THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION & THE ROOTS
OF MISSION IN AFRICA:
AN ESSAY ON ANTISLAVERY AND ANTISTRUCTURE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1792

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THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION & THE ROOTS OF MISSION IN AFRICA: 
AN ESSAY ON ANTISLAVERY AND ANTISTRUCTURE

by

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New Revolution and Old Grievances: Freedom and Slavery

Faced with the revolt of the North American colonies in the 1770s, the British authorities actively sought the enlistment of black troops for the armies they commanded against the rebels. It was recognized that black enlistment would have to be procured with promises of freedom, an extreme measure worth contemplating in view of the corresponding seriousness of the crisis facing the authorities. And so it was that John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore, issued a proclamation in Norfolk harbor, Virginia, in November, 1775, promising freedom to blacks joining the loyalist forces. He addressed his remarks to "all indented servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining his Majesty's Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper sense of their duty, to his Majesty's crown and dignity."  

In consequence, Virginians mobilized to combine the techniques of persuasion and


**An excerpt from the forthcoming The American Factor in West African Christianity, 1776-1892: A Study in Antislavery and Antistructure, Harvard University Press.**
sweet reasonableness with means forthright and punitive to stop enlistment and the insurrection threatened with it. The Continental Congress acted swiftly, with instructions to mount an armed resistance to the order, and commanding General Washington to take whatever measures he deemed appropriate to head off the instability threatened in the British declaration. Virginia was handed a resolution to resist Dunmore whose declaration, Washington charged, made him "the most formidable enemy America has; his strength will increase as a snowball by rolling." Among the framers and signers of the Declaration of Independence several lost slaves to the British side: James Madison, Benjamin Harrison, Arthur Middleton, and George Washington himself. Slavery was a matter that touched close to the heart of the revolution.

It was feared Dunmore's proclamation would have an unsettling effect on slaves, but, more seriously, that it would put a dynamite under the whole servile structure and cause society to crash at its foundations, with consequences too painful to contemplate especially where whites were outnumbered. The likelihood of such a dreaded outcome increased with the attractiveness of the offer to slaves that in one bound they would shake off their hated shackles. A double threat was implied in this. Rebellious colonists would lose their slave workers and would as a consequence be pinned down in their homes to take up the slack. It would leave the British relatively free to occupy the field of conflict so half-heartedly defended. Second, slaves thus conscripted would swell the ranks of the loyalist forces, with

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the additional incentive of getting even with their abusive masters. All Dunmore needed to do, he boasted, was to set up the royal standard and the slaves would fall into line behind the British. Just the thought, he reckoned, would be enough to unnerve the rebellious sort. Such, indeed, were the stakes that few could afford to treat it as mere bluster.

Jefferson reported that Virginia alone lost some 30,000 slaves by Dunmore's measures. Reports began to bulge with rebel fears that Dunmore's appeal to the slaves was threatening a general slave insurrection. The suggestion was clearly that the news would be of considerable propaganda value to the royalists. Dunmore, headquartered in Williamsburg, the colonial capital, was on hostile terrain, secure enough to issue threats, but not too much so to ignore the antagonism he caused by his pronouncement. When the time came to make good his word, he abandoned Williamsburg and boarded the Fowey at Yorktown in June, 1775, a signal that slaves could follow him there by actively enlisting as loyalists. It was a point of no return.

Rumors began to spread that slaves were on a stampede to join the British side, and, forewarned, the colonists launched a propaganda counter-offensive of their own to deter the slaves. Dunmore, it was correctly pointed out, had offered freedom only to the slaves of his enemies, and that as Governor, he once refused to sign a bill of abolition. His present stand, it was charged, reflected only an act of expedience, not of high principle, though it could be countered that Dunmore's critics were themselves scarcely acting any less expeditiously. In any case, the slaves
who absconded were given an opportunity to change their minds. An amnesty was offered to those who returned within a specified time, otherwise punitive measures were threatened. Meanwhile Dunmore and his forces were driven off shore where only the most daring, and luckiest, slaves could make it. But such was the draw that many tried, whether or not they perished. All who made it, perhaps no more than eight hundred total, ended up serving at sea, with all the limitations of a seaborne life. Such was the substance of what the sources enthusiastically called "Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment."

Commander-in-Chief Henry Clinton of New York in 1779 also issued the Philipsburgh Proclamation promising "to every NEGRO who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these Lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper."

The expected universal stampede never took place, though it produced significant movement. Perhaps up to 100,000 blacks, or one fifth of the total black population, responded by walking over to the British side.

Yet the movement of large numbers of blacks conceals a complicated picture. Slaves were still such a valuable economic commodity that the British themselves could not resist the temptation to sell them in the West Indies. In fact, the line between slaves who turned up on the British side and those who were taken


as legitimate spoils of war became blurred. In any case, thousands of blacks responded to the appeal, although, as can be imagined, it did not endear Clinton to the colonies, inspiring a paper in New Jersey, for example, to poetic indignation.

Then, following the capitulation of Yorktown in 1782 and with it the evacuation of some 5000 blacks with the British lines, the question of the real status of blacks who sided with the British erupted with particular force, and the British official in charge of affairs in Charleston, So. Carolina, for example, handed down an opinion reaffirming Britain's obligation to the blacks. He wrote: "There are many negroes who have been very useful, both at the Siege of Savannah and here. Some of them have been guides, and for their loyalty have been promised their freedom." These, he maintained, "could not with justice be abandoned to the merciless resentment of their former masters." The British had faced a desperate situation at Savannah from the combined force of French and American troops, and so, armed with promises of freedom, appealed to blacks to ameliorate the situation. The Revolutionists were defeated, but the governor, James Wright, found it difficult to disarm and re-enslave the blacks, a dilemma that was in the end overtaken by events. On December 14, 1782, the British evacuated Charleston with 5,327 blacks, half of them bound for Jamaica. From East Florida


some 2200 left for the Bahamas, over 700 to Jamaica, and thirty-five to England. In fact between 1775 and 1787 the black population of Jamaica increased by some 60,000, just to show that a significant demographic change was afoot.

In many slave communities, there was a general disposition to link the war with the specific cause for abolition. In 1774, blacks in Boston offered to fight for the British provided the British would guarantee to free them if they triumphed. The British took the proposal seriously enough to treat it as a matter for high security discussion, though that very confidentiality suppressed any more information about its eventual outcome. In 1775 a group of blacks organized in North Carolina to join the Loyalists in the conviction that if they succeeded they would "be settled in a free government of their own." In 1778 a slave named Tom, owned by one Henry Hogan of Albany, New York, was arrested and imprisoned for attempting to incite other slaves to bid for their freedom by joining the enemy side. In July, 1780, news was leaked of an impending slave plot in Albany County, New York, to burn the settlement and flee to the British side. In Elizabeth Town, New Jersey, a major slave plot was reported brewing in 1779, aided and abetted by prominent local Tories.

