

# The Black Freedom Struggle in Northern New Jersey, 1613-1860: A Review of the Literature

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*Yon, The Fidler and Sam, The Witch Doctor*

*From Life in the Old Dutch Homesteads: Their Romances, Their Customs, Their Habits, Saddle River, New Jersey from 1708, by J. Hosey Osborn (1967:157).*

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## Introduction

Knowledge of the history, and some would say even the existence, of slavery in the northern United States remains largely unknown outside of a small community of scholars and historically-minded people. Indeed, even as awareness of northern slavery grew exponentially after the discovery of the New York African Burial Ground archaeological site in Manhattan in 1991, research on and public understanding of slavery as an essential aspect of colonial and early American life in the North remains poorly recognized and even less understood (LaRoche and Blakey 1997, Melish 1998, Hodges 2019).

Nowhere is this more the case than in northern New Jersey. Settled as part of the Dutch New Netherland colony, Bergen and other northern New Jersey counties developed a largely agricultural economy producing surplus food and fuel for the urban center of New Amsterdam (later New York), the Caribbean, and the Atlantic world. Historians (e.g., Hodges 1999, 2010; Fishman 1997; Hack 2012; Gigantino 2015) have documented the development of the region and its consistent reliance on enslaved African and African American laborers. For more than 200 years, enslaved laborers cleared fields, built homes and outbuildings, planted and harvested crops, tended to farm animals, carted fertilizer and produce, cared for children, and performed countless other tasks that enriched their masters and stabilized the settler society.

While this work was common in the state and not done solely by enslaved Africans, the reliance on slavery among the largely Dutch farmers in northern New Jersey stands out. Bergen County consistently had the highest percentage of its population who were enslaved among all New Jersey counties, remaining close to 20% of the total in censuses taken between the 1726 and 1820. Hodges (1999:109) estimates that slaves made up 40% of the Bergen's labor force, a fact that led most landless and tenant whites to leave the county for opportunities elsewhere. This sense is captured by this account (Ryan 1996:7), in which Peter Hasenclever describes travelling up the Passaic River from Newark in 1764:

We appeared to have been suddenly transported to the Netherlands. The Dutch are settled throughout this fertile river valley. The roads are lined with the fields of prosperous-looking farms, in some cases of hundreds of acres; they are able to maintain such large properties by the use of slaves. I saw dozens of them hoeing in the furrows, men, women and children, often singing in a deep mournful-sounding way.

The evocative scene clearly depicts a situation where slavery was visible, common, normal, and a basic foundation of the local community. I ask readers to keep this image in mind as they go through the following pages. I suggest they pair this thought with this statement by historian Graham Hodges (1998:30): "the history of Bergen County allows us to consider what an American future in which virtually none of the white citizenry opposed slavery or favored black freedoms would have been like." The investment and commitment to slavery in Bergen and other counties in northern New Jersey was not the norm for the American north. Rather, this region, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century may have been the one most closely approaching what Ira Berlin (1998) termed a "slave society." In contrast to a "society with slaves" where slavery was practiced, but was one among many forms of labor, a slave society was concentrated on permanent and inherited bonded labor. Moreover, in slave societies slavery is sustained by law, economy, politics, and a wide latitude granted to slaveowner authority, including the right to punish or kill their slave property without recourse. Recognizing this situation is essential for interpreting the history of enslavement and freedom in New Jersey.

At the same time, this is a story about Africans and African Americans, so we cannot focus solely on how they were abused and exploited by white settlers. As with all people, enslaved and free people of color sought self-determination and struggled to preserve the freedoms they earned. Hodges (1989:1) provides a useful overview of the way freedom was envisioned by these African American New Jerseyans:

Freedom meant several things: personal freedom to exercise rights, to form black institutions, create black leadership, to work for wages, avenge past wrongs and to protect and extend liberty through military service. Rather than express their identity within the paternalism of the Dutch masters, blacks relied on an ideology drawn from African heritages and from the crucible of slavery and freedom.

The following review of secondary literature on early African American communities in New Jersey thus considers slavery and freedom as a relationship defined by the negotiation of power. On one side there was the power of the colony and the state, the masters, and a racist white community which sought to limit the freedom of black people. On the other side were Africans and African Americans, who found power in resistance, retribution, and their own forms of community. As Hodges suggests, these drew from multiple sources, some ancient and African and others recent and American.

While the focus in this review is the northern parts of New Jersey, examples are drawn from instances of slavery and freedom state-wide. I follow a framework used by most researchers by breaking the story into segments of time starting with the initial colonial settlement and Dutch colonization, turning next to the early decades under English rule, then the subsequent decades in the heart of the eighteenth century. I follow these sections by looking at the era of the American Revolution and then the period of emancipation that takes us to the start of the nineteenth century. The last section reviews the first part of the nineteenth century, tracking the slow end of slavery in the state and the development of African American life in freedom up to 1860. The focus throughout is on the experience of African-descended people and communities as they struggled with, adjusted to, and resisted the restrictions placed on them by legal status and race.

## Part 1. Early settlement and the rise of slavery in colonial Dutch New Jersey

The history of settlement in northern New Jersey begins with settlement of New Netherland, which was originally based in what is now Manhattan. The story of the first settler sets the stage. Captain Thijs Volchertz Mossel sailed the vessel *Jonge Tobias* in the Hudson River harbor in 1613. Mossel stayed a few weeks to trade with Native Americans. When he left, a member of his crew, Jan Rodrigues, remained. As Rodrigues was an African-descended man, this means that the first non-indigenous settler of Manhattan was a person of African descent. Because of his supposed disloyalty, Mossel later referred to Rodrigues as a “black rascal.” Rodrigues is said to have remained in New Netherland and to have married and fathered children with women from the Rockaway Native American nation (Hodges 1999:6-7). Of course, many settlers eventually joined Rodrigues as newcomers in New Netherland. The number of settlers grew rapidly after the Dutch West India Company was contracted to build a settlement on Manhattan 1621. Five years later, in 1626, the Company purchased sixteen black people from Portuguese pirates. These men and women were the first enslaved Africans in New Netherland (Hodges 1999:8-9).

### *The slave trade*

It is not a coincidence that during these same years that the Dutch became heavily invested in the African slave trade. According to Fishman (1997:5-6) “the Dutch West India Company sold 15,430 African slaves to sugar plantations owners in Brazil. During the years 1623-26, Dutch plunderers captured 23,000 slaves from Spanish slave ships. Some of these slaves were sent to New Amsterdam. Dutch slave trading activities were expended in 1637 with the Dutch capture of the Portuguese-controlled slavetrading castle Elmina on the coast of Guinea.”

By 1650 slavery was praised by company Director Peter Stuyvesant who noted that “these Negro slaves have offered a great relief in the purchase of Provision for the Garrison. We have a great need of a few slaves in order to truck them for provisions” (in Fishman 1997:6). In 1660 Stuyvesant called for additional slaves: “They ought to be stout and strong fellows, fit for immediate employment of this fortress and other works; also, if required, in war against the wild barbarians, either to pursue them when retreating; or else to carry some of the soldiers’ baggage.” Later the governor indicated that a new shipment of slaves was necessary “to procure provisions and all sorts of timber work, fix ox carts, and a new rosmill” (Hodges 1999:9-10). Similarly, authorities in Amsterdam wrote to Stuyvesant in 1660 that

agriculture would be beneficially promoted by Negroes, and the advancement thereof is of great importance, and the prosperity of the state [New Netherland] is, for the most part dependent thereon. We have therefore concluded and even resolved to try an experiment with a parcel of Negroes which ... we shall have conveyed to your honour by the first opportunity ... from Curacao. These Negroes shall then be publicly sold to the highest bidder there, on the express condition, nevertheless, that they should not be removed from thence, but are employed in cultivating the land” (in Fishman 1997:7).

The upshot is that the Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam adopted enslaved labor early and enjoyed the benefits captive labor throughout their tenure there.



Nieu Amsterdam, c1642. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nieu\\_Amsterdam,\\_c1642.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nieu_Amsterdam,_c1642.jpg)

### *First slavery in New Jersey*

A consideration of the evidence of early slavery in New Amsterdam is important because the first colonial settlers in northern New Jersey were part of that same colony. The first settlement in New Jersey was at Pavonia, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan in what is today Jersey City and Hoboken. Pavonia was a patroonship, or land grant, under the absentee ownership of Michael Pauw, who in September 1630 instructed a company official in Pernambuco to send the “20 men and 30 women, negroes, who were captured in the last prize...[and] convey the said blacks to Pavonia.” The letter continued, “The instructions as to the coast of Africa and Pavonia it had been carried out as desired” (in Hack 2017:Ch 1, 25-26). Hodges (1999:9) notes that these “twenty male and thirty female Africans” brought to the plantation were the “first black residents of New Jersey.” The West India Company promoted settlement of Pavonia and other patroonships in New Jersey by “promising in 1630 to garner black laborers for Patroons, Colonists, and other farmers.” Fishman (1997:17) notes one instance in which Jan Everston Bout leased land in Pavonia and at least one female slave from the Company in 1638. Hack (2017:Ch 1, 26) explains that “in September 1638. [Bout] ... came under scrutiny by Dutch officials after he snapped at a fiscal (tax collector). He declared, ‘Do you mean to catch me with the black wench? What would you do? I sleep with the black wench and have trod her.’ He then threatened: ‘If you or any one belonging to you come to Pavonia, I shall shoot you or them.’”

Pavonia was short-lived as it was in consistent conflict with Wappinger Native Americans who finally destroyed the settlement in 1643. One has to wonder what came of the enslaved Africans during and after these raids, and if any were able to escape their bondage by fleeing with the Native Americans. Nevertheless, Dutch settlers persisted and eventually secured a foothold strong enough for Bergen (present-day Jersey City) to be recognized as the first municipality in New Jersey in 1661 (Fishman 1997:8). Among those living in Pavonia, 19th-century historian Charles Winfield noted that “it is said

that among the soldiers of (Governor) Stuyvesant who were given land upon retirement who were transplanted to Bergen, were some of the Moorish race, whose particular complexion, physiognomy and characteristics are, it is alleged, yet to be traced in their descendants—the swarthy complexion, the sharp eye and curling black hair, so opposite to the ruddy color, the light eye and fair hair of the Hollander” (in Fishman 1997:18). Clearly, the earliest Dutch settlers were diverse even among themselves.

### *Intensification of slavery in New Jersey*

By 1640, the Dutch New Netherland colony was firmly established, and the West India Company intensified their efforts to settle the colony and provide settlers the resources needed to succeed. Of course, a top priority was labor and, especially after 1640, the use of enslaved African laborer was to be the man solution. It was around this time that Stuyvesant sought to make New Amsterdam the principle slave port of North America. In 1644, Governor Keift concluded that “Negroes would accomplish more work from their masters, and at less expense, than [Dutch] farm servants, who must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises” (Hodges 1999:25).

In the 1640s we also see evidence a growing internal slave trade, as farmers sold their slaves to other farmers. An emerging merchant class also pushed back against the company’s restrictions of the economic activities, which included internal coastal slave trade as well as trade with the West Indies (Hodges 1999:27). The company eventually acceded to these demands, and, by the mid-1650s, local merchants in New Amsterdam were allowed to trade in slaves with the Caribbean and the Chesapeake, and eventually directly with Africa. In September 1655, the first ship arrived in New Amsterdam directly from Africa with a cargo of 300 enslaved persons (Hodges 1999:28-29).

By 1660, New Amsterdam was considered the most important slave port in North America. At least 400 slaves came into the city for sale between 1660 and 1664, primarily brought through Curacao. By 1664, a tax list for New Amsterdam showed that approximately one out of eight citizens of the colony owned enslaved Africans (Hack 2017:25). In 1664, we see that agriculture was the focus. After England took control of New Amsterdam that same year, a captured cargo was inventoried showing 290 slaves designated “to be employed solely in agriculture, which is the only means by which the State can be rendered flourishing ... the slaves must be sold to our inhabitants on express condition that they will not be taken out of our district, but kept specifically there and employed in husbandry” (in Hodges 1999:29-30). Among these agricultural efforts was Nicholas Verleith’s farm in Bergen County, which was one of the first plantations outside the city where slaves worked.

The interest and commitment to enslaved African labor played a role in defining the character of the early settler communities. Among these characteristics was a consistent effort by African descended people to appeal and fight for their rights and their freedom. Hodges (1999:10) describes one instance when “five blacks traveled in 1635 from New Amsterdam to Holland to seek a settlement on their salaries of eight guilders per month, wages comparable to those of white laborers. They were apparently successful because in 1639 he company paid blacks for the building the fort.”

### *Free Africans in Dutch New Jersey*

In 1644, eleven enslaved black men petitioned the Council for New Netherland for their freedom. They argued “that they be released from their servitude and be made free, especially as they have been in the service of the honourable Company here [for 19 years] and long since have been promised their freedom” (in Fishman 1997:10). This petition was granted, though this half-freedom only applied to these men and their wives, and not to their children. The men were granted land as tenants of the Company as well as membership in the Dutch Reformed Church. Fishman (1997:10) suggests this action reflected a need to contain a stable work force which was depleted regularly as whites “were seduced by the more profitable fur trade.” The petitioners in 1644 were Paulo Angola, Big Manuel, Little Manuel, Manuel de Garrett, Simon Congo, Anthony Portuguese, Peter Santomee, Jan Francisco, Little Anthony, and Jan Fort Orange.

Another individual who “demonstrated the fluidity of race relations” had ties to New Jersey. This was Jan de Fries, the son of ship captain Johan de Fries and a black woman, Swartinne. Jan de Fries inherited his father’s property on the outskirts of Manhattan, which was held in trust by two former slaves of the captain, Paul D’Angola and Clara Criole. After marrying Ariantje Dircks, Jan de Fries moved to New Jersey as “an original Patentee of Tappan [on the New York border] where his descendants lived for many generations.” Other free people of color also moved to Tappan including another original patentees Nicholas Manuel from Manhattan (Hodges 1999:11-12, 35; Nordstrom 1977). It is likely that Manuel was related to, if not one of the 1644 petitioners. Nordstrom (1977:146) writes

Extant records designate three of the sixteen original shareholders of the [Tappan] patent as ‘free Negro, these being John De Vries, his son, John, Jr., and Nicholas Manuels. Manhattan records show that prior to their removal to Rockland [County] these three men had been yeomen farmers residing in the Outward above the ‘fresh water’ ... and that while there had been close neighbors of several white members of the patent group. Subsequently in the early years of the eighteenth century, additional pioneers of African descent joined the De Vries and Manuels families in Rockland, generally by familial extension. A son-in-law of John De Vries, Frans Van Salee from Bedford in Brooklyn was included among those who signed the second patent division in 1721 as well as John’s son Jacobus. Augustyne Van Donck, for another married a granddaughter of Claus Manuels’ and farmed a plot, which he had purchased, at the Jersey line near Saddle River in 1744. And further west, in what was still dangerous country, Samuel Francisco and the brothers Solomon and Jacob Peterson, who in all probability had been close neighbors of De Vries and Manuels in Manhattan, earlier, cleared land and built rough cabins close to the edge of what was called civilization.”

Hodges (1999:35) also notes that Youngham Antonious Robert, a freeborn black, purchased two hundred acres of land and became one of the first residents of Hackensack, New Jersey. ... Another free black, Jochem Anthony, was a member of the Bergen Dutch Reformed Church in 1679.”

### *Religion and slavery in Dutch New Jersey*

Early records show that religion was one arena where slaves and masters negotiated their relationships. Historically, slavery in Europe was minimal because of an understanding that Christians could not

enslave other Christians. This question came to the fore in the colonies when enslaved Africans converted and were baptized as Christians. Like most other settler churches, the Dutch Reform Church in northern New Jersey found a way to work around this complication. Following the Synod of Dort, the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church were no longer obligated to baptize parishioners, as this was to be the decision of the laity heads of household. So, slaveowners were empowered to deny baptisms to their slaves (Hodges 1999:20-21).

Reduced to mere spectators of religious service and practice Africans were nevertheless free to develop their own traditions. Among the best known was at the annual Pinkster celebration, or the Dutch adaptation of the Pentecost. As early as 1628, Pinkster was celebrated in New Amsterdam as a three-day holiday that involved drinking, dancing, and music. One Capuchin monk observed Angolans this way: "They fell a playing upon several instruments, a Dancing and a Shouting So Loud that they might be heard half a league off" (Hodges 1999:25).

### *Conclusion*

By the end of the Dutch era in 1664, we can see that people of color were found throughout the New Netherland colony in what is now New York and New Jersey. Many were enslaved laborers, but under Dutch rule, incentives existed not only for the importation of enslaved Africans but also for enslaved persons to petition for rights and freedom. While political issues and social control may have fostered their freedom, these men and women seized these opportunities to escape bondage. For more than a few, the hinterlands of New Jersey would become the starting point for a new life.



## Part 2. Slavery in early English East Jersey

Graham Hodges (1999:34-68) describes the early English period from 1664-1714 at the “closing vice of slavery.” He refers here to several developments that built on the Dutch commitment to slavery after 1640 in which the experience of African-descended people in New Jersey became ever more tied to the practice of slavery. This was made clear in the Articles of Capitulation that transferred New Amsterdam to the English. As Fishman (1997:27) puts it “this document ... upheld the private property institution of slaveholding to the project of the English master and slave traders. It was a tactical thrust aimed at gaining the allegiance of the Dutch propertied classes in the colony. The burghers and the Dutch West India Company itself accepted the capitulation without firing a shot. The scent and prospects of profits were apparently stronger than loyalty to the Dutch flag.”

