to New York, but others may have spent months—if not years—there, finally suffering sale as superannuated laborers unfit for plantation work. The physical effects of arduous labor would have been exhibited in the remains uncovered in the burial ground.

Africans were brought to the West Indies primarily to perform agricultural labor on sugar plantations. One of the most exploitative labor systems in existence, sugar cultivation followed a physically exhausting and dangerous routine (Figure 11) (see Somerset Record Office, Somerset, England, Dickinson Manuscripts, "A List of Slaves on Appleton Estate January 1, 1819").[5] Field hands worked from sunrise to sunset, with a ½-hour break in the mornings followed, in some instances, by a 2-hour break that included

[4] For the eighteenth-century commercial environment of West Central Africa, see Miller (1989), especially Chapters 6–9.

[5] An entry for that year notes that "Johanna, died her body being partly ground in the mill."

Figure 11. Women laboring in the cane fields (illustration by Michael Colbert, 2004).

cane-hole digging. Individuals were required to dig as many as 120 holes (roughly 4 feet square and 2 feet deep) in a day on previously ploughed lands and 90 in unplowed fields (Higman 1995:164). Once they dug the holes and planted the crops, the second gang (mostly adolescents, along with members of the first gang), spread manure from 80-pound baskets, which they carried on their heads. The second gang was also responsible for weeding the fields and removing trash (including cane leaves) for use as fuel. Young women who belonged to the "trash gang" usually carried heavy baskets from the mill and were required to stoop frequently (Carrington 2002:156). The third gang consisted of children who were assigned the task of cutting grass for the estate animals. They bundled the grass into 100-pound bales, which they sometimes transported, like the young women, on their heads (Sheridan 1996:38–39).

Once the cane was cut by the first gang, it was transported to the mill, where it was crushed between rollers to extract the cane juice. The process was especially dangerous, as clothing and hands were sometimes caught in the machinery. In the boiling houses where the cane juice was processed, the unbearable heat further compromised the health of the laborer. Higman (1995:166) has noted that the temperatures in these factories became so intense that enslaved laborers were required to douse the roof with water to stave off fires. Once boiling had been completed, laborers transported the finished product (in some instances weighing as much as a ton) to the curing house or to the distillery.

Such excessive labor in combination with maltreatment, poor diet, and diseases resulted in a high mortality rate among enslaved people. The enslaved population that undertook the heavy manual tasks suffered the greatest disabilities. The worst of these disabilities occurred during crop time, when the majority of the population worked continuously, sometimes without sleep, for extended periods of time.

"Fit for Town or Country": The New York Labor Experience

Introduction

Eighteenth-century New York Africans knew a city vastly different from the one that was familiar to the founding generations of the 1600s. Population increase and economic growth had transformed New York from a settlement possessing a distinctly rural character, whose few hundred inhabitants were concentrated at the tip of Manhattan Island, to a city several thousand strong that had crept steadily northward and westward. African labor grew increasingly valuable in the urban environment into which New York was evolving in the eighteenth century. Black people continued to perform the tasks demanded of them during the earlier century and had new, additional chores, necessitated by an economy in transition, thrust upon them (Table 8).

When considering the labor of African people in the eighteenth century, one is immediately struck by the diversity of work tasks they performed. For instance, Mary Dunn owned "two very good Negro Men Slaves Taylors, and one Negro Man Slave, a Butcher and Sawyer" whom she offered for sale when her husband, tailor John Dunn, died (*New York Gazette*, August 10–17, 1730). Benjamin D'Harriette owned 22-year-old Scipio, whom he employed as a cooper (*New York Gazette*, September 14–21, 1730), and Francis Vincent, a sailmaker who died in 1733, left property in the form of "two young Negro Men, both good Sail-makers" (*New York Gazette*, April 9–16, 1733). Jacobus van Cortlandt held Andrew Saxton to labor as a carpenter and cooper. When Saxton absconded in 1733, he took his "Tools for both Trades" with him (*New York Gazette*, August 27 to September 3, 1733). As these examples suggest, enslaved people were owned by merchants who kept them at labor in their mercantile houses and small shops; they also worked for professionals, such as attorneys and physicians, and for a variety of artisans, including rope makers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shipwrights, and coach makers (Kruger 1985:93). People of African descent labored as farmhands and mariners, domestics and dockworkers, bakers and brewers, tanners and millers, chimney sweeps and washerwomen, street vendors, and goldsmiths (Figure 12). Individual laborers often performed equally varied tasks. In the morning, one might be employed at sawing wood or "cutting away the ice out of the yard" and in the afternoon, at fashioning parts for a sloop (Horsmanden 1971:34). In describing the multifaceted nature of black labor in colonial New York, Ira Berlin has indicated that enslaved people could be employed in agriculture one day and in a variety of urban-based tasks the next (Berlin 1998:56). The relative ease with which New York Africans moved between town and country was a consequence of slave-owning family ties between the two regions, the propensity for city merchants to acquire country estates, and the practice of hiring out underutilized laborers.

"Fit for Country Business"

Although eighteenth-century New York underwent the transformation from village to town, certain sections remained more reminiscent of the countryside. Numerous farms remained in place in or near the town during this period, and Africans in the vicinity continued to serve as an important labor force in this regard. Cultivated lands were located west of Broadway and the upper reaches of Manhattan, including Haarlem. A description of this area in the 1720s judged it as consisting of little more than enslaved laborers and fields (Rothschild 1990:13). John Messeroll, the owner of a farm at Turtle Bay (34th Street in Manhattan), and Nicholas Bayard, a merchant with farm property in the "Out Ward," or outside of the town, doubtless kept some (if not all) of the five enslaved Africans that each held employed in agriculture. Advertisements in New York newspapers frequently offered for sale laborers "fit for country Business" (*New York Gazette, February* 8–15, 1731) or sought the labor of experienced plowmen.

During the winter months, men ordinarily engaged in farmwork were used to lay up a supply of timber for eventual export to shippers in the West Indies or for local use by merchants. At other times, New York Africans on the farms engaged in trades such as coopering and cordwaining. Hiring out was also an option preferred by New York farmers determined to keep their enslaved laborers fully employed during the winter months and after harvest.

As the diversity of crops increased, work tasks that formerly fell within the domain of black men likely passed to enslaved women. Adult women and girls from at least 12 years of age were considered able-bodied enough to perform numerous outdoor, as well as indoor, tasks related to farming. Historical data from other colonies provide some insight into possible

Table 8. Distribution of Blacks in New York City Households in 1703, by Occupation of Household Head

Occupation	Number of Households	Black Males (over 16)	Black Females (over 16)	Black Male Children	Black Female Children	Total Blacks
Merchant	50	49	57	19	20	145
Shipmaster	17	11	17	7	5	40
Bolter	7	14	5	3	—	22
Brewer	3	8	4	5	1	18
Gentleman	8	6	10	1	—	17
Cordwainer	10	7	5	1	2	15
Victualler	6	4	4	3	4	15
Baker	10	6	4	3	1	14
Cooper	7	7	4	1	—	12
Mariner	7	4	5	1	1	11
Carpenter	3	4	3	2	—	9
Bricklayer	3	3	3	3	—	9
Attorney	3	1	4	1	2	8
Blacksmith	3	2	1	2	1	6
Goldsmith	2	—	2	2	1	5
Sailmaker	2	1	3	1	—	5
Painter	1	1	1	1	1	4
Shipwright	2	2	1	—	1	4
Chirurgeon	3	—	1	—	2	3
Block maker	1	—	1	1	—	2
Printer	1	—	2	—	—	2
Shopkeeper	1	—	2	—	—	2
Butcher	2	2	—	—	—	2
Yeoman	1	1	1	—	—	2
Boatman	1	—	—	1	—	1
Weaver	1	—	1	—	—	1
Tailor	1	—	1	—	—	1
Barber	1	—	1	—	—	1
Glazier	1	1	—	—	—	1
Silversmith	1	—	—	—	—	1
Total	159	134	143	58	43	378

Note: Data from Rothschild (1990: Appendix 1 [1703 Census]). Rothschild compiled data on a total of 718 household heads based on Archdeacon (1971) and a 1703–1704 tax assessment. Heads of households, which included blacks (from the census), were identified in the Rothschild/Archdeacon list to obtain occupation. The Out Ward was not included in the Rothschild/Archdeacon list nor were female-headed households.

Figure 12. Labor sites in colonial New York (adapted from the Townsend MacCoun Map, courtesy the New York Public Library Map Division).

Figure 13. New York Africans loading a ship (illustration by Michael Colbert, 2004).

practices of black female agricultural workers in New York. For instance, Lois Carr and Lorena Walsh (1988) have found that women in eighteenth-century Virginia labored at the traditional tasks of hoeing and weeding. But they acquired new jobs as well, such as cleaning stables and spreading manure, grubbing swamps, and building fences (Carr and Walsh 1988:177). These work tasks approximated the labor-intensive plantation experiences of many men and women transported from the West Indies. It should be noted, however, that most women (and superannuated men) who arrived in New York after having labored in the West Indies would likely have been engaged in domestic work rather than in agriculture.

Unskilled Urban-Based Labor

The majority of New York Africans were kept busy with various unskilled tasks, such as loading and unloading the numerous ships that entered and departed this bustling port city. Black men performed the most physically demanding labor that shipping required, including the handling of heavy hogsheads that were routinely used to store goods (Figure 13). Whether they hoisted them from the vessels with the use of a block and tackle or rolled them into place, the labor was backbreaking and dangerous.

Despite the existence of laws intended to limit the use of black men as porters, the task of moving the merchandise to and from the docks fell to enslaved men as well. Many of the wealthiest merchants used their enslaved laborers to haul goods between the ships and the warehouses that sprang up along the East River (Archdeacon 1976:89–90; Foote 1991:108). Others who owned no laborers satisfied their need by hiring workers for the day or for longer terms.

The Use of African Labor in Manufacturing

Although primarily an unskilled class of workers, Africans and their descendents also provided more skilled

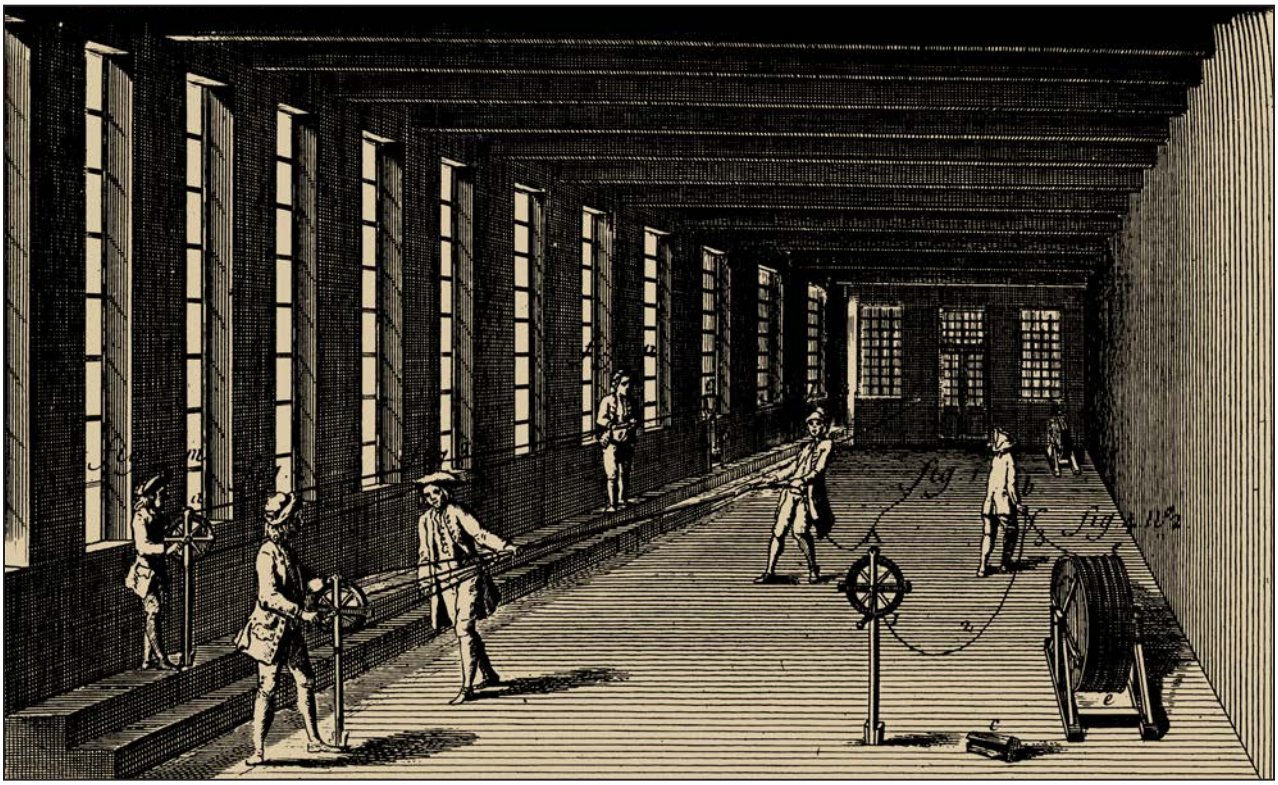

Figure 14. Ropewalk, a colonial industry (from Bridenbaugh 1950).

support in manufacturing. Eighteenth-century New York supported a number of manufacturing concerns that utilized black labor. Nicholas Bayard employed such laborers in his sugar refinery. Despite laws to the contrary, New York Africans worked alongside their owners in shipbuilding and related industries; in coopering and other types of woodworking; and in tanning, brewing, and cloth making.

New York's commercial interests stimulated the growth of shipbuilding in the colonial city, and, as a consequence, enslaved Africans were employed in a wide range of tasks that supported the industry, especially in repairing and caulking. The building of a ship took roughly one year, and shipwrights and their assistants used a variety of tools, such as the broadax, whipsaw, pod auger, plane, chisel, and adz, to perform their work. Black men who assisted in shipbuilding likely handled the timbers and planking, which were generally carried on the shoulders of the workmen (Bridenbaugh 1950).

Ropewalks, a related industry, employed black laborers in the making of cordage (ropes and cables) for ship's rigging (Figure 14). Runaway and sales advertisements in city newspapers make mention of black men "bred to the ropemaking business" (*American Minerva,* May 26, 1796; *Argus,* September 24, 1795; *Daily Advertiser,* September 7, 1801, and November 13, 1774). One of the alleged conspirators in the 1741 "Negro plot" to burn the city and kill the white inhabitants testified that he was returning home from his owner's ropewalk when he encountered some of the coconspirators (Horsmanden 1971:192).

Goods transported on ships or needing long-term storage generally were placed in huge barrels that often could accommodate several hundred pounds. New York's extensive shipping industry required that such containers be plentiful. As such, many free and enslaved African men were employed at coopering. Those Africans who worked in this capacity would have been exposed to other woodworking trades, such as joinery, wood turning, carving, coffin making, and cabinetmaking as well (Bridenbaugh 1950:75). However, their participation was challenged by white men who felt threatened by the competition black coopers posed. Such concern led a group of white men to petition the Assembly in 1743, complaining

> that several merchants . . . employ great numbers of Negroes in that occupation, not only to supply their own occasions with casks, but likewise sell and dispose to others; and pray such relief in the premises as shall be thought just and rea-

> sonable [New York Historical Society, Parish Transcripts, Colonial State Papers of America and the West Indies].

White men showed less concern regarding a black presence in certain other, more unpleasant manufactures. Slaughterhouses, tanneries, and other establishments that processed nonfood animal remains had been established in New York at an early date. Considered a "heavy craft," city tanneries, for instance, employed many African men (White 1991:11). Among the tanners and merchants involved with the industry who held Africans were prominent New Yorkers such as Joseph Waldron, John Livingston, George Shaw, Albert Polhemus, and Daniel Tooker.

Tanning was a long, tedious process that began with the acquisition and drying of hides. The hides were then placed in vats of lye for ease of hair removal. For several months, they were soaked in a liquid made from black-oak bark, which had been crushed or ground in mills (Clark 1949:167). The final stage in the process involved scraping and softening the hides with bear's oil. Once the hides had been processed, they were used to make shoes, boots, harnesses, and other leather goods.

Because of their noxious fumes and generally disagreeable characteristics, slaughterhouses and tanneries were located on the periphery of the city. Some of these establishments were centered around the Collect Pond (near the African Burial Ground). Tanneries and related industries continued to operate on the city's periphery well into the eighteenth century (Clark 1949:167).

Colonial New York also participated in the tobacco industry, but as Virginia and Maryland continued to dominate the growing of the crop, New York turned to the manufacture of snuff. Made by grinding and flavoring dried tobacco leaf, snuff enjoyed extraordinary popularity as an industry between 1720 and 1734 (Kammen 1975:161–190). Hogsheads of tobacco weighing as much as 1,000 pounds were being imported to New York by 1715 for conversion into chewing tobacco and snuff (Matson 1998:262). Black and white women did the stemming and flavoring, and males performed the lump making and pressing.

In 1760, Peter Lorillard and John Van Cortlandt, who both held enslaved Africans, expanded snuff manufacturing in the city. Van Cortlandt also entered into partnership with several others to run a small snuff manufactory by the mid-1760s. One of the partners, Frederic Lentz, supplied black and white labor for the industry (Rock 1989:67).

Cider; related products, such as cider brandy, cider wine, and other cider-based beverages; and whiskey were among the earliest forms of manufacture in New York, dating back to the Dutch period. These beverages were made primarily for household consumption, and women and girls learned how to brew as part of their household duties (see discussion below) (Matson 1998:261). Although production for domestic consumption continued under British rule, the lure of the export market spurred alcohol production.

In the early eighteenth century, the Beekmans, Bayards, van Cortlandts, Kips, and Rutgers were among several merchant families who brewed beer for public consumption. By 1768, at least 17 merchants were operating distilleries in the city. One of them owned a 90-gallon still and doubtless employed enslaved labor to work it (Matson 1998:261). When the brewer Harmanus Rutger died in 1753, his will providing for the disposal of his enslaved laborers stipulated that his grandson be given the choice of "the best of my negroes skilled in the brewing trade" (New York County Surrogate's Court 1893–1913:4:447).

Enslaved Africans were also held by goldsmiths and silversmiths. In August 1756, goldsmith Thomas Hammersley advertised for the return of his "negro fellow," Duke, who had run away 10 days before. Eight years later, the unlucky goldsmith found himself similarly indisposed when a second black servant took his leave as well (Gottesman 1970:48). Although the records are silent on whether these men were put to work in this industry, we do know that Africans were arriving from areas of the continent where knowledge of goldsmithing existed.

The Drudgery of Women's Work

Upon scanning the April 15, 1734, issue of the *New York Weekly Journal*, readers would have come upon the following advertisement:

> To be Sold, a young Negro Woman, about 20 Years old, she does all sorts of House work; she can brew, Bake, boyle soast Soap, Wash, Iron & Starch, and is a good darey Woman. She can Card and Spin at the great Wheel, Cotton, Lennen and Wollen, she has another good Property she neither drinks Rum nor smoaks Tobacco, and she is a strong hale healthy Wench, she can cook pretty well for Rost and Boyld; she can speak no other Language but English; she had the small Pox in Barbados when a Child.