Slaves and the Law:

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8 Ibid., 88.
9 Ibid., 89.
Such widespread and spontaneous outbursts of agitation among slaves indicate that there was widespread sentiment for abolition. Historical opportunity, in the form of siding with the British, might thus advance the cause, but so also might legal action that individual slaves initiated. Thus in 1766 in Massachusetts, John Adams backed the legal appeal of a slave woman who brought action in a court and prevailed. In 1769 another slave sued his master for his freedom in the Nantucket Court of Common Pleas and succeeded. In 1773 the slave Caesar Hendrick brought charges against his being "detained in slavery," as he put it, and won the case with damages and cost. In 1774 the slave of Caleb Dodge of Beverly, just north of Boston, initiated proceedings to obtain his freedom, which he did.

These individual suits were an important avenue of redress on the slave question, and they were resorted to where practicable. Between 1640 and 1865, for example, a total of 591 cases came before the courts in fifteen states and the District of Columbia. Of those cases, 279 were won, 224 lost and eighty-eight unresolved. Figures elsewhere show the same pattern. Of 670 suits for freedom only 327 were won, and 248 lost, with ninety-five undecided. These suits for freedom were filed in cases where the slaves were claiming rights in wills which provided for their emancipation. However, the evidence proves that such suits

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were of limited value, important proof that the slave voice was never completely silenced, but proof, too, that personal suits could not be an effective or universal answer to the problem. The enterprise and expense involved made personal suits an exceptional instrument, and the judgments rendered established no broad principle of universal freedom, with each individual case contested on its merits.\(^\text{12}\)

A more useful legal weapon would be to invoke tort law. So in January 1773, a group of slaves petitioned the General Court to grant them collective relief. "We have no property! we have no wives! we have no children! no city! no country!" they protested.\(^\text{13}\) In June 1773 the legislature appointed a "Committee on the Petition of Felix Holbrook, and others; praying to be liberated from a State of Slavery." For their petition, the slaves sought the support of the governor, Thomas Hutchinson, but, to their disappointment, he declined, and the petition accordingly languished. Undaunted, the slaves drafted a second petition in May, 1774, and sent it to the governor and legislature, describing themselves as "a Grate (sic) Number

\(^\text{12}\) Russell writes that "the length of time required to reach a final decision and the cost of such suits made freedom by this route beyond even the greatest sacrifices of all but a few determined slaves. In Isaac v. Johnson, a case begun in 1797 was given a decision in 1816. The deed of liberation in Manns v. Givens was granted in 1797, in 1815 began the struggle for its recording, and it was closed in 1836. The case of Charlton v. Unis and Unis v. Charlton which appears in the court records of 1847-1855 was initiated in 1826 when a suit for freedom was based upon the declaration than an ancestress had been free in Connecticut or Massachusetts in 1775. Charlotte (of color) v. Chouteau appears in Missouri records four times between 1847-1862. The cost of the suit for freedom in Woodfolk v. Sweeper is given as $743.30." Russell, "Slave Discontent," 1946, 419.

of Blacks who are held in a state of slavery within the bowels of a free and Christian Country." Their argument for freedom rested on natural law foundations. They were born free and had never forfeited that freedom by any compact or agreement of their own. On the contrary, they had been stolen from their parents, torn from their land, transported against their will, and condemned for life to be slaves in a country that claimed to be Christian. Their enslavement, they pressed, violated natural law norms, moral sentiment, and revealed canon. No species of law or truth could justify slavery. Their freedom should be restored, they insisted, not as a concession but as a right, and restitution by way of land should accompany it. The legislature debated the question, but evaded it, stipulating simply that "the matter now subside." Thus the path of collective assignation, like that of individual suits, came to a desultory end, too, though the petition remained a crucial tool in the drive for freedom.

The Slave Trade and American Independence:

However, legislative activity persisted in another sector, that having to do with the foreign traffic in slaves. The matter was raised on numerous occasions in the New England legislatures. In 1766 Boston instructed its representatives, Samuel Adams and John Hancock among them, to move for a bill to ban the importation and purchasing of slaves. Such a bill was eventually passed in 1771 but died when the governor withheld his signature. A commensurate bill was again

\[14 \text{ Ibid.}\]
passed in 1774 but it was thwarted when the House of Assembly was unexpectedly prorogued the following day. In 1774 Connecticut adopted a measure to ban the trade, strengthened by a measure which allowed the slave owner to manumit able-bodied slaves without becoming responsible for their subsequent maintenance. Rhode Island acted the same year, but saw fit to compromise its bold declaration that any slave brought into the colony would be automatically free with the concession that traders unable to sell their slaves in the West Indies might bring them to Rhode Island on condition that such slaves be re-exported within a year. What it gave with one hand it took back with the other.

Vermont, not yet a member of the Union and not a state with a large slave population to speak of, could afford to act the part of moral counselor to the nation, and so in 1777 it enacted into its Bill of Rights a clause that offered to ban slavery, only then to qualify it with considerations of age, gender, law, debt, fines, and so on. It affirmed: "Therefore, no male person, born in this country, or brought from over sea, ought to be holden by law, to serve any person, as servant, slave or apprentice, after he arrives to the age of twenty-one years, nor female, in like manner, after she arrives to the age of eighteen years, unless bound by their own consent, after they arrive to such age, or bound by law, for the payment of debts, damages, fines, costs, or the like."15

Outside New England similar action was being taken against the trade in

15 Cited in Locke, Anti-Slavery, 1901, 80.
foreign slaves. Pennsylvania strangled it with a prohibitive tax, beginning in 1712, and continuing through 1715, so that by 1773 the amount charged reached the punitive scale of a per capita levy of £20. The measures were retained for the period 1761-1773. However, in New Jersey, moves in 1774 to follow Pennsylvania's example failed. In Delaware the state constitution asserted that "no person hereafter imported into this State from Africa ought to be held in slavery under any pretense whatever; and no negro, Indian, or mulatto slave ought to be brought into this State, for sale, from any part of the world." Virginia (1778, 1785) and Maryland (1783, 1796) provided for similar measures.