### *English settlers from Barbados*

A second feature of the English system especially related to northern New Jersey was the arrival of large landowning settlers from Barbados. Barbadians were enticed by promises made by the English to provide 150 acres for each household head and another 150 acres for each manservant, which included slaves. As early as 1668, Governor Carteret granted enormous tracts of land between the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers to English Barbadian planters who had direct experience with single-crop plantation production based in slave labor. These include a tract of 5,300 acres of upland and 10,000 acres of woodland granted to William Sandford who was partnered with Major Nathaniel Kingsland. Kingsland never actually came to New Jersey, though his nephew Isaac Kingsland inherited his uncle's property which provided a base for his rise to prominence in New Jersey politics. Sandford and Kingsland named the tract New Barbados and divided it between them, Sandford taking the lower third and Kingsland the rest. To gain title to the land from the Native Americans, “Sandford gave 170 fathoms and black wampum, 200 of white wampum” as well as clothing, weapons, liquor, blankets, and tools (Pomfret 1962:54).

Other Barbadians who settled in northern New Jersey include Captain John Berry who acquired 10,000 acres, or six miles between the rivers above Sandford's tract. Berry is reported to have “arrived with thirty-two black slaves, twenty of whom were involved in clearing only 2,000 acres.” Another Barbadian, Michael Smith, “came with twenty Black slaves to take up a grant of 2,000 acres.” Barbadians also settled in Monmouth County, which is where Lewis Morris settled and established the Tinton Iron Works, which was run by “sixty to seventy black slaves” (Fishman 1997:29).

The Barbadians who came to New Jersey were experienced planters with a direct familiarity with slave-based commodity production. They also were part of extended merchant families, who providing ties to Barbados itself as well as other sites across the emerging Atlantic world. Hack (2017:Ch. 2, 13-14) explains that:

because of extensive deforestation, Barbados lacked wood to keep the sugar boilers running. And with little land available to grow foodstuffs, they were reliant on outside supplies. New Jersey, with its extensive forests and arable lands (especially in East Jersey), seemed to be an ideal feeder colony. The Barbadian migrants understood this well. Without these trade connections in the Caribbean, the economy of early New Jersey would have languished. Finally,

with economic connections solidified, New Jersey residents had easier access to credit, which allowed them to purchase preferred, seasoned slaves. Ethnic Dutch also benefitted from the English Caribbean trade. With their land and chattel property secured, their commodities could now flow to a much wider market in the Caribbean and Europe. Ready markets and access to credit created a great deal of optimism. However optimistic farmers may have been in the area, they needed labor to fulfill their expansion.

### *Growth of slavery in English New Jersey*

In just a few years after the Dutch capitulation that landscape of northern New Jersey changed dramatically and that a big part of this change was the arrival of a very large number of enslaved Africans brought to the colony by experienced planters. By one count, the number of slaves in East Jersey in 1680 was 120, which seems like an undercount, as this figure would rise to 1,500 by 1715 and again to 2,581 (8% of the colonial population) in 1726 (Hodges 2019:16). Wacker (1975:413-417) tabulated population figures for several early New Jersey censuses, which are transcribed in Appendix A. One point to note from these is the especially high figures for Bergen County where Negroes/slaves made up at least 18% of the population of the county up to 1810 and, except for 1745, almost 20% of all slaves in New Jersey.

Most of the labor required was for agricultural production for both international and local trade. Hack (2017: Ch 2, 23) writes that “*A Brief Account of East Jersey* (1682), noted the economic possibilities as ‘oak for timber...and all sorts of English grain...Indian corn...[and] flax and hemp.’ It goes on ‘[a] great plenty of horses, and also beef, pork, pipe staves, boards, bread, flour, wheat, barley, rye, Indian corn, butter, cheese, which they export for Barbados, Jamaica, Nevis, and other adjacent Islands, as also to Portugal and Spain and the Canaries, &ct. Their whale oil and whale finns, beaver, mink, and raccoon and martin skins they transport to England.’ Hodges (1999:47) suggests that by 1700, East Jersey was also serving as an agricultural hinterland, supplying growing urban population in New York with food and fuel. Along with local farming, this remained the focus of African labor in the colony.

### *Slave Laws*

The growing number of enslaved Africans in the colony came concurrent with laws meant to control this population. The first of these slave codes was passed 1682. Among the provisions this Act required “That all Masters and Mistresses having Negro Slaves, or others, shall allow them sufficient Accommodation of Victuals and Cloathing” (Axel-Lute 2005 – full text of this and other New Jersey laws related to slavery and free people of color are reproduced in Appendix B). The same Act referenced runaways with promises to double the time in servitude and to fine any who helped them. The 1682 act also forbid sales or purchases of goods from slaves, specifically as a reference to slave theft. Fishman (1997:42) notes that the payment offered for the whippings shows that “the ideology of white supremacy moved from an impulse behind the legislation to into the legislation itself.”

A second law passed in 1694 restricted the use of guns by slaves. The next year, in 1695, the legislature of East Jersey passed a law regarding the jury trial and punishment of slaves accused of murder or livestock theft. These laws indicate that slaves were actively resisting the restrictions of their captivity by

running away, stealing from their masters, perhaps threatening people with firearms, and murder. Instances of retaliation by whites for these acts are also recorded. Hodges (1999:52) reports that in 1680 several Negroes were “whipt 20 lashes a piece” for allowing hogs under their care to damage the property of a Col. Lawrence. Other more vicious responses also occurred in New Jersey. Convicted of arson, Cuffy was executed, disinterred, and hung in chains (Hodges 1999:53). Quack, convicted of stealing “was sentenced to be dragged along by a cart and at eight different locations in Hackensack, Bergen County, to be whipped precisely 117 times” (Fishman 1997:46). Jeremie and Agebee were hanged and Oliver whipped in 1695 after being convicted of killing Lewis Morris of Passage Point. During the brief trial, it was established the slaves were exacting revenge themselves as Morris had killed a slave woman they knew, though he was never punished. A gruesome death was ordered for Caesar, convicted on murder in Monmouth County in 1694. The judge’s sentence ordered that Caesar be brought to the place of execution, “when thy right hand shall be cut off and burned before thine eyes. Then, thou shalt be hanged by the neck until thou art dead, dead, dead; then thy body shall be cut down and burned to ashes in a fire” (in Fishman 1997:45).

After the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the slave codes became more focused and harsh. The 1704 *Act for Regulating Negro, Indian and Mallatto Slaves within this Province of New-Jersey* firmly established a collective white authority over virtually all aspects of slave life from movement to socializing to sex to trade to religion. Notably, a provision for the castration of rapists and fornicators of white women was disallowed by the Privy Council in London in 1709.

What little freedom black people could envision was ultimately shut down in 1713 by a new set of laws in New York and New Jersey passed after a slave revolt in 1712. On April 1, black people in New York set a house on fire. When whites came to put it out, they discovered these African Americans standing in the streets who “shot down and stabbed as many as they could” (in Hodges 1999:65). Eight whites were killed and 12 more injured. Terrified of the possibility of another revolt, colonial legislators acted quickly with stricter laws to control the enslaved. New Jersey’s 1713 *Act for Regulating of Slaves* reproduced much of the language of the 1704 Act but added new provisions regarding compensating slave owners for executed slaves, insults and restrictions regarding free blacks, and required bonds for manumissions. Not included in the full text of the Act is a statement in the preamble that describes free Negroes of the colony as “Idle, Slothful people who prove very often a charge on the place they are” (in Hodges 1999:67). This sentiment was then materialized in a prohibition of any further land acquisitions by free blacks and the attachment of a £200 security and a L20 annual fee to any manumissions. Hodges (2019:19) concludes that this law “made emancipation for New Jersey blacks very difficult and expensive. The slave code meant that the New Jersey government supported human bondage completely.” In other words, the vise of bondage and racism was closed as tight as could be.

### Part 3. Slavery in mid-18th-century New Jersey

Despite these early laws free blacks continued to live in East Jersey. In addition to those mentioned above connected to the Tappan patent, Yougham Antonius Robert purchased 200 acres in 1684 from indigenous people. Fishman (1997:35) also mentions several other land purchases by people of color between 1687 and 1707. Yet, the impact of new laws had a lasting effect. As Hodges (1999:69) describes it, “the free black society disappears.” Besides a few survivors who descended from the early settlers in Tappan, free people of color diminish in numbers as the colony entered the middle 1700s.

#### *Expansion of slavery*

One important cause for this decline was the bonds attached to manumissions. The other part of it was the increasing monetization of enslaved labor. Hodges (1999:70) writes that as “white tradesmen, merchants, and farmers became dependent on slaves for labor, they were reluctant to let go of their most valuable movable property.” In 115 New York wills filed 1712 between 1742, Hodges noted that almost all slaves were either passed along as an inheritance or sold to pay off the decedent’s debts. New Jersey wills show the same pattern (e.g. Adams and Carey 2016). Conducting the 1724 census, Francis Harrison noted that New York and New Jersey freeholders increasingly relied on slavery. As he stated, slaves are the key “portion of which young men have from their parents or received with their wives when the set out in the world.” Harrison also noted that freeholders, especially the Dutch, are “so used to property and Command, that they will rather starve then serve under any roof but their own,” which is why they preferred the permanence of enslaved labor to white indentured servitude (in Hodges 1999:79). The upshot of Harrison’s report was the suggestion that much profit could be gained by increasing the imports of enslaved Africans to New York and New Jersey.

Figures from the slave trade suggest that indeed the market for imported slaves was relatively hot after 1712. Moss (1950:293) notes that 115 slaves entered through Perth Amboy between 1718 and 1726. By 1757, more than 6,000 slaves came into New York Harbor and an additional 600 entered through Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Duties imposed on slaves from the West Indies suggest that most of these enslaved persons were brought directly from Africa.

A story on the slave trade pertinent to northern New Jersey relates to the ship *The Catherine*, owned by John Watts of New York City and Arent Schuyler of Bergen County. Schuyler was large slaveowner and seems to have entered into the partnership with Watts to profit further from slavery. *The Catherine* was known to have docked twice at Perth Amboy with loads of human cargo. Details from its 1733 voyage indicate that 130 slaves were brought to Perth Amboy and 110 more brought to New York. These Africans were obtained through trade along the West African coast as far south as Angola. They purchased 257 people, 17 of whom died on the journey to America.

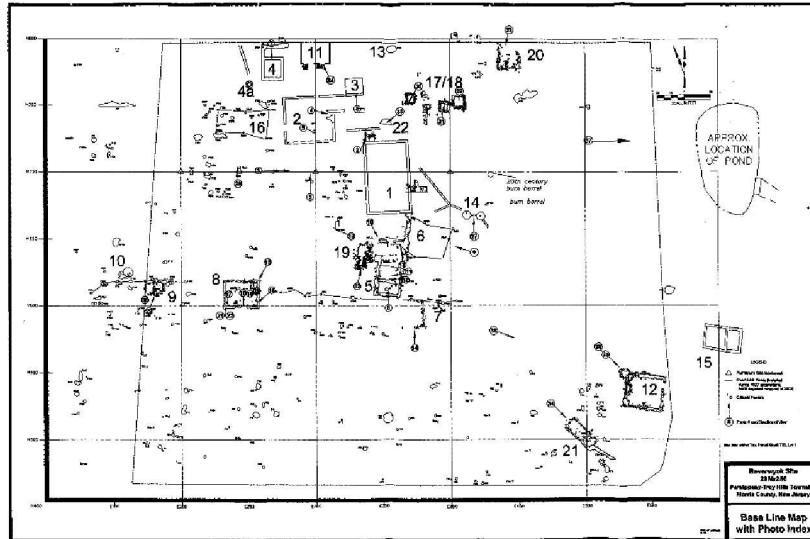
Despite the growing slave trade, New Jersey officials did make efforts to curtail it. In 1769, New Jersey passed a duty on imported slaves in hopes of getting more white servants into the colony. Justification for this act noted that “duties on the importation of Negroes in several of the neighboring colonies have been found beneficial to the introduction of sober industrious Foreigners [whites] ... [and] promoting a Spirit of Industry among the Inhabitants.” The act did not produce its intended effects since by 1775 the population of Africans grew to more than 21,000 within 30 miles of Manhattan (Hodges 1999:106).

The preference for enslaved labor is also found in evidence drawn from Tax Ratable records kept by New Jersey. Hodges (1999:107) writes that “in Dutch-dominated Bergen County, slaves and [indentured] servants outnumbered single [white] men by 306 to 8 in 1751 and 422 to 34 in 1769. According to Hodges (1999:109) slaves made up 40% of the labor force in Bergen County by 1780. The demand for slaves matched the growth of farming and other trades in the colonies. In 1740 Hunterdon county one report noted that “three-fourths of the corn that was planted and hoed, the flax that was raised and dressed, and other work done was performed by Negro slaves.” Another assessment in the 1770s noted that all but one household out of 300 living in Perth Amboy included at least one slave (in Fishman 1997:32).

### *Beverwyck*

One of the most compelling sites associated with slavery from this era is known as Beverwyck, a 2,000-acre property in Parsippany built in 1759 by New York merchant William Kelly. When the property was put up for sale a 1768 advertisement indicated had it had a “main house, several tenant or servant’s cottages, a barn, a significant number of small agricultural buildings, and a ‘Negro House.’” When the new owner, Caribbean planter Lucas Von Beverhoudt, settled at the estate in 1772 it was reported that there were twenty enslaved people there “including a blacksmith, shoemaker, and a mason” (Delle 2019:71). An archaeological study of the site in 1999 uncovered a wealth of information, including the location and archaeological contents of the “Negro House,” identified as Structure 8,

Excavations in the northeast corner of Structure 8 identified of a discrete concentration of eighteenth century personal artifacts including buttons, cutlery, a glass bead necklace and case, a perforated metal disk, and coins. Also recovered from this immediate vicinity were two shackles, two cowrie-helmet shells indigenous to waters between South Carolina and the Caribbean Island, and two Revolutionary War military buttons. In the southeast corner of Structure 8, just south of the hearth remains, a discrete concentration of kitchen vessels was encountered. Stacked almost directly atop of one another, from the surface, these vessels consisted of an iron cooking pot, a large portion of a creamware platter, a large rim fragment of a tin-glazed (Delft) serving vessel, and a small Chinese export porcelain handled bowl. With the exception of the iron cooking pot and the creamware platter fragment, which were oriented upright, the vessels were discovered inverted, or upside-down. Similar caches of personal artifacts or “small finds” such as those in Structure 8 have also been identified at several contemporaneous sites known to have had enslaved African occupants in the Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake region ... Based on comparative research, these caches have been concluded to be archaeological remains associated with religious practices of the sites’ enslaved African American occupants. Comparative research has revealed notable similarities between these caches to West African nkisi (minkisi: /?/.), which are placed in ritual as offerings to or protection from the spirit world (Silber and Catts 2004:Sec 7:14).



Site map from the excavation of the Beverwyck Site in Parsippany. Structure 8, left of center, is interpreted as a slave quarter or “Negro House.” <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/78cac489-7e8c-4e04-920c-51ba81d9f87c/>

### *Slave labor and skill*

Beyond the numbers, enslaved men and women were recognized as being quite skilled at their tasks. Hodges (1999:82) describes them as “jacks of all trades in the house and the field. New Jersey farmers concentrated on growing wheat, corn, and rye as well as keeping orchards and meadowlands. In Dutch communities, slaves herded cattle, pigs, and horses. Other chores included barrel-making, carting, shoemaking, carpentry, and preparing meats, poultry, and fish for cooking.” Evidence of these skills suggest that “the only difference between skilled free white labor and enslaved black worker was their degree of liberty.”

The labor of enslaved females is captured in this advertisement from 1734:

To be sold, A Young Negro Woman, about 20 years old, she dos all sorts of House work; she can Brew, Bake, boyle roast, soap, wash, Iron & Starch; and is a good darey woman she can Card and Spin at the Wheel, Cotton, Lennen and Wollen, she has another good property she neither drinks Rum nor smoaks Tobacco, and she is strong and hale healthy Wench; she can Cook pretty well for Rost and Boyd; she can speak no other Language but English; she had the small Pox in Barbados when a child” (in Hack 2017:Ch 3, 36).

Enslaved labor also supported the establishment and growth of an iron industry alongside the focus on agriculture in New Jersey. Especially in the Highlands in Bergen and now Passaic Counties iron mining required large gangs of laborers, including dozens of Africans. Fishman (1997:33) records that “at least forty Black slaves worked in one iron operation” based on a 1759 report. Arent Schuyler (mentioned above as an owner of *The Catherine*) made part of his fortune through a copper mine in what is now Arlington in southern Bergen County. An enslaved laborer owned by Schuyler is credited with discovering this mine. This man was given “a dressing gown like his master and some pipe tobacco” (in Hodges 1999:109), a small reward given that the Schuyler family profited from their copper for the next

34 years, relying extensively on enslaved laborers working in the mines. One observer noted when visiting Schuyler in the 1770s that fifty to sixty slaves worked on his plantation (in Hodges 1999:113).

Based on an analysis of data from runaway slave advertisements, Fishman (1997:34) expands our understanding of African American skills further: “Black labor was employed in agriculture, mining, iron-making, construction work, quarries, land and sea transportation, log-hauling, and crafts. Black people were also self-employed. They had many trades and skills, with indications that African heritage was an asset in this regard.” The latter likely included carpentry, blacksmithing, coppering, tanning, leatherworking, crop and livestock care, carriage driving, potash cultivating, saw and grist mill operating cook, houseworker, and barber. One man, Yombo, was a master leatherworker who was born around 1750 in Africa. He was later purchased by Aaron Mellick from Somerset County because he was “a most valuable workman” (in Fishman 1997:36). Hodges (1999:108) also notes evidence of slaves skilled as river pilots and watermen as well as “domestics, farmers, privateers, mariners, chimney sweeps, blacksmiths, bakers, coopers, shoemakers, carpenters, tailors, wavers, and barbers.”

### *Slave resistance*

It should not be a surprise that with the greater investment in slavery in New Jersey that we also see greater evidence of resistance by enslaved people. One form of resistance remained the cultivation of an alternative culture among the enslaved, and the clearest expression of this slave culture was revealed in the Pinkster celebrations. Described as a celebration of the “holy wind” that resurrected Christ, Pinkster promoted an ecstatic release of energy and faith, including moments when either master or slave could become “the mouthpiece of God.” In this way, Pinkster is interpreted as a promoting a sacred social equality of humanity. African-descended people seized this moment in many ways, but mostly to gather in collectives largely and otherwise forbidden. At the same time, Pinkster is known as “a mass celebration that often featured heavy drinking, gambling, prostitution, and much interracial comradeship” (Hodges 2019:23).