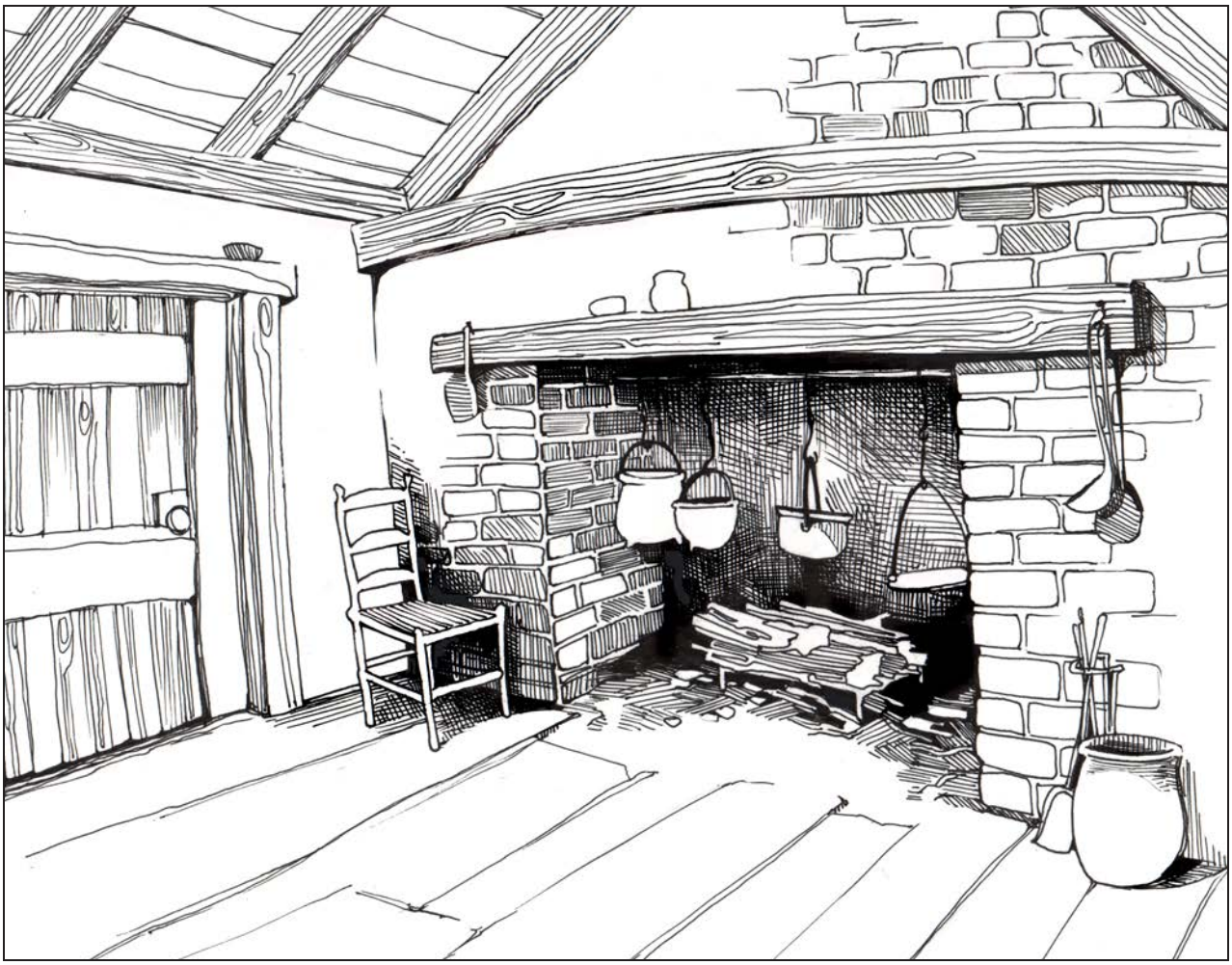

Figure 15. A "Negro kitchen" common in colonial households. African families often resided in or near this area of the household.

As the advertisement suggests, black women's labor sustained rural economies as well as urban ones. Although they could be found in the fields, for the most part they endured the drudgery that was typical of domestic labor in the eighteenth century. Enslaved women's daily chores often began before dawn and included preserving and cooking food, caring for children, cleaning house, and laundering clothes as well as spinning, weaving, sewing, and brewing alcoholic beverages. Their chores also included pumping and carrying water to meet household needs for drinking, eating, bathing, and cleaning.

Cooking was an especially burdensome task for enslaved Africans, particularly women. Often prepared in a detached "Negro kitchen"—typically found in the homes of wealthy merchants (Figure 15)—food was cooked in large, cast iron pots. When filled with food contents (including several gallons of liquid), these pots increased the burden of lifting that women endured throughout the day.

African women's labor also was exploited in the making of clothing from wool, linen, and cotton. Eighteenth-century New Yorkers used looms and spinning wheels extensively; teaching a young girl—whether enslaved or free—to spin was an important part of her education. In 1711, one of the directives left by Joseph Baker, a New York City mariner, was "to take especial care of my Negro girl named Elizabeth, free born in my house May 20, 1706." Baker stipulated that "at or before [Elizabeth] is eleven years of age she is to be taught to read English, good housewifery, and to sew, knit and spin linen and woolen well" (New York County Surrogate's Court 1893–1913:2:75).[6]

The nature of certain types of woven fabrics increased the physical exertion of the women who worked with such materials. Some of these fabrics

[6] Baker also stipulated that Elizabeth was to be allowed to live as a "white Christian" (which meant, presumably, that she would be entitled to certain privileges denied to other blacks) and receive three shillings a week during her lifetime.

Figure 16. Enslaved domestic laborers in eighteenth-century New York (illustration by Michael Colbert, 2004).

lacked flexibility and were unsuitable for wearing unless softened or fulled. In such instances, the cloth was saturated with warm water and soap and then pounded with mallets, sticks, or one's feet (Tryon 1917:210). Once rendered supple, cloths could be dyed using products such as the barks of certain woods or by using indigo (Tryon 1917:211–212).

Child Labor

In December 1721, Cadwallader Colden sought to purchase three or four enslaved laborers. Two of them, he advised, should be black men approximately 18 years of age; the third must be a black girl of about 13, whom his wife "designes . . . Chiefly to keep the children & to sow" (Colden 1918–1937:1:51). Forty years later, John Watts (1928:31), prominent New York merchant and councilor, would observe: "For this market, [enslaved laborers] must be young, the younger the better if not quite children, those advanced in years will never do." Watts's statement reflected his recognition of New Yorkers' growing need for domestic labor and their preference for compliant workers. Newspaper announcements of the arrival of "a parcel of likely negro boys and girls from nine to twelve years of age" or "a parcel of young slaves from the coast of Africa" were common in the second half of the eighteenth century (*New-York Mercury*, June 16, 1760). Children were recognized to have value as laborers even at an early age; hence, advertisements offered for sale or sought the acquisition of those as young as 6 years old (Figure 16). Vivienne Kruger (1985) has found that there was brisk buying and selling of enslaved

children between the ages of 6 and 12, when their prices were still low (*New York Chronicle*, December 21, 1769; *New-York Daily Advertiser*, January 30, 1792; *New-York Journal and Patriotic Register*, November 30, 1792, and July 25, 1792; see also Kruger 1985). Younger children, who required attention and could not perform sufficient labor to justify the cost of their upkeep, rarely suffered separation from a caregiving parent.

Children in the 6–12-year-old age group were often used to do housework and "attend at table" or engage in any labor the owner desired. Some of them, as the following advertisement suggests, began training in special skills at this early age as well: "A VERY Likely Negro Girl to be Sold, brought up here in Town, Speaks very good English, aged about Ten years, has had the Small-pox and Measels, and begins to handle her Needle" (*New York Gazette*, October 8–15, 1733).

Children may have been exposed to more strenuous types of labor in colonial New York as well. Doubtless, those who belonged to merchants and shopkeepers were as likely to work in their owner's warehouses and business establishments as they were in their households. Where men may have been preferable for certain heavy work, New Yorkers would have had to rely on whatever labor was available to them, including that supplied by women and children.[7]

Independent Economies among African Peoples

Although compelled to labor for their owners, some enslaved Africans found time and ways to engage in economic activity on their own account. The "internal economies" that developed among them helped to mitigate the deficiencies they suffered under slavery and surely provided psychological satisfaction as well. Africans who vended for their owners had ample opportunity, but presumably not permission, to sell a few of their own goods. The sale of independently grown crops and livestock, wild foods acquired from hunting and gathering, and crafts work (to say nothing of pilfered items) enabled enslaved workers to enhance their level of subsistence and earn money or other goods.

New Yorkers hastened to pass laws that sought to prohibit enslaved laborers from engaging in such independent economic activity. In 1684, for instance, the colony stipulated that no servant or enslaved person could "give sell or truck any comodity whatsoever during ye time of their service," and no free person could extend credit to servants or slaves for "clothes drinke or any other comodity" (New York State 1894:1:157). A 1702 law forbade New Yorkers to "Trade with any slave either in buying or selling, without leave and Consent of the Master or Mistress" (New York State 1894:1:761–767). The law fined the offender 5 pounds and three times the value of the item involved (New York State 1894:1:761–767). Hence, when the wife of Otto Garrison was convicted for purchasing soap from an enslaved person, she was forced to pay 5 pounds and 18 shillings (New York City Common Council 1905:1:232).[8] Yet another law in 1715 denied enslaved people the opportunity to sell oysters, thus protecting whites from competition and simultaneously restricting the ability of blacks to gain economic independence (New York State 1894:1:845).

It is worth noting that shortly before the 1741 "conspiracy" that so alarmed New York whites, the New York Common Council passed a law that prohibited "Negroes and other Slaves" from selling certain produce in the city. The council's motivation for such action was reflected in the August 1740 statement that

> [O]f Late Years great Numbers of Negros Indians and Molatto Slaves have Made it a common Practice of Buying, Selling and Exposing to Sale, not Only in houses, out houses yards but Likewise in the Publick Streets Within this City, great Quantities of Boiled Indian Corn, Pears, Peaches, Apples and other kind of fruit which pernicious practice is not only Detrimental to the Masters Mistresses and Owners of Such
>
> Slaves in Regard they Absent themselves from their Service: But is also productive of Encreasing if not Occasioning many and Dangerous fevours and other distempers & Diseases in the Inhabitants in the same city [New York City Common Council 1905:4:497–498].

[7] Data compiled from the African Burial Ground population point to certain biomechanical stress markers on the remains of adults that are indicative of hard labor. As Wilczak et al. (2009 [Chapter 11, Volume 1 of this series]) point out, however, that children are not good candidates for such study because of the constant bone remodeling that is related to natural growth.

[8] This was strengthened by a measure passed in October 1730 that forbade New Yorkers to "sell rum or other strong Liquor to any Negro Indian or Mulato Slave or Slaves or shall buy or take in pawn from them any wares Merchandises apparrel Tools Instruments or any other Kind of goods whatever" (see New York State 1894:2:679–688).

Figure 17. Market House (or Meal Market)—where Africans were bought, sold and hired (from Bruce 1898).

The law exempted vendors from the Out Ward who had their owners' permission to sell goods. New York bondmen and bondwomen were forbidden to sell these goods, perhaps because they had successfully established an informal economy that inured to their own benefit rather than that of their owners.

The absenteeism and inattentiveness of certain owners and the idleness or abundance of unclaimed time that some enslaved people enjoyed also placed them in a position to hire themselves out to those seeking labor. In an effort to regulate this activity, the Common Council enacted a measure in November 1711 that designated a specific place—the Market House at the Wall Street slip—where enslaved laborers could "take up their standing" for purposes of hire (Figure 17) (New York City Common Council 1905:2:458). In so doing, the council limited the ability of bondmen to earn money without the knowledge or consent of their owners.

New Yorkers recognized that independent economic activity on the part of enslaved laborers threatened to undermine the foundation on which their system of bondage was based. The very nature of the society, however—with its anonymity and the willingness of many whites to overlook these victimless crimes (especially if they were benefiting monetarily themselves), the mobility of its servile labor force, and the opportunity for bondmen and bondwomen to acquire items for sale (either by illegal or legal means)—ensured that these internal economies would survive.

Chapter 10

Social Characteristics and Cultural Practices of Africans in Eighteenth-Century New York

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

In May 1731, New York merchant Enoch Stephenson placed the following simple, one-sentence announcement in the city's *Gazette*: "A Parcel of choice Negro Men and Women to be Sold" (*New York Gazette*, May 17–24, 1731). The advertisement likely raised hardly an eyebrow, as such items were commonplace in the eighteenth century. Although this type of notice cavalierly consigned black men and women to the position of property, enslaved New York Africans pressed to create a life for themselves that defied their servile legal status. The continuous influx of African-born people influenced the worldview of New York's black population, and the traditions they brought with them helped to shape new institutions and permitted them to cope with the issues they faced while in bondage.

Eighteenth-Century Social and Cultural Origins

The African Background

The Africans transported to New York had lived in communities based on kinship and village loyalties and enjoyed expanded connections through intervillage exchange and marriage. Beyond these groupings, crosscutting social institutions controlled a great deal of local and, to some extent, regional social life. In the Senegambia, many of these institutions had religious overtones. Certain Islamic groups consisted of students who had studied under the same master and developed solidarities as a consequence. Traditional religious customs included extrafamily and extraregional groups that were based on a person's occupation. In some instances, caste groups formed around occupational specialties whose members intermarried and recognized solidarity based on those unions. In other instances, occupational groups expanded beyond their original intention. An example is the *ton*, a hunters' association located in Bamana country. According to tradition, the Bamana empire of Segu was founded in 1712 by Biton Kulibali, who acquired his first supporters and army in the hunters' association. This association was quickly expanded from an occupational group to both a military and political one.[1] Clearly, the principles of such a group could be expanded in other contexts to additional uses as well.

In the Sierra Leone-Liberia region, the most important crosscutting social institutions were groups such as the Poro Society, which were dominated by the political elite. John Matthews and Thomas Winterbottom, who observed the society in the 1780s and 1790s, thought it was a secret organization composed only of men—women had a separate society—for all were sworn to an oath of secrecy about its inner workings, which enforced order and punished crimes such as murder or adultery in particular (Matthews 1788:82–84; Winterbottom 1803:135–137).[2] That these institutions might be modified and extended in the environment of the Americas is suggested by Margaret Washington's (1988) contention that the independent churches of the Gullah or Sea Islands were in some ways modeled on and influenced by the Poro and Sande (women's) societies. Many of the Africans brought to those areas were from the Sierra

[1] For versions of the story of the origins of the Bamana empire, see, among others, the version based on oral and documentary sources in Djata (1997:9–25).

[2] Earlier accounts from the 1750s by Newton (1962:30) and Owen (1930:69 [mention of the society only]) concur but are less informative.

Leone region and were sought after because of their knowledge of rice cultivation (Washington 1988).

In the Gold Coast region, a number of contemporaries mention societies of nobles, some of which were hereditary and connected to wealth and others that recruited members from among the newly rich. The iconography of these societies was occasionally repeated in the New World (in the West Indies) and therefore clearly had relevance beyond simple social solidarity (Kea 1982:101–104; Thornton 2000: 181–200). In the coastal towns, there were also the *asafo*, military and self-help or civic associations with their own symbols and membership (Kea 1982:130–133).

In the Niger Delta region, Igbo society was dominated by social fraternities, which included the Mbrenchi (or Embrenche) society, as described by Olaudah Equiano (1995 [1789]).[3] Membership in the society followed recruitment and initiation, but Equiano said his father was a member, his brother had been initiated, and he himself would also have joined had he lived in Africa until the necessary age. The members of the society in Equiano's time virtually governed the village, making decisions about war and about justice (Equiano 1995:34–35 [1789]).

In the city states like Calabar, another important institution was the canoe house, an organization formed by and around the owner of large vessels. Although the institution is not described for this early period, some documentary evidence—such as the letter from Rey de Calabar to Francesco da Monteleone dated September 22, 1692 (Brásio 1952–1988:14:224)—does suggest that at least one man in Calabar was the head of a house like this one, which might form the nucleus of a crosscutting organization.

In Kongo and Ndongo, the mixture of European customs and traditional African cultural practices that had characterized the seventeenth century continued into the eighteenth. Indeed, some Kongo Catholics moved freely between the Christian world and African traditions. In 1727, a witness revealed to the Holy Inquisition then visiting Luanda the case of a certain Dom Simão Affonso. Simão Affonso, the witness claimed, was married in Mbwila but left his wife and "went to the lands of the infidels to use their fetishes and to carry their idols on his head throughout the district of Mbwila" (Arquivo Nacional de Torre de Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal, Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor, Livro 291, fol. 98).

Such practices were not limited to Kongo Christians, for an official Portuguese report from the 1780s complained that African traditions in the interior were so strong that Portuguese residing in the Kongo engaged in "idolatrous practices" carried out at ritual houses and also participated in African funerals and divining. The report also noted that the Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese engaged in "oath-making, polygamy, infidelity, adoration of idols, and circumcision" (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Angola, Report of Alexandre, former Bishop of Malaca, June 20, 1788, Caixa 73, Document 28).

Indeed, Central Africans had followed a variety of customs. As early as the mid-seventeenth century, Cavazzi (1687:1:143) noted that the Imbangalas, who had established the state of Kasanje in the middle Kwango, "drill holes in the nose and ears and pass through them some bird feathers" and "add in the middle of the forehead two horns." Cavazzi (1687:1:143) noted as well that "in childhood they file [the teeth] . . . [O]thers . . . make a gap between the two upper teeth in front and also the lower. . . . [T]his is not as a device but only for greatness."[4] Women "have the breast compressed so that they appear with them tied across with a cord" (Cavazzi 1687:1:143). In Loango, although men had no scarification, women made small incisions on the front and back of their bodies with a nail. The Kongolese, on the other hand, had no scarification, but both Mondongo men and women had scars, the women having four vertical cuts on the backs and navel (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:441–442). Moreover, Oldendorp's Mondongo informants told him that male infants were circumcised.

West Central Africans continued to practice both male and female initiation, participated in hunting societies and harvest and fishing festivals, and consulted religious practitioners in connection with sickness, births, and other celebrations.[5] They also retained a judicial system based on public ordeals, especially

[3] As indicated in Chapter 6, Equiano's account is now being challenged. It is likely, however, that even if he did not have firsthand knowledge of life in Igbo society, he might have been informed of such by other Igbo with whom he came in contact.

[4] See references to filed teeth among the burial ground population in Chapter 6 of Volume 1 of this series (Goodman et al. 2009).Within the group were 26 individuals—14 men, 10 women, and 2 adults of indeterminate gender—who exhibited culturally modified teeth. Dental modification—the intentional filing or chipping of the anterior teeth to form distinctive patterns and styles—was common to many African populations.

[5] For a discussion of female initiation practices among Kimbundus, see Douville (1991:108–109).

for those who committed murder or adultery. These tests of endurance included ingestion of poisoned water or other liquids or placing one's hand in fire or on a heated iron to prove one's innocence. Social networks in West Central Africa spread over great distances, and the different ethnic groups adopted and exchanged each other's rituals. For instance, the *indua* poison oracle of Kasanje attracted people from the Portuguese colony as well as those from the Dembos, Kongo, Kissama, and Libolo, who went to consult the oracle for the resolution of their conflicts (Sebesteyén and Vansina 1999:339).

Religious practices varied throughout the regions of West and Central Africa, so people who became commodities in the slave trade would have followed varying faiths. Islam continued to exert a strong influence in Senegambia and Sierra Leone (as it had in the seventeenth century) but was frequently syncretic. In those regions, the people practiced both male and female circumcision (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:376; see also Boucard 1974:270–271).[6]

Even as the interior became strongly Muslim as a result of expansionist wars, most of the coastal regions of West Africa were beyond Islam's grasp as late as the seventeenth century. This situation gradually changed in the eighteenth century as Muslim holy men and traders with roots in the mountainous interior became more and more prominent. In the mid-eighteenth century, visitors remarked that such men, who were often engaged in trading *gris-gris* (verses of the Qu'ran placed in amulets and used as a protective charm), could be found in every town along the Sierra Leone coast. Although they had failed to bring about widespread conversion that could be found in the mountains, they did create an awareness of the spiritual power of the religion among the inhabitants of the coast (Matthews 1788:69).[7]

Traditional African worshippers believed in the concept of the immortality of the soul but not a resurrection of the dead in the Christian sense. They had holy places, shrines, and other sites where their god (known to the people as Nesua) resided and where the faithful went to pray. Priests also performed mediating roles and administered oaths to detect witches and uncover other crimes (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:379–380). Descriptions from Sierra Leone indicate the presence of lesser spirits who served the divine being and thus created an image of a less monotheistic concept of divinity (Matthews 1788:66–67).

Among the Akan of the Gold Coast, Christianity and Islam were of far less significance than traditional African faith. Small enclaves of Christians settled near the coastal forts, and similarly small numbers of Muslims entered the region for commercial purposes. The Akan religion recognized a high god, usually called Nyame or Nyamkompung, and a variety of territorially specific deities, whose shrines were the object of considerable local worship. In addition to shrines, individuals also had personal religious items, sometimes in their houses. Mediation with these various deities was by means of priests, called, among other things, Akomfo.[8]

Among the groups that inhabited the Bight of Benin in the eighteenth century, there was belief in a high god, who was often referred to as Mawu, or Vodu, in Fon or a variant of this in Ewe (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:412, 423). Pires's (1957:90–91) 1800 account gives the names of other important deities that included Lebá (Legba), the "Good Director of Life and Death," and Bokó, or Aganán, a royal leopard, with a priest, or *loko*, in charge of each one. The god often appeared in oracles or in shrines of various types; sometimes certain animals were held to have divine characteristics (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:420–422).[9] Dahomeans were little influenced by Christianity but did not discredit it. In the 1780s, the biracial wife of the Portuguese interpreter at court stopped a terrifying thunderstorm by saying a series of prayers to the Virgin Mary and then invoked an image of Saint Anthony. During the encounter, the ruler declared that the "true fetish" was that of the whites. He agreed to pay for one mass each week at the chapel in the Portuguese factory, but he never converted to the faith (Pires 1957:93–94).