In the southern slave belt, measures were being adopted against the foreign slave trade, but such measures were actuated by very different motives. Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia, for example, were engaged in a struggle to repeal objectionable parliamentary legislation, and in that cause adopted a policy of non-importation of slaves. In that anti-parliamentary struggle the Continental Congress also joined in 1774. In April, 1776, Congress voted to reaffirm that policy for the same reason. Jefferson wrote that in Virginia the foreign importation of slaves was halted by the outbreak of the revolutionary war, saying "the business of the war pressing constantly on the legislature, this subject was not acted on finally until the year '78, when I brought in a bill to prevent their further importation. This passed without opposition, and stopped the increase of the evil

16 Cited in Locke, Anti-Slavery, 1901, 73.

by importation, leaving to future efforts its final eradication."\(^{18}\) However, a radical measure guaranteeing freedom to slaves after a certain date, and that the children of slaves were to remain with their parents until they reached a certain age and were then to receive a practical education at the public expense, after which they were to be colonized under the protection of the United States, was later withdrawn on the ground that the public mind was not prepared for it.\(^{19}\)

This was the context in which the antislavery clause, later expunged, surfaced in a draft of the Declaration of Independence, a clause which accused the king of England of conniving in violating "the most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him." That language shows the slave question was being attached to the specific cause of the colonies in pursuit of a political aim rather than as an issue for the necessary reform of society at home.

Thomas Jefferson, an architect of the Declaration and a leading voice in the Virginia legislature, said that, in voting for the ban on slave importation, as we just saw, he was not acting to abolish the trade as such. Rather, even if slavery was abolished in an indefinite future, Jefferson was not predisposed to accept the full implications of freedom for the slaves. On the contrary, he would contemplate


\(^{19}\) Locke, \textit{Anti-Slavery}, 1901, 76.
emancipation only within the safeguard of deportation. He had studied the classics on the matter and learned a vital lesson. "Among the Romans," he noted in 1781, "emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second (step) is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture." It did not make much difference, Jefferson said, whether blacks were originally a distinct race or were made distinct by time and circumstances. The fact remains that their distinctness is a function of their inferiority vis-a-vis the whites. It is thus more than likely that it is nature, not the condition of the blacks, that has produced the distinction with whites. Jefferson called color "that immovable veil of black," which drew a sharp line between the races.

He expanded on this, giving a philosophical justification for his opinion. "Nothing," he asserts, "is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion have drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation and deportation, peaceably, and in such slow degree, as that the evil will wear off insensibly, and their place be, pari passu, filled up by free white laborers." James Sullivan, governor of Massachusetts, shared Jefferson's views.

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21 Thomas Jefferson, Autobiography, 1993, p.49. Jefferson's view of racial separation found echoes even a hundred years later when in a case involving West Chester and
He said when he contemplated the mass deportation of blacks he saw it something fraught only with gloomy prospects, adding, "We have in history but one picture of a similar enterprise, and there we see it was necessary not only to open the sea by a miracle, for them to pass, but more necessary to close it again, in order to prevent their return." So emancipation was dangerous without the safeguard of planned deportation. The British, intent on inflicting maximum harm, were using mass evacuation of former slaves as a punitive weapon to destabilize and disrupt the new republic.

**Negotiation**

At an important conference convened in May, 1783, at Orangetown on the Hudson River, to discuss the matter of slaves who might be the property of Americans, these sentiments were very much to the fore. At that conference, General Washington, flanked, among others, by George Clinton, N.Y.'s able war governor, parleyed with Sir Guy Carleton, the British C-in-C. Washington reminded Carleton that it was contrary to the terms of the provisional treaty, signed the previous November, to remove from the country blacks, and anything

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Philadelphia in 1867, the legal opinion was offered that the "natural separation of the races is...an undeniable fact, and all social organizations which lead to their amalgamation are repugnant to the law of nature." *West Chester & Philadelphia R.R. v. Miles*, 55 Pa. 209, 213-14 (1867). In postbellum South, a whole series of laws and regulations were adopted, called the Jim Crow laws, to legalize segregation, and, in effect, inequality between the races. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

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22 Staudenraus, 1961, 4.
else, that might be considered the property of Americans. Carleton responded that
the blacks who had taken advantage of the proclamations for freedom had the right
to be embarked, admitting that some had already left under that understanding.
Washington demanded compliance with the spirit and letter of the provisional
articles, of which the seventh article stipulated that "His Britannic Majesty shall
with all convenient Speed[, ] and without Causing any destruction[, ] or carrying
away any Negroes or other Property of the American Inhabitants[,] withdraw all
his Armies, Garrisons, and Fleets, from the said united States." 23 Carleton's
interpretation of the seventh article amounted to an attack on the property rights
of Americans, Washington charged. Carleton insisted that "no interpretation could
be sound, that was inconsistent with prior Engagements of the Faith and honor of
the Nation, which he should inviolably maintain with People of all Colours and
Conditions." If Britain took Washington's view, Carelton continued, his records
would make full compensation possible, so that "the Slave would have his liberty,
his Master his Price, and the Nation support {of) its honor." 24 To General
Washington's dismay ("I have discovered to convince me that the slaves which
have absconded from their masters will never be restored") 25), Carleton responded
that to abandon the blacks who had acted on Britain's word would be a

23 Cited in Walker, Black Loyalists, 1976, 10; also in Robin Winks, The Blacks in


"dishonorable Violation of the public Faith,"26 and that Britain would be prepared to make monetary restitution in lieu of turning over blacks. Such blacks, however, formed only a small fraction of slaves.27

*Embarkation*

The Continental Congress, feeling stymied by British reluctance to observe the terms of the provisional treaty on returning blacks, instructed General Washington to abolish the commission charged with negotiating with the British on the matter and to return to Philadelphia. Grievances over the question, however, continued to sour relations with Britain for over half a century, although Alexander Hamilton had been a lone voice sympathizing with the British position.28 At any rate, with formal American resistance now out of the way, the embarkation process

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27 In the South there were some 700,000 slaves by 1790, and 3.5 million in 1860. Sydney A. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, 655.