Recreation of Pinkster celebration at Philipsburg Manor’s Djembes and Dance Event.

<https://hudsonvalley.org/article/what-is-pinkster/>

Hodges (1999:88) summarizes how “Blacks could use Pinkster for their own purposes.” As described in satire published in 1737,

Africans from the Guinea Coast in particular were adept as drums and stringed instruments. Bangars, rattles, and fiddles were common at Pinkster festivals. Performance on the fiddle was very different from European methods, with a highly percussive style which the musician plucked the bow energetically. Pinkster songs, with their emphasis on role reversal, complemented African songs of dances of derision. Finally, the use of several instruments at Pinkster created an orchestral style akin to the music of an African festival.

Fishman (1997:69) explains the politics of these 'Negro assemblages.'

Such gatherings undoubtedly served a valuable purpose of morale-boosting and welding together. They could also no doubt be the occasion for exchanging views on the oppression that weighed down on all and serve as basis for possible concerted action to advance towards the freedom goal .... Gatherings of black people were feared by masters and local authorities because of the human impulses and independence that could be demonstrated, the social ties that could be strengthened, and the concerted action that possibly could be aired.

More active forms of protest are also known in mid-18th-century New Jersey. In 1734 a slave revolt was foiled in Somerset County when a slave informed a man named Reynolds that "Englishmen were generally a pack of Villians and Kept the Negroes as Slaves, Contrary to a Positive Order from King George, sent the G----- of New York, to set them, Free, which they said the G----- intended to do but was prevented by his C----- and A-----." Reynolds reported the slave who was arrested along with two others, one of whom was hanged. Further investigation discovered that as many as 30 slaves were part of the conspiracy, most of whom were either maimed or whipped. It was also discovered that these 30 slaves vowed to each "rise at midnight, cut the throat of their Masters and Sons, but not to meddle with the women who they intended to ravish and plunder the next day, and then set all the houses and barns on fire, kill all the draught horses and secure the best Saddle Horses for their flight towards the Indians in the French interest" (in Hodges 1999:89-90).

A second revolt in Somerset County occurred five years later in 1739, though this was an individual act. In this case, a slave in Rocky Hill was ordered by the overseer's wife to fetch wood and make a fire. "He replied in a surly tone that he would make fire enough and pursued her with an axe." The slave killed the overseer's son and then set fire to the barn burning more than a thousand bushels of grain. He was captured and burned at the stake.

Resistance as self-defense is also known and the case of Jack is emblematic. In 1735, Peter Kipp struck Jack in punishment and "the said Negro Resisted & fought with his Master Striking him Several Blows and afterward taking up and (sic) Ax threatening to kill him his said master and his Son and the destroy himself" (in Fishman 1997:67). Jack was burned at the stake for this offense. Another act of self-defense seems to have actually worked for one slave, Silvia Du Bois. Fishman (1997:48) writes that "At age twenty, she determined not to be beaten by her mistress. As she told an interviewer in later years, 'I fixed her .... I knocked her down and blame near killed her.' Silvia fled only to be contacted by the master with the message that she was set free."

In 1741, New York was once again embroiled in a slave revolt conspiracy. Prompted by a series of fires, wary New Yorkers discovered a wide-ranging conspiracy to destroy the city and massacre whites. Dozens of slaves and a handful of white co-conspirators were tried and several of these hanged or burned at the stake. The extent of this conspiracy reached to Hackensack in New Jersey where slaves



assaulted their masters with axes, poisoned them and burned seven barns (Hodges 2019:33). Two slaves, Ben and Jack, were tried for these crimes. At the trial, Ben “declared that some days before Ye fire Happened Ye Prisoner Jack with some other Negroes Came to him and Desired him to Aiding & Assisting to them to Sett fire on the Severall Barns Since consumed & and that he the Prisoner with some other Negroes Done Ye same” (in Fishman 1997:74).

In Bergen County, violent retribution against slave resistance was all too common. Dinar received 30 lashes and Pero 500 lashes for theft. Hodges (1998:42) also reports that “some masters ... torture[d] recalcitrant slaves , including leaving them bound to tress in the mosquito-ridden swamps near the Palisades.”

A fascinating story of slave resistance in New Jersey took place in 1752 in Somerset County. In this case, an unnamed slave was condemned to burn at the stake for the murdering his master, Jacob Van Neste, at the fork of two rivers near Raritan. Hodges (1999:134-135) recounts the story:

Van Neste had angered the slave, described as ‘large and athletic,’ by taking some tobacco without his permission. When Van Neste returned home one evening, the slave struck his master with an ax as he dismounted at the stable door, nearly decapitating him. The next day, local farmers proved the bondsman’s guilt by forcing him to touch the slain mater’s head, causing, according to eyewitness reports, blood to run from the corpse’s nose and ears. The execution took place the following morning at dawn. Sherriff Abraham Van Doren of Somerset County orchestrated the killing with drawn sword held high above his head while riding on his horse. Van Doren represented implacable authority to the audience of local farmers and their slaves, for whom the immolation was intended to be a horrific lesson of the futility of resistance. Onlookers reported that the slave ‘stood the fire with great intrepidity.’ Newspapers accounts related that as the flames covered his body, he shouted to the assembled blacks, ‘they have taken the root, but left the branches.’

It is notable that a very similar set of events took place in 1767 in Hackensack. In this case, a slave named Harry killed a white servant named Lawrence Tuers quarreled, a conflict that ended when Harry crush Tuers’ skull with a cart rung and drove two plugs into his ears. Harry was forced to stroke the head of Tuers’ corpse to prove his guilt. Guilt was determined by magistrate Johannes Demarest who recorded that indeed “blood immediately ran out of said Tuers nostril” (Hodges 1998:42). In both of these instances, the pre-modern mindset of New Jersey’s slaveholding community is apparent, yet Hodges (1989:6) adds another interpretive dimension. For enslaved Africans, these resistance acts, taken in case from Raritan all the way to the funeral pyre, reflected an African tradition in which young men were taught to have “a profound disdain for pain,” which understood as a sign of their self-mastery. Thus, Harry and the others who fought back were likely highly respected, if not regarded as heroes.

### *Self-emancipation*

By the time of the 1712 conspiracy in New York, self-emancipated slaves and servants became a routine occurrence. Both Fishman (1997) and Hodges (1999, Hodges and Brown 1994) have analyzed advertisements posted in regional newspaper describing runaways as a means to understand the

experience of the enslaved. The impact of running for freedom for the enslaved is clear, but we should also recall that “Blacks who fled slavery by the hundreds were a costly reminder to the slaveholders that freedom was foremost in the minds of the bondsmen. It cut deeply into profits and put the master on notice that neither repression nor paternalism could reconcile blacks with bondage ... slavery itself was provocation enough for running away (McManus in Fishman 1997:61).

Between 1711 and 1775, 1,300 advertisement for labor runaways were placed in New Jersey papers with close to 300 of these referencing people of color. The number of advertisements are telling such that in 1740 there were seven times as many ads placed as in 1710 even though the black population only grew by three times. Then again between 1740 and 1770 the number of ads increased four times though the black population only doubled in size. Calculations also show a much greater likelihood that people less than 26 years old would run away.

Methods used to runaway also varied. For example, one ad noted that “a young Negro man, named Esop ... can write, and it is most likely that he may have a counterfeit pass” (Fishman 1997:65). Simon “pretended to be a doctor and very religious and says he is a churchman.” Mark and Jenny, who ran from Major Prevost in Bergen County in 1775 were described as “a preacher” and “smooth-tongued and very artful” (in Hodges 2019:26). Sometimes runaways left in groups, some of which were interracial as slaves and indentured servants left together. In one, three left together, “one member was part Indian, one was full Indian, and the third was mulatto.” Families also left together. “In 1773, Phoebe, a Black woman, ran away with her two-year-old child. In the same year an interracial family took flight. This family included Ned, a mulatto, his wife—apparently free—and their three-month-old child” (in Fishman 1997:65).

Solidarity among people of color is also evident in runaway ads. In one case an escapee was assisted by two slaves across the Passaic River to Newark. Family solidarity also played a role such as in the case of Peter, a slave who ran away and was thought to have gone to his mother in Trenton. Indian-black alliances were also recorded. Sampson, a part-Indian, part Black slave ran away with a slave boy in Salem County, they both spoke a native language.” Such alliances also led to marriages, about which Herbert S. Cooley said, “the New Jersey Negroes are said to have been noticeably modified in physical appearance by an unusually extensive intermingling with Indian slaves” (in Fishman 1997:65-66).

### *Slave laws*

Given the possibility for resistance and escape and the growing dependence on enslaved labor across the colony, New Jersey continued to update its slave codes in the 1750s and 1760s. In 1751, the legislature passed *An Act to restrain Tavern-keepers and others from selling strong Liquors to Servants, Negroes and Molatto Slaves, and to prevent Negroes and Molatto Slaves, from meeting in large Companies, from running about at Nights, and from hunting or carrying a Gun on the Lord's Day*. Imposing a curfew and prohibiting the assembly of large groups was clearly an effort to address some of the easiest ways enslaved person could resist. In 1754, a new Act established that rude and disorderly behavior was to be tempered with 30 lashes. Then, in 1768, the legislature updated core provisions of the 1713 act regarding the crimes subject to the death penalty that slaves sentenced to die would do so without the benefit of the clergy, and the elimination of special courts so quicker hearings could take place.

### *Slave culture*

Drawing from a range of sources, Hodges (1999:115-117) discusses evidence for a culture among slaves that ran alternative to that of whites. Black culture, he states is “reflected the hardness of black life” and is “evident in taverns, alehouses, and dance halls, at markets, and at secret black gatherings in the woods, where conspiracies were hatched.” Tavern keepers were indicted for allowing Negroes to fence stolen goods at their bars. We also see black culture in music and dance. For example, black fiddlers were apparently common given their frequent mention in runaway slave ads, though perhaps the exposure to the freedoms of tavern life led fiddlers in particular to find a desire to take off. Hodges notes that “a talented fiddler, or in African American terminology, a ‘songster’ or ‘music physicianer’ could make a living singing and playing for fellow blacks.” He further notes that touring musicians were common in West Africa.

Like Pinkster, rural frolics created opportunities for musical and dance performances that some enslaved persons may have strived for. Easy access to alcohol and perhaps also prostitution at such frolics was clearly a draw but also a means of terrifying whites who would have been afraid that such ‘negro assemblages’ would get out of control. In response, in 1767, “twenty negroes received the Discipline of the Whip, at the Publick Post for preparing a ‘junketing frolic,’ designed at a poor white man’s house in the Out-Ward, where two pigs ready for the fire and two gallons of wine awaited them” (in Hodges 1999:116).

Hodge’s analysis of the escaped slave advertisements shows that over time these slaves were described as being more belligerent and assertive. Once identified as cunning and artful, slaves in the 1750s became smooth-tongued and sly and “very apt to feign plausible stories and may perhaps call himself a Free Negro.” In the 1760s there was an increase in reference to slaves as drinkers or troublesome when drunk.

### *Family and religion among the enslaved*

Notably absent in this discussion are more traditional foundations of culture such as religion and kinship. Yet, as we know, slaves were mostly held back from formal religion and the “slave family was a precarious institution subject to the needs and wishes of the master” (Zilversmit in Fishman 1997:77). That said, Hack (2017:Ch 3, 33) observes:

Surviving wills uncover a striking ability by slaves to forge and maintain relationships. 162 out of 403 (40%) of the decedents in East Jersey noted some family assemblage – a number that is probably low due to the non-descript nature many decedents noted their slaves in their wills (i.e. ‘man, woman, 2 boys’). Masters often promoted marriage of their slaves, or at the very least recognized it. According to indentured servant, William Moreley, masters did this with their self-interest in mind. He wrote: ‘their masters make them some amends, by suffering them to marry, which makes them easier, and often prevents their running away. The consequence of their marrying is this; all of their posterity are slaves without redemption. On Sundays in the evening they converse with their wives, and drink Rum or Bumbo and smoak tobacco, and the next morning return to their masters labour.’

We also see evidence of family relations in the runaway ads indicating the importance of kinship ties, even despite the efforts of the slaveholders to undermine such relations. Among these as we also see interracial alliances and unions between whites, African Americans, and Indians as well as mulattos, indicating that part of the slave culture was defined by aspects of race and the racial and interracial communities that formed in colonial New Jersey. Among the few stories of free blacks and people of color in colonial New Jersey, Fishman (1997:79) relates the following: "Charles Selcy, who had obtained his freedom at age thirty-one, purchased the freedom of his wife and children for ninety-five pounds. He had accumulated money for the purchase by his labors on a rented farm." To this we can add the marriages of free people of color recorded at the Lutheran Church in Hackensack in 1746. These include marriages of Willem Smidt and Barbara Franssen and Caspar Francis Van Sallee, the grandson of Anthony the Turk, and Johanna Cromwell, a free black (in Hodges 1999:124).

The existence of a slave culture outside of the white Christian mainstream is also evident in some cases. A clear example is found the autobiography of James Albert Ukasaw Gronniosaw, an African born man who ended up in Somerset County, New Jersey as the slave of Reverend Theodore Frelinghuysen (Fuentes and White 2016). Gronniosaw was instructed by Frelinghuysen in Christianity, though he rejected many of the lessons, even attempting to kill himself because of his confusion and despair. He eventually found God while sitting under a tree outdoors. Hodges (1999:123-124) concludes: "Gronniosaw got his revelation in the open air near a tree, a symbol of the presence of divinity in African culture. His private conversion enabled him to live as a slave in a white-dominated culture. At the same time, his inner light stemmed from an African conception of salvation."

Hodges (1999:128) discusses other examples of African cultural survival with less influence of Christianity. "During the 1730s New Jersey slaves used African methods to poison their masters. Self-appointed black doctors were leaders in the revolts of 1712 and 1741 ... [and] Jack, from Bergen County, gained a reputation as a cunning man, who used charms to secure obedience from others." Hack (2017:Ch 3, 32) notes that an increase after 1750 of slaves imported directly from Africa led to "consternation of whites when Africans arrived 'bearing their tribal marks, and exhibiting their native characteristics, as if still inhabiting the wilds of Gueana.'"

#### Part 4. African Americans in the Cockpit of the Revolution

New Jersey is recognized historically as the site of significant battles and related military and political activities during the war of the American Revolution. People of color were closely tied to these machinations and fought on both sides of the war and found ways to advance their own freedom struggle. Hodges (1999:140) notes that “Blacks in New York and New Jersey ... viewed the Revolution as a triangular conflict” between Patriots, Tories, and people of color.

##### *The Somerset Decision*

Revolutionary conflicts between slaves and masters started in 1772 with the Somerset Decision, in which Chief Justice Lord Mansfield ruled that slavery would no longer be tolerated in Britain (Hodges 1997:94). Word of this decision inspired many to fear or hope that the ruling would be applied in the American colonies. Fishman (1997:103) reports that there was black uprising in Perth Amboy in 1772 that was perhaps a response to the decision. Hodges (1997:94) notes that in 1774 ninety-two slaveholders in Shrewsbury and Middleton in Monmouth County signed a petition to the Governor which “describes blacks in the county as ‘Increasing in Number and Impudence’... and ‘running about at all times of the Night Stealing and Taking and Riding Peoples Horses.’” Such night meetings continued into 1775 prompting fears that the “Domestics” would rise up and “cut the throats of their Masters.” The Committee of Safety in Shrewsbury ordered that all meetings of Negroes be broken up and that their guns and ammunition be confiscated. In February 1776 the committee ordered that “all slaves either negroes mollatos or others that shall be found off their masters’ premises any time of the night after the daylight is done shall be Taken up [and] delivered to the Minute Men to be kept under Guard until he shall receive fifteen stripes on the Bare Back” (in Hodges 1997:94-95). Clearly, in these years, enslaved persons were actively finding ways to meet and develop concerted action all the while terrifying white masters in ways that they likely enjoyed as a sort of freedom.

##### *British offer freedom to escaped slaves*

There was a second decision that inspired African Americans to actively seek freedom and further disrupted the normal state of affairs. In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the British Governor of Virginia, offered freedom to “indent[ur]ed servants, negroes ... willing to serve His Majesty’s forces to end the present rebellion” (in Hodges 2019:34). Those who responded this call became known as Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment. Similar promises of freedom were made and advertised in newspapers by General William Howe and Henry Clinton in 1776 and 1779. Inspired by these declarations “hundreds of enslaved New Jerseyans fled their Patriot and Loyalist masters during the war to join the British forces in New York” (Hodges 2019:35). Critical of Clinton’s offer, one New Jersey poet wrote:

A proclamation of late he send  
To thieves and rogues who are his only friends  
Those he invites; all colors he attacks  
But deference pays to *Ethiopian Blacks* (in Hodges 1999:150).

Regardless, white apprehensions about offering freedom to captive Africans who ran away is clear. Not only did slaveholders not want to lose their property, but the gathering of slaves with plans for escape or revolt led to acts of repression. In Elizabeth in 1779, fears that “negroes had it in contemplation to rise and murder the inhabitants. Many of them are secured in goal” (in Fishman 1997:105).

These fears were not without merit since the evidence for self-emancipation and retaliation is abundant. Fishman (1997:107) and Hodges (1999:144-45) both mentioned that after General Howe’s Hessian troops entered New Barbados in 1776 that “blacks fled their masters to work within the British lines.” Fishman (1997:106) notes that newspaper advertisements between 1775 and 1782 record “106 slave and 139 indentured New Jersey-related runaways.” Some of these men and women escaped as the British passed through northern New Jersey in the later part of 1776, during which “over fifty slaves” from Bergen, Essex, Somerset, and Middlesex counties fled to the British to gain their freedom contributing to what was taken to be a “wave of revolt” (Hodges 1997:95). Self-emancipations continued throughout the war. Some of those known by name include Samuel Smith, James and Catherine Van Sayl, Aaron and Sarah Jones, and Oliver Vinson (Hodges 1999:95-96).