[6] Oldendorp's informants from the region he called Kanga—probably Kru-speaking people along the Liberian coast and frequently enslaved in the mid-eighteenth century—noted that merchants in their lands were both Muslim and literate.

[7] Matthews's experience on the coast was from 1785.

[8] The most systematic account of Akan religion, albeit for the seventeenth century, is Müller (1968:43–101 [1676]. For the eighteenth century, see Oldendorp (2000–2002:1:389–391 [in Asante], 2000–2002:1:392–394 [Akyem], 2000–2002:1:395–399 [northern groups]; most of his space is devoted to religious beliefs as related to him by a dozen informants from various areas). Ferdinand Ludwig Rømer (1760:49–106) provided a rambling account without much theological order or rigor, much of it from Accra and based on testimony of Putti [Okpoti], one of Rømer's principal informants.

[9] Oldendorp also cites accounts in early books, such as Bosman and des Marchais, along with his own informant, who was a Creole whose parents were from Whydah and had told him stories of the past in their home. Another informant from Wawu mentioned a "Tiger" as a god, which the people treated the same way as the Whydan snake (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:424–425; see also Pires 1957:131–133).

In the Niger Delta, most Igbo groups called their high god Chukwu and believed that he manifested himself in trees and other places. Some of the faithful were "living oracles" to the supernatural to which others had recourse, and the people believed that the intentions of the Other World were most often manifested in "good and bad spirits" (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:430, 432–433).

In the eighteenth century, missionary critics of Kongolese Catholicism continued to denounce the retention of local rituals and moved against the local priests in particular by burning their spirit houses. Yet throughout the Kimbundu and Dembos areas, the ubiquitous presence of altars with images, many with statues of famous Catholic saints alongside statues representing local beliefs, spoke to the strong continuity of African rituals. These public altars were located throughout the Mbundu region, and there was a local priesthood that attended to them. The altars and the local priests competed directly with the foreign priests and officials who were intent on burning them and eliminating African religious authorities. For example, the Portuguese described the Dembos (a region that supplied slaves to the British) as "idolatrous Catholics" who adored altars that contained "massive wooden idols" and other human figures of both sexes (Correia 1937:2:202). The rulers of some Dembos states, however, attempted to reassure the Portuguese in Luanda that they were making every effort to "baptize the population" and were "destroying the idols and barbarous customs" (Dom Alvaro Filho Segundo persona de Dembo Ambwilla to Sousa Coutinho, letter, February 28, 1767, Oficios para Angola -79-A-2, fol. 2, Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Angola). The Capuchin missionary Father Cherubino de Savona, who lived in the Kongo in the 1760s, also discerned the presence of indigenous Kongo practices among the population in the interior of the kingdom. He wrote that the people nearest the capital were "good Christians," but those in the eastern province of Wandu, even though fully baptized and asking for missionaries, were "full of superstition and idolatry" (Toso 1974:208).

The West Indian Cultural Background

New York Africans who had sojourned in the West Indies for an extended period of time would have been influenced initially by the new cultural patterns that emerged as a consequence of their circumstances in the islands. Even as bondage challenged African social and cultural structures, enslaved people continued to rely on those institutions that provided physical, psychological, and spiritual support. Kinship networks continued to serve this end.

Certain scholars who have studied West Indian slavery have maintained that although familial structures existed under slavery, the system caused fragmentation and led to alternative forms of unions that were neither obligatory nor stable. Recent scholarship, however, lends support to the presence of nuclear single family units. Barry Higman (1975), for instance, has concluded that this type of family served as a model, despite constant assaults upon it that included separation of mates. As his research was concentrated on enslaved families in the rural areas, Higman (1975) has conceded the probability that urban units and households were headed by women as a consequence of miscegenation, low sex ratio, and the size of slaveholdings.

The types of families that emerged during the period of slavery varied as much as did the islands. In some places and times, families consisted of husband and wife or might include siblings. Even households consisting of mothers and their children (and perhaps a grandmother) may have been less matrifocal than their composition would suggest (Higman 1975). The practice of inter-plantation marriages, whereby men and women found mates off the estate, reflected a desire to avoid inbreeding. Such practices led enslaved people to travel long distances at night to visit their wives and partners.

Misunderstanding the nature of the enslaved family unit, some West Indian managers attributed night travel to promiscuity among Africans. One manager lamented his inability to

> confine Negroes in their choice of concubines. This plurality of wives constituting their greatest luxury arising from natural habits and constituted by general usage among them. In this country, promiscuous intercourse is being carried beyond all bounds of licentiousness known in Europe. They are not satisfied to confine their intercourse at home but carried on abroad on neighbouring Estates that they may have less interruption at home and less jealousy abroad. . . . There is much difficulty to keep the Negroes Women at home while forward in pregnancy or at any labour [Thomas Lawson to Henry Goulburn, letter, January 19, 1807, Goulburn Papers, Accession No. 319/151/32, Surrey Record Office, Kingston-upon-Thames].

Other planters recognized the importance of marriages and families to Africans, especially in the age of amelioration that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. Hence, they sought to introduce such unions on their estates. Rather than serving as a humanitarian gesture, however, their actions were designed to increase the possibility of breeding. Aiming to encourage coresident unions instead of allowing their enslaved people to augment the population of other estates, managers offered marriage incentives in the form of cash. On one estate, the owner advised his manager: "Upon the marriage of a young couple . . . I desire you will not only assign them a lot of land, but that you will have the house built for them altogether at my expence" (Pinckard 1816:1:457). Toward the end of the eighteenth century in Barbados, Africans were encouraged to marry at their naming ceremonies. The managers selected their wives, and they were joined accordingly (Pinckard 1816:1:457).

As the church became more important in the lives of enslaved people near the end of the eighteenth century, marriages occurred more regularly. The churches became the allies of the planters in the effort to encourage large families. Apart from gifts, clothing, and monetary awards at the time of the birth of children, those families that had seven offspring received the following indulgences: the women were exempted from all estate work, and their husbands were entitled to tether animals on plantation lands. They could also transfer this right to others.

African peoples found their practices of child rearing altered as a consequence of their enslavement. Considered valuable property because they were future sources of labor, the rearing of children mainly became a responsibility of estate management. On some estates, black children were thoroughly examined every Sunday morning to ensure that they were free of vermin, yaws, and worms. Their meals were prepared in common kitchens by specially selected superannuated enslaved women. When parents died, especially if they had been in the active service of the estate, the management made a special effort to rear the children under the watchful eyes of the overseer (Carrington 2002:136–138).

Slavery also altered the characteristics of African culture. Separation from the homeland and the demands and restrictions imposed on their new lives required that enslaved Africans create traditions shaped by their new reality. The steady stream of imports into the West Indian islands, however, also served to renew the African heritage of those long removed from their homelands or those born in the Americas. Hence, Africans in diaspora enjoyed certain cultural continuities that contributed to their sense of self. Through religion, language, dance, song, folklore, relationship to their elders, and burial, they fashioned an existence for themselves that circumvented their bondage.

Millions of Africans imported into the Caribbean brought their religious beliefs with them, and although they faced the hostility of the white planters and clergymen, they "clung desperately to their deep-seated notions" (Bell 1970:8). The syncretic practices they had developed in Africa continued in the West Indies, as Christian beliefs and practices were subsumed within the framework of an African worldview. On some islands, there was a greater emphasis on African ideas within the worship ceremony. This was particularly the case in Haiti where voodoo (Vodun), identified as being Dahomean in origin, was possibly the most African of the religions and attracted many practitioners who were also members of the Catholic Church.

Shango (practiced in Trinidad and considered to be similar to voodoo and Yoruban in origin) had also incorporated many Catholic doctrines. This religion and many others, such as Santeria—a New World expression of the Yoruba religion and its counterparts candomblé and macumba—make significant use of the drums, dance, and song (chanting) during worship. Africans in the West Indies danced to achieve "spirit possession," and they may have worshipped several gods, especially because they emerged from numerous linguistic and other ethnic groups (Bisnauth 1996). In the Caribbean, therefore, the divinities of different groups were merged together. Opposition to African religions led the planter class to suppress African traditions. Hence, the black population turned to the priests as well as to the obeah for satisfaction against injustices. Both groups acquired immense stature in slave societies and had great influence over the population (Bell 1970:8–10).

Many obeah men and women used herbs and plants to cure illnesses, thus establishing a long tradition of herbal remedies throughout the region. The planters denied that healing in this way was possible, and they accused the obeah practitioners of using paraphernalia, potions, spells, and varied substances (including poison) to harm their victims. Laws and ordinances were adopted to stamp it out, but none succeeded, as many men and women continued to practice obeah in spite of the colonial laws prohibiting it (Bell 1970:8–10).

Just as the sacred and secular worlds of African peoples overlapped in their homelands, so too did they under slavery. Music especially filled spiritual needs as well as providing cultural support during daily secular routines. Even during the Middle Passage, African peoples used song to buoy their spirits and to keep alive the memory of homelands. In addition, the captives immediately set about establishing bonds that would recreate ties that would remind them of their village codes and practices. Once they arrived on the plantations, Africans devised ways to express their cultural roots with a minimum of white interference. As they held an ideological belief in transmigration, they could also employ their musical instruments and songs to retain a cultural link with Africa. Two instruments that they brought with them or recreated were the *banjar* and the *toombah*. One eighteenth-century commentator wrote of these instruments:

> The banjar is somewhat similar to the guitar, the bottom, or under part, is formed of one half of a large calabash, to which is prefixed a wooden neck, and it is strung with cat gut and wire. The instrument is the invention of, and was brought here by the African negroes, who are most expert in the performances thereon, which are principally their own country tunes, indeed I do not remember ever to have heard any thing like European numbers from it track. The toombah is similar to the tabor, and has the gingles of tin shells [Luffman 1790:135–136].

The *banjar* and the *toombah* helped to form "the band," which sometimes included a type of African drum and a rattle as well. The drum, played by two men, was made of a hollow piece of wood with dried sheepskin tied over the end. One of the players sat "across the body of the drum, as it lies lengthwise upon the ground, beats and kicks the sheep-skin at the end, in violent exertion with his hands and heels; another sitting upon the ground at the other end, behind the man upon the drum beats upon the wooden sides of it with two sticks" (Luffman 1790:135–136). The band also included singers of both sexes who performed African songs. The band played at dances mainly on Sundays in "any square or any corner of the town" (Luffman 1790:135–136). In Louisiana, these dances took place at the famous "Congo Square." In the Caribbean, the dance took place with couples in a circle in the center of a large crowd. The structure of such a dance is described in detail by George Pinckard (1816:126):

> The dance consists of stamping of the feet, twisting of the body, and a number of strange indecent attitudes. It is a severe bodily exertion . . . for the limbs have little to do with it. The head is held erect, or, occasionally, inclined a little forward; the hands nearly meet before; the elbows are fixed, pointing from the sides; and, the lower extremities being held rigid, the whole person is moved without lifting the feet from the ground. Making the head and the limbs fixed points, they writhe and turn the body upon its axis slowly advancing towards each other, or retreating to the other parts of the ring. . . . Not a smile not a significant glance, nor an immodest look escapes from either sex. Occasionally, they change the figure by stamping upon the feet, or making a more general movement of the person, but these are only temporary variations; the twistings and turnings of the body seeming to constitute the supreme excellence of the dance.

Over the years, Africans retained most features of their dances, despite laws enacted by local legislatures forbidding such behavior. And despite the belief that these dances were lewd and indecent, over time, white participation led to their general acceptability.

African American Social Structure and Cultural Characteristics in the Eighteenth Century

Introduction

The foregoing discussion conveys just how diverse were the beliefs and practices of those societies from which New York Africans arrived. Upon arrival in the colonial city, they drew upon these traditions to forge bonds with each other as well as to cope with the myriad troubles attending their enslavement. Social networks forged between the native and African born, and a sense of shared circumstances fostered cultural continuities and identity in the black community.

Establishing and Maintaining Family

Cadwallader Colden's "Negro Wench" exasperated her owner. The young woman had fallen in love with Gabriel, one of Colden's laborers, and Colden was determined that his own economic needs would prevail

Table 9. New York's Black Population by Ward, 1703

Ward	Black Males	Black Females	Black Male Children (under 16)	Black Female Children (under 16)	Total
East Ward	77	78	37	22	214
South Ward	57	58	23	34	172
Dock Ward	68	79	24	26	197
North Ward	31	18	5	4	58
West Ward	32	30	16	8	86
Out Ward	33	13	19	7	72
Total	298	276	124	101	799

Note: From U.S. Bureau of the Census (1989). This differs somewhat from the figures arrived at by Foote (1991:94–127).

over the romantic interests of his chattel. Hence, he sold the young man and when told that he might try to return, Colden (1918–1937:1:193) conspired to keep him away from "that Wench that I value."

Africans and native-born blacks who resided in New York in the eighteenth century shared the desire to find life mates and build families. Wills, runaway advertisements, diaries, and letters provide a glimpse of how difficult it was to forge lifelong ties and develop a sense of community. Patterns of slaveholding, demographic realities, and the looming threat of sale and division as a consequence of punishment or the owner's death compromised enslaved people's ability to enjoy this most basic of human rights.

Besides owners' self-interest, black family structure and stability in colonial New York depended largely on the unique economic characteristics of each ward in the city (see Table 9).[10] In the East Ward, the center of shipbuilding and commerce, a demand for unskilled manual labor produced the largest concentration of enslaved people in a single community. It was here that New York's mercantile families—the Beekmans, Schuylers, and Philipses—conducted their business. Half the whites in the ward held bondpersons, most of them men and boys, the majority of whom lived alone (Foote 1991:94–95). Thelma Foote (1991:94–95) has shown that although such patterns would have made it difficult for these men to form bonds with other black people within their residences, they had opportunities to interact with other laborers from the ward (and those brought in from the outside as hires as well) in the shipyards and on the docks.

By contrast, the South Ward was dominated somewhat by women and girls, who frequently were the sole black laborer in a household. Unlike the men in the ward who had ample opportunity to interact with others because of the practice of hiring out, these women would have had occasion for social engagement primarily as a consequence of weekly trips to the local market and more frequently to the tea-water pump.

The most affluent area of the city, the Dock Ward, was home to the wealthiest merchants. The laborers these men held were employed at the owners' businesses (many of which were located in the East Ward) or hired out. Hires were imported from the East Ward as well. More than two-thirds of the residents held enslaved laborers, and better than one third of those laborers, many of whom were women, lived alone.

The least affluent neighborhood, the North Ward, was home largely to journeymen and day laborers. Nearly half the residences held a single enslaved person, and men outnumbered women by a significant degree. The West Ward and Out Wards were the most remote areas of the city, the latter located outside the city limits. In the Out Ward, the demand for farm laborers resulted in black men greatly outnumbering black women and children.

The majority of New York Africans lived in households with two or three bondpersons. Frequently, a mother and her child (or children) occupied a dwelling under the same roof as their owner. Adult males often belonged to someone else and resided in a separate household (Goodfriend 1992:Chapter 6). The denial of desired visiting rights with their families frustrated

[10] The following discussion is based primarily on the 1703 census. Demographic patterns would have changed over time. For discussion of this trend, see Davis (1984); see also Foote (1991:90–125).

black men and led to confrontations with offending slave owners. One such instance allegedly led to the burning of the fort that marked the supposed conspiracy of 1741 (Horsmanden 1971:xiv).

The inadequacy of housing for enslaved laborers and concern that domestics would be distracted by the burden of caring for dependent children too young to contribute to the household economy prompted some owners to discourage childbearing. Women who refused or were unable to keep their procreative functions in check were subject to sale. Illustrative of this is an advertisement that appeared in the May 27, 1751, edition of the *New York Gazette*, revived in the *Weekly Post Boy*:

> To be Sold, an excellent Negro Wench, about 20 years old, with a male child, about three months old; the Wench has had the Smallpox, can cook, wash, and iron, can be well recommended, and is Sold for no other Fault than being too fruitful.

A similar newspaper entry advertises the sale of "a young Wench about 29 years old, that drinks no strong Drink, and gets no Children, a very good Drudge" (Foote 1991:85). Under unrelenting pressure to remain childless and because they were unable to provide adequate care for their children already born, enslaved women sometimes embraced a horrific solution. In at least one instance, an African woman unhinged by her owner's complaints "took her own young child from her breast, and lait it in the cold, [where] it froze to death" (Horsmanden 1971:87).

Demographic and slaveholding patterns doubtless encouraged enslaved men and women to form familial bonds with non-kin who were in close proximity to them. Through these relationships, they could endure the isolation of their owners' households and find lasting and fulfilling ties when separated from spouses, parents, children, and siblings.

The Specter of Sale

The possibility of sale weighed heavily on the minds and hearts of the enslaved. Financial considerations or diminished labor needs might lead an owner to offer up his laborers for purchase. In such instances, an entire family could find itself defenseless and its future uncertain, as the following eighteenth-century advertisement reveals:

> To be sold: a black family, consisting of a man, his wife, a fine girl about twelve, another girl about five years old, and a male child capable of running about alone, the parents are honest, sober, neat, quiet, well disposed; have lived in the country; the man an excellent farmer, the woman a good cook, and excellent in a dairy; the eldest girl very handy in attending at table, the younger a child of hopes; in short, it is a useful trustworthy comely family, and of late years accustomed to live in this city. The above will be sold either separate or altogether [*The Daily Advertiser*, June 8, 1793].

Similarly, the death of an owner almost always necessitated a division of his estate. As property, enslaved people found themselves listed as part of the inventory and scattered to the numerous relatives who lay claim to the estate of the deceased. The disposal of enslaved property under these circumstances is typified in the case of New York merchant James Shaw. Shaw owned a family that consisted of a man, woman, and boy. Upon his death, each was bequeathed to separate members of his family (New York County Surrogate's Court 1893–1913, vol. 8).

Separation as a consequence of punishment proved to be an all too real experience for New York Africans as well. Recalcitrant laborers faced the likelihood of sale away from family and friends to the South or the West Indies. Swedish traveler Peter Kalm (1964:1:208) noted that "nothing makes more impression upon a negro [in the North] than that of sending him over to the West Indies, in case he will not reform." In cases where enslaved people had been accused of crimes that threatened the safety of white New Yorkers, financially conscious owners sought to protect their investment by electing to transport such dangerous property out of the colony rather than agreeing to its destruction. In this manner, 71 of the 101 enslaved people convicted in the 1741 incident were transported from the colony rather than being forced to face execution.[11]

Despite the obstacles they encountered, black men and women insisted on establishing familial relationships. John Sharpe (1881:355), the chaplain of British forces in New York, in 1712 spoke of enslaved people forming marriages by "mutual consent."[12] Although it may be argued that identifying these unions as mar-

[11] See "A List of Negroes Committed on Account of the Conspiracy," in Horsmanden (1971 [following page 465]).

[12] The chaplain's concern, however, was not that blacks might have problems establishing familial relationships but that they did so without benefit of the "blessing of the church."

riages is inaccurate (as the owners did not recognize such relationships as legal or any more binding than those between livestock), one should remember that enslaved people maintained their own values and fashioned a worldview independent of slaveholders.

The Sacred World of New York Africans

Perhaps in no way was this independent worldview more obvious than in the sacred realm. In a letter to John Riddell dated November 27, 1762, John Watts (1928:97) explained why he felt compelled to part with his enslaved cook, citing a certain unfortunate (at least from his perspective) cultural proclivity the woman suffered:

> Mr. Isaac Young-Husband has a Wench of mine in his hands called Belinda, middle aged but not very comely, she is a simple innocent creature & a very good Cook, has lived long in my family & indeed was a most necessary Servant, but her simplicity led her to triffle about charms which alarmed my female family too much to keep her.

Similar traditional African beliefs and practices were noted, especially in connection with resistance. In the 1712 uprising, for instance, enslaved men sought invincibility by covering their bodies with what they believed to be a special powder; they also confirmed their commitment to each other and the revolt by swearing a blood oath. And in the 1741 "conspiracy," black men swore upon an oath of "thunder and lightning" (Horsmanden 1971:297).[13]

The infusion of African-born people, especially after the mid-eighteenth century, kept traditional African beliefs fresh in the minds of the enslaved. Moreover, significant numbers of captives arriving from Africa came from regions with a strong Islamic presence. Presumably, at least some of them were professed Muslims who attempted to follow their faith, even under slavery (see Gomez 2005).