28 Quarles, *The Negro*, 1973, 62-63. However, Dr. Benjamin Franklin was an active antislavery voice, having come under the influence of the Quakers and of Benezet and Granville Sharp. He visited Phillis Wheatley in London and pledged her his support for the cause. He became in 1785 President of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. One of his last public acts was to petition Congress in February, 1790 to institute emancipation. Quarles, 1973, 189. Franklin cited a celebrated French moralist to the effect that when the Frenchman contemplated the story of slavery, from its source in the wars of greed, its course in the trans-Atlantic passage to the cruelties required to maintain the institution, "when he saw a bit of sugar, he could not help imagining it to be covered with spots of human blood," in fact to be wholly tinged with it. Extract of Franklin's Works, vol ii, p.128 in Wadström, *Essay*, 1794, vol. ii, Appendix, 218.
began desultorily. In August 1782, 4,230 whites and 7,163 blacks were assembled in Charleston, S.C., awaiting departure instructions, which came only in March 1783, and even then it affected only 259 white adults, sixty-five children, and twenty-four slaves who left for Halifax, Nova Scotia. Many others left for Jamaica and East Florida in conditions of great hardship and uncertainty.\(^{29}\) In New York, matters proceeded more smoothly, and some 3,000 blacks left for Nova Scotia on 30 November 1783, collected, catalogued, and classified. To their ranks must be added a large number of nameless blacks carried in unregistered private vessels\(^{30}\).

Britain's determination to keep faith with its black loyalists, however, created rather than resolved the issue of the final destiny to be assigned them. Life in Nova Scotia and other settlements such as New Brunswick and Shellburne diverged sharply from the high expectations that hope of freedom had nurtured.

"Despite the relative insignificance of slavery in the province, and the difficulties involved in retaining a slave at all and then keeping him economically employed, still Nova Scotia was a slave society displaying the crude traits of all such societies,"\(^{31}\) and so, not surprisingly, we hear of desperate pleas for freedom

\(^{29}\) Winks, loc cit.


\(^{31}\) Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 1976, 41. The example of the free black, Lydia Jackson, illustrates the problem. She was invited to work for one Henry Hedley who turned on her and demanded payment for her board on pain of seven years indentured servitude. She agreed instead to one year which Hedley surreptitiously changed to 39 years on the certificate of indenture. She was then sold for £20 to a Dr. Bulman and his wife who beat her with fire tongs and kicked her in the stomach even though Ms. Jackson was eight months pregnant. A court case on her behalf was dismissed by the magistrates.
accompanied by demand for land. For example, in 1787 the government stopped
the meager rations they were providing for the slaves in Halifax, and several
owners turned out their slaves rather than provide for them. Two years later, the
local Overseers of the Poor petitioned the authorities in Halifax to release the
settlement from a "burden it cannot bear," with specific reference to the blacks of
Birchtown who were living "in the most distressing circumstances," with only the
paltry rations from the Overseers forestalling starvation. To add to the gloom,
reports were proliferating that blacks were being carried off to sea to be sold in the
West Indies. Even in Nova Scotia, blacks were being sold for bushels of potatoes,
so depressed were the economic conditions. One gloomy assessment spoke of
how the Nova Scotian blacks were "obliged to live upon white-mens (sic) property
which the Govr has been liberal in distributing - and for cultivating it they receive
half the produce so that they are in short in a state of Slavery." Thus
sharecropping aggravated the hardship. "It is," observes John Clarkson, "a
Common Custom in this Country to promise a Black so much pr Day and in the
Evening when his work is almost finished the White man quarrels with him and

After three years with the Bulmans, Ms. Jackson learned of their intention to sell her as
a slave in the West Indies. She escaped and fled to Halifax where she met John
Clarkson. Walker, Black Loyalists, 1976, 50.

32 Walker, Black Loyalists, 1976, 54.

33 Winks, Blacks in Canada, 1972, 40.

34 Cited in Walker, Black Loyalists, 1976, 46.
takes him to a justice of the Peace who gives an order to mulct him of his wages."

And so the problem of resettling the blacks, rather than being resolved, festered.

The Black Poor in London

The plight of those blacks who were taken to England was scarcely better, as the story of Peter Anderson makes clear. A sawyer from Norfolk, Va., Anderson arrived in England promised a pension, which he received in the sum of £10 following Lord Dunmore's timely personal intervention. He exhausted this amount quickly and was reduced to penury, appealing to the pension's commissioners for assistance. "I endeavour'd to get Work," he pleaded, "but cannot get Any I am Thirty Nine Years of Age & am ready & Willing to serve His Britanick Majesty While I am Able But I am really starvin about the Streets Having Nobody to give me a Morsel of bread & dare not go home to my Own Country again." By 1786 there were some 1200 blacks living in near-destitution in London, taxing the slender resources of the Committee of the Black Poor.

Carl Bernhard Wadström, a contemporary Swedenborgian with humanitarian interest in Africa, includes in his Essay on Colonization an extract from the Report of the Sierra Leone Company. It paints a dispiriting picture of life

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37 It was called The Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, founded in January, 1786. Braidwood, 1994, 63-127.
The blacks living in London are generally profligate, because uninstructed, and vitiated by slavery: for many of them were once slaves of the most worthless description, namely the idle and superfluous domestic, and the gamblers and thieves who infest the towns in the W. Indies. There are severe laws against carrying, or enticing slaves, from the Islands, without the knowledge of their owners. Yet some of those fellows contrive to conceal themselves, or are concealed by others on board ships on the point of sailing...In London, being friendless and despised, on account of their complexion, and too many of them being really incapable of any useful occupation, they sink into abject poverty, and soon become St. Giles's black-birds.38

The Committee of the Black Poor tried to devise a plan to relieve the growing distress of blacks on London's streets. In 1772, the estimates of the number of slaves in England put the figure at between 14,000 and 15,000. 1772 was the year of the famous decision of Lord Mansfield setting free a slave called James Somerset, and thereby setting in motion a powerful antislavery movement

38 Carl B. Wadström, *Essay on Colonization, particularly applied to the Western Coast of Africa, with some Free Thoughts on Cultivation and Commerce; also Brief Descriptions of the Colonies already formed, or attempted, in Africa, including those of Sierra Leone and Bulama*, 2 vols., London: Darton & Harvey, 1794, vol. ii, 227-228. Cited also in Kuczynski, 1977, 40n.
in England. One historian claims that the words attributed to Lord Mansfield, and which became the rallying cry of the antislavery cause, first turned up in a nineteenth century source. Mansfield was supposed to have said, "The air of England has long been too pure for a slave and every man is free who breathes it." Yet that sounds like a free rendering of the sentiment expressed by a contemporary poet. In any event, it happened that one of the members of the Committee of the Black Poor was Henry Smeathman. He had lived in Africa for four years pursuing his hobby of "fly-catching," a man with pretensions to being a botanist. It was his detailed plan that was presented before the Committee. In the plan a settlement scheme would be established in West Africa, a settlement that would repeat the American experience in Africa. He wrote: "In short, if a community of 2 or 300 persons were to be associated on such principles as constitute the prosperity of civilized nations, such are fertility of the soil, the value of its products, and the advantages of such an establishment, that it must, with the blessing of the Almighty, increase with a rapidity beyond all example; and in all probability extend its saving influence in 30 or 40 years, wider than even American

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39 Cited in Winks, Blacks in Canada, 1972, 26n. Lord Mansfield's decision was that "The claims of slavery cannot be supported. The power claimed was never in use here, or acknowledged by law; and therefore the man Somerset must be discharged."