Some of these men and women appear to have contributed to several retaliatory acts. Following the Patriot retreat in November 1776, “Torries and fugitive blacks sacked the homes of Patriots in Schraalenburgh in Bergen County ... [and] raided the Bergen county Townships of Closter, Tenafly, and Tappan to secure cattle and forage.” Also, in 1776, a former slave fighting with British in Newark murdered Thomas Hayes, slashed his uncle, and stabbed Nathan Baldwin (Hodges 1999:145).

There was push back against these acts of self-emancipation. Patriots submitted ads to sell 113 slaves between 1776 and 1782, some of whom were Loyalist property (Hodges 2019:41). In some cases, the sales were of men and women caught away from their homes and thus assumed to be on the run. To curb these abuses, the New Jersey legislature “took action against these self-appointed enslavers in Continental uniforms” by imposing a fine £5000 on the kidnappers and setting the slave free (Fishman 1997:104). Patriots are known to have entered Tory property to confiscate goods and slaves. In Monmouth County Tories claimed the loss of twenty-nine slaves during the war.

The British also engaged in slave kidnappings. Fishman (1997:108) reports that “the British kidnapped a sizable group of Black people and impressed them into labor or military service.” One estimate states that 250 slaves in total were taken. Examples include slaves taken along with livestock and a wagon in Monmouth County and slaves taken in a door-to-door search in Paterson.

### *Quaker abolitionists*

Not all whites were as abusive towards African Americans. In the spirit of the Revolution’s focus on liberty, many New Jerseyans adopted an anti-slavery stance. One of the earliest voices to this effect were the Quakers who made up a sizable portion of the population in West Jersey, though many lived in the East Jersey as well. The Quaker anti-slavery stance was voiced in the Quaker Minute decision of 1755 which asked church members “Are Friends clear of importing and buying Negroes and do they use those well which they are possessed of by Inheritance or otherwise endeavoring to train them up in the

Principles of the Christian Religion?” From this year forward Quakers debated and urged members to free their slaves, disowning those who did not.

The Quaker Samuel Allinson took to the legislature and the Governor to urge that New Jersey abolish slavery, though he met sharp resistance from slaveholders. They argued that free blacks were depraved and thus would be more of a problem than those who were enslaved. A draft bill which would have eliminated the surety fee of manumission was proposed, but it also forbade “free blacks from entertaining enslaved people and threatened heavy fines. Any free black could be sold into indentured slavery for nonpayment of debts, interracial marriages were punishable by fines of one hundred British pounds, any black [slave or free] who assaulted a white person would be whipped. Free black, mulattos, and Indians were prohibited from voting, holding office, or testifying against whites” (Hodges 2019:36). This bill was never brought to a vote due the interference of the war, yet the racist and proslavery bent of its intent is clear.

Some non-Quakers were also advocates for abolition, including Jacob Green, a Presbyterian minister in Morris County. In 1776, Green laid bare the basic contradiction he saw in the Patriot cause:

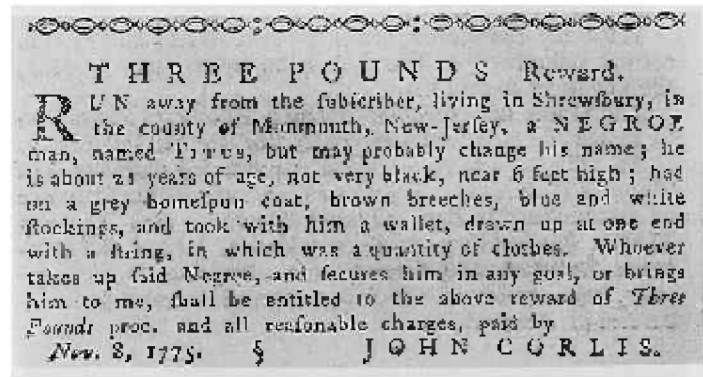
What a dreadful absurdity! What a shocking consideration, that people who are strenuously contending for liberty should at the same time encourage and practice slavery! And being thus guilty, expose themselves to the judgement of Heaven! May slavery cease in America! Well may the West India islands be afraid of their slaves where that unnatural inequity is so abundantly practiced (in Fishman 1997:114).

Repeating similar sentiments from the pulpit two years later, he was met with Patriot retaliation in the form of a mob who gathered to intimidate him and then after he spoke ransacked his church.

### *Black loyalist retaliation*

Still, the strongest and most vital forces fighting against slavery were African Americans themselves. I have already mentioned that many took the opportunity to escape their bondage during the war and that others engaged in retribution, but the most potent Black action was taken by those who served both sides as soldiers and laborers. Stories of Black Loyalists in New Jersey are in fact some of the most interesting and important.

One loyalist story begins in 1775 when the Quaker congregation in Shrewsbury, Monmouth County asked one of their members to free his slaves. This was John Corlies, who owned four slaves (his mother owned two others). Corlies stated that his slaves “have no learning and he is not inclined to give them any” and thus he felt no need to set them free. The congregation disowned Corlies in 1778. Among those present at these discussions was a slave named Titus, who was just about to become 21 years old, the age when Quakers would have set young men free. Hearing that he would not be freed, Titus chose to self-emancipate, which we know because Corlies put an ad in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* offering a reward for his return.



Advertisement of the self-emancipation of Titus Corleis, aka Colonel Tye. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 12, 1775. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colonel\\_Tye\\_Runaway\\_Ad.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colonel_Tye_Runaway_Ad.jpg)

Titus may have escaped all the way to Virginia to join Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. Whether or not he did, he re-enters New Jersey history as Colonel Tye serving in the British army at the Battle of Monmouth in 1779. Over the next year, Colonel Tye led multiple raiding parties consisting of both black and white soldiers from Staten Island into Monmouth County. These raids included sacking and burning Patriot homes and netting the Loyalists dozens of cattle, horses, clothing, furniture, as well as people. In one raid, Tye is said to have captured and freed two slaves. In others he captured or killed Patriot officers and militiamen. His group of dozens of black men, Queen's Rangers and other refugees came to be known as a "motley band" and their exploits reported in New York newspapers. Tye's story ends when he was shot during a raid on the home of Captain Josiah Huddy who had been leading raids on Staten Island. Even though Tye was shot only in the wrist, he quickly developed lockjaw and died. He died knowing that Huddy was captured, but he did not live to see Huddy hanged by the hand of another black loyalist (Hodges 1997:96-104).

Another well documented Black Loyalist is Major Tom Ward who led a team of woodcutters, foragers, and raiders based at the blockhouses built at Fort Lee and Bergen Neck. His group was credited with facilitating the escape of twenty-nine enslaved persons from New Barbados in Bergen County in June 1780. Hodges (199:152) describes the process this way: "their method was to flee with the interracial guerilla bands sent out to forage in Bergen County. Blacks could leave through ferry landings at Fort Lee, Bull's Ferry, and Fort Delancey at New Barbados Neck, where blockhouse manned by refugees and black soldiers guarded access to New York City .... Protected by the blockhouse fugitive blacks rolled logs down a natural gorge at Weehawken, tied the logs together, and floated them across the Hudson River to freedom." Ward's Blacks continued to terrorize the Bergen countryside and help other slaves escape. He is reported to have hired three slaves to kill a creditor. These poor souls were caught and then hanged north of Brown's Ferry Road; "their bodies left hanging in the air for weeks, an act of desecration that terrified blacks viewed as preventing their souls from returning to Africa" (Hodges 1999:153).

Hodges (1998:44) declares that the most feared black unit was the Black Brigade, who were the last to leave New York in 1783. One observer described them as "fitted for and inclined towards barbarities[, ] lacking in human feeling and are familiar with every corner in the country." Several of these soldiers were from Bergen County including Close Herring of Tappan, John of Hackensack, Lewis Freeland of New Barbados Neck, and his wife Elizabeth Freeland from Paramus. Hodges (1998:49) also notes that many



had served for years after escaping their master at a young age. John “was but 13 when he left his mater in 1776. Isaac Taylor ... left John Van Horn in 1775 at the age of 14.”

Former slaves who were likely members of the Black Brigade who served in the British militia in Bergen Neck were court-martialed in 1782 for the murder of Cornelius Nissee of Bergen County.

William Grant, one of the men on trial, confessed that a former slave named Sisco, whom they called Colonel, advocated that group should ‘go out ... and take a rebel.’ The nine left their camp, seized two Bergen residents and marched them a few miles before releasing one. Sisco ordered the group to shoot the other, Nissee, at which time Grant objected. Another prisoner, Caesar Totten, stepped in and shot him the chest while a second shot came from Daniel Massis’ gun. The group then took Nissee’s money, clothing, and shoes, hid the body with branches and leaves, and traveled back to camp” (Gigantino 2015:50-51).

During the trial it was discovered that another of accused, Harry Scobey, had been enslaved by Nissee. Scobey was seeking revenge because Nissee had sold his wife out of New Jersey.

Despite the turn in the tide of the war in 1781, Ward’s brigade continued to plunder Bergen County positions in Hackensack and Closter. Ward’s Blacks are also credited in 1782 with murdering one Captain Hessius from Totowa Falls after he enquired about self-emancipated slaves in New York City. Ward’s overall success at maintaining control over the blockhouses and the Bergen Neck region even earned him a visit from Prince William Henry (later King William IV) in 1782.

Many other Black Loyalists contributed to the British cause in exchange for their freedom. In New York, Black loyalists, many of whom were from northern New Jersey, “worked as laborers in the Quartermaster General’s Department for the wagon master, or in the Forage and Provision Departments of the Army.” Black loyalists were paid for this work, which would have supported their continued backing of the British who were guarding their freedom. Other opportunities for work including working on British privateering vessels or for the Royal Chimney Sweep (Hodges 1999:149). Hodges (1999:151) also describes how a cultural life emerged among the formerly enslaved in New York. There were “Ethiopian Balls,” horse races, as well as regular activities at taverns all of which were interracial affairs.

### *African American Patriots*

While the American cause was generally proslavery, African Americans did serve the Patriots in multiple capacities. Military service was one way. At least two regiments of African Americans fought in New Jersey. Fishman (1997:111) reports that 400 black troops played a decisive role at the Battle of Red Bank in Gloucester County. Another 700 black soldiers fought with Patriots at the Battle of Monmouth.

In some instances, Patriots sent slaves as replacements for themselves to serve in the militias, and the slave would be free upon completion of their service. One enslaved man, Samuel Sutphin, joined the militia in Somerset County in place of his master, Casper Berger, who had recently purchased Sutphin for that purpose. Sutphin served for four years, seeing conflict in New York City, Long Island, and upstate New York, where he was shot in the leg. After the War, Sutphin expected to be freed but he was instead sold twice more. He only gained his freedom after meeting the demands of his last owner Peter Sutphin,

which included 20 years of labor (Hodges 1999:140-41). The case of Oliver Cromwell in Burlington County had a happier result. After serving from 1777-1781 in place of his master he was freed and received a federal pension. Peter Williams, Sr. escaped from his Tory master and served in the Patriots (Moss 1950:301). He was emancipated by the state after the war and moved to New York City where he became the custodian of John Street Methodist Church. His son, Peter Williams, Jr., became a very well-known anti-slavery cleric in the city (Hodges 2019:43).

Labor outside of military service is also known. The former slave Cyrus Bustill of Burlington County was known as the “Baker of the Revolution” since he baked all of the bread for Washington’s army at the port of Burlington. Others labored anonymously in the iron furnaces and forges in the New Jersey Highlands producing cannon balls, shot, and agricultural tools. Some were wagon drivers serving both the military as well as Patriot smugglers. Agricultural work was of course essential in providing food for the troops (Fishman 1997:111-113).

While the outcome of the Revolutionary War is clear with today, with the Americans winning and establishing a new nation, much of the turmoil of the war and its impact was slow to be resolved. One of the key points of contention was the freedom of enslaved and formerly enslaved Africans. Some New Jersey slaveowners adopted the spirit of liberty and saw the Revolution as a time for change. Moss (1950:301-302) notes there state and municipal acts freeing African Americans who served in the war. One act refers to Peter Williams mentioned above. Another was Cato freed by act in 1789. IN Cudjo was freed and given an acre of property on Newark for serving place of his master Benjamin Coe. Fishman (1997:114) notes that “at least 38 slaves were manumitted in Burlington County” without surety bonds between 1776 and 1782. Future Governor Joseph Bloomfield freed his fourteen slaves on July 4, 1783 in a public display. Still, the power of the slaveowners is clear in the fact that thousands of people of African descent remained enslaved in New Jersey, as I discuss in the next section.

### *Black Loyalists escape to Canada*

Those who escaped their bondage by joining the British were likely quite concerned by the outcome of the war. George Washington saw these former slaves as stolen property and sought to return them to their masters. General Carleton who led British New York disagreed and honored the original British offers of freedom in exchange for their service. “Under pressure from Washington, he agreed to list each black émigré from New York City, providing names, ages, brief descriptions, origins status, and date of arrival .... The list of 3,000 included 1,336 men, 914 women, and 750 children ... Almost 60 percent of blacks leaving New York City at the end of the war did so in family units, a huge jump over colonial era patterns for fugitive slaves” (Hodges 1999:156). More than 100 of these escapees were from Bergen County, six from Middlesex County, more than thirty from Essex County, and twenty-four from Monmouth County. Those known by name included Joseph and Betsy Collins of Hackensack; the eight-member Van Nostrandt family from New Barbados Neck; and Nicholas and Lena Clause; Sarah Stevens and her son; and John and Nancy Van Bruyek and their daughter Sarah of Tappan. Single women, including Susan Herrin and Dinar Blauvelt of Tappan and Polly Richards of Acquakanonck. Left for New York City” (Hodges 1998:45). These émigrés travelled from New York to Nova Scotia and some then went to Sierra Leone in Africa. The list of these 3,000 individuals as well as other data about them has been published (Hodges 1996; Black Loyalist 2019).

## Part 5. The Struggle for Abolition

While the patriot victory in the Revolutionary War was a triumph for American liberty, African Americans in New Jersey were largely denied access to the fruits of independence. James Gigantino (2015:65) in fact argues that “the Revolution helped entrench slavery deeper in in New Jersey and served as a bulwark against freedom.” The causes of this entrenchment were many. For one, as the site of multiple battles, raids, encampments, and troop movements, New Jersey was in disarray by the end of the war. Local communities across the state faced a great deal of work in order to rebuild their farms, towns, and ways of life. This meant that concern with justice for the enslaved was not a top priority for most whites. Second, a white labor force in New Jersey required for this rebuilding was relatively sparse, so enslaved laborers were seen as essential. Third, given that many enslaved Africans self-emancipated during the war as well as fought with the Loyalists against the patriots, there was not a lot of support for them after the war ended. Finally, given that the Quakers remained neutral during the war, most patriots felt little kinship with them. So, their postwar advocacy for abolition did not find much in the way of broad popular support, in fact some blamed Quakers for “poisoning the minds of our slaves” (in Hodges 1999:163).

### *Debating abolition and slavery*

These factors actually came together to revive the schism between East and West Jersey. West Jersey had a larger Quaker population, which included a number of members the very active Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Furthermore, the intensity of battles and the number of African people fighting with loyalists was much less in West Jersey. Similarly, while both regions were overwhelmingly white in 1790, the population of West Jersey had less than half the number of slaves as East Jersey and only slightly more than half the number of people of color. Given that the overall population of East Jersey was one-third smaller than West Jersey, this means that slaves made up 11% of the total population of East Jersey while they only made up 3% of the population in West Jersey. The influence of Quaker abolitionism is also seen in these figures in the case that West Jersey counties had almost twice the number of free people of color than in the East (see population tables in Appendix A). Exemplifying the latter are the 75 of manumissions in Burlington County between 1786 and 1800, which led to a decline by 17% of all slaves in the county. Neighboring counties (Gloucester and Cumberland) also saw a significant decline in number of slaves after 1790, while the slave population in East Jersey counties grew between 20 and 30 percent (Gigantino 2015:74).

The commitment to slavery in the East is recorded in several different sources. Tax Ratable records show that there were 88 different Newark slaveowners in 1783. Advertisements for the sale of slaves also continued. Gigantino (2015:69) records that there were 201 different sales between 1784 and 1804. These sales also show that slavery persisted even as new sorts of work developed. In particular, advertisements reflect a growing demand in the post-Revolutionary era for domestic and industrial work in addition to agricultural labor. The iron industry in the New Jersey Highlands was one place slaves worked as well as a salt works in East Jersey.

Despite sectional differences, West Jersey Quakers continued to push for statewide abolition. They had some success in 1786 when the State legislature passed Quaker State Senator Cooper’s “An ACT to prevent the Importation of Slaves into the State of New-Jersey, and to authorize the Manumission of

them under certain Restrictions, and to prevent the Abuse of Slaves” (see Appendix B). The Act ended the sale of slaves in New Jersey brought from Africa since 1776. It also simplified the manumission process and removed from the £200 surety bond attached to manumissions in 1713 for slaves over 35 years of age and established an expectation of “humane” treatment of slaves (Moss 1950:302). The success of the bill appears to have rested on the addition of several new restrictions applied to free African Americans in the state: “Any free black convicted of a crime above petty larceny would be banished from the state. Travel outside the black’s home county was prohibited without a certificate authenticating the bearer’s freedom. Moreover, free blacks from outside of New Jersey were denied entry into the state” (Hodges 1997:115).

That same year, 1786, several West Jersey Quakers formally established the New Jersey Society for the Abolition of Slavery in Trenton (Hodges 1997:115; Fishman [1997:134] notes that the statewide organization did not form until 1793). Two years later, members of this organization lobbied for amendment to the 1786 Act that required stricter penalties for foreign slave trading and the kidnapping of free blacks by slave catchers. Sale of slaves out of the state also required their consent and slaveowners were to be fined if they did not teach their slaves to read. The latter was likely an attempt to improve the capabilities of African Americans as free people in the future. However, as Hodges (1997:116) notes, the law “proved ineffectual in Monmouth County where literacy rates and evidence for schools for blacks are recorded on from 1817.”