Christian beliefs remained influential with some enslaved people, however, as the runaway advertisement for the return of Andrew Saxton makes clear. An enslaved laborer owned by Jacobus Van Cortlandt, Saxton was described as well spoken and "professeth himself to be a Roman Catholick" (*New York Gazette*, August 27 to September 3, 1733). But although the earliest New York Africans had joined, married, and baptized their children within the church (expecting that such actions would afford them a more favorable position in the society and perhaps even lead to freedom), those who came later seemed less inclined toward church membership.[14] Neither were white New Yorkers interested in winning converts among their enslaved property. John Sharpe (1881:350) complained in 1712 that "the first hindrance to the truly pious work of Christianizing [black people] is an unwillingness in their masters that they should be so." Such resistance, Sharpe (1881:353) maintained, sprang from the belief that blacks lacked an immortal soul and that Christianity "makes them rather worse than better."

Fearful that religious instruction made enslaved people rebellious, New Yorkers resisted the efforts of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (or SPG). In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the SPG established and supported a catechetical school in which to instruct Indians and enslaved blacks about Christianity. Elias Neau, appointed instructor, held classes—which included white indentured servants and apprentices as well—in his home on Wednesday and Friday evenings and on Sundays after church services (Sharpe 1881:354).

Contemporaries found Neau to be a conscientious catechist who visited his students in their humble residences when they were sick and was determined to win enslaved people over to God. Although large numbers of African Americans did not or could not partake of the instruction that Neau offered, those who did enjoyed a heightened status within the community of enslaved people because of their literacy (Goodfriend 1992:126–132). Neau's school suffered severe reproach as a consequence of the 1712 revolt, but classes continued until the 1720s, when he died.

Despite Neau's efforts, many of his black students had not pursued baptism as an end to religious instruction. Sharpe (1881:355) suggested that they lacked incentive to do so, given that baptism produced no material change in their civil status and that "they find their usage the same, the appellations, the exactions, censures and severities . . . if they had the benefit of our laws after Baptism where life or member is concerned . . . it would be a motive to their diligence in attaining a sufficient measure of knowledge in order to be baptized." He asserted

[13] For discussion of the 1712 revolt and 1741 "conspiracy," see Chapter 13.

[14] For discussion of the "Africanization of the northern colonies" and its impact on religion, see Berlin (1998:60–61, 189–190).

as well that the practice of polygamy prevented some black men and women from seeking baptism. Whether by preference of the enslaved or by the designs of an owner, concurrent multiple marriages precluded Christian unions and barred Africans thus engaged in such practices from entering the ranks of the saved (Sharpe 1881).

The Secular Life of New York Africans

Marginalized by a society that defined them as property, Africans and people of African descent created a world in which they found respite from the drudgery of labor as they pursued their own social and cultural interests. Despite numerous laws that attempted to restrict their behavior, enslaved people enjoyed a variety of secular cultural expressions within the environment of New York City. Men (overwhelmingly, but on occasion, women as well) gathered at the various establishments where they could drink and talk freely—taverns, dram shops, tippling houses, and the tea-water pump. Men whose owners were out of the city for extended periods of time—leaving them virtually free to move about with little challenge—and those ostensibly on errands found white proprietors (and black ones too) more than willing to bend or break the laws for profit. Such gatherings afforded enslaved men opportunities for fellowship as well as the chance to share lamentations concerning their bondage.[15]

African-influenced cultural expressions were discernible at certain street markets where enslaved people entertained each other (and incidentally, white spectators) through song and dance and exhibited their skill with certain musical instruments (Figure 18). At such gatherings, they interacted with both men and women, including those arriving in town from the countryside to vend a variety of goods, and blacks from the city going about their daily chores (Foote 1991:236–237).

Thomas DeVoe (1969 [1862]), who wrote a history of the various markets that dotted the New York landscape in the colonial period, addressed the issue of black cultural expression, especially dancing. Although his research was conducted a generation after the demise of slavery, he was able to interview people who remembered the vibrant culture that was evident in the markets. DeVoe surmised that the introduction of "public negro dancing" occurred at the Catharine Market, where butchers, fishermen, and other vendors erected stands and sold their goods. The unique dancing style, he believed, was first introduced by blacks from outside the city, especially Long Island and New Jersey, who came to town during holidays and who earned a few shillings by dancing in the markets. Eventually, city blacks competed with the others for the money to be made.

DeVoe described the "break-down" or "shake-down" that characterized black dance as taking place on a board or shingle that was approximately 5 or 6 feet long. The contestant was confined to the plank and danced while others tapped out the music by "beating their hands on the sides of their legs and the noise of the heel" (DeVoe 1969:344 [1862]). These expressions would have created and reinforced a sense of a separate black culture that encompassed the many ethnic groups within the larger community of people of African descent.

These daily cultural expressions revealed the strength of the continued reliance of New York Africans on an African heritage. Music and dance had been central in the lives of Africans in the societies from which black New Yorkers were plucked, as it accompanied rites associated with birth, initiation, marriage, healing, war, and even death. Music took center stage at religious ceremonies and in the various festivals that celebrated harvest. White contemporaries commented on the distinctiveness of certain cultural practices among black people, although usually in a less than complimentary fashion. Expressive dance was seen as "lewd and indecent gesticulation"; vocalizations became "sounds of frightful dissonance" (White 1991:96–97).[16]

Such differences were especially pronounced in the New York African's celebration of Pinkster. Originating with the Dutch observance of Pentecost, some have argued that by the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Pinkster had been appropriated by Africans and had become the occasion for festival and merrymaking. Eileen Southern (1997:53) has suggested that the celebration and its African influences were reminiscent of those at Congo Square in

[15] Testimony offered at the trials of the men and women charged in the 1741 incident suggests that New York Africans had grown accustomed to congregating in public and private establishments where they entertained each other and commiserated (see Davis 1985; Horsmanden 1971).

[16] The commentary reflected the observations of Pinkster in Albany. However, Africans in New York City engaged in similar kinds of cultural expression and perhaps attracted the same response from whites locally.

Figure 18. Dancing at the market (from Costello 1887).

New Orleans.[17] James Fenimore Cooper's (1937:60 [1845]) depiction of Pinkster in his nineteenth-century fictional work *Satanstoe* suggests that the celebrations occurred in the vicinity of today's City Hall Park, near the location of the African Burial Ground. Thus far, however, no documentary evidence has been uncovered that places it there.[18]

The greater mobility of enslaved men enabled them to form informal organizations based on residency and a shared desire to resist efforts to proscribe their

[17] A. J. Williams-Myers (1985) supports the idea that Pinkster was a continuation of Africanisms. Not all historians, however, have emphasized this African influence on Pinkster celebrations among New York Africans. Shane White (1991) acknowledges the importance of African traditions in the celebration but believes that its blending of both European and African cultures is of greater significance.

[18] Cooper's description of the celebration emphasized African traditions as well, along with the widespread attendance of African peoples at these gatherings, including those residing many miles from the city. Although Shane White (1991) discounts the description because its source is fictional, Cooper's depiction, so recently rendered after the abandonment of the practice, may have had a factual base.

lives. Smith's Fly Boys and the Long Bridge Boys identified with neighborhoods within the wards where they lived and labored, and their associations doubtless provided a kind of bond, an extension of kinship, that likely eluded them as individuals. Although it has been argued that these associations consisted of acculturated men, it is likely that such groups represented an attempt on the part of people of African descent, daily reminded of their roots, to use their heritage as a framework when fashioning social institutions.[19]

Such reminders did not preclude participation in European-inspired social networks. Before the mid-eighteenth century, black men had formed an association that took the name "Free masons," after an organization whose membership consisted of the mercantile and political elite of the city and of English society. Their "impudence to assume the style" (Horsmanden 1971:67) of such a respected and influential group offended and exasperated New York's white population, but enslaved men determined that they would reject the status that their owners had assigned to them.

In contrast, certain black organizations devolved into criminal gangs. Such activity represented resistance against their circumscribed lives (as many have noted) as well as a means of supplementing the subsistence provided by their owners. The Geneva Club—so-called after a group of men from the Long Bridge area broke into a tavern cellar and pilfered Geneva gin—was one of a number of such groups that stole from local merchants and households and fenced the goods to white men and women who were seeking their own means of survival (Horsmanden 1971:67). The money to be made from such activities could materially enhance the quality of life not only for the men themselves, but for those to whom they felt responsible—wives, children, and other relatives—despite physical separation resulting from the patterns of slaveholdings.

[19] For a discussion of associations among enslaved men, see Craig Wilder (2001).

Chapter 11

Disease and Health

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

Even as labor shaped the experiences of enslaved Africans in colonial New York, disease and ill health exacerbated the burdens of work. Some of the afflictions from which they suffered left markers on the bones, offering clues from the grave about an individual's disease history. Bowing of the femur and tibia (an indication of rickets), dental pathologies and developmental defects (including caries and abscesses), and other evidence of nutritional deficiencies and childhood stress are evident in the remains. In addition, one sees markers for infectious diseases, numerous fractures, and osteoarthritis (as discussed in Chapter 9 of this report; see also Null et al. 2009 [Chapter 10, Volume 1 of this series]). The likelihood that many of those in the African Burial Ground were either African born or had sojourned in the West Indies makes it imperative for any discussion of this population's health to factor in the disease environment they encountered before their arrival in New York.

Disease Environment and Health in West and West Central Africa

Extant sources provide little information concerning health practices among Africans in the eighteenth century, either in the west or central region. We do know that in some areas, such as the Senegambia, the people were subject to recurring famines, caused in part by the uncertainties of the climate and war (Archives Nationales de France, "Réponse du conseil superieur du Senegal au memoire d'observation sur ledit Senegal et Gorée du mois de fevrier 1754," C6/14).[1] War and the slave trade also had long-term demographic effects in certain regions, unbalancing the sex ratios as adults, especially men, were removed from the population through either death or sale. Claude Boucard's (1974:255) report on Bambuk in 1729 noted that "all the villages are well populated; in effect one sees in them a great number of children and women, but I think in all three kingdoms [that made up Bambuk] there are scarcely three thousand men capable of bearing arms."

What is known about health practices in West Central Africa centers around treatment for ailments. Most observers identified the priests (Ngangas) as filling the role of medical practitioners in addition to carrying out their spiritual functions. The missionary Giovanni Francesco da Roma (1649:114–116), writing in the seventeenth century, noted that the Ngangas used a variety of herbal treatments, spoke to "the Devil in calabash," made circles on the soil or in the air, then asked the sick person if he felt better. If the patient's health improved, he paid the Nganga and left. If, on the other hand, the patient had a relapse, he went back to the Nganga and was treated until either cured or dead. Roma (1649:114–116) also noted that the Ngangas used a lancet to phlebotomize and that the people, especially the women, were "superstitious" and believed in omens such as birdcalls. Among the Mondongo, priests also provided medical advice during states of possession (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:439).

Health Conditions and the Middle Passage

Whatever their condition when they left their homelands, by the time Africans arrived in the Americas, the trek to the port of embarkation and the several weeks

[1] For a larger picture focusing on famine, see Webb (1995).

or months of travel spent traversing the ocean virtually guaranteed poor health. Africans enslaved in the transatlantic trade suffered physically and psychologically, as they were forced to leave the familiar behind and often walked great distances overland to departing ships. Along the way, they experienced hunger and exhaustion and devastating loss (especially when loved ones, too weak to continue, were abandoned and left to die along the side of the road).[2]

A second stage of emotional and physical distress began with incarceration in holding facilities as enslaved people awaited the arrival of a ship. Whether it was the "castles" at Gorée, Cape Coast, or El Mina, or a holding pen at some other, less notorious place, African men, women, and children experienced the utter despair of being confined with hundreds of like souls in apprehension of unknown fates. Poor sanitation and ventilation, inadequate diets, and overcrowding compromised physical health even more.

The arrival of a ship brought relief from the holding cells, but onboard conditions hardly improved the health of enslaved people. The Atlantic crossing might be delayed as captains either waited for greater numbers to reach the coast or sailed to other ports in search of more captives. Once the ship was underway, diseases such as smallpox, fevers, and "the flux" (dysentery) often moved through the human cargo unchecked, devastating the population and reducing it sometimes by as much as 15 percent or more. The sheer horror of it all led some to take their own lives. Others succumbed to what was called at the time "fixed melancholy" but is now known to be caused by dehydration and inadequate intake of food. Isaac Wilson, a surgeon on board the ship *Elizabeth*, described the condition as beginning with

> lowness of spirits and despondency; refusing their proper nourishment . . . at length the stomach gets weak, and incapable of digesting their food; fluxes and dysenteries ensue; and, from the weak and debilitated state of the patient, it soon carries him off [Great Britain 1975:72:574–575].

By the time they reached the Americas, many survivors would have experienced weeks, if not months, of debilitating conditions and would have been in a state akin to shock. How they fared in this next stage of enslavement would depend on the new disease environment into which they were thrust, as well as the characteristics of the economy.

[2] The Middle Passage is addressed extensively in the House of Commons sessional papers (Great Britain 1975, vol. 82).

Disease and Health in the West Indies

Enslaved laborers who arrived in New York after having sojourned for a period of time in the West Indies would have been exposed to a variety of illnesses common to that environment. The diseases affecting them could be divided into seasonal types—that is, those determined by climate and weather conditions and by the environment in which they lived—and those that were chronic. Endemic illnesses were made worse by the physical, social, and economic conditions that enslaved laborers endured—malnourishment, crowded quarters, long hours of labor, poorly constructed huts that opened to the elements and rested on damp and wet terrain, and lack of sanitary conditions in the compounds.

The physical condition of enslaved individuals can be gleaned from "slave lists," which were kept by plantation managers and which provide detailed information on the health of each class of workers. The lists are instructive concerning the number of invalids and unhealthy individuals they identify (e.g., Bodleian Library, Oxford [BLO], Barham Papers, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, "A List of Negroes on Mesopotamia Estate, Jamaica," and "A List of Slaves and Stock on Island Estate at Elizabeth, Jamaica"). Most of the skilled laborers, such as drivers, carpenters, and other artisans, were listed as "able," but coopers—perhaps because of their rigorous jobs—often appeared as "weakly" or "very weakly." Infants who were too young to work were cited as being in good health, although many of them had yaws. Although most women were listed as being "healthy," the journals recorded a significant number as "weakly" or "sickly." For the most part, however, field workers were categorized as "able" or "healthy," as were both boys and young girls (e.g., BLO, Barham Papers, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, "A List of Negroes on Mesopotamia Estate, Jamaica," and "A List of Slaves and Stock on Island Estate at Elizabeth, Jamaica").

Examination of these lists reveals a host of diseases that afflicted the enslaved Africans. Among them was "cocobay," an "utterly incurable" disease that was "peculiarly infectious among slaves" and likened to leprosy (Stewart 1823:302). Enslaved Africans were petrified of the disease, and because it was determined to be incurable, they expelled all ailing members from the community, placing them in individual huts some distance away.

New arrivals to the West Indian plantations were especially sensitive to the environmental changes

they encountered there. Although they may have been accustomed to the intensity of the sun's rays, "New Negroes" who were transported to the mountains (with its cooler, damper conditions) often fell ill soon after their arrival with "severe colds, pleurisies, fluxes, and other distempers" (British Library, London (BLL), Long Papers (LP), Additional Manuscript (AM) 12, 404, fol. 354a). Many of the ailments that most often afflicted the newly arrived Africans proved fatal. This was especially so because many of those imported into the islands came from the Gold Coast or from parts of Central Africa, such as the ports of Luanda and Benguela, where inhabitants experienced relatively dry and hot conditions.

Compromised health related to environmental change also affected American-born Africans who may have been moved from a south-side to a north-side parish. This occurred in non-British colonies as well—in Spanish Santo Domingo, French Saint Domingue, and Dutch Netherlands Antilles. Even in the Spanish mainland colonies, Africans were not exempt. Many of the deaths recorded by the Spanish magistrates were related to sudden environmental change and disease. In Grand Colombia, the government took the initiative to combat excessive fatality. It became customary for newly arrived Africans to be quarantined in order to avoid infecting the larger populations with their illnesses. It also served as a way of slowly integrating the new Africans into the different disease environment with minimal loss of life. In some instances, this quarantine would last for up to a year because of severe illness and trauma from the Middle Passage (Sharp 1978:112).

Edward Long, a Jamaican planter, noted that the cool nights and mornings in Jamaica and the early-morning routine of the enslaved Africans, especially those newly arriving from the continent, had a significant impact on their health. Long (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fol. 325b) observed that

> The Chillness of the morning air in this island seems to cast a damp upon their spirits, and renders them for a time feeble and torpid; one sees them creeping slowly out of their huts, bundled up with thick clothing, shivering, and uneasy; but as the day advances, they grow more and more active and alert. . . . They love warmth in the night, and never sleep without a fire in their hut; the watchman too, in the open air, lay themselves upon a board, by a rousing fire, and sometimes so near, as to scorch their very skins.

Enslaved Africans in the Caribbean also suffered from yaws. James McTear, a medical practitioner, described yaws as primarily a childhood illness, although it also affected young adults. In his estimation, yaws posed the greatest threat to those in the population who suffered from malnutrition and weakness:

> The disease almost always leaves a train of secondary symptoms behind it, which are never got rid of in life. These are swellings in the feet, pains in the bones etc. which, generally act as the bringers on of other diseases and shorten life in one way or another. . . . The negroes have a notion that this complaint preserves the constitution from others of a more formidable nature [Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (LOC), Papers of James McTear (PJM), MMC-2584, "A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies"].

The reaction of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean to outbreaks of yaws infections was to treat it as smallpox and to inoculate their children (LOC, PJM, MMC-2584, "A Practical View"; see also Carrington 1999).

Tuberculosis or consumption, *mal d'estomac*, fluxes or dysentery, and inflammation of the bowels further compromised the health and endangered the lives of enslaved people. The environment in which they lived was the ideal spawning ground for the bacteria and viruses that caused many diseases, especially as it lent itself to the contamination of food and water. Moreover, food shortages at times forced the enslaved to eat unripened fruits and immature vegetables, such as young yams (Barritt to Phillips, letter, 15 December 1789, Slebech Papers: Nathaniel Phillips' Jamaica Estate Papers, Manuscript 8345, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth). When such foods were not cooked properly, amoebic and bacillary dysentery and fluxes became major killers on plantations and among enslaved communities in urban centers (Stewart 1823:306).

Children and young adults were especially susceptible to certain diseases. The buildings in which children were born and the conditions under which they passed the first few days of life lessened their chances for survival. Such places were often open and damp, and because they were devoid of bedding, the newborn lay on bare boards or on "bass mats." The most prevalent childhood disease was trismus nascentium, or lockjaw ("jaw-fall" in the local parlance). In the opinion of

one contemporary, the disease developed from "the retention of the meconium by not keeping the infant sufficiently warm; or by giving it rum, and ailment of hard digestion" (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fol. 354d) The cause of the high mortality rate among newborn children was also blamed on the African midwives and doctors. McTear (LOC, PJM, MMC-2584, "A Practical View") wrote that the "preposterous treatment of the infants, their improper ligature of the fuvis, and the load of burnt stuff which they apply to it, together with their keeping the infant almost smothered with heat and clothes, are, I have no doubt the main cause of exciting trismus."

Although lockjaw was chiefly blamed for deaths among very young children of 1–9 days old, worms (including hookworms, roundworms, tapeworms, and Guinea worms) were the perennial killers of children and young adults and were thought to be the most destructive of diseases (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fol. 354d). Worms entered the body in several different ways. The hookworm, for instance, usually penetrated the skin in the area of the feet. Communities of enslaved people, characterized by poor sanitation, a dirt environment, and damp conditions, were ideal breeding grounds for disease.

Aside from environmental factors, diet played a critical role in determining the health of enslaved Africans. Laborers generally had access to a variety of foods, including "pulse, herbs, plantains, maize, yams . . . pork and fish, fresh or salt; salted beef, herrings, jerked hog, or fowls" (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fols. 325b–326a). Yet provisioning was a constant problem. The British West Indies depended heavily on North American supplies for the provisioning of their enslaved workforce, importing 19,000 quintals of refuse-quality codfish from New England annually (Burke 1757:167–168).

Diet often facilitated the growth of hookworm larvae. The presence of hookworms was detected from one of many symptoms, which included "an enormous appetite, extreme lethargy, generalized swelling, and retarded mental, physical, and, among children, sexual growth" (Sheridan 1985:216). Worms also produced anemia in the afflicted and were associated with geophagy, or dirt-eating, a practice engaged in by children as well as by adults (Sheridan 1985:217). Geophagy was common among enslaved persons in the Americas and likely reflected the effort to satisfy some nutritional deficiency (Hunter 1973).

In an effort to relieve the economic pressure of importing food, West Indian plantation managers allowed enslaved workers plots of land on which to grow their own provisions. In theory, the laborers were permitted 26 days of free time per annum in which they could work in their gardens. In practice, however, most received approximately 2 weeks during which to cultivate their provision grounds. Crop time—immediately after Christmas to June or July—coincided with the most important period in provision production. Planting provisions consumed a great deal of time between April and June, when the young plants needed to be nurtured to gain full advantage of the rainy season.