40 The poet, William Cowper (1731-1800), expressed an identical sense when he wrote, "Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs/Imbibe our air, that moment they are free;/ They touch our country and their schackles (sic) fall."
Independence (emphasis in original)."\(^{41}\)

**The Sierra Leone Resettlement Plan**

In Smeathman's plan of settlement\(^{42}\) the growing black population of London would be siphoned off and transported to Sierra Leone where they would be put to productive work on the soil. A good and sound plan of public education would be instituted. The settlement scheme would, at a stroke, deal with a complex matter: it would remove blacks as a burden on English society; it would offer them land and the conditions necessary to their freedom; and it would, through useful labor, create the kind of legitimate industry required to repay the Crown for the costs of repatriation and to furnish an alternative to the continuing trade in slaves. Smeathman had hit on a winning formula. However, he died in July, 1786, before the plan could be put into effect.

After a couple of false starts, harbingers of worse to come, a batch estimated at 459 persons, including 112 white women prostitutes, drugged and bundled onto ship as partners to the black men, eventually left England. Anna Maria Falconbridge, married to a Company agent, Alexander Falconbridge who as a surgeon on slave ships abandoned that to work with Thomas Clarkson for


\(^{42}\) Henry Smeathman, *Plan of a Settlement to be made near Sierra Leone, on the Grain Coast of Africa: Intended more particularly for the service and happy establishment of Blacks and People of Colour, to be shipped as freemen under the direction of the Committee for Relieving the Black Poor, and under the protection of the British Government*, London, 1786, pp. 16-17.
abolition, said she was at first incredulous of the story. "Good heavens! how the relation of this tale made me shudder; I questioned its veracity, and enquired of the other women who exactly corroborated what I had heard." Nevertheless, she remained firmly convinced that the British government would not have countenanced what she called "such a Gothic infringement on human Liberty." Later she met the white women in question, or such of them as had survived, "decrepid (sic) with disease, and so disgusted with filth and dirt, that I should never have supposed they were born white; add to this, almost naked from head to foot...I begged they would get washed, and gave them what cloaths (sic) I could conveniently spare." Of these settlers about fifty died before final boarding, twenty-four were discharged, twenty-three absconded, and thirty-four died at sea. Eventually about 377 arrived in Sierra Leone in May, 1787.

Olaudah had played an active role in the organization of the settlement effort in London, but just before the expedition set sail for Sierra Leone he was dismissed. The motive seems to have been jealousy of his influence. Olaudah


44 Letter dated Granville Town, 13 May 1791, in Anna Maria Falconbridge, Narrative of Two Voyages to Sierra Leone, during the Years 1791-2-3, In a Series of Letters, &c. London, 1794, reprinted London: Frank Cass, 1967, p.64. Cited also in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey, 1977, 51. The general wisdom was that Granville Sharp did not know about the white prostitutes. He would have found it impossible to reconcile it with his public stand on the whole settlement scheme. Yet it seems equally astounding he should be ignorant of so flagrant an abnormality. It is easier to assume he had knowledge, and qualms, about it.
admitted as much when he defended himself against aspersions on his character, saying he wished to inform the public "that the principal crime which caused his dismissal, was on information he laid before the Navy Board, accusing the Agent [of the expedition] of unfaithfulness in his office, in not providing such necessaries as were contracted for the people, and were absolutely necessary for their existence, which necessaries could not be obtained from the Agents. The same representation was made by Mr. Vasa to Mr. Hoare, which induced the latter, who had before appeared to be Vasa's friend, to go to the Secretary of the Treasury, and procure his dismissal." The Sierra Leone expedition hardened into ill-will towards Olaudah, symbolized by contemporary remarks published at the time, such as the editorial leader in the July 3, 1787 issue of the Public Advertiser to the effect that "what we asserted of Vasa the Black, some months since, and have proved what we expected, that the expedition would be carried on with more harmony by his absence." In fact the Public Advertiser led a campaign of racial attacks and villification against Olaudah, accusing him of advancing falsehoods "as deeply

45 Published in the Public Advertiser, July 14, 1787, reproduced in Life of Olaudah Equiano, vol.i, p. xlii.

46 Life of Olaudah, vol.i, pp. xli-xlii. The captain of the expedition, Captain Thompson, wrote the Navy Board a letter of complaint against Olaudah, accusing Olaudah of sedition and spreading a turbulent and insolent spirit among the Africans of the expedition. The Navy Board, however, did not take the same view, though it did not reinstate Olaudah either. Olaudah died on 31 March, 1797, and his surviving daughter, Joanna, inherited his estate worth £950 in 1816 on reaching 21.
black as his jetty face." In an anonymous attack in *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Olaudah "is made in shape of a pig to bring up the rear" of the detestable ranks of abolitionists. But a sympathetic and knowledgeable correspondent objected that such scurrilous attacks ought not to be made "in a mask; while you yourself wish to fight in Masquerade, I have no desire to make the discovery."

In any case the London settlers, a rump of the 'Black Poór', staggered onto land on 14 May, 1787, after some protracted negotiations with the chiefs. They called their settlement Granville Town, capital of the Province of Freedom. They chose Richard Weaver as their first Governor. Weaver was a Philadelphian, who was apparently freeborn. He first went to England in about 1779 seeking help. However, he and his wife were denied assistance by the claims commission and

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47 Ibid., vol.i, xxxvii.


49 See John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870*, London: Faber and Faber, 1969. Peterson argues that Smeathman's commercial and economic motives for the founding of the Province of Freedom were complemented by Granville Sharp's humanitarian vision, with a third influence coming from the evangelical religious interest in making indigenous converts. The evangelical group, Peterson argues, "successfully propagandized the cause of abolition, and, in organizational technique, established a standard for similar movements throughout the following century. The Clapham evangelicals gave to the Sierra Leone venture its meaning as a tangible symbol in the fight for abolition." 22-23. My argument in this book goes further than Peterson in claiming that Africa was essential to the antislavery strategy, and that to achieve that objective, the antislavery movement would have to confront the old political and social structures that promoted slavery and the slave trade. As such antislavery and antistructure belonged together.
received only the daily allowance. He joined the expedition to come to Sierra Leone with hopes of improving his life.