West Jersey Quakers continued to fight for abolition in the legislature throughout the 1790s. Bills were put forward in 1790, 1792, and 1794, though none passed, facing fierce opposition from representatives from slaveholding counties like Bergen, Somerset, and Monmouth. These bills proposed a gradual manumission process in which children born to enslaved mothers would be free but required to serve their mother’s master for twenty-eight years. Finally, in 1797, a small minority was able to pass a preliminary emancipation act which indeed children of enslaved mother would be born free, allowing their owner agreed to it. Like in 1786, several restrictions were added to the bill so that it would pass. These included “employment without consent of the Master was prohibited; travel after dark or on Sunday was forbidden to slaves, and minimum rewards were established for the return for violators; public whipping were mandated for minor slave offences” (Hodges 1997:125). Additional changes were made to the slave code in 1798, which, though lightening some of the punishments and restrictions, nevertheless confirmed the state’s commitment to slavery as a whole (see Appendix B).

Alongside their work in the legislature, members of the Abolition Society also supported African Americans seeking to confirm their freedom in the state’s courts. The case of Frank, Cloe, and their son Benjamin in Middlesex County is one example. Frank, a free man, contracted with Cloe’s owner Isaac Anderson in 1778 to purchase her freedom for 180 pounds. As free people, they had a child named Benjamin. The couple later separated, and, afterwards, in 1803 Cloe became sick and was unable to support herself and Benjamin, so she required public assistance. The overseer of the poor then charged Isaac Anderson for their care. After Cloe died, Anderson continued to be charged for Benjamin’s care, at which point he declared that Benjamin was his slave. The Abolition society sued Anderson and successfully won Benjamin’s freedom in court, though Anderson demanded to be paid \$150 for expenses related to caring for Benjamin. The Society paid this fee (Gigantino 2015:78).

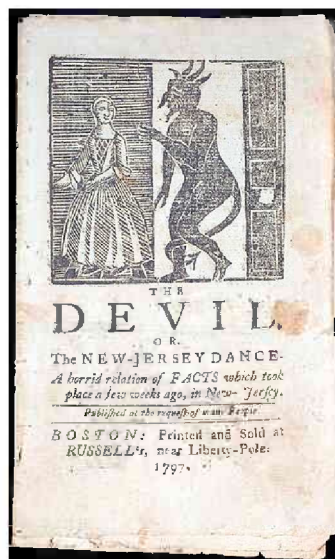
Society members supported other claims like this as well as in support of kidnapped free blacks being transported south. Four free African Americans were taken from debtor’s prison on Martha’s Vineyard

in 1803 and stowed aboard the sloop *Nancy*. The captain intended to take them south to be sold as slaves. While docked in Egg Harbor, the four captives escaped and found protection among abolitionists who enlisted the Society to provide their legal protection (in Gigantino 2015:78).

Gigantino (2015:81) notes that despite these acts, most Abolitionist Society members were ambivalent about effort to support black equality. “In 1796 the society forced its Gloucester chapter to recall funds earmarked to educate black children.” Their legislative failures and compromises also reflect the fact that their focus “was the legal institution of slavery instead of improving black life.”

### *Intensification of racism*

Part of the failure to see the humanity and struggle of Africans American—enslaved and free—can be attributed to an emerging racist discourse among whites which suggested and depicted African Americans as a separate and inferior race incapable of succeeding in freedom. Evidence in New Jersey for this ideology is found in reprints of Edward Long’s *History of Jamaica* which suggested enslaved Africans were violent savages or in Almanacs that “continually portrayed Africans as heathens or devilish apes” (in Gigantino 2015:69). In 1797 a pamphlet was printed *The Devil or the New Jersey Dance: A Horrid Relation of Facts which Took Place a Few Weeks Ago, in New-Jersey. Published at the Request of Many People*, that told the story of a murderous black fiddler.



The Devil, Or, the New-Jersey Dance (Boston: Printed and sold at Russell's near Liberty-Pole, 1797). Zinman Imprints Collection. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Devil\\_Or\\_the\\_New-Jersey\\_Dance\\_\(2920685010\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Devil_Or_the_New-Jersey_Dance_(2920685010).jpg)

Religious leaders also added to this racist image. John Nelson Abeel, a Dutch Reformed Minister inspired fear by suggest that if the slaves were freed that whites would suffer from “negroes who are black as the devil and have noses as flat as baboons with great thick lips and wool on their head [along with] the Indians who they say eat human flesh and burn men alive and the Hottentots who love stinking flesh” (in Gigantino 2015:70).

In 1794, as an agent for “Dutch investors and owners of vast land tracts”, Theophile Cazenove advanced this racist rhetoric in his published travel journal. His opinion of free blacks was especially low: “the free negroes are quarrelsome, intemperate, lazy and dishonest. Their children are still worse, without restraint or education. You do not see one out of hundred that makes good use of his freedom or that can make a comfortable living, own a cow or a horse .... They are worse off than when they were slaves” (in Fishman 1997:144). Fishman also notes that “is strictures about African Americans not owning land or livestock did not show knowledge of the legal disqualifications in New Jersey history [preventing] African Americans from doing this.”

### *Slavery expands in East Jersey*

As West Jersey Quakers sought to end slavery, those in East Jersey invested in the practice further. Between 1790 and 1800, the number of slaves in East Jersey counties grew from 8,196 to 9,406. If we include Morris and Sussex Counties, which were both closely connected to East Jersey and also saw their slave population grow during this decade, this figure rises to 10,695 or 86% of the statewide total.

East Jersey slaveholders also controlled the majority of wealth in the state. In one example from Monmouth County, “slaveholders in Middletown, Upper Freehold, and Shrewsbury between 1784 and 1808 possess more than five times the average amount of land, four times, the number of cattle, and five times the number of horses as freedholders without bondspersons” (Hodges 1997:118). Similarly, in Bergen County, slaveholders in “Hackensack, Bergen, Harrington, and New Barbados ... owned for times as many horses and cattle and non-slaveowners” (Hodges 1999:165). Large holdings by slaveowners left very little property for other free people, both black and white, a factor that led to a scarcity of young white male laborers who left slaveholding counties and the state altogether for opportunities elsewhere. Hodges (1997:118-19) concludes that “enslaved blacks, then, were the species of property that best insured prosperity, maintained larger farms, and provided the means of mobility.”

The control of this wealth is featured in the records of wills in the state. Only one of twenty-two will probates in Monmouth County between 1782 and 1784 freed a slave. The rest bequeathed their chattel property to relatives (Hodges 1997:122). Notably, Quaker influence can be seen, especially after 1790 in Monmouth County, “when twenty-five of ninety-seven slave-owners’ wills provided for emancipation” (Hodges 1997:127). All but one of these emancipations was gradual, in the sense that the slave would remain the property of a widow or child for many years following the master’s death. In Middlesex County, for example, William Stone declared in his 1788 will that his slave “Cato was to be free when he reached the age of thirty” (Hodges 1999:173).

A testament to the wealth attached to slave ownership in New Jersey is recounted in the recent book edited by Marisa Fuentes and Deborah White, *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*. Throughout this book, researchers present clear data that associates the founders of the New Jersey’s state university with slavery. One major benefactor and trustee from 1787 until 1815 was Dutch minister Elias Van Bunschoten, whose family’s wealth derived in no small part from enslaved labor. The family bible, which records more than 59 slave births, was summarized by a biographer this way:

Of those slaves whose names are recorded in the old Dutch family bible, we know twelve sprung from the loins of the Nanna family, five from Cetty, fourteen from the tribe of Cay, twelve from

the Ginna, twelve from Susanna, four from Betty, and others from Tudd, Ezebel and Robe Hearman Judge. The dates of births recorded range from July 30, 1749, when Susanna Betty was born, onwards through a succession of primitive names such as Nanna, Ginna, Cay Betty, Betty Susanna, Pegga Susanna, Caty Suanna, Eve Ginna, Robe Susanna, Nanna Betty, Adam Susanna, Cay Robe and many others, until the even century is reached when more common names appear, such as Silver in 1801, Simon in 1802, Dorcas in 1804, Ruth 1806, Alfred 1807 and Henry 1810 (in Boyd, Carey, and Blakely 2016:55).

### *Violence against the enslaved*

The preservation of wealth through slave ownership and inheritance certainly established a class of people with a vested interest in the continuation of slavery in the state, yet wealth alone could not suppress either white racial violence or black resistance. Hodges (1997:134) recounts the story of one slave, Sambo, whose petty thefts led his master to eventually break his will. "The Formans considered Sambo exemplary, a servant 'who stayed close to home, was very submissive.' These qualities, David Forman, reported, 'exalted our compassion,' to 'let him have a little liberty like all the rest of the Negroes in the county we permitted him to go out for an evening.' Left to his own designs, Sambo immediately stole two geese and took them 'to an Old Free Negroe here.' Their compassion now abased, the Formams gave Sambo 100 lashes." After additional lashings for similar small offenses, Forman reported that "Sambo became more malleable."

Even as gradual emancipation was being codified, white violence persisted. "In Bergen County, in the early nineteenth century, slaves were still being shipped by master and governmental authorities. Records were being kept as to the number of lashes administered. For example, in 1804, ... the 'Slave of John Dennis (in New Brunswick) was whipped two days. The first he had 40 striped & and the other 30" (in Fishman 1997:124). Similarly, in 1801, Ned and Pero, "were found guilty in Bergen of larceny and ordered to be whipped from place to place throughout the county during the course of a month. Each week they were whipped at a new location: the courthouse, Pond's Church, Hoppertown, and New Bridge, for a total of 400 lashes. Ned died from his whippings" (Hodges 1999:180).

### *Fighting to acquire and preserve their freedom*

Fighting for their freedom, especially among those already legally free, was the preoccupation of New Jersey's African Americans during this time. The threats to their freedom came in various forms, but in most cases, it involved false claims of ownership of free people by whites. For example, Phillis, who had been free from 1785 to 1795 was seized by "one McDonald ... under a bill of sale from Hanns, son of Phillis' former owner. The son would not honor his mother's promise to set Phillis free" (Fishman 1997:127). The State Supreme Court heard the case and set her free. Another example is the case of Cuff in Somerset County. Cuff was promised his freedom by his master Gilbert Randolph, "either at his own death or when his son, James, came of age. However, when James came of age, Randolph reneged on the agreement and demanded additional years of service." Again, the court found in favor of Cuff and set him free (Gigantino 2015:80).

Another way to gain freedom was through private contracts between slaves and masters that stipulated the terms of service. The slave Lewis was

sold to New Jersey Chief Justice David Brearly on April 28, 1780 with the contractual provision that 'said Negro is to become free after thirteen years.' When Brearly died eleven years later, his executors gave Lewis a pass stating he had 'two years and seven months to serve [and] (as he not wanted by the family) has the Liberty to travel for a few day Not exceeding thirty miles from this Place to find master of his own choice.' Lewis made an agreement with merchant Moore Furman of Trenton, who paid Brearly's executors 18 pounds, 15 shillings for the remainder of his time (Hodges 1997:128-29).

Many enslaved persons also found freedom by escaping their bondage. In just two years after the end of the Revolutionary War in Monmouth County alone twelve slaves ran away. Hendrick Smock's slave Ben ran away in 1784. He 'spoke very well ... very likely will change his name and pass for a free man" (in Hodges 1997:122-23). Fishman (1997:128, 139) reports that "at least eighty-nine slaves fled from, to, or within New Jersey" between 1784 and 1792, and another "sixty-seven Black runaways from the period 1801-1806" in central Jersey, and finally, "forty-six Black runaways for the period 1807-1815" in northern New Jersey. A notable trend observed by Hodges (1999:174) is that "nearly third of the 1,232 self-emancipated people of color enumerated [for New York and New Jersey] ... took flight between 1796 and 1800." The point here that this rash of self-emancipations certainly played role in the passing of state-wide manumission legislation in both states at that time.

One ill effect of the absconding slaves was the way whites reacted such that any person of color could be seen as a possible runaway. Sam and Tom two free African Americans narrowly escaped re-enslavement when they were captured as possible runaways in 1785. They were jailed but set free after they produced certificates of their freedom. Fishman (1997:128) rightly asks: "what if they did not have a certificate at hand?" In 1797, a traveler in Elizabethtown noted that the jail there was used almost entirely to hold escaped slaves who were held a certain number of days before being sold. This could very well have happened to free blacks who could not prove their status.

### *African American resistance*

Other forms of resistance practiced by enslaved African Americans during this era included petty crime, burglary, assault, and arson. In Monmouth County, black people are known to have stolen linen, horses, and sheep, for which they received thirty-nine lashes. In Bergen County, black men assaulted white men on at least three separate occasions between 1793 and 1795. "'Negro Jude' was arrested in 1792 for intent to burn the house of Roeloff Van der Veer of Freehold" Monmouth County (Hodges 1997:133). Cases against Bet (1780) and Cuffe (1794) in Bergen County also involved arson (Hodges 1997:144, n.34). Fishman (1997:129) notes that in 1788 "three African Americans were executed in Middlesex County on the ground of concerted arson activity over a period of ten years." Six fires were recorded in Elizabethtown in 1797 were blamed on a slave conspiracy as were fires in Newark. In the 1790s, there was a rash of fires up and down the East Coast, including in New Jersey. These certainly worried whites and alongside the increase in self-emancipations, spurred their action on the manumission legislation.



### *The presumption of slavery*

Despite resistance and the push for freedom from both white and black communities, free people of color in New Jersey remained a perceived threat to the social order. One example comes out of Newark in Essex County. Being a port city, Newark had more opportunities for work and independence than the countryside, so it was place free African Americans were drawn to. Yet, in 1801 the white residents of Newark convened to discuss their concerns about the newcomers. "The proposed agenda included the following points: (1) the 'unlawful residence' of free Black people in Newark, (2) meetings of the free Black people, (3) the 'unlawful absence of slaves,' [and] (4) unlawful dealings with or employment of slaves" (in Fishman 1997:132). City residents called another meeting eight years later to again address the "'threat' of the increase in the number of Free African Americans ... It projected vigilante action: 'concerted means ... to suppress riotous and disorderly meeting of Negroes in the streets at night'" (Fishman 1997:162).

During the decades after the Revolutionary War, African Americans were burdened with a "presumption of slavery." Nothing about the way of life in New Jersey, even active abolitionist efforts, had undone the association of blackness with bondage. Free African Americans thus were required to demonstrate their freedom to anyone who asked and faced the threat of defending if not losing their freedom at any point if accused of crime, escape, or because of the legislative will of the state's leaders. "It was not until 1836 ... that the New Jersey Courts abandoned their position that a person of color was presumed to be a slave unless evidence to the contrary was provided" (Fishman 1997:142).

### *African American landownership and communities*

Despite these troubling conditions, some African Americans were able to develop financial security and social standing in the years after the Revolution. One of the bases for success, of course, was owning property, and during this era the foundations for a handful of free black communities were laid. One these is known as Skunk Hollow, which was a community of about 75 individuals living near the NJ-NY border in what is now Palisades Interstate Park. Skunk Hollow was founded by Jack Earnest in 1806. By 1880 the community grew to 75 people living in 13 households, after which it declined and was altogether gone by 1910. Archaeologist Joan Geismar completed a very thorough study of Skunk Hollow, which she published as *The Archaeology of Social Disintegration in Skunk Hollow: A Nineteenth-Century Rural Black Community* (Geismar 1982). Other free black communities formed in Monmouth, Middlesex and in south New Jersey, where one, Tumbuctoo Westhampton, NJ, in Burlington County has been examined archaeologically (Barton and Orr 2015, Hodges 2019:50).

Prior to the formation of free black towns and communities, there are records that show black land and property ownership as early as 1784. Sixteen free blacks in Middletown and seventeen free blacks in Shrewsbury were listed as farmers in Monmouth Country in 1784 and 1787. These included Tom Cavey and Ephraim Rawley who owned seventy-five acres of land and Samuel Lawrence who owned 100 acres and five cows. Others simply owned cattle, horses, and hogs (Hodges 1997:123).

Probably the wealthiest African American in these years was a man named Mingo, who did not appear to own land, but his other property was valued at £685 in 1802. This included "wearing apparel worth seven pounds, 'horses, wagon & guns Saddle and bridle' worth twenty-five pounds, and grain, corn, rice,

and 'cakes of cider in the cellar.' Most of his estate consisted of £586 of 'Notes and bonds against sundry people.'" Here we gain not only understanding of the way Mingo acquired his wealth, but also the chance to reflect on exactly how people of color could survive economically in the racist world they lived in. Specifically, Mingo was most certainly a creditor to other African Americans who may have seized this opportunity to secure a foothold in the local economy. One such use of credit would have been to acquire land through leases, of which Caesar Abraham held four at the time of his death (Hodges 1997:131; also see examples in Fishman 1997:152-157).

We are lucky to have a view on these conditions from Brissot de Warville who travelled in New Jersey in 1788. De Warville notes that African American had a higher death rate than whites largely due to "poverty, neglect, and especially the lack of medical care." He also noted that "African Americans are not loaned money by commercial establishments. They aren't even allowed to enter those establishments!" (Fishman 1997:149). Still, visiting black farmers he was "impressed by the good clothes, their well-kept log cabins and their many children" (in Hodges 1999:176). De Warville was clear that African American suffering was to be blamed entirely on whites, who acted "as if [black people] belonged to an inferior race" (in Fishman 1997:149).

#### *African American religion*

Black communities also found refuge in religion, especially through in their own spiritual leaders and institutions. Most white churches denied African Americans membership, including Quakers who were otherwise their most active supporters. Hodges (1997:138) notes that a fear among Quakers was "once accepted, [they] 'must be intitled to the privilege of intermarriage.'" The Dutch Reformed Church took another path in 1792 when it declared that "no difference exists between bond and free in the Church of Christ," yet acting on this liberal sentiment appears to have been confined to the city (in Hodges 1999:181). In the countryside, such as in Freehold in Monmouth County, free blacks were accepted as church members but were expected to sit in segregated "negro pews" (Hodges 1999:182). In lieu of joining white churches, African Americans in the post-Revolutionary era crafted their own religious communities.