Illness and other factors that compromised health influenced the level of fecundity as well (Henry Goulburn to Samson, letter, 3 August 1813, Goulburn Papers, Acc. 119/51, Surrey Record Office, Kingston-Upon-Thames, England). Those whose labor was the least intense reproduced the best. Enslaved African women who worked more intensely, such as those on the sugar estates, experienced difficulty in becoming pregnant and avoiding miscarriage (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fol. 358). The rampant contraction of venereal disease was also damaging to fertility. The contraction of various strains of the disease caused many to seek the "modern" medicine of that time to cure their plight. The medicines were meant either to "repel, or carry off the virus," but frequently it killed the fetus and sterilized both men and women (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fol. 354b).[3]

Years of exposure to the West Indian disease environment stripped the Africans of the beauty that even Edward Long and other planters had backhandedly conceded to their enslaved laborers. Long had written of the "chrystalline humour of the Eyes, which as well as the teeth gives some degree of variety by their whiteness & lustre . . . a smoothness and glossiness of the skin." But at the end of their lives, Long (BLL, LP, AM 12,404, fol. 325b) observed,

> even these few ornaments are diminished as they advance in years, and vanish at the approach of old age; at this period their eye balls are gener-

[3] Contemporaries concluded, however, that disease may have been less a factor in reducing fertility than the attitudes of women toward child-rearing. Joseph Barham argued that Africans were "highly unfavorable to natural increase. The sexes live almost in common together and the females avoid child bearing by every means in their power. . . . The more the existence of their master depends on their procreation of children the more they seek to defeat it" (BLO, Barham Papers, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Letter-Book of Joseph Barham, "Increased Population" [1832], MS Clarendon Dep. C. 428).

> ally bleared, their teeth yellow, or decayed, & their skin wrinkled, collapsed and rough; so that nothing in human shape can possess the attributes of ugliness in greater perfection than a superannuated negro.[4]

Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, high percentages of superannuated individuals populated the plantations of the West Indies. The incidence of disease compounded the problem, and the number of able-bodied workers, according to one report, consisted of a "very small number not half of the whole—with so weak a gang much Revenue cannot be expected" (see James Laing to N.W. Senior, letter, 5 September 1786, N. L. W. Nassau-Senior Papers, E61, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; see also Dickson 1814:33–34; Hibbert, Hall & Fuhr to Smyth, letter, 15 May 1790, Woolnough Papers, Ac/Wo 6 [27] 142 [a], Bristol Colonial Record Office, England; Henry W. Plummer to Joseph Foster Barham, letter, 10 June 1789, Barham Papers, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Clarendon Dep. C. 357/B2, BLO).

Disease and Health in New York

Physical well-being among enslaved laborers in New York was compromised at the outset, as workers arrived in the city under great disadvantage. Occasionally, they succumbed to the rigors of sea passage (be it transatlantic or by way of the West Indies) within days of debarkation. Abraham Lynesen's two newly purchased enslaved laborers, for instance, "were so very weak when brought on shoar that in a few days they dyed under the Doctors hands" (New-York Historical Society [NYHS], Parish Transcripts, Colonial State Papers—America and the West Indies [PT], 22 September 1725, vol. 20 [1720–1738], fol. 159). Arriving laborers routinely were examined for evidence of smallpox and other infectious diseases, and sale did not take place until the buyer was convinced of the soundness of his purchase. Such inspections often uncovered less-than-healthy cargo. Such was the case in 1726, when the captain of the sloop *Anne*, arriving from the coast of Guinea, was charged with having imported "52 [enslaved Africans] the greater part whereof being sick and in a weak condition, that (after having been at a considerable charge in clothing victualing nursing and physicking them) fourteen of them dyed" (NYHS, PT, 20 April 1726, vol. 20 [1720–1738]).

Frequently, purchasers of enslaved people remained unaware of illnesses until long after finalizing the sale, as John Van Solingen discovered when he bought an enslaved woman from Benjamin D'Harriette in 1730. Van Solingen brought suit against D'Harriette when the African woman who had been sold as sound subsequently required treatment that included "divrs druggs, medicine plasters, poultases, physick, eye water and eye salve . . . for a certain malignant distemper or disease commonly called or known by the name of Yaws" (NYHS, New York City Mayor's Court Records [NYCMR], Select Cases of the Mayor's Court, pp. 350, 364–366, 368). In a similar case, the owner of an enslaved woman named Judy complained in 1737 that the laborer was "lame in shoulder, impotent and unsound and infirm and afflicted and troubled with great weakness and divers distempers, diseases, pains and ailments and altogether unable and unfit to work" (NYHS, NYCMR, Select Cases, pp. 350, 364–366, 368). The frequency with which Africans arrived in the city either ill, superannuated, or "unfit to work" led the House of Assembly to declare

> Whereas it may happen that of the negroes or other slaves which shall be imported into this colony some are so sick that they are more likely to dye than live Be It Enacted that all such slave or slaves as shall depart this life within 30 days after importation or landing shall be exempted from the duty aforesaid provided proof be made upon oath before the treasurer of this colony that such slave or slaves dyed within the time above limited after the landing or importation thereof and that they were sick at the time they were landed [NYHS, PT, "Duty on Negroes," 1728, vol. 20 (1720–1738), fol. 4].

Even if they survived passage relatively unscathed, enslaved laborers faced conditions likely to compromise their health. New York's winters especially greatly affected new arrivals. Peter Kalm (1964:207), a Swedish visitor to the city in the mid-eighteenth century, observed that

> it has frequently been found, that the negroes cannot stand the cold here so well as the Europeans or whites; for while the latter are not in the least affected by the cold, the toes and fingers of the former are frequently frozen . . . The frost easily hurts the hands or feet of the negroes who

[4] Africans and their descendants were typically considered to be superannuated at 50 years old.

> come from Africa, or occasions violent pains in their whole body.

John Van Cortlandt, New York merchant and owner of the slaving vessel *Mattey*, echoed this sentiment. When the captain of the vessel sent word to Van Cortlandt that he was having difficulty selling his cargo of captives at Barbados, the merchant instructed the captain to leave for New York immediately in order to avoid coming "late upon the Coast which will be of bad consiquence to the naked Slaves and many will perish" (McKee 1935:118).

In addition to the climate, there was little to recommend the daily living conditions of enslaved people in colonial New York. The compact pattern of settlement within the city precluded a spacious and disease-free environment and subjected enslaved and free residents to epidemics. New York Africans struggled to survive in the most austere accommodations. Owners typically lodged their laborers in the least desirable spaces of their homes—lofts and attics, cellars, and kitchens—where they suffered severely from the damp, dark, draftiness, and alternating heat and cold of the rooms. Those fortunate enough to have their own rooms were usually lodged on a separate floor above the rest of the household (Davis 1984:135). Many, however, were lodged in the "Negro Kitchen." Such structures—whether shared with one or two others in the household or inhabited by a single laborer—deprived the enslaved of personal space that might have ameliorated their condition.[5]

The quality and quantity of their diet further limited enslaved New York Africans' ability to enjoy good health. We get some sense of that diet from the narrative of John Jea, born in Old Calabar (West Africa) in 1773. Jea had been brought with his parents and siblings to New York when he was 2½ years old. His Dutch owners fed the family a mixture of the following:

> Indian corn pounded or bruised and boiled with water . . . and about a quart of sour buttermilk poured on it; for one person two quarts of this mixture, and about three ounces of dark bread, per day, the bread was darker than that usually allowed to convicts, and greased over with very indifferent hog's lard [Jea 1998:369].

On rare occasions, "when he was better pleased," Jea's owner gave him a week's allowance of half a pound of beef and half a gallon of potatoes.

Although a variety of foods was available in the city, fresh meats were scarce and vegetables seasonal. As Jea's account suggests, enslaved people subsisted on diets abundant in corn and other cereal grains. Samp and samp porridge, a staple of the diet of non-elite New Yorkers from the earliest days, consisted of Indian corn that had been coarsely ground in a mortar. The resulting food product was either boiled alone or mixed with salt beef or pork and vegetables (Earle 1896:129–130).[6] Suppawn (cornmeal and milk porridge) also enjoyed popularity among New Yorkers. Some indication of what was considered an adequate working-class diet is provided by data on maintenance of the poor. The poorhouse bill of fare adopted in 1736 included bread and beer, milk porridge, or beef broth and bread for breakfast; pork and peas porridge or fish and peas porridge for dinner; and bread and cheese, "sappaan" and milk, or beef broth and bread for supper (New York Public Library, Minutes of the Justices, Church Wardens, and Vestrymen of New York City, 1694–1747, 3 June 1736). Both men and women would have had the opportunity to supplement this diet, to the extent that they could move about the town and barter or earn money to purchase food outright. But such opportunities often depended upon happenstance and did not provide the certainty enslaved people needed.

The quality and quantity of clothing available to New York Africans also affected health. The range and extent of wardrobe varied with individual owners, the season, and the ingenuity of the enslaved.[7] In general, men possessed breeches, a shirt, jacket, and cap, and women wore a skirt, petticoat, blouse, and hat. Both wore "negro shoes," but it is likely that most wore them primarily during the colder months (NYHS, Nicoll Manuscripts, Charles Nicoll's Ledger, 1759–1765, and Account Book, 1753–1760).[8] Some individual laborers enjoyed a wardrobe beyond the general fare, acquired either by the largess of their owners or as a consequence of their own devices, sometimes through pilfering. It was under the latter circumstances that 18-year-old Hannah was punished

[5] Fear of fires from cooking food persuaded owners to establish these separate kitchens where their laborers could be lodged as well.

[6] According to Earle, the corn to make samp was often ground by the enslaved Africans.

[7] Runaway advertisements attest to the variety of attire available and the individualism permitted by one's own personal style. Enslaved women even adopted the style of the era of wearing hooped petticoats (see DeVoe 1969 [1862]).

[8] Storeowner Nicoll supplied twice as many new or repaired shoes to his clients who purchased shoes for their enslaved laborers during the colder months as during the warmer (see also Foote 1991:144).

when she stole "as much Bristol Stuff as would make her a Gown and Pettycoat and also a Solk Muslin handkerchief and a Small piece of Callicoe" that could be sewn into clothing (Goodfriend 1992:122). Hannah contended that she had no choice, as she was "almost Naked and her mistress would give her no Clothes" (Goodfriend 1992:122). The clothing Cesar carried with him when he absconded from John Moor, a New York merchant—although perhaps not representative of the general attire available to enslaved people—attests to the resolve of New York Africans to dress well. Included in his wardrobe were

> several suits of Cloaths, viz., Two Comblet Coats, one brown, the other whitish; also, an old homespun Coat; Two Suits of ozenbrigs Jackets and Breeches; one pair of Leather Breeches, good Stockins and Shoes, a good Hat, and some Shirts [*New York Gazette*, August 12–19, 1728].

Substandard accommodations, poor diet (including the possibility of contaminated food and water), and clothing that proved inadequate for harsh New York winters contributed to the susceptibility to disease and illness of the city's enslaved population. Exposure to certain infectious diseases such as smallpox, yellow fever, diphtheria, influenza, and measles was common, and newspaper advertisements were replete with attempts to reassure potential buyers of enslaved labor that the person offered for sale "has had the Small-Pox" (see, for example, *New York Gazette*, October 8–15, 1733; *New York Weekly Journal*, April 15, 1734). Several epidemics swept through New York during the eighteenth century—smallpox outbreaks in 1702, 1745–1747, 1752, and 1756–1757; yellow fever in 1702 and again in 1743; measles in 1729 and 1788; and outbreaks of various other diseases throughout the century. It is uncertain how many New York Africans were affected, but presumably they, like other poor people, bore the brunt of such epidemics (Duffy 1968:58–59; see also Duffy 1953).[9] Inoculations (before arrival in the city or at the beginning of an outbreak) may have mitigated the effects of some smallpox epidemics, but their use on the African community by slaveholders would have depended on the willingness of owners to experiment with valuable property.

There was considerably more danger inherent in day-to-day conditions than in those posed by epidemics. For instance, enslaved people, like other New Yorkers, were susceptible to poisonings resulting from the consumption of various liquids and foods. One such danger involved the use of pewter containers. Connoting its owner's high status, pewter was used widely in the city. Although its cost may have been beyond the financial reach of enslaved and free blacks, recorded illnesses among food preparers in other parts of the Americas suggest that they may have been suffering from contaminated leftovers stored in pewter dishes or larger storage objects seamed with lead (see Handler et al. 1986).

Storage vats and the tools used in the manufacturing of alcoholic drinks were likely as well to have been made of pewter, similar to those used in distilleries in Jamaica and Barbados. Pewter in distilleries caused lead poisoning, which in eighteenth-century medical circles was known as plumbism and dry gripes. The consumption of tainted rum caused great sickness among Caribbean and New York City populations, particularly when the drinking habits of eighteenth-century workers are taken into consideration. One observer described a contemporary's fondness for drink as follows:

> As he walks out In the morning he takes what is called a small glass (half a gill) of bitters, gin, or something of the sort, at the first grog shop he passes; and commonly takes a second whet . . . before he gets to work. Generally he takes two more of these small glasses of raw and clear stuff . . . as he returns home to get his breakfast. Thus a half pint is disposed of before eight o'clock A.M. [Rock 1989:47].

Other dangers from distilled alcohol lurked in the spirits sold by local merchants. In 1750, Gerardus Beekman indicated to a potential buyer of rum: "I have Examined the Cask of Rum Left in my Store and am Some what affaird that my Negro fellow has filled up the Cask Rum Sent You with the wrong Spirits if he has it cannot Alter the Quality or test much, however it is not so good as you Expected" (White 1956:1:100). "New rum," which is underaged liquor, was a prevalent cause of illness in Jamaica and, by extension, New York, as it was also imported into the city. Jerome Handler has written of its lingering symptoms which, without treatment, frequently led to an untimely death in otherwise healthy individuals. This debilitating illness likely affected black men in New York, as there were instances of black and white laborers being

[9] Extant records suggest, however, that there was an underreporting of smallpox cases involving New York's African population (see *New York Gazette*, August 23–30 through December 13–21, 1731).

routinely supplied with alcohol. For instance, an invoice submitted by William Dudgale details the expenses incurred in preparation of an execution. The invoice preparer claims to have "Paid negro hire, cartage, hire of ladders, ropes . . . with liquor to carpenter and negros" (New York Municipal Archives, Unfiled Papers of the Common Council). Similarly, when the City Ferry House was under repair, John Deane submitted a bill for expenses that included the labor of at least four black men, two of whom were known as "Negroe Ben and Negroe Roben." Aside from the wages the men received, there was a charge for "Liquor at Sundry times for all the workmen" (New York Municipal Archives, Unfiled Papers of the Common Council).

Not least of the factors affecting the health of enslaved people was the toll exacted by strenuous and repetitive labor (as Chapter 9 of this report suggests). Dock work, porterage, farming, and other manual jobs that involved heavy lifting and the bearing of weighty objects on the head and shoulders would have produced stress to the body and compromised health. Even the daily routines of domestics (such as carrying water into the house) and the repetitive motions of those women who worked at spinning and weaving exposed them to injury. Such injuries as are found in the African Burial Ground population provide the physical evidence of the consequences of exposure to hard labor (Null et al. 2009 [Chapter 10, Volume 1 of this series]).

As was the custom of the day, medical care for enslaved blacks (and for most people) likely traumatized the body as much as the disease. Standard treatments in colonial New York (and throughout the colonies) consisted of purgings of the body through the inducement of bleeding, vomiting, sweating, and evacuating the bowel. Doctors dressed cuts and other wounds and dispensed drugs that would have the desired purgative effect. The treatment of Jupiter, an enslaved laborer owned by the Lloyd family of Long Island, is indicative of the nature of medical treatment available to enslaved Africans similarly situated in New York. Dr. George Muirson diagnosed the "Pains in [Jupiter's] Leggs, Knees, and Thighs, ascending to his Bowels" as "a Gouty Rumatick Disorder" (Barck 1927:1:309–310). Muirson directed that the man receive

> one of the Purges, In the morning fasting, and att night one of the boluses, the next day take away about 12 or 14 ounces of blood (not-withstanding he lost blood in the winter) from the foot will be the most Serviceable, a day or two after as You find his Strength will bear It, Give the Other Purge, and the bolus Att night. On those days he Doth not Purge, and Bleed, Give one of the powders In the morning And another In the Evening, mixt in some Diet Drink, made with Equal Parts of Horse Redish Roots, The Bark of Elder Roots, Pine Budds, or the Second Bark, wood or Toad Sorrel, make It Strong With the Ingredient; and Lett him Drink Constantly of It, for a Month, or Six weeks and then the Remainder of the Summer let him Have milch whey to drink, he must live on a Thin Spare Diet, abstaining from meat att nights all Spirituous Liquors, Salt, pepper, and Vinegar. Have sent some oyntment to be Used as he did the former [Barck 1927:1:309–310].

Such aggressive treatment could have rendered the enslaved person debilitated and incapable of labor, if it did not take his life.

A pharmacist's daybook that records the treatment of blacks over the course of a single year suggests that at least some enslaved people received a degree of medical help for their ailments. From the treatments indicated, it would appear that they suffered from a variety of ills, including worms and other parasites, fever, and abrasions (NYHS, Daybook, April 26, 1743 to April 9, 1744, of an Unidentified N.Y.C. Physician; see also Montague and Montague 1981). For instance, the journal had numerous entries that recorded "dressings for yr. Negro." In fact, treatment for wounds was the most frequent entry, followed by purging and bloodletting.

Even under the best of circumstances, eighteenth-century New York was an inhospitable place for its inhabitants. This was especially so for those relegated to the poorest living conditions and subjected to the harshest labor. The African Burial Ground population, with its preponderance of children and younger adults, confirms the short-lived, substandard existence that enslaved and free blacks endured in the colonial city.

Chapter 12

"By the Visitations of God":[1] Death, Burial, and the Affirmation of Humanity

by Edna Greene Medford, Emilyn L. Brown, Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Linda Heywood, and John Thornton

Introduction

Given the living conditions, work demands, and exposure to serious infectious diseases in eighteenth-century New York, it is little wonder that death was ever-present among the enslaved and free black population. Because the municipality did not record deaths in the eighteenth century, one is left to rely on extant church documents that record burials. But even these sources are of limited use for determining the rate of mortality for people of African descent in the city, as the data pertain overwhelmingly to the white community. Anecdotal information is provided by statistics for periods of epidemic. In a 6-week period that coincided with the 1731 smallpox outbreak, for instance, the city witnessed 50 burials of blacks, representing 3.2 percent of that population (Blakey et al. 1998). The figure may reflect an underreporting, as white burials were calculated at 4.4 percent of the total white population (Blakey et al. 1998).

The deaths of persons legally defined as property placed the responsibility for "disposal" of the remains on the owners. As a member of a household (albeit a subordinate one), deceased Africans might expect that the basic necessities of burial would be supplied by those who had held them to labor. As with everything else in slavery, the notion of responsibility varied with the individual. The daybook of cabinetmaker Joshua Delaplaine suggests that some owners at least supplied coffins for their laborers. During the period recorded by the daybook, Delaplaine filled 13 orders for coffins for the burial of Africans, most (if not all) of whom presumably were enslaved. The deceased persons included men, women, and children (New-York Historical Society, Joshua Delaplaine Papers, 1721–1779, 1815–1817, The Day Book of Joshua Delaplaine, 1752–1756).

The few pieces of evidence available concerning black burials suggest that white participation in black mortuary practices ended with the furnishing of a coffin. Indeed, Chaplain Sharpe (1881:355) had claimed that New York Africans were buried "by those of their own country and complexion without the office . . . the Heathenish rites . . . performed at the grave by their countrymen." David Valentine (1860:567) also suggested that graveside rites and rituals followed the practices that Africans had brought with them:

> The negroes in this city were, both in the Dutch and English colonial times, a proscribed and detested race, having nothing in common with the whites. Many of them were native Africans, imported hither in slave ships, and retaining their native superstitions and burial customs, among which was that of burying at night, with various mummeries and outcries.

The nature of those "Heathenish rites" and "mummeries and outcries" can perhaps be discerned by considering the burial practices of eighteenth-century Africans.