However, the settlement was poorly sited, and the tropical abundance that Sharp and others promised the settlers turned out to be a pipe dream. The gravelstone defied every strain of effort and optimism, and the tropical rainstorms, which in Sierra Leone amount to over one hundred inches in just three months between July and September, just pounded and bleached the soil, with the deadly malaria affliction rising with the vapors. Richard Weaver wrote despondently: "We came too late to plant any rice, or anything else, for the heavy rain washes all out of the ground; and we must stay till next month, to plant a little rice." 50 In these forlorn circumstances, death was a familiar companion, illness a common fate. The rains set in on June 28, and the death toll rose. In all of June only nine people died, but in July no fewer than forty-two of the settlers were carried off. By September 16, 1787, eighty-six of the 377 immigrants had died while fifteen had run away. Thus 170, or more than a third of the original settlers, had died within about seven months, while sixty-two, or nearly one-eighth, had run away or been discharged. Thus the original numbers were reduced to 212 black men, thirty black women, twenty-nine white women and five white men, making a grand total of 276.

The survivors had to contend with grasping chiefs. Weaver wrote London asking for help to avert starvation. The settlers had bartered their stores, including muskets and clothes, for rice to survive, but had run out of anything more to trade. In despair, the settlers broke up into groups to work on passing ships or for near-by slave-traders. Granville Sharp may be forgiven for his near-despair at the sad state of affairs in Sierra Leone, and was at the point of admitting defeat. He wrote to William Pitt, the Prime Minister, that "all the surviving White people, the three surgeons, and the land-surveyor that was sent out last year at the expense of the Government, have actually entered the service of the slave-dealers, and that the greater part also of the Black poor are gone into the same detestable service at different factories in the neighbourhood, and some even on board the slave-ships." To add insult to injury, some of the black settlers were sold themselves as slaves.

Sharp had reason, as he said, to grow "apprehensive that all the rest would be obliged to disperse in like manner, unless a speedy supply of live stock, with some recruits, could be immediately sent out." Accordingly, a second batch of settlers, fifty in all, was despatched from London to revive the settlement, but it was a drop in the bucket. Only thirty-nine embarked, of which twelve died of fever


52 Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey*, vol.i, 46.
on the voyage, four stayed behind at the Cape Verde Islands, and two returned. This haggard remnant of humanity, what Granville Sharp was used to calling "worthy passengers," "worthy inhabitants," twenty in all, tumbled out of the ship onto land, a stunning anticlimax of the plan to move the antislavery strategy to Africa.

Waiting for them was chiefly opposition. Local rulers disowned any treaty a predecessor had made with the settlers and issued a quit order. However, under the shadow of gunboats, the chiefs would prevaricate and offer revised terms of compromise. An official, without explicit authorization, would act on impulse and sign a treaty, judging rashness less risky than confrontation with the chiefs. So after such a treaty the settlement of Granville Town, with a total population of not more than 200, became official on August 22, 1788.

However, the respite released pent up jealousies in the settlement. Weaver accused James Reid, elected to succeed him, of stealing the stores. Then Weaver, who had earlier fallen ill but had now recovered, signed the treaty with the chiefs in August 1788, only to find that John Lucas, who was Governor in June 1788, had repudiated it in an earlier signing. The chiefs, exploiting the confusion, moved in to carve themselves an advantage. The slave trade in turn benefited and grew as a result. Captains of slave ships grew emboldened and disputed the authority of the settlement. Thus challenged, the settlers acted with an implausible mix of force and threats to enforce treaty agreements. Such actions drew them deeper into costly entanglements while exposing them as less and less credible. Alerted, slave traders
set up to pounce and exact revenge by inciting the chiefs, already at loggerheads with the settlement. In sum, a chain of antagonism was created, with any one incident set to ignite a widened circle of conflict. It strangled the settlement.

One such incident was a dispute involving an American slave ship that had kidnapped some of King Jimmy's Temne people. The king retaliated by seizing a boat from another American slave ship, killing three of the crew, confiscating the cargo and selling the boat to the French.

In November, 1789, an American ship, H.M.S. Pomona, arrived in Freetown on a mission to deliver copies of Sir William Dolben's Act of 1788 regulating the slave trade. The Captain, Henry Savage, immediately found himself at the center of a controversy between the settlers and Bowie, a slave trader on Bance Island. No sooner had he settled that dispute than another dispute surfaced in which Bowie and the settlers made complaints against King Jimmy who, they alleged, needed restraining so that he would desist from instigating hostilities against the settlement. Bowie also urged Savage to avenge the recent murders of three Americans. Savage's order to King Jimmy to report to the Pomona was ignored, but before he decided his next step, a young midshipman of the party he had sent out had inadvertently fired into a thatched house and set it ablaze. The whole village went up in flames. In that highly volatile atmosphere, Savage unwisely decided to send a second boat under the command of Lieutenant Duncan to apprehend King Jimmy, but before they could all embark King Jimmy's people opened fire on them. Duncan, the sergeant of marines, and a settler were killed.
In the next several days King Jimmy's people tried to prevent the *Pomona* from watering. One of the settlers, named Thompson, tried to get word out to Naimbana but was shot dead as he stepped out of the boat. Savage subsequently got two of Naimbana's chiefs to come to the ship and instructed them to get King Jimmy to cease hostilities and to extract an undertaking that Naimbana would hold a meeting of the chiefs to guarantee permanent peace. At that point, sensing further retaliation as foolhardy, Savage opted for a stay of execution and, accordingly, firing his cannon more in frustration than meaningful engagement, sailed away, leaving the settlers to the mercy of the chiefs. However, instead of agreeing to establish a permanent peace, King Jimmy simply issued an ultimatum giving the
settlers three days to evacuate\textsuperscript{53}. It was not long after that that Granville Town was attacked and razed. Sharp received the melancholy news only in April, 1790.

\textit{Antislavery and Early Colonization in America}

The settlement was good as doomed, and, barring some miraculous intervention, so, too, in fact, was the very idea of it. That intervention came in a timely fashion and from a quarter that, if not miraculous, was most unusual. The story of that second chance takes us to the United States and its religious and humanitarian spirit. Even before black loyalists presented Britain with the problem of their final destination, there were individuals in the American colonies active in the cause of ameliorating the condition of blacks, slave and free. Quakers and Puritans worked tirelessly to spread antislavery sentiment, actuated by deep religious and moral scruples. Rev. Dr. Samuel Hopkins, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Newport, RI, wrote in robust terms in his \textit{Dialogue concerning the Slavery of the Africans} in 1776, arguing for emancipation. He urged the Second Continental Congress in 1776 to take urgent measures for the total and immediate abolition of slavery. He supported a scheme in which Christian blacks would be repatriated to Africa where they could live as free men and enjoy the fruit of their labor. In April, 1773, he approached a fellow clergymen, Ezra Stiles, a future president of Yale, about the matter. The two of them thought a group of

\textsuperscript{53} Braidwood, \textit{Black Poor}, Liverpool, 1994, 204-205.
thirty to forty blacks should be selected and trained accordingly. Two blacks from Hopkin's church were chosen consequently: John Quaumino, a freedman, and Bristol Yamma, a slave. Stiles thought the two "had good common natural abilities," but added soberly that they were "of slender acquaintance as to Letters."