Two itinerant African American preachers in particular have been documented to travel and preach in New Jersey. George White, a former slave in Virginia, became "an exhorter in Shrewsbury and Middletown" in Monmouth County in the 1790s. He wrote that "many of my African brethren, who were strangers to religion before, were now brought to close in the offers of mercy' through trances and shouts" (in Hodges 1997:139). John Jea was another African itinerant preacher who found reception in New Jersey. Jea was born in Nigeria, but he was a slave in New York when he "claimed an angel taught him to read the bible in Dutch and English." He was baptized in a Presbyterian church, a fact that he claimed set him free. As a preacher Jea drew hundreds of African Americans to his services. "The meetings were based loosely on Presbyterian and Methodist 'love feasts.'" Jea wrote that the services were held "out of doors in the fields and woods, which we used to call our large chapel" (in Hodges 1997:139) where he preached "a theology of rebirth by linking to story of Lazarus with aspirations of an emerging free black congregation" (Hodges 1999:185).



*Life, History and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher*, 1811. Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University <http://pursuitoffreedom.org/gradual-emancipation/>.

In addition to black preachers, African Americans also made initial step towards creating their own Christian denominations in this period. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was founded by Richard Allen in Philadelphia in 1787. By 1800, there was an AME church in Salem County and in 1807 another in Trenton. By 1860 there were thirty-two AME churches in the state. In New York, dissident African Americans formed the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church in 1796 (Hodges 1999:184). Along with Baptist and other denominations, the black church became a vital institution supporting free African Americans in the nineteenth century.

#### *1804 Gradual Abolition Act*

The closing event in this post-Revolutionary Period was the passage of "An act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" on February 15, 1804 (see Appendix B) making New Jersey the last northern state to take a step toward freeing its slaves. This act established that all children born to enslaved mothers after July 4, 1804 would be free once they served their masters for a term "if a male, until the age of twenty-five years; and if a female until the age of twenty-one years." This calculation was one way to appease slaveowners who feared that setting slaves free would cause great material damages their way of life. Instead, the children of enslaved mothers would be required to labor through some of their most productive years in much the same way as if they remained enslaved.

As many have put it, the 1804 Act did not free any slaves. It also provided nothing to these young men and women upon the completion of their indenture, as was the norm for white servants. In addition, New Jersey, unlike very other state in the North that adopted a gradual emancipation process, never amended the law to free those born before the act went into effect. As such, slavery did not formally end in New Jersey until the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the US Constitution was ratified in 1865.

As the premise of the 1804 Act borrowed from other northern state legislation, its success rested largely on the abandonment system. “Modelled after New York’s law, the abandonment system allowed slaveholders to surrender children born to their slaves to the local overseers of the poor before age one. These children would then be bound out like poor white children until adulthood” (Gigantino 2015:91). Slaveholders would then be paid by the state to care for these children, a process that not only won them over to support the Act, but nearly bankrupted the state in 1807.

This crisis led many to call for a repeal of the law altogether including among Bergen County slaveholders who declared that abolition was “unconstitutional, impolitic, and unjustly severe” (in Hodges 1999:171). Morris and Salem County citizens also lodged their protests. A petition from Salem County complained that

“there is no white laboring population sufficient for the farming interest, and we do seriously believe that the passage of the law will cause so much difficulty that the farmers will not be able to procure workmen for their farms. Your memorialists need only remind your honorable body that the black population is exceedingly ignorant and prejudiced and cannot be expected to yield that regard to the law which is evoked from the white citizens of the state” (Moss 1950:304)

In fact, critics of the Act appeared almost immediately, such as Torrence Demarest among others who claimed that free blacks would “have more security and be better off as slaves” (Fishman 1997:138). In contrast, African Americans embraced the opportunities of presented by the Act, such as Quamino, a former slave in Burlington County, who said in 1806, “I don’t know much about freedom, but I wouldn’t be a slave again if you gave me the best farm in the Jersies” (in Fishman 1997:138).

## **Part 6. Slavery, Freedom, and Citizenship, 1804-1860**

Following the 1804 Gradual Abolition Act, New Jerseyans faced a new world in which the end of slavery was on the horizon. Yet, the meaning of abolition and the experience of enslaved and free people of color in light of impending abolition was hardly clear. For one, the 1804 Act created a new legal status for those born to enslaved mothers, and the Act itself did very little to explain what this status would be like. Moreover, whites in the state, both those averse to freeing the slaves and those who supported abolition, were unsettled in their opinion of what should happen to free blacks. Many whites supported the idea of colonization, which, by sending African Americans to newly created settlements in Africa, would have created an entirely white population in the state. Most African Americans, of course, rejected this idea and fought against it.

This era was also a time when the problem slavery in New Jersey grew to be more connected to national issues. Abolitionists and anti-slavery whites in fact turned away from the state to address slavery in the South. At the same time, people of color in New Jersey, both enslaved and free, were kidnapped and/or sold to the southern planters, with many spending the rest of their lives working on plantations in the newly established cotton and sugar fields of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. For those who remained, the struggle for freedom and to gain the rights of citizenship continued. The state curtailed voting rights and took decades to officially decouple African ancestry with slave status. Nevertheless, people of color established their own communities and towns with their own churches, schools, and mutual aid societies. From this base, a few acquired land, established businesses, and accumulated wealth, and, in some cases, these places became refuges for both free people and those escaping bondage on the Underground Railroad.

### *Demographics*

Overall, the population of African Americans in New Jersey grew from 14,185 in 1790 to 25,336 in 1860. Yet, given that this is sixty years, a growth of just 11,000 people is less than expected. Wright (1988:35-36) in fact observes that between 1820 and 1840, that black people in New Jersey “increased in number by fewer than 2,000, from 20,017 to 21,718. By contrast, during the same period New York’s black population grew from 39,367 to 50,031 and Pennsylvania’s from 30,413 to 47,918.” The implication here is that African Americans in New Jersey were leaving state and establishing new lives most likely in Philadelphia and New York City. The presumed draw was a combination of better work opportunities and better chances to join a community. During this era the state did see a steady decline in the number of enslaved persons, as expected given the 1804 Gradual Abolition Act. From a peak of 12,422 in 1800, the number of enslaved fell to 7,557 in 1820, 684 in 1840, and just 18 in 1860. Notably, in these years, slavery was concentrated in the northern counties of the state. In 1800, northern counties recorded 11,915 slaves versus just 507 in the southern counties. In 1820 these figures were 7,375 in the northern counties and 182 in south. All 18 enslaved persons in 1860 were in northern counties in 1860 (Wright 1988:81-86).

Looking specifically at Bergen County, Hodges (1999:229) notes that “as the slave population dropped from 1,683 in 1820 to 222 in 1840, the free black population first rose to 1,059 to 1,894 in 1830, then dropped to 1,529 in 1840, not regaining its 1830 level until 1900.” Hodges reports similar patterns of stagnant growth in Monmouth and Middlesex Counties. He also notes an uneven distribution of African

American men and women such that rural areas had many more men while urban centers had more women than men. Finally, he shows that black autonomy was hard won as “of the 1,879 free blacks [in Bergen County], 1,185 lived [as dependents] on the property of whites just before the Civil War.”

### *Slaves for a term*

James Gigantino (2015:95) helps to explain the meaning of the 1804 Gradual Abolition Act by referring to an observation made in 1824 by the traveler Peter Chandler. Chandler wrote upon entering Pennsylvania that “Today [he] left the land of slavery, New Jersey. The blacks are permitted to be held in bondage.” While this is an accurate statement since no one was actually freed by the 1804 Act, Gigantino (2015:96) explains that this observation was an assessment of the status of people of color in the state, whether they were enslaved or “slaves for a term.” His point is that even though the children of enslaved mothers were legally free, to observers like Chandler this was not likely evident. In the vast majority of cases, these free boys, girls, and young men and women did the same sort of work, lived in the same conditions, and suffered essentially the same fates as their mothers and other enslaved African Americans. This included especially the possibility of being worked to death, sold, and corporally punished. At the same time, it also included the possibility for the same sorts of resistance by these slaves for a term that we have seen among enslaved people.

It is important to understand the legal status of a slaves for a term, which Gigantino (2015:99) describes as “one different than apprentices and closer to slaves.” The case of slave for term Betty illustrates. Betty and her enslaved parents were purchased by Thomas Morrell who promised to free them after seven years of service. However, Morrell sold the trio to Phineas Moore who then sold them to Elihu Price. When the seven years were up, Betty’s parents declared themselves free. Price, not a party to the arrangement made with Morrell, petitioned to have his property returned. The case came to focus on the legal status of Betty and after appeal to the state Supreme Court, it was determined that Betty’s status was to be considered separately from her mother: “the condition of service attached to the child from the circumstances of its birth... resulted from being born of a slave; it was separated at its birth from the fate and was no longer to follow the destiny of the mother.” As Gigantino (2015:100) explains: the child was attached to the mother “by kinship, but not by law” in the same manner as would be a slave.

Another way to understand the status of children like Betty is to compare them to indentured whites. Indentures themselves were legal contracts specifying not only the expectations of the servant in terms of their length of service and the sorts of work and behavior they would do and demonstrate, but also what they would receive in return. “For apprentices, this included the skills the master would teach the child, the food or clothing provided, and any payment distributed at the end of the contract ... [which could include] one hundred dollars, a Bible, and two sets of clothes” (Gigantino 2015:103). Slaves for a term were not working under a contract, other than a law that stated they were to remain the *de facto* property of their mother’s master for two decades after their birth. At the end of their term, they received nothing, nor could they claim they were owed anything.

In fact, during the abolition era, the claims went the other way as slaveowners petitioned that the costs of raising the child were in excess of the amount of labor they could expect in 21 to 25 years of service. More than 700 Bergen County slaveowners petitioned to repeal the Abolition Act in 1806 on the

grounds that “holders of such slaves [deserve] an equal right to the unlimited services of their issue or offspring and more especially as they protect, clothe, and support the parents” (in Gigantino 2015:109). Note that even though the children in this description were legally free that the slaveowners refer to them as slaves, a common ‘mistake’ over the next two decades state-wide.

In order to manage the ambiguous status of slaves for a term, the state of New Jersey established that all counties would keep a record of black births. In this way, the name of the slave for a term, their date of birth, and the name of the mother’s owner would be public record. Over 3,500 individuals were recorded in these books which were kept from 1804 until the middle of the century (Hodges 1997:175). While these are a magnificent record of slavery and slavery for a term in the state, at least one instance shows its potentially significant limitations. This was the case of Peter, who, when purchased at age seven, was found to have never been registered in the Middlesex County black births book. Without this sale it likely Peter would never have been registered and perhaps never freed when he reached the legal age. What we learn here is that “the state pushed the responsibility for enforcing freedom onto the slaveholder and the slaves for a term themselves” (Gigantino 2015:109), a situation which confirms the state’s minimal concern for those in bondage.

Rather, the state’s interest as expressed in its laws and statutes effecting the action of slaveholders, seems to have been the perpetuation of slavery and the minimization of free black households and communities. Gigantino (2015:111) notes that “blacks in New Jersey established their own households at a slower rate than in Connecticut, Rhode Island, or Massachusetts ... [where] blacks in Boston, Providence, and New Haven crossed the critical two-third threshold of independent households in 1790.” Even in the 1820s, 35% of free people of color still lived in white-controlled households in Newark.

One factor was the nature of the abolition law, which designated some of the most the productive years of a young servant’s life to be for the benefit of mother’s owner. In this way, both slaves for a term and even their manumitted parents were unable to gain from the work of the young people. This does not include the pain of leaving children behind. As such, the preservation of multiracial households headed by current and former slaveholders was sustained. In one case, Ann and Rufus Thompson were freed in 1828, but since their children would remain slaves for a term until 1848, they remained in the employ of their masters for an additional twenty years, a situation that certainly limited their freedom and capacity to build autonomous lives.

Situations like these suggest that the nominal freedom of the 1804 Act imposed severe restrictions on people of color in New Jersey. Thus, it is not surprising that resistance by slaves for a term looks much the same as that of enslaved persons in earlier years. For example, Benjamin Anderson assaulted his master in 1832 for which he received three years of hard labor. Thirteen-year-old Tom and fourteen-year-old Tillman ran away from their masters. These acts are not at all different from those perpetrated by enslaved people such as Bill, who ran away from his master Israel Crane in 1816, Francis Cisco who ran away from Gary Wistenwell of Hackensack in 1845, thirteen-year-old Ann Hitchens who poisoned her master and mistress in Hunterdon County in 1813, or Sam and Chloe who burned down their master’s barn in 1816 (Gigantino 2015:133,124).

*Negotiating freedom and poverty*

Slaves and slaves for a term are also known to have negotiated with their masters for their freedom. In some cases, they entered a contract in which they promised to provide faithful service for a finite set of time like Daniel from Sussex County, who made deal with his master Benjamin Youmans to serve an additional four years (Gigantino 2015:125). In other instances, bonded men and women purchased their own and others' freedom all at once or over time. One was Sam, a slave owned by John Blauvelt in Bergen County, who agreed to pay his master \$50 per year for four years starting in 1809. Again, we see the perpetuation of slavery during the abolition era as young men and women, some of whom were born free, are made to trade years of their lives or accumulated wealth in order to escape bondage.

Those who escaped slavery, whether legally or not, and remained in New Jersey found that freedom came with its own set of burdens that reflect the many ways white anti-black racism could be expressed. One way freedom was acquired was by slaveholder manumission. In a very few cases, slaveholders granted freedom in their wills. David Johnson of Newark, for example, freed Cuff within one month of his death (Gigantino 2015:130). However, most slaveholders perpetuated slavery as they had done for decades. In Newark and Morris Township, only two wills registered after 1804 granted freedom and in once instance this was to be delayed until the slave Jack reached 31 years of age. It was, in fact, common that slaves and slaves for a term were sold to pay debts or to provide support for living spouses. This was the case for the wife of John Morris who was to be cared for by the sale of two slaves for a term in 1820 (Gigantino 2015:130). Hodges (1997:151,178) also notes that very few slaveowners in Monmouth County freed their slaves at the time of their death, where a total of 192 saves were bequeathed to relatives between 1816 and 1841. The 1814 will of Kenneth Hankinson, for example,

granted to his son Peter 'my negro boy as his slave for life.' He also established a timetable for the gradual emancipation of his other slaves, Abraham would be freed in seven year, at age twenty-five. The indentures of Cyrus, nine, and Humphrey, eight, were to be sold until they to reached twenty-five, after which they would be free. Likewise, the indentures of three female slaves were to be sold until each reached age twenty-five. Finally, Hankinson extended to his inheritors a claim on Dick, 'who is now run away,' establishing a fifty-dollar reward for his capture and perpetuating his slavery 'for life if he is ever taken.'

Just as slave births were recorded, the state also expected manumitted slaves to be registered by the counties. Manumission records are an excellent view on slavery in the state, though they do show that slaveowners were not as eager to embrace black freedom as they could have been. In most counties, especially those in the former East Jersey, manumitted slaves were freed on average close to or over 30 years of age. Given that the labor of enslaved persons was typically hard, life expectancies among African Americans were not much above 40 years. Thus, those freed after thirty could look to live another ten to twenty years, though these would not be their strongest years, a fact that indeed led to many formerly enslaved men and women to require public assistance (Gigantino 2015:Table 3). Evidence for this appears in the overseer records for Newark that show between 1807 and 1816 that twenty-nine black claimants received support for food, housing expenses, funerals, and medical care. The frequency of such claims led the city to initiate a process of ensuring that all poor black people were legal residents of Newark and to remove those who had recently moved there back to where they lived while enslaved (Gigantino 2015:135). Hodges (1998:54) notes that "no emancipated blacks in Bergen [County] were able to accumulate enough capital to warrant a legal statement" in the form of a probate inventory.



Concerns for African American poverty led to some acts that were truly shocking. In one case, Phebe was re-enslaved by the overseer of the poor of West Windsor in 1813. Phebe and her daughter were freed by purchase when her free husband, Boston, purchased them from their owner Thomas Truxton. A few years later Boston died, so Phebe and her daughter were forced to request public assistance. In response, the overseers declared that Boston's purchase was actually a manumission, which put the burden of Phebe and the girl's care on Truxton, who was responsible as her former owner. To evade this cost, Truxton sold Phebe as a slave to William Covenhoven, officially returning her to slavery, and act sustained by the overseers.

A second shocking example of limited freedom was implemented by the Newark Female Charity Society, who provided poor relief to city residents both black and white. However, in order to qualify for food and supplies, families were required to have their homes inspected and the characters judged. If Society members deemed them unsatisfactory, relief was tied to an expectation that they would "surrender their children to the overseers of the poor, who would bind them out to labor for a white family until majority" (Gigantino 2015:136).

Another example of the struggles imposed on free people of color was what Hodges (1997:163) calls a "cottager system" in Monmouth County that worked similar to share-cropping. Here, free people of color entered into seasonal or annual agreements with white landowners to earn a living. They would provide specified work for a period of time and in some cases be allowed to live on and work land owned by the white farmer. This situation improved on day laboring, but most African Americans cottagers remained landless. Hodges (1997:163) concludes, that though a cottager "was an independent contractor, not a slave" their life "resembled more a 'mild slavery' than the free choices of nascent capitalism."

Free people of color also faced the stigma of race along with the struggles of poverty. On July 22, 1811, a letter to the Newark newspaper, the *Centinel of Freedom*, reported that a member of the local "committee charged with quelling the 'noisy and riotous' blacks" was knocked down. The letter spurred

a group of white Newarkers ... to punish those responsible by making open war on the black community, destroying the home of one freedman and damaging another. In the melee of revenge, whites destroyed furniture and beds and looted several homes that contained large quantities of playing cards, proof, they claimed, that the July 22 commotion involved enslaved and free blacks who consorted together and engaged in games of ill repute" (Gigantino 2015:123).