African Mortuary Customs in the Eighteenth Century

As in the seventeenth century, burial customs in Africa were influenced by religious beliefs, be they Islamic, Catholic, or traditional. Hence, in West and West Central Africa, practices varied widely. Among the Wolof of the Senegambia, the deceased was wrapped in a shroud, taken outside the village to a cemetery, and

[1] This phrase was commonly used in colonial New York to define death from natural causes.

placed in an uncovered trench. The funeral group surrounded the trench with earthen walls to protect it from intrusion by animals (Ritchie 1968:319–320). In the Sierra Leone–Liberia region, the coastal people (for whom there are descriptions) wrapped the deceased in a clean, white cotton sheet, placed him or her upon a bier, and carried him or her to the place of burial, which typically was located far outside the village. Such ceremonies took place in either the morning or the evening (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:381).[2] Interment followed a simple ceremony, without any grave goods. The grave itself was decorated on the surface with expensive mats (Matthews 1788:122–125).

Gold Coast mortuary practices provided that the body be interred either wrapped in a shroud or placed in a coffin, which became increasingly common in the eighteenth century (Bosman 1967:227–232 [1705]; Isert 1992:219–220; Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:388–389; Rømer 1760:243–234). In some instances, the deceased was interred wearing clothes and jewelry, such as beads and local monetary objects. An interrogation of the corpse for signs of involvement of witchcraft in the death might precede interment (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:388–389). Objects reminiscent of the person's life, such as tools, were placed on the grave, as was a clay representation of the deceased, often painted red and white. These would be washed and cared for by the living for some time afterward (Thompson 1758:45). In the eighteenth century, people were much more likely to be buried in the house where they lived, often in the room where they died. Such treatment had been reserved for especially important people in earlier times.

Inhabitants of the Bight of Benin also tended to bury their dead in the house where the deceased lived, as there were no discrete cemeteries. Among the Popo, interment followed after the body was wrapped in a white cloth, whereas Fon speakers (including Dahomians) dressed their dead in clothing supplied by neighbors. Few grave goods were left at the site, but mourners sacrificed a bird and placed a large pot of water in the grave (Barbot 1992:640; Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:412–415).

Early-eighteenth-century accounts of burials in the coastal city states of the Niger Delta region describe the dead as being cleaned and then smoked to preserve them. Subsequently, he or she was wrapped in white cotton, placed in a tightly fitted coffin, and buried under the house where he or she had lived (Bosman 1967:448 [1705]; Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:429). Similarly, Oldendorp's (2000–2002:1:435) informants told him that the Igbos buried those of noble birth under houses after washing them and wrapping them in white cotton cloth, believing that the soul of the deceased would soon possess a newborn of the same dwelling or nearby. In describing the burial of a woman in his country, however, Equiano (1995:78 [1789]) indicated that her tomb was a small, thatched hut under which her body rested. Offerings of food and drink were placed on top of the structure. The dead, he noted, were buried after being washed and ornamented. Grave goods consisted primarily of "their implements and things of value," which included tobacco and pipes. Interrogation to determine whether witchcraft or foul play figured in the death of the deceased might be a feature of the trip to the grave (Equiano 1995:78, 80–81 [1789]).

Eighteenth-century West Central Africans continued to follow the practices common in the seventeenth century, in many instances blending Christian rituals with traditional African customs. Among Africans from the Dembos and the Kimbundu-speaking areas, for example, burials exhibited many traces of local practices. An eighteenth-century European description of such funerals, known as *entambes* (*entambos*), indicated that they contained "abominable superstitions" where "fetishers join in the most devout and serious rites of Christianity" (Correia 1937:1:87–89).

In West Central African regions where the state was much more loosely organized than the Kongo and whose leaders had not converted to Christianity despite their intense interaction with Europeans, burial practices exhibited decidedly traditional customs. A Loango man reported to Oldendorp that prior to interment the corpse was left upright so that the body would be drained of all liquid as it decayed. Friends who visited left behind cloth that the family used to wrap the body, giving it the appearance of a barrel. They then placed the body on a bier, laid it in a box made of grass, and positioned it in the grave (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:439–440).

Oldendorp provided additional evidence concerning burial practices in areas distant from Loango, where the population also followed indigenous mortuary customs. The Loango informant told him of certain Africans in the area, whom Oldendorp (2000–2002:1:443–444) identified as "black Jews," who buried their dead far away in a "walled" grave. These "black Jews" carried calabashes that they cov-

[2] Oldendorp's informants told him that in the Kanga country burials took place in the evening.

ered with colorful painted designs, which sometimes represented a snake or humorous scenes (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:443–444).[3]

Mondongo people who resided in the interior retained bodies for 4 weeks before burial. During this time, friends and relatives of the deceased drank and ate next to him. At the end of this 4-week period, the friends wrapped the body in cloth made from the inner bark of a special tree and put the body and grave goods into a vaulted tomb (Oldendorp 2000–2002:1:443–444).

Burial Customs in the West Indies

Although we have limited evidence as to the extent to which New York Africans drew on burial traditions that originated in Africa, information abounds for connections between African customs and West Indian practices. Those peoples from the West Indies who were destined for New York would have been intimately familiar with the customs of burial in Africa, because strength of numbers, absentee ownership, and the preponderance of the Africans born on the islands encouraged the retention of certain traditions. A key feature of those traditions was the belief that the ancestors intervened to safeguard the living from evil. This belief led to veneration of the dead; hence, every measure was taken to ensure that the departed relative had a proper burial. In fact, relatives guarded against the dismembering of the deceased person's body in the belief that it might prevent transmigration to Africa. Care also had to be taken with the dead because the spirit could be reincarnated in an unborn child. The possibility of reincarnation gave rise to naming children after ancestors, as is evident from slave lists that exhibit the repetition of certain African names.

Burial customs differed slightly from island to island, but there are some general characteristics that can be identified. On those islands where the Christian church played a role in the lives of enslaved people, mourners adopted the practice of dressing in white and tolling the church bell. The body was placed in a wooden coffin, which was then "covered with a sheet, by the way of a pall" (Luffman 1790:112–113; see also Pinckard 1816:130). One observer reported that the coffin bearers performed the "reel" while others danced. They also continuously spoke to the deceased, imploring him or her "to go in orderly manner to the place of interment" and promising that God would punish those who had done him or her ill (Luffman 1790:113) (Figure 19). In Jamaica, coffin bearers raised and lowered the coffin three times, a custom common among the Ashanti, who were the dominant force on that island. Their influence was particularly noticeable in the religions practices of Jamaica (Williams 1932:143).

In Barbados, mourners placed the deceased into a basket and then carefully emptied the body into the grave. Attending one such funeral, an observer wrote that the mourners

> had full faith in Jenny's transmigration to meet her friends, at her place of nativity and their persuasion that death was only a removal from their present to their former home; a mere change from a state of slavery to a state of freedom; did not barely alleviate but wholly prevented the natural grief and affliction arising from the loss of a friend. They confidently expected to hear from poor Jenny, or to know her influence in the way they most desired, before morning [Pinckard 1816:133].

Hardly a solemn occasion, death was celebrated by many enslaved people as the deceased person's delivery from slavery. The observer noted that "grief and lamentations" played no role in the service, stating that

> no solemn dirge was heard! No deep sounding bell was tolled: no fearful silence held. It seemed a period of mirth and joy! Instead of weeping and bewailing, the attendants jumped and sported, as they talked and laughed with each other in high festivity [Pinckard 1816:133–134].

In the spirit of celebration, family members and friends brought food and drink, which they prepared and consumed at the residential compound of the deceased. Visitations continued to the home for 9 days, and on the ninth night, the family held a special prayer for the departed member (Pinckard 1816:133–134).

[3] Oldendorp identified these Africans as "black Jews" because his informants told him that they had specialists who circumcised all young boys. They also kept the Sabbath, were ostracized by the other Africans, and were scattered about engaged in trade. Many West Central Africans practiced circumcision, but the ones identified by Oldendorp also had taboos (e.g., food restrictions) that set them apart from their neighbors. The presence of Jewish customs among Africans in the coastal regions of West Central Africa should come as no surprise, as there were many Portuguese Jews living and trading in Angola and the Kongo.

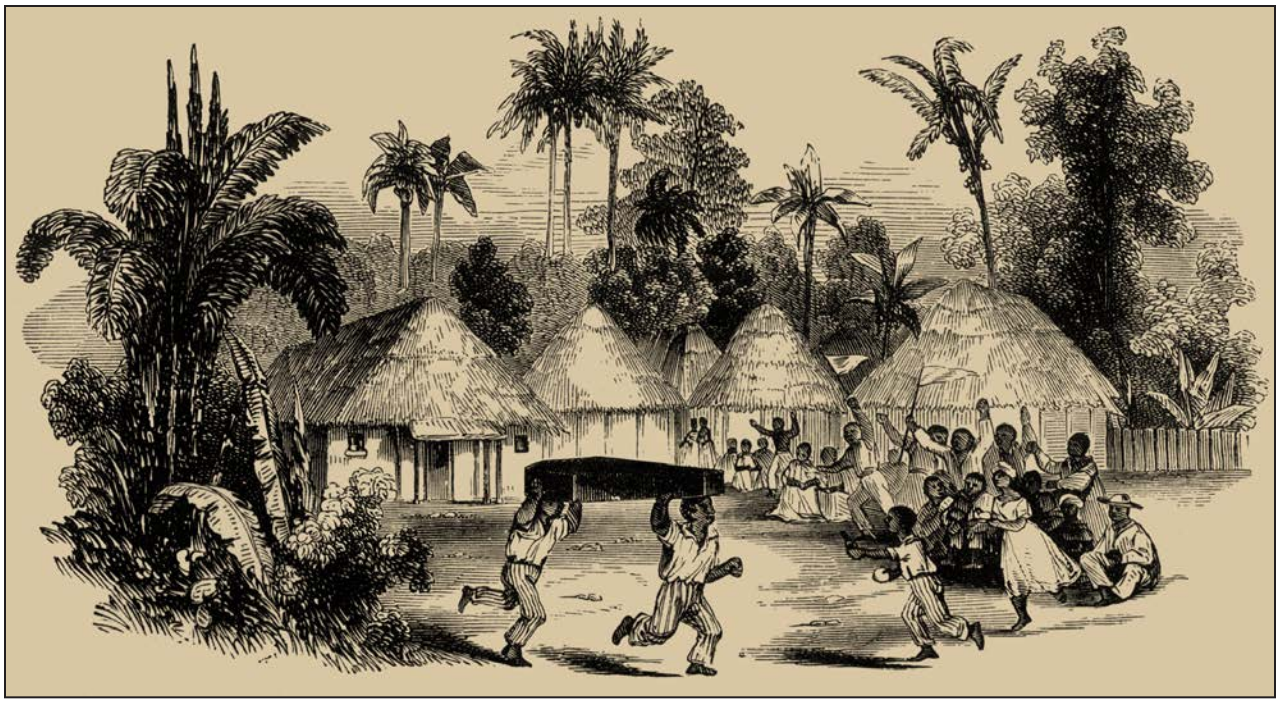

Figure 19. Divining the cause of death, an African funeral rite practiced in Jamaica (from Phillipo 1843).

Burial Customs in New York

Although documentary evidence provides little understanding of burial practices among African peoples in colonial New York, archaeological data offer glimpses of prevailing customs. The archaeological study reveals, for instance, a cemetery whose burials are remarkably uniform, with more than 90 percent of the remains placed in coffins, shrouded, and laid out so that their heads are oriented to the west (Perry and Howson 2009 [Chapter 5, Volume 2 of this series]) (Figure 20). All were placed on their backs, and most were individual burials. This sameness suggests that the ethnically diverse Africans shared agreed-upon traditions that had been created by drawing on the similarities of many African customs and adapting to the circumstances they found in New York.

Although the deceased were laid to rest in a manner not unlike that of white New Yorkers, certain items of material culture point to an African cultural continuum. For instance, several members of the African Burial Ground population were interred with beads. The configurations they wore included necklaces, waist beads, and wristlets; they adorned the bodies of men, women, and children (Bianco et al. 2009 [Chapter 13, Volume 2 of this series]). In many African societies, beads hold ceremonial significance at every stage of life: at birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, and, finally, entry into the community of ancestors and spirits. For the living, they provide protection against evil, guard against bad fortune, and connote wealth, status, and fertility (when worn around the waist) of the wearer. The presence of beads is an indication of the important expressive role they continued to play in the lives and death of New York Africans (Medford et al. 1998).

Shells also have significance in an African mortuary context, reflecting the belief that they "enclose the soul's immortal presence" (Thompson 1983:135). In an African American context, they are a metaphor for water:

> The shells stand for the sea. The sea brought us, the sea shall take us back. So the shells upon our graves stand for water, the means of glory and the land of demise [Thompson 1983:135].

Archaeologists recovered more than 200 shells at the African Burial Ground; most represented grave fill, but several apparently had been placed inside the coffin or on the lid. The presence of shells suggests the continuation, in at least some aspects, of African spirituality and burial customs (Medford et al. 1998).

Laws provide additional clues to mortuary practices and reveal Europeans' attempt to shape and to

Figure 20. Interment in the African Burial Ground would have been carried out by members of the African community (illustration by Michael Colbert, 2004).

control African customs. A 1722 law, for instance, suggests that New York Africans buried their dead at night, a practice that likely reflected the difficulty of finding time during the day to engage in sacred practices. In any case, night burials with their attending "mummeries and outcries" alarmed owners who feared that the potential for conspiracy existed (New York City Common Council 1905:3:296). Hence, the council passed a 1722 law to regulate the burial of "all Negroes and Indian Slaves that shall dye within this corporation on the south side of the Fresh Water," restricting burials to daylight hours (New York City Common Council 1905:3:296).[4] A 1731 amendment to the 1722 law conveyed an even more intense fear of conspiracy:

> For the preventing of great numbers of slaves assembling and meeting together at their Funerals, under pretext whereof they have great opportunities of plotting and confederating together to do mischief, as well as neglecting their Masters Services it was ordered that, if more than twelve slaves assembled at a slave funeral, those present were to be whipped at the discretion of the Mayor, Recorder or one of the Alderman except the 12 slaves admitted by the owner of the dead slave, the gravedigger and the corpse bearers [New York City Common Council 1905: 4:86–88].

In addition, the law forbade the use of "pawls" (palls) and pallbearers at the funerals of enslaved people, possibly because the cloth might be used to hide objects employed for insurrectionary purposes (New York City Common Council 1905:4:86–88).

It is no surprise that white New Yorkers sought to control the African population, even in death. In their mortuary practices, New York Africans exhibited unity and humanity; both challenged the legitimacy of slavery and threatened to undermine its very existence. The African Burial Ground was a powerful

[4] Presumably, this law applied only to those persons living within the town limits.

symbol of the strength of the African community and the commitment that its members had to each other. In a sense, it was an example of passive resistance, practiced by a people who were left with few alternative ways of challenging the legal status that had been imposed upon them.

Chapter 13

A Constant Source of Irritation: Resistance in the Eighteenth Century

by Edna Greene Medford and Emilyn L. Brown

Introduction

White New Yorkers' fear of resistance among enslaved people was hardly unfounded. Court records and correspondence between slaveholders and agents attest to the propensity of New York Africans to resist subtly and sometimes violently their state of bondage and the efforts to dehumanize them. Although their actions posed no serious threat to survival of slavery as an institution, daily resistance in the form of sullen behavior, insubordination, theft and other criminal activity, running away, and a general disregard for laws designed to circumscribe their lives operated to undermine the effectiveness of white control.

Enslaved people in colonial New York recognized that demographic considerations and institutional safeguards precluded any possibility that they might upend the power relationship in the city. But they understood as well that the nature of the city itself—especially the labor needs of its economy—compromised slavery and enabled the enslaved population to enjoy certain freedoms inconsistent with a servile status. As a consequence, they took every opportunity to test the limits imposed on them.

As they moved about the city–ostensibly in the service of their owners—enslaved people took advantage of the opportunity to further their own interests. One might stop long enough to socialize with acquaintances or engage in illegal activities that had monetary as well as psychological value, such as "playing at dice or papa" (Horsmanden 1971:463). Such interactions were frequent enough to persuade colonial New Yorkers that laws should be enacted that would limit the interchange and circumscribe the behavior of enslaved people. Building on the restrictions imposed shortly after the British gained control of the town and colony in the second half of the seventeenth century, a series of laws were passed that attempted to restrict movement and association. As in the earlier period, enslaved people defied the laws with impunity. Disobedience doubtless allowed them to affirm their humanity, acted as a safety valve for pent-up frustrations, and provided a practical solution to meeting the material needs and wants that were either unattainable or hindered by slavery.

Flight

When they found no satisfaction in simple disobedience of the law, enslaved people took flight. Primarily associated with young men, running away became especially pervasive as the growth of the city in the eighteenth century permitted a certain anonymity. As Shane White (1991) has shown in his study of late-eighteenth-century African Americans in New York, those who fled from their owners were motivated by the desire to be free and to visit relatives and friends who had been kept from them by the vagaries of slavery.

Appeals in local newspapers for the apprehension of runaways reveal that literate blacks took ample advantage of the opportunities that knowing how to read and write afforded them. Enslaved people learned quickly that literacy and a facility with language enhanced their chances of successful escape. When Cesar absconded from John Moor, the owner placed an advertisement that indicated that the enslaved man "Reads and Writes English, and its believed he has got a sham Pass" (*New York Gazette*, August 12–19, 1728). Cesar was apprehended but "slipt away again at Kings-bridge" the following month (*New York Gazette*, September 23–30, 1728). Thirty-five year old Yass could also read and write and was considered a "sensible cunning Fellow, and has probably got a

Pass forged" (*New York Gazette*, June 23–30, 1729). Other African-descended people were bilingual or multilingual, speaking their natal tongue as well as a variety of other languages.

Insubordination

Even when the boldness of flight held no appeal, those who remained in servitude exercised individual acts of defiance by displaying behaviors deemed inappropriate or unacceptable for unfree people by whites. Such conduct prompted Gerardus Beekman to part with an otherwise valuable laborer:

> I find she Smoaks tobaico also which is also a bad Quality in a wench. she makes No Sauple and will tell Everyone who Asks her what You Sent her away for. Its because I drink and keep bad Company she says [White 1956:1:113].

Insubordination also proved to be the undoing of an enslaved woman held by Cadwallader Colden. Although her skills in the kitchen and at laundry and her "aversion to all strong Liquors" recommended her, Colden found her disposition to be intolerable:

> Were it not for her Alusive Tongue her sulleness & the Custome of the Country that will not allow us to use our Negroes as you doe in Barbadoes when they Displeas you I would not have parted with her. But I doubt not that she'l make as good a slave as any in the island after a little of your Discipline or without it when she sees that she cannot avoid it. I could have sold her here to good advantage but I have several other of her Children which I value & know if she should stay in this country she would spoil them. She was born in Barbadoes & is about 33 years old [Colden 1918–1937:50:39].

Crime and Punishment

As long as enslaved people gave dissatisfaction only to those to whom they were bound, punishment was at the discretion of the owner. But when they violated municipal or colony laws, owners lost control of and the benefit of their own property. Such was the case with Cumbe, who on May 5, 1797, stood before the court accused of grand larceny. Despite his pleas of innocence, the enslaved man was convicted, not of the crime with which he was charged, but of petty larceny. Yet the "Twenty coffee bags each of the value of five shillings" and "twelve pounds of dipt Candles" (also worth 5 shillings each) that he stole carried a punishment of 6 months at hard labor in the Bridewell (the city jail). The court further judged his crime to be of sufficient gravity that his owner be encouraged to transport him (New York Municipal Archives [NYMA], Manuscript Collection, District Attorney's Indictment Papers for the City of New York, 1790–1800; see also NYMA, Manuscript Collection, Minutes of the Court of General Sessions of the Peace, 1762–1776).

Cumbe's crime was a common one among enslaved and free blacks in late-eighteenth-century New York. Inadequate supervision of bondmen and bondwomen, lax enforcement of laws intended to control black mobility, and a decided willingness on the part of certain elements of the white community to bridge the color divide if profit could be gained by it—and that was frequently the case—emboldened blacks to challenge prevailing legal constraints. They felt little moral compunction in dismissing laws that were neither instituted by them nor intended to protect their rights.

Laws introduced in the second half of the seventeenth century attempting to circumscribe black life were expanded throughout the eighteenth century. In November 1702, the provincial legislature passed an "Act for Regulating Slaves," which constituted a comprehensive slave code. The measure forbade enslaved people from giving evidence in court against free men. If convicted of striking a free "Christian," a bondman could receive a sentence of 14 days in jail and be subjected to corporal punishment. In order to prevent enslaved men and women from "confederating together in running away, or other ill practices," the law denied them the right to meet in groups of more than three, except "when it shall happen they meet in some servile Imploym't for their Master's or Mistress's proffitt, and by their Master or Mistress consent." According to a 1702 law, conviction for such an offense carried a penalty of up to 40 lashes "upon the naked back" (New York State 1894:1:519–521).