Undeterred, the two blacks left in 1774 for Princeton to stay at the college and receive further instruction from President John Witherspoon. Hopkins wrote to John Adams in December, 1775, for funds to send the two to Africa. At the outbreak of the war in 1776 over $500 had been received from contributions, but hostilities put paid to any idea of proceeding further with the scheme.

The Quakers were prominent as pioneers of early abolition. One of their most outstanding spokesmen was Anthony Benezet, a schoolmaster from Philadelphia. Benezet was born in 1713 of French Huguenot parents who fled to Holland shortly after their son's birth, and thence to England where they adopted the Quaker doctrine. Benezet subsequently emigrated to America and taught at a Friend's school in Philadelphia. In 1770, he established an evening school for blacks. A fervent antislavery campaigner, perhaps the foremost of his day, he published several works against slavery. For example, writing in 1726, he

54 Quakers had been active in early anti-slavery efforts. As a consequence, in 1672, the Virginia Legislature passed a measure forbidding Quakers to admit blacks to their meetings. In 1688 a group on Germantown, Pennsylvania, adopted a resolution against slavery, confirming official fears of the Quakers as a pro-abolition religion. See Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, 111. See also Mary Locke, *Anti-Slavery*, Boston, 1901, 94, 96ff, 123, 142ff.
excoriates slavery, saying, "Upon the whole...it must appear to every honest unprejudiced Reader, that the Negroes are equally intituled (sic) to the common Privileges (sic) of Mankind with the Whites, that they have the same rational Powers; the same natural Affections, and are as susceptible of Pain and Grief as they, that therefore the bringing and keeping them in Bondage is an Instance of Oppression and Injustice of most grievous Nature, such as is scarcely to be parallelled by any Example in the present or former Ages." His writings had their impact on Thomas Clarkson who was instrumental in organizing the antislavery lobby in England, with William Wilberforce as the Parliamentary spokesman. Benezet also had an effect on Patrick Henry who admitted even as a slave-holder that the practice, in his words, was "repugnant to humanity, inconsistent with the Bible," and destructive to liberty.

Benezet argued for the abolition of the slave trade, saying that the purported distinction between slavery and the slave trade is a spurious one, "a Plea founded more in Words than supported by Truth." From his educational work among blacks in Philadelphia, Benezet said he was convinced that the African had not only a right to freedom but a capacity for mental and moral improvement that would make blacks fit for the responsibilities of a free society. He rejected the prevailing view


of the inferiority of the African race.

By canvassing such positive views of Africans, the Quakers put themselves on the cutting edge of eighteenth century understandings of non-Western races and societies. The positive evaluation of blacks that the Quakers were presenting was based on the facts, conditions, and circumstances of Africans living in the New World, not on fanciful concoctions of the Noble Savage theme. Firsthand knowledge and experience of New World Africans became a requirement for making judgments about the people, and it was the Quakers who mobilized as a group to advance that position that early. Thus Benezet wrote in 1788 that the accounts of travelers in Africa remained a source of much unreliable knowledge, because these travelers merely rehashed fabricated accounts, repeating errors from one traveler to another. It only takes the report of one trustworthy observer to expose the unsoundness of such travel accounts. One such report, Benezet said, was by Peter Kolben (1675-1726), a man of learning sent from Prussia to make astronomical observations in South Africa, who, "having no interest in the slavery of the Negroes, had not the same inducement as most other relators, to misrepresent the natives of Africa." Mary Locke emphasizes the importance of such Quaker contribution, and, in particular, takes the work of Benezet as representative of that cause. She offers it as her critical opinion that "there is

probably no other man in the period of gradual abolition who did so much for the antislavery movement in America as Anthony Benezet."\(^{58}\)

As for Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), a physician, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a close colleague of Jefferson, he was equally influential in humanitarian circles at home and abroad, working to advance the cause. He turned down an offer of 1000 guineas a year to practice medicine in Charleston, S. C., because, in his words, he could not accept to serve where wealth had been accumulated from the sweat and blood of Negro slaves. He wrote on the subject in such robust terms and canvassed widely against slavery. Reacting to standard arguments that both the Old Testament and New Testament are ambiguous on the question of slavery, Rush asserts that "If it could be proved that no testimony was to be found in the Bible against a practice so pregnant with evils of the most destructive tendency to society, it would be sufficient to overthrow its divine Original."\(^{59}\) His views influenced Granville Sharp, the eminent English Quaker, who gave his name to the first Sierra Leone settlement established by blacks from England in 1787. It has been suggested that Tom Paine owed his radical ideals to both Benezet and Rush. Paine's first public essay, published in March, 1775, was called "African Slavery in America", where he developed


sentiments closely modeled on the writings of Benjamin Rush who in 1773 had directed an address to the colonies "upon Slave-keeping," "designed to shew the iniquity of the slave trade." Paine's opposition to slavery was based on what he regarded as its inherent conflict with Christian conscience, a notion carrying more than a whiff of its Quaker source. It is a matter for debate whether political radicalism or religious idealism fired Paine to write in 1776 his epochal essay, Common Sense, but one may justifiably argue that the Quaker religious factor was a guiding light. And the clause which was struck off the Declaration of Independence charged George III with violating, not so much the autonomy and economic interests of the American colonies, as "the most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, capturing and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither." It shows the scale of the Quaker religious achievement, and, indeed, in looking elsewhere for the continuity of the theme into the African setting, we find in the work of Olaudah Equiano an explicit reference to the ameliorating influence of Benezet and other Quakers who enabled 'the sable race to breathe the air of liberty.' The effect of the Quaker antislavery campaign was virtually to shut down the market for slaves in Philadelphia by 1715.