One can only wonder what the women of the Newark Female Charity Society did following this incident. Regardless, the conclusion among Newark leaders was that the problem was the African Americans themselves, so, "city officials called a meeting in 1812 'to adopt measures for the removal of free blacks not resident here and to prevent riots at night'" (Gigantino 2015:195).

An equally vicious attack on the African American community in Newark occurred in the summer of 1834. Following a sermon titled the "Sin of Slavery," delivered by William Weeks, the white pastor at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Newark, "a number of whites charge[d] the altar" and captured a black man who stood with Weeks to confine him in the town jail. Subsequently a mob of two to three hundred white men who "had assembled outside the church. Proceeded to smash its windows, destroy

the pulpit, and break the majority of the pews ... Violence quickly spread to other areas of Newark where white mobs targeted free black businesses” (Gigantino 2015:210).

### *Denial of voting rights and other legal actions*

Anti-black racism among legislators and state leaders also informed decisions regarding African American liberty and voting rights. Only three years after the 1804 Gradual Abolition Act, the state legislature passed a voting rights act which denied the franchise to African Americans and women, while at the same time lowering the property requirements for white men. The impetus for the Act was a perception of “striking evidence of the miserably defective system of New Jersey elections” in which “restless, ignorant, and viscous aliens, Negroes, and transients” supposedly interfered with proper procedure (in Gigantino 2015:146). Notably, the latter scapegoating statement was made William Griffith, president of the Federalist Abolition Society. While the new Act disenfranchised both women and African Americans, that it was passed immediately following the Gradual Abolition Act makes the case that free blacks with vote was the primary threat being addressed. When African Americans sought to fight their disenfranchisement through a series of conventions in the 1840s, the state legislature was unmoved. It was not until 1870 that their voting rights were reinstated and then only by virtue of the Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.

In the intervening years African Americans suffered more setbacks than gains in terms of their civil rights. One of the most egregious was an 1821 court decision that declared that in New Jersey “all black men were *prima facie* slaves.” The case was a trial of man accused of helping a self-emancipated slave escape to New York. He claimed he should not be liable since he was unaware of the escapee’s legal status. The court thus declared that all African Americans in New Jersey should be assumed enslaved unless they can prove their freedom (Gigantino 2015:176). This decision remained the *de facto* law of the state until 1836, when the State Supreme Court reversed its assessment and established that the *prima facie* status of African Americans should be as free people. Yet, this change did not address the surviving statutes of the 1798 slave code. Thus, the state continued to “restrict slaves from testifying against whites, mandated a 10 p.m. curfew for free blacks, prohibited ‘disorderly conduct’ by both slaves and free blacks, and barred free blacks from owning firearms and begging in public” (Gigantino 2015:200). Moreover, one year later, in 1837, the state passed legislation requiring all free people of color to register with the state. So, while they might have been seen as a free people, they were nevertheless still regarded as something other rights-bearing individuals.

In the new constitution installed in 1844, the restrictions on voting rights already in place were reproduced. Yet, new language in the 1844 document which declared that “all men are by nature free and independent” was cited by lawyer Alvan Stewart in an attempt immediately abolish slavery in the state. Opposing attorneys rejected the claim, stating that this language was simply a rhetorical flair that was not intended to impact the property rights of New Jerseyans. The State Supreme Court agreed (Ernst 1986). In response, the legislature established the following year that there were no longer slaves in New Jersey, but rather, that those 700+ individuals who were held captive were to be considered instead as “apprentices for life” (Hodges 1999:225). As Hodges (1997:174) concludes, this act established that “New Jersey property rights took precedence over human rights.”

The state maintained a regressive approach to African American freedom for the rest of the antebellum and Civil War eras. Despite eloquent pleas to affirm their citizenship rights by African American attendees at a Trenton convention in 1849, state leaders strongly supported propertied interests defined in the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. "Senator Jacob Miller of New Jersey extolled it and the institution of slavery. Referring to the South, 'where the slave labors contentedly in the cotton fields for his master,' Miller applauded slavery as a key part of the 'best system of laws ever devised by man.' The Fugitive Slave act ensured that 'the rights of property and the rights of citizens are protected and defended by the constitution and the laws of slavery'" (in Hodges 2019:81). Given this sentiment it is neither surprising that New Jersey was known to many as the "Georgia of the North" (Wright 1953:91) nor that the state legislature both denied Lincoln's right to free the slaves in the emancipation proclamation and failed to ratify the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments (Hodges 1997:192-194).

### *Connections to slavery in the South*

One reason for legislative recalcitrance was a direct interest in the well-being of the southern states who during these years became large-scale consumers of the New Jersey industrial goods. Largely driven by demand for basic farm equipment including clothing and tools for slaves, the products of New Jersey industry became tied to the preservation of slavery in the nation. Among these products were shoes, clothing, leather and iron goods produced in Newark, Paterson, and in forges across the state. Hodges (2019:61) states that "shoes, often manufactured for the cotton producing slave states, were Newark's primary industry." Wright (1988:28) argues that "white New Jerseyans increasingly felt that the abolition of southern slavery would ruin them economically."

The influence of southern slavery also came in another form: the kidnapping and sale of African Americans in New Jersey so they could be sold to labor-needy southern slaveowners. Hodges (1997:148,175) notes that internal sales of slaves among New Jersey farmers continued, such as the sale by James Baird of Bett, a slave for life, in 1814 to D.W. Disborough of New Brunswick or the sale of a "healthy black woman, 34-35 years of age ... used to all sorts of domestic work" by Peter Smock in 1837. Yet, the sale of African Americans to southern planters introduced a more nefarious set of practices that rightly terrified people of color, whether they were free or enslaved.

In one version, New Jersey slave owners sought to dispose of their slaves before they would be set free as a result of the 1804 Act. Such actions required the state to institute laws in 1812 and 1818 requiring the consent of the slave being sold if they were to leave the state (Fishman 1997:178). Still, a report from Paterson notes that "a tavern-keeper on Main Street ... occasionally took a string of horses South to sell and usually took several Negroes to care for the horses. He never brought either horses or Negroes back" (in Fishman 1997:178). Another instance of duplicity is the case of Samuel Thompson of Monmouth County who "convinced a black mother, aged twenty-five and a 'slave for life,' to go to Louisiana, because there her sons Philip, three, and Ralph, five, would be servants only until age twenty-five. Through the ruse he stole rather than gained the boys freedom" (Hodges 1997:150). Fishman (1997:178) also notes two reports of dozens of slaves sold out of the state made in 1818, one in which the slaves were found aboard a ship in Perth Amboy.

### *Kidnapping and human trafficking*

The other version of this human trafficking perpetrated by New Jersey residents involved working directly with southern planters to kidnap slaves for sale to the South. The Cannon-Johnson Company kidnapped and sold more than 200 African Americans in the 1820s, running through taverns along the Nanticoke River on the Maryland-Delaware border. They bribed sheriffs, employed black associates, drafted false documents, and created safe houses in a sort of “reverse underground railroad” (Hodges 2019:80). The most notorious of these rings was led by a corrupt Common Pleas Judge Jacob Van Winkle and his brother-in-law Charles Morgan, a Louisiana planter. Under Van Winkle’s judicial authority, the team produced false affidavits of slave’s consent for their sale out of state. The draw was that southern planters were willing to pay twice the price for a slave as those in New Jersey, plus as was reported in a New Orleans newspaper, the ringleaders were able to convince customers that “Jersey negroes appear to be peculiarly adapted to this market – especial those that bear the mark of Jacob Van Winkle, as it is understood that they offer the best opportunity for speculation” (in Fishman 1997:179). Van Winkle was eventually indicted when seventy-five slaves were found to be shipped south. Van Winkle claimed that they had given the consent, including the young children, which included a ten-day old infant, whose cries were interpreted as consent to be sold. Van Winkle himself was never convicted (Hodges 2019:79, Fishman 1997:178-179; also see Fishman 1997:204-210).

### *Colonization*

Even liberal whites in New Jersey contributed to the racist conditions of African Americans in the state. This came in two forms. The first was a tacit declaration that passing the 1804 Act met the goals of the anti-slavery community. As such the New Jersey Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery had its final meeting in 1809. It would not be until the 1830s before another state-wide anti-slavery organization was founded (Hodges 1999:192, Wright 1988:31).

The other liberal response to the African American struggle was colonization, which was established in the state in 1816 under the auspices of the American Colonization Society (ACS). In this scheme, whites proposed to send free blacks from New Jersey to Africa where they would be Christian “civilizing agents” among Africans (Wright 1988:35). The New Jersey branch of the ACS was founded by Reverend Robert Finley, a Presbyterian Minister from Basking Ridge. Finley enlisted the support of social leaders across the state including many Princeton university professors as well as politicians and elites such as Commodore Robert Field Stockton, Theodore Frelinghuysen, General John Frelinghuysen, and Samuel Bayard (Wright 1998:35).

The impetus for colonization was based in an awareness among its founders that the situation for African Americans was difficult. Finley explained that “everything connected with their condition, including their colour, is against them,” so, “sending them to the land of their ancestors” was seen as the best and kindest option. At the same time, white benevolence had its limits. Other New Jersey colonizationists feared that the free blacks, “an enormous mass of revolting wretchedness and deadly pollution” would cause “a moral and political pestilence” (in Hodges 1999:215-16). Samuel Bayard claimed that “whites were leaving New Jersey because they disliked working with blacks.” He feared black insurrection if they were to remain, since how could they be expected to accept white authority if their population continued to grow. Arguing that there would be 320,000 more Negroes by the 1920s,

Bayard posed these questions: “Will they be content to endure every burden, while they enjoy but few privileges? Will they be content to have questions of life and liberty decided by white Jerseymen, when perhaps from mutual antipathy, and impartial trial will be impossible? Shall they vote? Shall they be entitled to Representatives?” (Wright 1948:180). The general theory of colonization was that objective white racism combined with perceived black “ignorance, misery and depravity” was creating an untenable situation in the state (Hodges 2019:66-67).

The colonization process involved the creation of schools to educate free blacks so they could “evangelize in Africa.” Sabbath schools were created for teaching how to read the Bible in Parsippany and Newark. These were the first schools for African Americans in the state, though they were segregated. Despite this opportunity, the majority of New Jersey African Americans rejected colonization, for they could see clearly that it reflected white priorities, which as Hodges (2019:68) observes: “better, members of the ACS concluded, to sacrifice black rights than to provoke racial conflict.”

#### *African American anti-colonization*

George Fishman (1997:183-193) provides a detailed examination of the successful black anti-colonization struggle in New Jersey. From the very beginning free people of color organized their opposition in public rallies, the first being in 1817. Rallies continued throughout the early 1800s in Westfield, Rahway, Elizabeth, Paterson, Newark, Trenton, and New Brunswick. In 1830, New Jersey-native Rev. Peter Williams, Jr. stated:

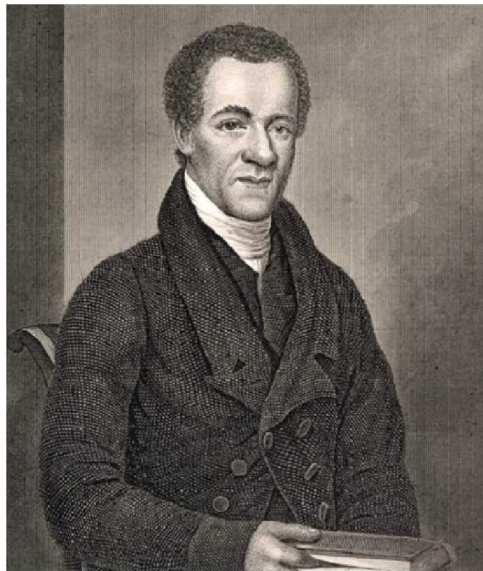
We are natives of this country. We ask only to be treated as well as foreigners. Not a few of our fathers suffered and bled to purchase its independence; we ask only to be treated as well as those who fought against it. We have toiled to cultivate it, and to raise it to its present prosperous condition; we ask only to share equal privileges with those who came from distant lands, to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Let these moderate requests be granted and we need not go to Africa or anywhere else to be improved and happy.

A major anti-colonization rally took place in Trenton in 1836 at the African American Mount Zion Church. Speakers at the rally declared colonization as “a positive libel of our character.” In a series of resolutions, African Americans asserted their native claim to America, though they did suggest that could be enticed to move to “a portion of the Western territory as a state with the same rights as any other free state.” They also penned a strict condemnation of the ACS:

we view the Society as the inveterate foe both to the free man and the slaveman of color ... it has unequivocally declared its object, to wit, the extermination of the free people of color from the Union ... they have not failed to slander our character by representing as a vagrant race; and we do therefore disclaim all union with the said Society and, one and for all declare that we will never remove under their patronage; neither do we consider it expedient to emigrate anywhere.

Among the most eloquent anti-colonizationists was Rev. Samuel Cornish, a founding editor of *Freedom’s Journal* in New York, America’s first black newspaper, and later the *Colored American*. In 1839, Cornish wrote that colonizationists were “swindling up the souls and drying up the liberality, benevolence, and

piety of Jerseymen.” He also noted that he had seen in New Jersey “the bitterest persecution, the meanest and most shameful deeds worked upon and toward defenseless colored people.” In 1840, Cornish writing with Theodore Wright of New York published a twenty-six page “definitive manifesto of African American aspirations” titled *The Colonization Scheme Considered in Its Rejection by Colored People*.<sup>1</sup> Among a host of concerns, rejections, and corrections, the authors “brought out the deleterious effects on free African American resulting from the place of honor accorded to slaveholders: 1. The activation of ‘un-Christian’ prejudice; 2. Public persecution; 3. Deprivation of employment, resulting in poverty; 4. Demoralizing influences.”



Rev. Samuel Cornish, a black minister, writer, publisher, and activist from Belleville and Newark.  
<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/cornish-samuel-eli-1795-1858/>

Black anti-colonization activism in the state was successful in that very few African Americans from New Jersey immigrated to Africa. Fishman (1997:193) notes that between 1820 and 1853 only twenty-four people left the state. By 1872, even after stepped up efforts by the ACS, the number did not reach 100, “a very small fraction of one per cent of the free African American population.”

#### *Establishing African American communities in New Jersey*

Instead of embracing colonization, African Americans in New Jersey put down roots and created communities and institutions to support their well-being. These achievements did not come without struggles of their own. For the most part, African Americans were poor. One assessment by Hodges (1997:178) based on tax records from Upper Freehold in 1839 shows that of “the sixty-one names of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://books.google.com/books?id=FPpxAAAAAAAJ&pg=PA4&ots=-tqQL67egW&dq=The%20Colonization%20Scheme%20Considered%20in%20its%20Rejection%20by%20Colored%20People&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

‘colored persons’ on the list, all were taxed at the minimal level.” In this community and many others in the state, the only work for black people was agricultural labor, which left them dependent on whites for their livelihood. Probate records from Monmouth county reveal that black people with estates tended to be valued very low such as Hagar Smock’s which was valued at less than forty dollars (Hodges 1997:198). Moreover, agricultural work was arduous and at times dangerous. Coroner’s reports for Monmouth County record African American deaths from falling from the second story of a barn, being kicked by a horse, and exposure, such as James, a 13-year old who froze to death (Hodges 1997:179-80).

African Americans working in urban areas did not fare much better. Hodges (1999:238) notes that black couples found places to live in the urban fringes where men could remain working in agriculture while women commuted to work as domestics. This system worked since neither occupation was considered skilled labor. Rather, skilled labor was informally restricted to whites. Even the forward-looking Alexander Hamilton’s in his 1791 *Report on Manufactures*, “called for an industrial plan that would attract immigrant manufactures and artisans to the new nation, a method Hamilton and associates used in Paterson” (Hodges 2019:60). As such, new industries developed in New Jersey hired very few African Americans. Even laboring jobs were hard to acquire. “In Elizabeth, construction of railway lines and factories attracted Irish immigrants, which competed fiercely with black residents for jobs. Black unemployment in the city became so bad that a number of residents left for the British colonies of Trinidad and Guiana” (Hodges 2019:61).

Despite these struggles, African Americans continued to survive and develop independent communities. Several all or mostly black towns or settlements were established in the state. These included Lawnside, Fetersville, Kaighnsville, Springtown, Gouldtown, Jordantown, and Timbuctoo in southern New Jersey (Hodges 2019:62, Fishman 1997:195, Barton and Orr 2015). There were fewer northern communities like these, though Joan Geismar (1982) researched the Skunk Hollow community in Harrington Township, Bergen County through both historical and archaeological research. Descendants of some of Old Tappan’s original patentees still lived in the area along the New Jersey-New York border (Hodges 2019:64). A smaller community in Paramus known as Dunkerhook is also being researched archaeologically (Lutins 2002, Norris 2010, Johnson and Matthews n.d.). Rather, in northern New Jersey African Americans congregated in urban neighborhoods such as the African Shore in Paterson, as well as in sections of Newark, Hackensack, Elizabeth (Fishman 1997:227, Hodges 1999:238). Hodges (1997:189) also notes that black communities developed in Monmouth County in the “newer towns of Ocean, Atlantic, Raritan, and Manalapan.”

Of course, the basis for a successful community is tied to capital and social organizations. Black landownership was not common, but it did exist. Cuffe Minkerson owned land in Monmouth County which has passed as an inheritance to his wife, Esther, in 1813. By 1860 twenty-four African Americans in Monmouth County had estates valued at over \$1,000, including Willam Larebe whose real estate was valued at \$4,500 (Hodges 1997:L164). Ceasar Jackson of Washington Township in Bergen County also owned land, though his estate was valued at only \$164 (Hodges 1999:237). Bass Staats Bergen of Somerset County purchased his freedom in 1818 and then acquired a small plot of land from John Tummy. After Tummy died, Tummy’s children claimed the land as their own and evicted Bergen from his home. Bergen won his appeal and got his land back, though it required an act of the state legislature to do so (Fishman 1997:211)! At Skunk Hollow, the first landowner was Jack Earnest, a former slave, who purchased five acres and 30 square rods of land in 1806 for \$87.50 (Geismar 1982:17).