The provincial act of 1702 also strengthened the 1684 law intended to restrict the economic activity of enslaved people. Although the earlier measure forbade a servant or bondman to "give sell or truck any comodity whatsoever" (New York State 1894:1:157), the new act prohibited any person "to Trade with any slave either in buying or selling, without leave and Consent of the Master or Mistress, on penalty of forfeiting Treble the value of the thing traded

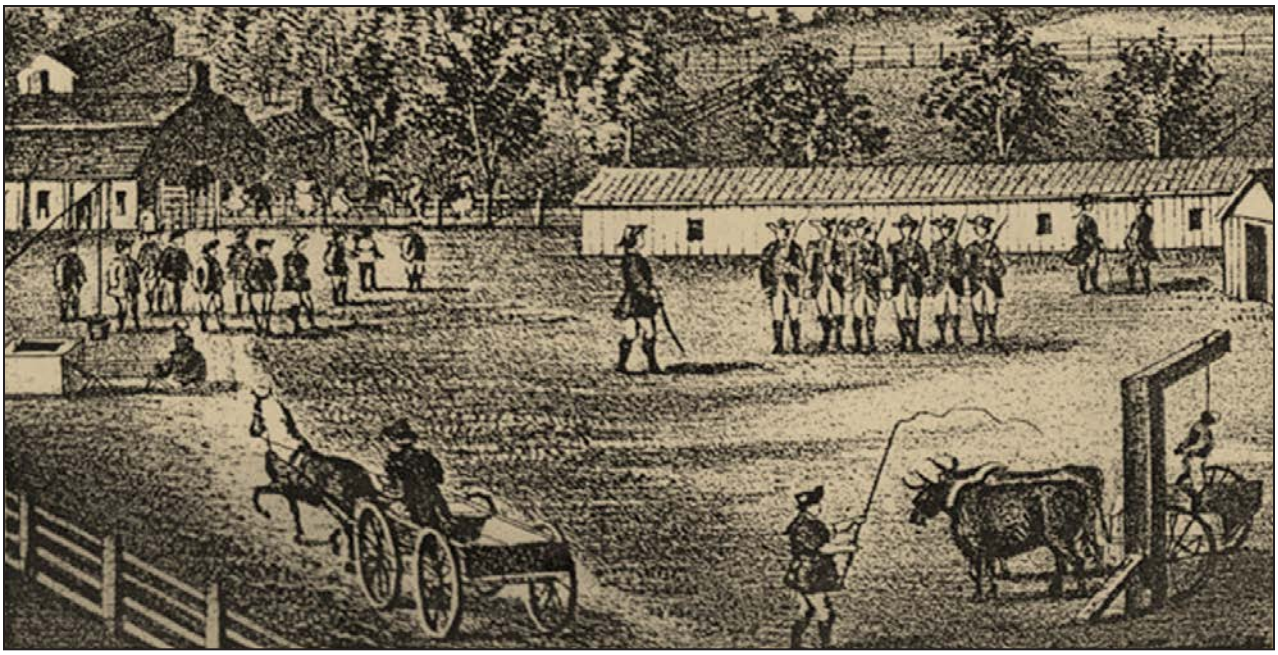

Figure 21. Execution of a New York African on the Common (from Valentine 1860).

for and the sum of five pounds" (New York State 1894*:*1:519–521).

The laws that followed the 1702 act reiterated white New York's concern with controlling black behavior, especially those actions that reflected violent resistance. Murder and conspiracy to commit the murder of freemen and freewomen were declared capital offenses, as was rape or conspiracy to rape. Anyone who would "willfully burn any dwelling-house, barn, stable, out-house, stakes of Corn or Hay, or shall willfully mutilate, mayhem or dismember . . . or shall willfully murder . . . he, she or they so offending shall suffer the pains of Death" (New York State 1894*:*1:765) (Figure 21). Enslaved people were forbidden to use or have in their possession firearms, unless with the permission or in the presence of their owners (New York State 1894*:*1:761–767).

The relative ease with which New York's black population moved about the city, anxieties regarding theft, and the manner in which black people chose to pass their leisure time led to legislation controlling entertainment. In 1722, New Yorkers passed a measure that restrained enslaved laborers from gaming with money (New York City Common Council 1905*:*3:277–278). Gaming for copper pennies, halfpence, or farthings was prohibited in any street, house, outbuilding, or yard. And in early 1741, the Common Council passed a law that prevented blacks from fetching water on Sundays beyond the nearest pump or well and forbade them from riding a horse through the streets or on the Common (New York City Common Council 1905*:*5:50).

When either enslaved blacks or free black men and women ran afoul of the law, they could expect swift punishment. The nature and degree of that punishment, however, varied widely. In August 1719, Betty and Frank, two laborers accused of unspecified offenses, suffered the court's finding that they be "tied to a cart and whipped upon the Naked back" 39 lashes as they made their way about the city (NYMA, Minutes of the Court of General Sessions of the Peace, August 4, 1719). William Luce's "Negro man," James, was ordered to receive "25 stripes on his naked back at the public whipping post" for the same offense that had landed Cumbe 6 months in jail (Scott 1983:412–413). Harry was confined to jail for 8 days for the crime of petty larceny. Freeman Jack, indicted for stealing 12 ears of Indian corn, pled guilty and received 15 lashes on his bare back (Scott 1983:412–413). It is worth noting that the standard punishment for petty larceny appeared to be somewhat harsher than this, as John McCune, who pled guilty to petty larceny in 1769, was sentenced to receive 39 lashes. Other offenders routinely received a similar number (Scott 1983:22). In the case of enslaved offenders, however, the court generally recommended that they be transported elsewhere.

Blakey and Rankin-Hill (2009 [Volume 1 of this series]) suggest that more violent forms of punishment were meted out to New York Africans. In their study of the burial ground population, they found evidence of numerous fractures to the bones of both men and women that are suggestive of violent treatment. The most dramatic example is Burial 25, the young woman described in Chapter 1 of this report. In addition to a gunshot wound, the woman's remains reveal facial trauma caused by blunt force; her lower right arm had sustained an oblique fracture from having been simultaneously twisted and pulled (Wilczak et al. 2009 [Chapter 11, Volume 1 of this series). In Burial 364, the remains appear to be mutilated. Such practices would have been consistent with punishments for capital offenses in colonial New York, especially those involving armed revolt.

Armed Revolt

The 1712 Uprising

Overt and violent resistance to slavery was rare, demographic factors perhaps having influenced decisions to respond to enslavement more clandestinely. Occasionally, however, black men and women did take up arms in resistance to their bondage. Such was the case in 1712, when a group of enslaved laborers "resolved to revenge themselves for some hard usage they apprehended to have received from their masters" (Brodhead 1853–1887:5:341). The men set fire to an outbuilding and waited in ambush as their owners came to extinguish the flames (Scott 1961:43–74). Armed with guns, knives, hatchets, and swords, they killed nine "Christians" (that is, whites) and wounded several others. The governor dispatched a militia unit to hunt them down the following day. As the military forces closed in, six insurrectionists took their own lives rather than endure New York's swift and deadly justice (Brodhead 1853–1887:5:341).

The court eventually charged more than three dozen men and women with murder, accessory to murder, or assault. Twenty-seven were convicted and sentenced to suffer punishments reserved for those who dared to strike a blow for freedom: hanging in chains, burning at the stake (including one by slow roasting), and breaking on the wheel. At least two women were convicted, one of whom was pregnant and received a reprieve until delivered of her child (Brodhead 1853–1887:5:341; see also Scott 1961:62).

The insurrectionists were drawn from various African groups residing in the city. They included West Africans from the Gold Coast (so-called Cormantines), those from the Slave Coast (the Pawpaws or Popo), and free blacks. Some of the African born could not speak English and hence required the use of an interpreter at their trials (Foote 1991:216). The union of the various African peoples suggests that although they may have been separated by linguistic and cultural differences, enslaved New York Africans found common cause in resistance to bondage.[1] Not only had they come to an agreement over the necessity for armed resistance, but they had settled on African traditions and beliefs to seal the collaborative effort. Before taking up arms against their owners, the men enlisted the aid of Peter, the Doctor, "a free negro who pretended sorcery [and] gave them powder to rub on their clothes to make them invulnerable" (Scott 1961:47). Such behavior is suggestive of other acts of resistance in the American colonies and in the Caribbean, such as the Stono Revolt and the Maroon uprising in Jamaica of the early 1700s and others later in the century (Long 1774). In many instances, cemeteries played a prominent role in such activities (Mullin 1992). It is likely that the African Burial Ground itself was a rallying point for such action in 1712.

Two of the participants in the revolt in 1712 were "Spanish Indians" who had arrived in New York as prizes from a captured Spanish vessel. They had been resident in the city for several years, and "by reason of their color which is swarthy, they were said to be slaves and as such were sold, among many others of the same colour and country" (Brodhead 1853–1887:5:342). The Spanish Indians had claimed free status, some of them indicating that they had been members of the ships' crews (Brodhead 1853–1887:5:342; see also Foote 1991:214). The issue of the status of such enslaved people continued to prove problematic for New Yorkers for many years following the 1712 revolt. Their presence and influence would be quite evident later in the century during the 1741 "conspiracy."

The Great "Conspiracy" of 1741

The uniting of diverse segments of the community of African peoples in New York was reflected in the

[1] See Foote (1991:215–216) for discussion of likely motivations of each group of insurrectionists.

1741 "conspiracy" as well. The meaning of the events of that year remains open to debate,[2] but testimony given in the trials that followed illuminates the interactions and shared sympathies of many in the New York African community. The incident also provides insight into the relationships between enslaved Africans and those in the city whose personal interests conflicted with the laws and prevailing social customs.

Word of a conspiracy among the enslaved population began with accusations leveled by Mary Burton, a teenage servant girl indentured to tavern keeper John Hughson. Following the arrest of two enslaved men for burglarizing a local shop, Burton first implicated her employer as a fencer of stolen goods and a frequent entertainer of enslaved people. A short time later, the young woman again offered evidence against Hughson, claiming that he was the leader of a group of black men who were responsible for a series of fires currently threatening the city. The aim of the enslaved men, she claimed, was to burn down the city, to kill many of its white residents, and to make Hughson king (Horsmanden 1971:41–42). In addition to the enslaved men and the tavern owner, she accused Hughson's wife, Sarah; another white woman, who boarded with the couple and socialized with blacks; and later, a schoolmaster whom she alleged was a Catholic priest (Horsmanden 1971:44, 213–214).[3] New Yorkers, fearing an uprising of enslaved Africans encouraged by the "hand of popery" (Brodhead 1853–1887:6:197–198), could not bring themselves to accept the possibility that black men might rise up of their own accord. Hence, Hughson became the "contriver and main spring of the whole design" (Brodhead 1853–1887:6:197). Sensing the need of white New Yorkers to credit white intervention for the alleged conspiracy, Africans who sought to save themselves from the flames of the stake and the hangman's noose told the authorities what they longed to hear. Black men (and a few women) had met at Hughson's, where the white man swore them into a confederation bent on destruction of the colonial city.

Testimony given at the ensuing trial revealed that Hughson's Tavern was frequented by varied groups of people of African descent. Present were "country negroes," who routinely traveled to the city to sell produce from their owners' farms that were situated in the Out Ward and other jurisdictions. Joining them were "Spanish Negroes," who found themselves unlawfully enslaved and who took every opportunity to proclaim their rightful status (Horsmanden 1971:185–186). Also present were other acculturated blacks who lived and labored within the town limits and, alongside them, fairly recently arrived Africans. At least one of the men in the group, Will (the enslaved laborer of Anthony Ward, a watchmaker), had been implicated in two uprisings in the West Indies, one in St. John's and the other in Antigua in 1736 (Horsmanden 1971:265–266). Will purportedly had taunted the men assembled at Hughson's with the statement that blacks in New York were "cowards; for that they had no hearts as those at Antigua" (Horsmanden 1971:212).

The testimony also suggested that enslaved blacks had extraordinary freedom of movement in the city. Cuff "had a great deal of time upon his hands, perhaps more than any negro in town, consequently was much at large for making frequent daily or nightly visits at Hughson's" (Horsmanden 1971:115). Similarly, Jack was often at liberty because his owner, Gerardus Comfort, was away for extended periods. Comfort's yard was a meeting place for Africans who came there to get tea water (Horsmanden 1971:145–146).[4] Clearly, enslaved men had ample opportunity to gather and simply socialize or plot revolt.

Evidence suggests that ethnic solidarity may have played an important role in networking among the enslaved population, as people bearing Akan day names were friends and alleged conspirators (Horsmanden 1971:466–473). Supposedly in recruiting for the revolt, the men often greeted each other with the appellation "countryman" (Horsmanden 1971:245).[5] However, the principal organizing units, whatever the nature of the conspiracy, were the social organizations most popular among black men: the "Geneva Club," the "Fly Boys," and the "Long Bridge Boys."

[2] Thomas J. Davis (1985) has argued that New York Africans in the 1740s spoke and acted in ways that suggested that they chafed under their bondage and conspired, if not to burn down the city, at least to take actions that would redress their grievances.

[3] The woman boarder was apparently the lover of one of the leaders of the alleged insurrection. John Ury, the suspected Catholic priest, represented the fear of white New Yorkers of being taken over by the Spanish (see McManus 1966:131–136).

[4] The well on Comfort's property was used extensively by the town's residents, who sent their servants to fetch good drinking water. The property was near Hughson's establishment.

[5] Michael Gomez has argued that the degree of cooperation among various African ethnicities, as well as between the native born and creole, depended on the ability to forge a common identity, one that required a de-emphasis on ethnic group and class and the embracing of a racial consciousness. For a discussion of this effort toward transformation, see Gomez (1998).

Despite the assertion that the defendants were "furnished with all the necessaries of life, meat, drink, and clothing" (Horsmanden 1971:106–107), enslaved people had good cause to strike out against their owners and the institution that kept them fettered. But there was little to be gained by resisting so overtly. New York Africans were well aware that demographics did not favor them or any attempt they might make to seize their freedom. The setting of fires to cloak theft, however, might be viewed by some as a plausible activity. White New Yorkers, already alarmed by reports of recent revolts elsewhere, could come to no more reasonable explanation for the events of 1741 than that enslaved people were bent on destroying the city and killing them. The hysteria that ensued led to the execution of 30 Africans—13 at the stake and 17 by hanging. Seventy-one others—as a consequence of perceived lesser culpability—suffered transport outside the colony.

Women and Resistance

Among those transported was Sarah, the sole woman convicted in the affair. Remarking on the rarity that her conviction presented to the court, Horsmanden (1971:121–122) wrote that

> this was one of the oddest animals amongst the black confederates, and gave the most trouble in her examinations; a creature of an outrageous spirit. . . . She, no doubt, must have had extraordinary qualifications to recommend her to the confidence of the confederates; for she was the only wench against whom there was strong and flagrant evidence of having consented to and approved this execrable project.

Had Horsmanden taken the time to investigate, he would have realized that the spirit of resistance Sarah exhibited was shared by many of her enslaved sisters. In discussing enslaved women's resistance in the West Indies, historian Barbara Bush contended that this "spirit of revolt," rather than constituting a spontaneous occurrence, reflected a "continuum of resistance which linked Africa and the West Indies" (Bush 1990:67). Equiano (1995:40 [1789]) told of watching as his mother and other women among the Igbo in West Africa defended their villages against invasion. Women destined for New York doubtless brought that tradition with them. Despite their apparent absence from open revolt, black women in New York attempted to subvert the laws and customs and enjoy a certain degree of self-determination in a variety of ways. Burdened with the added responsibility of child-rearing and somewhat isolated within the owner's household, women did not have the opportunity to flee as often as men. Nor did they have as much opportunity to create sisterhoods that might lead to emotional support and profit. Yet an undeniable hunger for freedom and a desire to disrupt normal economic operations sometimes elicited flight. The effort to attain a level of subsistence might lead to the pilfering of household and personal items that could be used for one's own comfort, exchanged for cash, or bartered. Frustration over lack of autonomy sometimes led to arson, a dangerous and destructive business in light of eighteenth-century building characteristics. Although not all black women were constant irritants to their owners, their contentious sisters were numerous enough to challenge the notion that domestic laborers acquiesced to an allegedly mild form of slavery in New York.[6]

[6] For a discussion of black women's resistance in colonial New York, see Medford and Brown (2000).

Chapter 14

New York Africans in the Age of Revolution

by Edna Greene Medford and Emilyn L. Brown

Introduction

Resistance reflected a desire to expand personal liberty, if not an inclination to overthrow the institution of slavery itself. Hence, when white New Yorkers raised their voices and shouldered their guns in defense of their rights as free men in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the population of people of African descent stood ready to use the situation to their advantage. Their own struggles heretofore—whether subtle day-to-day efforts designed to provide momentary psychological relief or more direct action that shook slavery's foundations—prepared them to enter the War for Independence out of self-interest. Through participation in the struggle—whether on the side of the colonial forces or as agents of the British—large numbers of New York Africans seized freedom for themselves, helped to alter perceptions about liberty, and set in motion events that ultimately led to the emancipation of the city's and the state's bondmen and bondwomen.

Securing and Extending Freedom in Revolutionary New York

On September 15, 1776, British forces under Commander-in-Chief General Henry Clinton occupied New York City. The military units would remain in place until November 25, 1783, when defeat at the hands of the patriots would compel the British to evacuate. During the ensuing 7-year occupation, the city would experience all the challenges attending wartime disruptions—martial law, food and fuel shortages, exorbitant prices for consumer goods and basic necessities, and shortage of housing resulting from British efforts to quarter soldiers after the destruction of roughly one-fourth of the city by fire. New York also experienced fluctuations in its population, as British troops, Loyalists, and enslaved runaways occupied the space vacated by patriots fleeing British advance (Still 1956:43–44). As has already been noted, the African Burial Ground may have served as the final resting place for some of these people as well as for captured American soldiers who were imprisoned in New York during the war (see Foote et al. 1993).

Wartime New York witnessed the expansion of population and possibilities for its African American residents as well, both those who had resided in the city before the Revolution and those who made their way to the British side once armed conflict commenced. As the headquarters of British forces, the city attracted runaways from bondage, especially after Lord Dunmore, governor of Virginia, and later, Commander-in-Chief of British forces, General Henry Clinton, issued proclamations offering freedom to those willing to flee their patriot owners and join His Majesty's legion.[1] As a consequence, thousands of enslaved laborers left plantation and farm, evacuating with the British forces when they left tidewater Virginia and low-country Georgia and South Carolina. Some of those persons thus removed landed in New

[1] Dunmore issued his proclamation in 1775 to enslaved people in Virginia where he was governor. The proclamation declared "all indentured servants, negroes, or others (appertaining to rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining his Majesty's troops" (Holt and Brown 2000:162). General Henry Clinton's Philipsburg Proclamation of 1779 offered "to every Negro who shall desert the Rebell Standdard, full security to follow within these lines, any Occupation which he shall think Proper" (quoted in Burrows and Wallace [1999:248]). These proclamations enticed enslaved people to flee to the British and brought many to the city of New York (see Hodges [1992:23] for a discussion of the consequences of the two proclamations).

York, where their presence reshaped the character of black life in the city and encouraged those still held in bondage by Loyalist slaveholders to intensify their own struggle for freedom.

Black fugitives from the South and New York's own enslaved and free blacks served in both a military and civilian labor capacity during the Revolutionary era. Military laborers consisted of armed troops as well as those who performed manual labor. Groups such as the Black Brigade, formed shortly after British occupation of the city, personified the willingness of black men to fight on the side of the British, as long as the latter ensured eventual freedom. Under the leadership of its black commander, Colonel Tye, the Black Brigade waged guerrilla warfare in the patriot-controlled countryside and towns, ferrying enslaved laborers to the British lines, as well as livestock and other essential goods (Hodges 1992:24, 1999:151–152). Other men joined the patriots, less because they cared about American independence than that they embraced the promise of eventual freedom. That promise was made belatedly, following earlier American objections to black fighting men.

Those men less inclined toward direct military participation sought to advance their own interests by taking advantage of opportunities for employment made possible by the scarcity of white laborers. The British made extensive use of black civilian laborers who served as teamsters and porters, operated watercraft, and strengthened the city's defenses. Free blacks and those who were refugees received wages and, the latter, the promise of freedom as well (Foote 1991:368). Locally enslaved men did not fare as well. They were hired out by their owners to the British army and continued to perform those labors considered too dangerous or disagreeable for whites. Hence, the person responsible for keeping the chimneys of the army quarters clean employed "a half dozen negroes, each of whom can sweep at least twenty chimneys a day, and often must clean more," reported one observer (Still 1956:53). Yet the chimney sweeps received nothing for their labor, "save coarse food and rags" (Still 1956:53).