Sylvia Du Bois followed a different path to success in nineteenth century New Jersey. Du Bois was born into slavery, though she emancipated herself after an altercation with her mistress. Later in life she established and ran a nightclub in Hopewell, Somerset County. The club was an attraction for free people of color, slaves, and whites who came for the alcohol, dancing, cockfights, fox chases, prize fights and prostitution. She recalled her own dancing expertise in which she could “strike a heel or to [sic] with equal ease and go through the numbers as nimble as witch.” She notes that “we had frolics almost every week ... we was sure to have a fiddle or a frolic.” Training Day or the general militia muster was annual highlight, “then we’d have some rum and then you heard them laugh a mile and when they got into a fit [sic], you’d hear them yell more than five miles” (in Hodges 1999:221). Du Bois recalled that the tavern burned down in 1840 after which she “she rebuilt a wigwam style hut on the land and for a couple of decades made a living raising hogs” (Gillette 2017).



Sylvia Du Bois and her daughter Elizabeth Alexander, 1882.

<http://blogs.mycentraljersey.com/hillsborough/2017/02/07/sylvia-dubois/>

### *African American Churches and Schools*

Landed wealth among a few African Americans enabled communities build institutions for meeting their collective needs. The most common was the church. The first black churches in the state were in Salem County and the Bushtown African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, established in 1807 (Hodges 1999:217). In 1811, African Americans in Trenton organized the Religious Society of Free Africans in Trenton, which affiliated with the AME church in 1816. AME Churches were also founded around the same time in Mount Holly, Mount Moriah, Bethlehem, and Mount Zion. The Clinton AME Church in Newark was founded in 1822, and a black Presbyterian Church opened in Elizabeth in 1823 (Hodges 2019:68). Over a dozen more towns saw black churches founded the state during the 1830s, a fact Hodges (1997:183) calls “the black church movement.” African American churches were also built at Skunk Hollow and Dunkerhook in Bergen County (Geismar 1982:25).



The impetus for building separate churches is an artifact of white racism that extended into the churches themselves. Some churches designated “negro pews” where people of color were required sit for services. Samuel Cornish published a series of articles in the *Colored American* detailing the regular racism he experienced within the Presbyterian Church regarding “pay discrimination, bureaucratic snubs, and a lack of association between black and white ministers exacerbating the sores caused by the ‘negro pews’” (Hodges 1999:240-41). He also noted that free people of color “starved for the breathe of life ... no one cares for their souls ... [because they] are not allowed equal privileges in the, said to be, God’s houses, nor at his table.” In Morristown, Cornish reported that “three hundred poor, outcast, oppressed colored people [could not] worship God in the houses that their sweat and blood has helped to build” (in Gigantino 2015:202).

Schools were another institution that allowed black communities to find footing. I mentioned above that the first schools for African American children were run by the ACS in Parsippany and Newark. Another early school was established by the New Brunswick African Association in 1817, which taught a cohort of thirty-four men and a dozen women (Hodges 1999:219, 2019:71). A Newark Sunday school for African Americans opened in 1815, and over 200 people of all ages enrolled. Similar schools opened in Elizabeth, Hackensack, and Aquackanonck. Newark’s first common school was opened in 1826 by the AME Zion Church with both adult and children as students. In 1828, Abraham and John King opened a second “colored” school in Newark. In 1816, Newark’s *Centinel of Freedom* reported that “the little time they employ every Sabbath in the school, furnishes their principal opportunity; and yet their improvement has been extraordinary ... Judging from the facts and observations, it would seem to be vain any more to oppose the cultivation of the mind of the coloured people on the ground of inferiority of intellect” (in Fishman 1997:198). This school acquired public funding in 1836 and remained open until 1909. Known later as Mr. Baxter’s school, it was a key institution in Newark early African American history (Wright 1941).

Betsey Stockton stands out as one of the state’s most important African American educators. Stockton was born in 1798 as a slave of the Stockton family in Princeton. At six years of age she was gifted to her owner’s daughter Betsey Stockton Green and her husband Rev. Ashbel Green, the eighth president of Princeton University. A professor, Green made sure Betsy was educated and then freed her when she was twenty years old. Stockton then took a missionary post in Hawaii where she established the first school for ordinary Hawaiians. She returned to Princeton in 1828 and established a Sabbath school as well as secular programs for black children and adults. She even encouraged Princeton students to teach courses in algebra, Latin, history and English literature. Finally, in 1858, she founded the Witherspoon School for Colored Children which taught African Americans in Princeton until the city schools were integrated in 1948 (Hodges 2019:63-64).



Betsey Stockton. Born enslaved in Princeton, she founded the Witherspoon School for Colored Children in 1858.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betsey\\_Stockton#/media/File:Betsey\\_Stockton.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betsey_Stockton#/media/File:Betsey_Stockton.jpg)

The history of black education in New Jersey also includes difficult stories related to white racism. For example, in 1846, a letter to the *New Jersey Freeman* detailed the mistreatment of African American students:

In the town of Plainfield in this State, there is public free school supported by tax levied on the inhabitants without distinction. Last year, the colored children, whose parents paid their proportionate share of this tax, were put in a basement by themselves where teacher visited them a few times a day to instruct them. Those parents of colored children who are willing to submit to such outrage, continued the children at school until it got too cold to be in the basement without fire, when they took them away.

Months later, the Plainfield school found a solution to this problem by no longer accepting black students (Fishman 1997:230).

#### *African American political and cultural voices*

Other outlets for social organizing also developed in African American New Jersey. Black-owned newspapers provided updates and analysis of happenings in the state. Samuel Cornish's *Colored American* was founded in 1837. Inspired by its success other black writers followed suit including Alfred Gibbs Campbell who published *The Alarm Bell* out of Paterson. Campbell was also a poet and is known for his poem *I Would Be Free*:

#### **I Would Be Free**

I would be free! I will be free!  
What though the world laugh at me?  
To me alike are its smiles and its frowns,

I trample in scorn on its riches; and crowns  
Are worthless to me as the heads which wear them.  
O! how can humanity bear them?

I would be free! I will be free!  
Free, though the world laugh at me!  
I smile at its jeers and spurn its control,  
And ne'er to its fetters shall bend my soul;  
Let those who have need of a master wear them,  
But never can my spirit bear them.

I would be free! I will be free!  
And Truth shall my leader be!  
Yea, whither she leads shall my willing feet  
Joyfully tread in her footprints; and sweet  
Shall her lessons be to my hungering soul!  
To my thirsting and hungering soul.

I would be free! I will be free!  
Though scorching my pathway be;  
I can cheerfully bear the cross, and dare  
The lot of my chosen leader to share;  
And the cross shall be lighter than air to me,  
For Truth shall my guide and helper be!<sup>2</sup>

Paterson's black community appears to have been particularly well-organized in the ante-bellum era. Besides Campbell's poetry and *The Alarm Bell*, there was a powerful anti-slavery broadside produced by the "Citizen of Paterson" in 1841 titled *Address to the Legislature of New Jersey on Behalf of the Colored Population of the State*. Here is an example of this text:

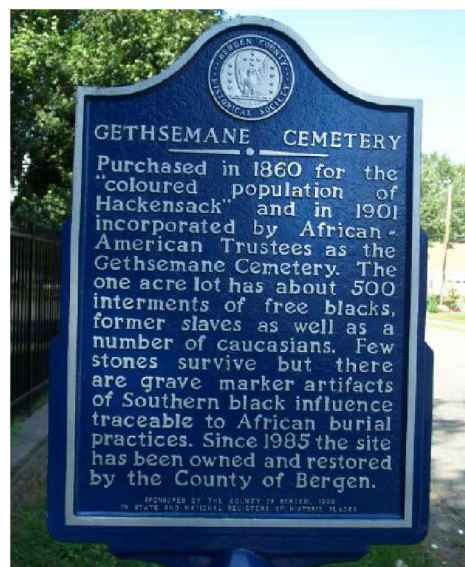
We have petitioned our State rulers to repeal all the partial and unjust statutes, as uphold slavery or impose inabilities on men for their color or descent. But these petitions have been treated with cold neglect, not, we charitably believe, because our statesmen approve of slavery, nor on the account of the interest of a few dozen slaveholders among us, who are as well able to pay for the labor they require as the rest of us; but chiefly because of the unjust ascendancy of the Slave Power in the National Government. Men of both parties who feel that slavery in New Jersey is wrong, are afraid to act in relation to it, lest is jeopard [sic] the interests of their own party in the South ... How can we allow mere questions of pecuniary advantage or of party ascendancy to overshadow the great question of Human rights? (in Fishman 1997:224).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sites.google.com/site/aapoets19century/home/7-alfred-gibbs-campbell-1826>

Preceding these citizens of Paterson was another organization founded in 1817 as the African Association of New Brunswick. Though nominally established by the white Rev. Leverett F. Huntington, the society was run by its members who recruited new members, elected officers, and ran the meetings. Members paid a fee of fifty cents to join and fifty cents per year in dues for free people and twenty-five cents for slaves, with their master's permission. The Association ran a well-attended "African School" in Parsippany. As Fishman (1997:199) writes, "attending African Americans were primarily interested in group contact and education as a means of overcoming their oppressed status and possibly going on to a career in the ministry or teaching."

Another source of common ground among African Americans that seems to be evident in the antebellum era was a reconnection among some members to their African heritage. While Cornish argued for adopting the identity of "Colored," fearing that identification with Africa bolstered colonizationist schemes (Wright 1988:31), others appear to have embraced their ancestral heritage. Hodges (1999:258-59) points to the African Society for Mutual Relief, which in the 1840s, "began to decorate their most sacred ground by African methods ... At Gethsemane Cemetery in Little Falls, Bergen County, graves are covered with pieces of broken white pottery; one contains pipes reaching from the grave to surface." Hodges interprets these practices as "a vernacular re-creation of the African past of the interred."



Historic marker at the Gethsemane Cemetery, Little Falls.

<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/1593984/gethsemane-cemetery>

Political action among African American Americans blossomed in the 1830s with the formation of the state-wide New Jersey Anti-Slavery Society in 1834, the state's first black abolitionist body (Wright 1988:32). Hodges (2019:88) notes that the society touted a long list of accomplishments including having "secured black dignity and rights in American society, settled constitutional and biblical questions about human rights, abolished the 'Negro Seat' in churches, and helped black students gain an education ... Locally the society established the newspaper *The New Jersey Freeman*, which ran from 1844 to 1847 [and] hosted such black political luminaries as Henry Highland Garnet and white abolitionists Lewis Tappan and Luther Lee, though Alvan Stewart was the most popular out-of-stater." Alfred Gibbs Campbell and Samuel Cornish were among the Society's officers.

Beginning in the 1830s African American activists met at annual national conventions to commune and discuss how to implement an anti-slavery and anti-racist agenda. New Jersey never hosted a national convention, but it did have state-wide conventions. A convention in 1849 met at Trenton's Mount Zion Church to craft a demand for African American citizenship and voting rights. At a rally organized by the convention, Dr. John S. Rock spoke with passion. Rock was a self-trained medical doctor who had been denied admission to medical school because he was black. He turned at the point to dentistry and later studied law and became the first African American to be admitted to the bar of the U.S. Supreme Court. His intellectual talents were made public at the rally in 1849. He clarified that African Americans were "not human being enough to vote but they were for paying taxes and obeying the laws." He also explained the inconsistency in the logic that would allow foreign-born residents the vote while denying it to native-born black people who were more familiar state and local affairs. He also rejected the conception that African Americans were degraded challenging that: "you shut every avenue of elevation and then complain about degradation; what else can be expected when we are looked upon as *things*, and treated worse than unthinking animals?" He concluded his speech with this:

The country a man is born in, is his country; and the humanity that would oppress a colored man for a white man's sake, is not humanity for us; and the man that will refuse to assist suffering humanity, on account of color, is undeserving the name of man ... Our design, in speaking frankly, is not to upbraid you, but to show you our maltreatment, and ask that you ameliorate our condition, by giving us our rights (in Fishman 1997:247)



Dr. John S. Rock was a doctor, dentist, lawyer, and orator in New Jersey. <http://loc.gov/exhibits/civil-war-in-america/biographies/john-s-rock.html>

### *The Underground Railroad*

Political activism on the surface often reflects actions that are not as easy to see in the historic record, and of course one of the most powerful anti-slavery political acts during the antebellum era was the mostly invisible Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad involved the clandestine passage of escaped slaves out of the South into the North and Canada. While there were many routes north, New

Jersey had a series of passages that allowed for travel from Maryland and Delaware up to New York City. Most of the known routes in the southern part of the state converged at Bordentown leading from there to New Brunswick and to Perth Amboy or Jersey City. Isaac Hopper a Philadelphia Quaker is credited with being among the earliest freedom fighters associated with the underground railroad in New Jersey. Escaped slaves knew of him and where he lived and would turn up at his home to find refuge and if necessary legal counsel. He also identified New Jersey farmers to establish places of refuge for escapees.

As the railroad grew, conductors developed a series of trunk lines consisting of safe houses and routes such as from Camden to Burlington to Bordentown or leading from the Delaware Bay north through Cape May and Salem. Black towns like Lawnside, Guineatown, Sadlertown, Springtown, Goudltown, Colemantown, and Timbuctoo became both destinations for self-emancipated people as well as stopping points for those travelling further north (Hodges 2019:81).



<https://ruafrica.rutgers.edu/resources/global-timbuktu/symposium/maps/58-resources/global-timbuktu/symposium/maps/145-new-jersey-underground-railroad>

The most well-known of New Jersey's underground railroad operators was Harriet Tubman. Tubman escaped slavery in Maryland and ended up in Philadelphia. From there she moved to Cape May to work as a domestic servant in the resort business and met and began to work with Stephen Smith, "the wealthiest black man in America." Tubman learned from Smith and many others in Cape May about the railroad network, which provided her safe passage from Smyrna, Dover, or Odesa in Delaware to Springtown or Marshalltown in New Jersey. In all Tubman led nineteen rescue missions that emancipated more than 300 captives (Hodges 2019:92-95).

## Conclusion

The African American freedom struggle in New Jersey's colonial and early national history is powerful statement of both the capacity of some to violently dehumanize others and of how those so mistreated rejected this imposed status in defense of their humanity and their liberty. African American New Jerseyans are very well documented in the texts consulted for this essay, but these stories need to be made more widely available to the public. It is honorable that some of the state's historic sites, like Dey Mansion, are making efforts to broaden their narratives to include stories of the African American struggle to mitigate the injustices of slavery and create a life as free people. We all gain by knowing more about how the state, its leaders, and the majority community consistently oppressed people of color and the manifold ways they resisted this racial agenda.

We need a greater public recognition of the African American contributions of labor, patriotism, social and political organization, community leadership, and the arts that made the settlement and culture of New Jersey what is today. African-descended people literally built New Jersey's homes, public buildings, roads, and drained its wetlands; they tended the herds, cleared fields, planted, tended, and harvested crops, and hauled these goods to market; they hunted and gathered food and medicinal plants; they drove wagons, operated ferry boats, and worked in the state's iron mines and forges; they cared for families as babysitters, housekeepers, nurse maids, and provided elder care and companionship. Some established businesses to serve their own people and the community at large; others trained for the ministry and led congregations or studied medicine, law, and education. African Americans New Jerseyans also served in every American war since at least the Revolution.

Each of these contributions was made in the face of the majority in the state who either ignored their struggle or actively despised and/or exploited them. Thus, the ability of African Americans to establish their own relationships, allies, communities, towns, and neighborhoods; create and lead their own churches and schools; print and distribute their own newspapers; cultivate their own artistic and cultural traditions; and persistently defend their humanity and their liberty as well as those of their enslaved brethren in the South—and to do this all in the face a vicious racism at home—should leave all of us in awe of their collective resilience and power.

What should we do next? While I do not claim this essay is the result of a complete and total review of every source on African American history in New Jersey for the time period considered, I do think there are two areas with great promise for new research.

The first is archaeology. I mentioned a few cases where archaeology has contributed to the African American story in New Jersey—particularly at Beverwyck, Skunk Hollow, Timbuctoo, and the project just starting at Dunkerhook in Paramus—and these are not the only sites that have been examined in the state. Nevertheless, a formal program on African Diaspora archaeology in New Jersey has yet to be articulated. Awaiting us are a wide range of untapped archaeological resources that lie buried in the ground or, having already been excavated, housed in museums across the state. The archaeological record is essential to telling the story of historic Africans and African Americans since the sites and artifacts they left behind are among the very few primary sources that can directly connect us to people of color from New Jersey's past.

A second question that appears ripe for exploration is the relationship across the color line between people of African descent and Native Americans. Documentary sources are clear that Native Americans

were enslaved in New Jersey and that people of African and Indian heritage interacted and conspired. Stories of African-descended people escaping to Indian communities are known as well as the presence of Indian and “half-Indian” people in New Jersey communities. We also know that the surnames of some of the early patentees at Old Tappan, such as De Vries and Degroat, are still found among members of the Ramapough Lunappe Nation in Passaic and Rockland (NY) Counties. Similar overlapping histories are also known for the historic free black settlement at Gouldtown and the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape in Cumberland County. While mixed-heritage histories are inherently complicated, stories of alliances, relations, and community development among these diverse people of color in the state deserves more scholarly attention.

One site where these new directions could be examined together is Ringwood Manor in Passaic County. Already recognized as a nationally significant historic site associated with prominent Hasenclever, Ryerson, Cooper, and Hewitt families, Ringwood Manor today is the site of magnificent historic manor house. The basis of the wealth on display, however, was the mining and forging of New Jersey Highlands iron and many of the furnaces, forges, a grist mill, a saw mill, and workers’ houses survive as archaeological resources. From documents and oral history, we also know that enslaved laborers as well as members of the Ramapough Lunappe Nation worked at Ringwood. Perhaps as much as any other site in the state, Ringwood provides the opportunity to expand the story of New Jersey’s people of color through new research in the archives, the archaeological record, and from the memories of communities historically connected to the site.



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