The uncertainty that plagued enslaved people who sought freedom in wartime New York is evident in the recollections of fugitive Boston King, who fled to the British forces in South Carolina, was captured by the patriots and brought to New Jersey, and eventually escaped to freedom in New York. His sense of security was interrupted at the end of the war, when rumors surfaced that fugitives would be returned to their owners. "The dreadful rumour filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror," King recalled, "especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New York, or even dragging them out of their beds" (Walker 1989:459; see also King 1798).

When the British forces and the Loyalists withdrew from the city in 1783, 4,000 black men, women, and children (most of them recent arrivals from the former southern colonies) evacuated with them. Among the black evacuees, however, were long-term residents of New York who had been owned by the city's most successful merchants. Fifty-year-old Cyrus, for example, had been enslaved by the Bayard family. Carlotta Livingston (also 50 years old) had been enslaved by the Livingstons. A great many individuals came from Philipse Manor (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Book of Negroes Registered and Certified after Having Been Inspected by Commissioners Appointed by His Excellency Sr. Guy Carleton R. B. General and Commander in Chief on Board Sundry Vessels [Book of Negroes Registered and Certified]). Most had secured their freedom by their participation in the war; others had purchased it or had been born free.

The origins and backgrounds of the black evacuees were as varied as those at the beginning of the century. Thomas Brown, for example, was from the West Indies and had lived in the city for only a few years. Twenty-four-year-old Elizabeth Black had been brought to the city from Madagascar at the age of 9 by the Van Cortlandt family. Twenty-two-year-old Joe Freeman, born in St. Kitts, arrived in New York in a privateer, and 25-year-old Cato had been brought to the city 18 years before on a ship from Guinea (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Book of Negroes Registered and Certified).

The evacuees hoped to enjoy freedom and prosperity in Nova Scotia, where they were promised land and an opportunity to live independent lives. But the failure of the British to honor their promises and refusal by locals to extend either rights or assistance prompted frustrated Black Loyalists to seek and gain permission to emigrate to Sierra Leone. Before century's end, they had traded the disappointment of a Canadian existence for the prospect for better times in Africa (Winks 1971; see also Schama 2006; Wilson 1976).

As had been promised by the Americans, those enslaved New Yorkers who had supported indepen-

dence received their reward of freedom. A law passed by the New York Assembly on March 20, 1781, declared that any enslaved man "who shall serve [in the military] for a term of three years, or until regularly discharged, shall immediately after such service or discharge be, and is hereby declared to be a free man of this state" (Higginbotham 1978:138). The 1781 law assisted in providing the environment that would ultimately lead to an effort toward the universal emancipation of all New York Africans.

Manumission in City and State

In the wake of the Revolution and its attending egalitarian rhetoric (and doubtless influenced by slavery's lesser significance to the economy than in the South), newly formed states in the North moved to implement plans of emancipation for all enslaved people, either by gradual process or through immediate legislative and judicial action. In post–Revolutionary War New York, the process was protracted. There was hardly a groundswell of abolitionist sentiment except among the black population. The labor of enslaved people remained important to the city, with families continuing to utilize the services of domestics and New York's merchants and artisans drawing on both skilled and unskilled black labor (Hodges 1999:163–164). Yet the population of free blacks increased steadily over the course of the next few decades as New York moved slowly toward joining the ranks of those states committed to ending slavery. Despite the failure to embrace abolition at the end of the Revolution, over the next decade the state instituted certain measures that challenged the institution peripherally. Of most importance was the prohibition of the sale of enslaved people and the partial rescinding of a law requiring the posting of a bond of £200 before an enslaved person could be manumitted (Hodges 1999:169).

An act to end slavery did not pass the state legislature until 1799, after more than a decade of debate. Patterned after the Pennsylvania model, the measure called for gradual abolition, granting freedom to any child born to an enslaved mother after July 4 of that year. The law stipulated, however, that such children would labor for the mother's owner for several years—female children until the age of 25 and males until they reached 28. The law also allowed the mother's owner to abandon the child after it turned a year old. Under such circumstances, the child was bound out by the overseers of the poor (Gellman and Quigley 2003:52–54). A second emancipation act in 1817 provided for the freeing by July 4, 1827, of all enslaved persons born before July 4, 1799. Any enslaved children born between 1817 and July 4, 1827, were required to work for their owners until they turned 21 (Gellman and Quigley 2003:72). So, although slavery was outlawed by 1827, indentured servitude or apprenticeship persisted for several years thereafter, and only in 1841 was a law passed to prohibit out-of-state owners of enslaved laborers from domiciling their bondmen and -women in New York for more than 9 months.

Beyond the efforts of African Americans themselves, the organization that spearheaded emancipation in New York was the Manumission Society, established in January 1785, and whose ranks included merchants, shipowners, bankers, lawyers, judges, and even slaveholders. The organization would include in its membership prominent men such as John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Duane, mayor of the city. The men contended that "as free citizens and Christians" they were obliged to

> regard with compassion the injustice done to those among us who are held as slaves [and] to endeavor by lawful ways and means to enable them to share equally with us, in that civil and religious liberty with which an indulgent Providence has blessed these states and to which these, our Brethren are by nature, as much entitled as ourselves [New-York Historical Society (NYHS), Reports of the Standing Committees of the New Manumission Society, 1785–1822, 4 February 1787].

The members of the Manumission Society were especially concerned with challenging actions that contradicted the laws of enslavement and freedom. "The violent attempts lately made to seize and export for sale, several free negroes who were peaceably following their respective occupations in this city, must excite the indignation of every friend of humanity and ought to receive exemplary punishment," the Manumission Society proclaimed (NYHS, Reports of the Standing Committees of the New York Manumission Society, 1785–1822, 4 February 1787). The reference was to "Blackbirders," abductors whose activities kept the Manumission Society occupied for the next several years. The organization sought to ameliorate the condition of those enslaved by speaking out against public sales "whereby [blacks] are made a bait to avarice, and more liable to be separated

from endearing connections" (NYHS, Reports of the Standing Committees of the New York Manumission Society, 21 February 1788). The Society intervened directly on behalf of free and enslaved people such as Juba and her five children (ranging in age from 5 to 27 years) who had been born free but were held in slavery (NYHS, Reports of the Standing Committees of the New York Manumission Society, n.d.). The Society also secured the freedom of Sarah, who had been brought from Maryland and sold in the city, and a black woman held by Samuel Campbell, who had sold her to New Jersey, although she was later returned to New York. Throughout the period of gradual emancipation, the organization acted to protect the freedom of or secure freedom for those seeking it as a consequence of the laws prohibiting importation and exportation of enslaved people as descendants of Indians, and as veterans on the side of the Americans in the Revolution (NYHS, Reports of the Standing Committees of the New York Manumission Society, 1785–1822, 19 May 1800).

Education and Social Control

At mid-century, a "Charitable society of worthy and well disposed Christians in England" consented to be the primary support for the establishment and maintenance of a school for the instruction of black children in reading, sewing, and other skills. The advertisement seeking a school director appealed to New Yorkers who "have a regard for the souls of their poor young slaves . . . to assist in forwarding and promoting" the endeavor (*New-York Mercury*, August 4, 1760). As access to freedom increased and concerns arose over improving the conditions of free and freed blacks, efforts toward providing education for black children intensified. In 1785, black and white working adults were organized to instruct child apprentices in various trades. The *American Minerva* (August 22, 1785), a local newspaper, reported that

> nothing can tend to raise the African character more than by such means rescuing them from the state of servitude to which they are now universally condemned . . . the African shall find himself associated with free industrious mechanics: his thoughts will be raised, his mind will expand, and he will stand a proof to mankind, that nature has not done less for the negro, than for any of her other children.

In addition to this instruction in manual labor, African Free Schools were established beginning in 1787. There, black children learned the fundamentals of reading and writing and began to hone skills that would prepare them for the leadership of their people.

The Manumission Society played a significant role in this effort, providing monetary support for several of the schools for black children. But such support carried with it a demand to free blacks that they conform to the values and standards imposed by white New Yorkers. In 1788, the Manumission Society appointed a committee to "consider the ways and means to prevent the irregular behavior of free Negroes" (NYHS, Reports of the Standing Committees of the New York Manumission Society, 1785–1822, 21 February 1788). The committee found it advisable to require all blacks who were under the patronage of the Society to be required to be registered in a book that recorded their names, ages, residence, occupation, and number of persons in their household. If they changed residence or their family membership increased or declined, they were to report such to the trustees of the school or their representative. Trustees were authorized to refuse admission to any children whose parents failed to register. Finally, the committee advised that those who registered be notified that

> the benefits to be derived from this Society are not to be extended to any except such as maintain good character for sobriety and honesty—an peaceable and orderly living: and that they be particularly cautioned against admitting servants or slaves to their houses—receiving or purchasing any thing from them; and against allowing fiddling, dancing [NYHS, Reports of the Standing Committees of the New York Manumission Society, 21 February 1788].

The Manumission Society may have been willing to facilitate the transition from slavery to freedom, but it was equally determined to shape the lives of those it had helped.

Protest and Agency in the Late-Eighteenth Century

The experiences of war and efforts to improve the condition of free blacks in the postwar era fostered black agency in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Those blacks who gained literacy used it to

advocate for themselves and the rest of the black community. Well versed in their legal rights, they became politically active and spoke out against the injustices they saw around them.

A petition that free blacks brought in 1788 illustrates the concerns of that community and their ability to take action on their own behalf. The petition protested the desecration of the most sacred of places for the community, the burial ground:

> That it hath lately been the constant Practice of a number of Young Gentlemen in this City who call themselves students of Physick to repair to the Burying Ground adjudged for the use of your Petitioners and under cover of the night and in the most wanton sallies of excess to dig up the bodies of the deceased Friends and relatives of your Petitioners, carry them away, and without respect to age or sex, mangle their flesh out of a Wanton curiosity and then expose it to the Beasts and Birds [New York Municipal Archives, Unfiled Papers of the Common Council, 4 February 1788].

Grave robbing had become a serious concern to New Yorkers in the winter and spring of 1788, especially to blacks, who were the principal victims. Readers of *The Daily Advertiser* (February 16, 1788) were told that "few blacks are buried whose bodies are permitted to remain in the grave . . . swine have been seen devouring the entrails and flesh of women, taken out of a grave, which on account of an alarm, was left behind . . . that human flesh has been taken up along the docks [and] sewed up in bags." In a sarcastic response to the concerns presented in the newspaper, a "Student of Physic" ridiculed those who would speak for the dead, when they ignored the suffering of the living. As the practice of grave robbing continued, alarmed blacks secured a private lot on which to bury their dead, but medical students threatened the owner of the property, extracted the body of a child from the grave, and attempted to secure another. The bold act elicited a warning to the abductors:

> [t]hey may not alone suffer abduction of their wealth, but perhaps their lives may be the forfeit of their temerity should they dare to persist in their robberies, especially at unlawful hours of night [*The Daily Advertiser*, February 28, 1788; see also Landeheim 1950:27].

The disquiet created by newspaper reports and occasional raids on white cemeteries turned to rage in April. Children who happened upon a dissection in progress alerted their parents, who in searching the hospital found partially dissected bodies. Over the course of 3 days, an angry mob pursued the city's doctors and destroyed property. The riot was quelled only after the militia fired on the mob, killing five and wounding several more (Heaton 1943:1862–1863). It is uncertain how many of those who took part in the event were people of color, but there can be little doubt that African Americans had the most to gain in raising their voices against such injustices.

Beyond protecting themselves from the utter disregard of their human rights, blacks in late-eighteenth-century New York sought to build institutions that would meet their needs for independence, that would reflect their own sense of community, and that would relieve them of the burden of racism. Among their first efforts in this regard was the formation of a church. As they had done in Philadelphia a decade before, free blacks in New York resolved to take control of their own spiritual needs. In 1796, a group of black men who were members of the John Street Methodist Church sought and gained permission to hold separate meetings. A formal separation came a few years later when the worshipers incorporated the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and constructed a place of worship at the corner of Church and Leonard Streets (Burrows and Wallace 1999:398–400).

Other New York Africans followed the John Street example. In 1794, a group calling itself the African Society formed "for the laudable purposes of improving . . . morals . . . promoting a Spirit of brotherly Love, and a strict regard to the Laws of the State" (New York City Common Council 1905:2:112).[2] The Society sought as well to secure property for the erection of a church and to "procure a place for . . . the interment of people of color" (New York City Common Council 1905:2:112). In 1795, the organization petitioned the Common Council for assistance in reaching those goals. Shortly thereafter, property was purchased on Chrystie Street, and a new cemetery was opened (New York City Common Council 1905:2:137).

The opening of the Chrystie Street cemetery coincided with the closing of the African Burial Ground.

[2] Excerpted from the "Petition of the African Society on the Subject of two Lots purchased for burial ground, June 22, 1795."

Doubtless, the petitioners had sought to secure a new cemetery because the African Burial Ground had been reserved for other uses. Grading of the site and its subdivision into lots in 1795 ushered in a new and significant phase in the history of the plot of land that most colonial New Yorkers had not thought valuable enough to merit much attention. But its closing deprived New York Africans of a vital symbol of black community and humanity. In time, the cemetery and the people interred there became a deeply buried memory, inaccessible to posterity and denied their rightful place in New York history.

Epilogue

The decades immediately following the closure of the African Burial Ground were years of both opportunity and challenge for black men and women in New York. At 1800, nearly 6,000 persons of African descent resided in New York County, more than half of them as free people. The number of free blacks grew steadily as the gradual emancipation laws of 1799 and 1817 encouraged owners to manumit their laborers and emboldened African Americans to negotiate for their release from bondage (Hodges 1999:171–172). As the free black population grew, black institutions—both religious and secular—flourished, indicative of the effort of African Americans to further their independence. But slavery and indenture continued to shape the lives of many black New Yorkers, and discrimination imposed second-class status on the rest.

European visitors to New York during this period noted the entrepreneurial ventures of certain free blacks, indicating that they operated fruit and oyster stands or managed small shops (Still 1956:89). Others entered the trades despite stiff resistance from white mechanics who viewed them as a threat to their own source of income (Rock 1989:110). Certain individual blacks even enjoyed significant economic success in the city's booming economy. Among them was Pierre Toussaint, the Haitian hairdresser who did not gain his freedom until 1807. Toussaint's fortune was used to aid fellow blacks to freedom as well as to support charitable causes that assisted both races. Joining him was Peter Williams, a founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church. Williams, too, had been formerly enslaved and was a successful tobacconist. His son, Peter Williams, Jr., was destined to become the first minister of St. Philip's AMEZ Church. James Varick, a future superintendent (bishop) of the AMEZ church, earned a living as a shoemaker. And William Hamilton, an outspoken proponent of freedom and black rights, was a carpenter.

A group of these prominent African New Yorkers came together in 1808 to form the African Society for Mutual Relief. Peter Williams, Jr., served as the organization's vice president; Varick became the Society's first chaplain; and William Hamilton became its president. The organization provided monetary support to its members who fell sick and to their widows and orphans when they died (Porter 1995:37). The need for such an organization underscored the precarious existence that most free black New Yorkers endured during this era.

Women and children were especially susceptible to poverty. They often had little recourse but to accept whatever employment was offered to them, be it in industries such as manufacturing cloth, supplying labor on Long Island and New Jersey farms, laundering clothes, or manning stalls in the public markets (Stansell 1987:13–14, 16). At times, black women and their children were exposed to especially dangerous work. In 1790, for instance, a fire broke out at Slidell's soap and tallow manufactory. Caused by boiling turpentine, the fire "burned a negro girl and scorched her mother considerably" (*The Daily Advertiser*, December 10, 1790).

Yet, the impending demise of slavery encouraged both the free and bound to press for a new relationship in the workplace, one that recognized the changing times and reflected the determination of New York Africans to exercise greater control over their lives. Perhaps many a wealthy New Yorker echoed the sentiments of merchant John Pintard (1940:1:145), who complained, "How much the comfort of existence depends on domestics." The Pintard family employed a "little black girl, very smart and cleanly, but whose stay depends on the caprice of her mother" (Pintard

1940:145). Time proved Pintard (1940:145) justified in his fear of losing his servant:

> Our little black girl Betty, was yesterday taken away by her parents Altho' Mama had consented to pay the extravagant wages of $3 a month for her services, being only 11 years . . . we are well rid of a child who was subject to the control of a capricious cross grained mother whom nothing could satisfy. She expressed an expectation that her child should be sent daily to school and have presents in the bargain, as many such places to be found, in which she will find herself mistaken.

Throughout the winter of 1818, the Pintards continued to be plagued by labor unrest. One servant, Tamar, "acted ungratefully to say the least" and had "a stubborn sullen disposition" (Pintard 1940:145). She eventually left the family and perhaps was responsible for the departure of another of Pintard's domestics as well. In any case, their departure forced Pintard (1940) to perform domestic chores for a time:

> They both left us, nearly together, the beginning of this month and for 8 days I had to make the office, kitchen and parlour fires, hang on the tea kettle, bring all the wood and coals, sweep entries &c until Mama could provide herself with some decent body.

As individuals sought to exercise greater autonomy, African American leaders challenged black men and women to elevate themselves and to support each other in times of distress. In his address to the African Society for Mutual Relief on the first anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, William Hamilton challenged the "proposition . . . by men who claim a preeminence in the learned world, that Africans are inferior to white men in the structure both of body and mind . . . that we have not produced any poets, mathematicians, or any to excel in any science whatever" (Porter 1995:36). Hamilton argued that allowing for the conditions and circumstances under which black New Yorkers lived and labored, "it will soon be perceived that we do not fall far behind those who boast of a superior judgment" (Porter 1995:36). Believing that "deep poverty and distress is the bane of improvement," he urged the Society's members to advance the race by working together to "improve the mind, soften the couch of the sick, to administer an elixir to the afflicted, to befriend the widow, and become the orphan's guardian" (Porter 1995:37).

Although leaders such as Hamilton were keenly aware that black New Yorkers would have to survive largely through their own efforts, they understood that prosperity and progress could be hindered by white interference or helped along by white acceptance. Hence, some sought to ensure whites of their worth and their usefulness. When the second war with Britain threatened America's existence in 1812, they got their chance. Fearing impending attack from British forces, New York authorities had appealed to the black population for support in erecting defenses around the city. One "citizen of colour" urged black men to

> exert ourselves . . . for the protection of our beloved state . . . Let no man of colour, who is able to go, stay at home on Monday next, but let every one assemble at 5 o'clock A.M. in the Park, to join with their brethren in their patriotic effort [Still 1956:76].

But optimism concerning equality of opportunity and fair play for New York's African American population proved ill founded. As white Americans increasingly touted egalitarianism during the period after 1820, black men faced challenges to their participation in the political process. Before 1821, both black and white voters in New York were bound by property and residency requirements. At the constitutional convention of that year, however, partisan politics and racial considerations resulted in the lifting of restrictions on white men and the virtual disfranchisement of blacks. The new constitution that was drafted imposed a residency requirement on blacks and limited the franchise to those who possessed real property of at least $250 (Litwack 1961:80–84).

By the time the remaining bondmen and bondwomen were released from slavery on July 4, 1827, African Americans had been present in New York for roughly 200 years. The city had benefited immeasurably from their labor, all the while employing repressive means to keep them in a subordinate position. Yet, New York blacks had withstood assaults on their humanity and had responded to oppression by drawing closer together. The cohesiveness of the black community was evident to a foreign observer who witnessed a celebration in 1825 in honor of slavery's imminent demise:

> On the afternoon of the third of October, there was a great procession of negroes, some of them well dressed, parading through the streets, two by two, preceded by music and a flag. An Afri-

> can club, called the Wilberforce Society, thus celebrated the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in New York, and concluded the day by a dinner and ball. The coloured people of New York, belonging to this society, have a fund of their own, raised by weekly subscription, which is employed in assisting sick and unfortunate blacks . . . marshals with long staves walked outside of the procession. During a quarter of an hour, scarcely any but black faces were to be seen in Broadway [Still 1956:111–112].

One hundred and seventy-eight years later (appropriately, on October 3 and 4), a primarily African-descended population gathered in lower Manhattan to pay tribute to the New York Africans whose role in the development of the colonial city had been virtually forgotten. Song and dance and prayers and praise were offered for the men, women, and children whose lives represented not simply the presence of unfree labor in New York but symbolized the operation of slavery throughout America. By honoring New York Africans, those assembled elevated the nation's enslaved people from chattel to human beings. On that early fall weekend, black men and women were accorded their rightful place in the history of New York City and of the nation.

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