However, in spite of such heroic efforts by the Quakers, there was a major structural weakness in their arguments. Their critics are probably uncharitable to charge that the Quakers could afford their antislavery stance because they had such

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little stake in slaves. Thus did Abbé Raynal argue, insinuating that "philanthropy was not a sufficient motive for the sacrifice of wealth."\textsuperscript{61} It is enough to point out that slaves were a valuable economic asset, and slavery part and parcel of the world view, well into the nineteenth century, regardless of how many slaves one owned, to clinch the point that philanthropy had motives separate from economic inducement. So the charge of wealth contradicting philanthropy need not stick to establish the structural weakness in Quaker arguments.

That weakness has to do with the Quaker pacifist tradition not allowing a decisive role for law and penal sanctions against the slave trade. The use of the magistrate's sword the Quakers rightly rejected in matters religious, but by forcing slavery through the bottleneck of stringent religious inquiry, by diligently 'putting the cause to the Christian query,' they deflected from it legal reprisals. With exemplary piety, they had preached on the inhumanity of slavery and the slave trade, trusting in moral sentiment to dissolve the bonds of servitude. But they forgot mammon is able to ride conscience with easy rein, and that even if, like a headstrong steed, conscience should stumble and threaten to bolt, it will relent and respond to being massaged with worldly gain and advantage and resuming its course. Or, as the African proverb says, 'The hand of money can make a bad road become a pleasant path.'\textsuperscript{62}


\textsuperscript{62} Cited in Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, \textit{The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger
Thus, Quakerism raised the slave to full humanity on the refined rule of sifting religion through a subjective ethical mesh. However, from that position Quakerism was powerless to proceed against so resistant a public and political subject. Others would have to carry the fight into that muscular terrain. (George Fox (1624-1691), the founder of Quakers, had told slaves in Barbados that Christ died for them, too, but such Quaker teachings prompted harsh, restrictive measures against religious instruction for slaves.\textsuperscript{63} In such a case the pacifist strategy was futile.)

This theme of the religious roots of American public ethics is pursued in the testimony of John Quincy Adams, and we should break our chronological line to turn to it now. The occasion was the heated debate about admitting Missouri into the Union as a slave state. His words, recorded in his diary in February 1820, are a \textit{cri de coeur}. He confided passionately:

Oh, if but one man could arise with a genius capable of comprehending, a heart capable of supporting, and an utterance capable of communicating those eternal truths that belong to this question, to lay bare in all its nakedness that outrage upon the goodness of God, human slavery, now is the time, and this is the occasion, upon which such a man would perform


\textsuperscript{63} Davis, \textit{Slavery in Western Culture}, 1988, 214.
the duties of an angel upon earth.64

The question we now have to consider is whether, and how, this American religious spirit remained with the African Americans who went to Nova Scotia and elsewhere, and, furthermore, the means and circumstances of its transmission to Africa.

Concerning the situation of blacks in Nova Scotia, it was no secret to the authorities that they felt badly let down by conditions there. Their problem was how to fulfill the high hopes raised by the promise of freedom and economic opportunity for blacks. Whatever the solution, everyone concerned felt that only British jurisdiction would continue to assure the welfare of the blacks. Canada, while falling under such jurisdiction, had to all intents and purposes come up short on economic opportunity. Instead of a grateful society of freed blacks the authorities were confronted with simmering discontent, with disgruntled voices being raised against what was considered an untrustworthy officialdom.

Thomas Peters: Moving Antislavery to Africa:

64 John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), eldest son of the second President of the U.S., John Adams, was the country's sixth President (1825-1829). Noonan, Jr., John T., The Antelope: The Ordeal of the Recaptured Africans in the Administration of James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977, 22. John Quincy Adams was closely involved in the Amistad affair in which a group of 54 enslaved Africans mutinied on a Spanish slave ship the Amistad, killing the ship's captain and some crew members. The ship landed in Long Island. Spain went to court in Washington to demand return of the ship and slave cargo. The matter went to trial. The Africans were released in 1842 after John Quincy Adams led a successful defense. The grateful Africans gave Adams an inscribed Bible, called the Mendi Bible, after the name of their tribe in Sierra Leone.
It was out of this ferment that new hope was born with the activities of Thomas Peters, and with him we rejoin the theme of taking antislavery to Africa that Equiano, with all his setbacks, also set out to promote. Peters had fled in 1776 from his master and joined the British, lured away by the promise of freedom. Twice wounded in battle, he survived the war when he and his wife went to settle in Nova Scotia. Arriving in London in 1791, he bore the grievances of Nova Scotian blacks who felt cheated out of the promises made them by the British. Peters became an instant London celebrity, being warmly received by Granville Sharp and his fellow reformers. "His eloquence, his passion, his spirit, made him the rage of the newspaper world, the latest fashionable craze, and the nearest object of philanthropy."

A few words are in order on the life of Thomas Peters. He was born in the 1740s in Nigeria as an Egba Yoruba. He was kidnapped in 1760 and sold to a French slave ship, the *Henri Quatre*. Peters arrived in French Louisiana, and soon after his French master sold him to an Englishman. By 1770 he had been sold again, this time to William Campbell, a Scotsman in Wilmington, North Carolina, the seat of New Hanover County, where Peters learned his trade as a millwright. The war approached Wilmington early in 1776, and it was evacuated in February of that year. Peters joined the British side of the war to effect his freedom, and enlisted in the regiment of the Black Pioneers. He was present at the British bombardment of Charleston, S.C., in the summer of 1776, and was with the British when they moved north to take Philadelphia at the end of 1777. At the end
of the war he and the other blacks were taken to New York City in preparation for their shipment to Nova Scotia.  

In Canada where freedom proved no less elusive, Peters reasoned that he and his people "would have to look beyond the governor and his surveyors to complete their escape from slavery and to achieve the independence they sought." Peters organized a petition among the blacks of St. John, New Brunswick and in Digby, Nova Scotia, and carried it personally to London for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, William W. Granville. The petition described the harsh conditions of blacks in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, asking for an urgent plan to remedy the situation. The situation of the blacks in Canada that had been described three years earlier in 1788 as desperate, with most of them "without Clothing" and numbers of them "destitute of the necessities of Life" and facing "the most keen Distress" with the winter cold, had only grown worse and more alarming. The choice was between finding arable land in Canada, which was unlikely, or else emigrating elsewhere for the purpose. The petition brought immediate action, with the Secretary of State initiating inquiries in Canada and

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asking that either the blacks be provided with useful land or else enabled to emigrate to Sierra Leone. The Directors of the newly formed Sierra Leone Company accepted Peters' petition, and "concurred in applying to His Majesty's Ministers for a passage for them at the expense of government, and having obtained a favourable answer to their application, they immediately availed themselves of the services of Lieut. Clarkson, who very handsomely offered to go to Nova Scotia, in order to make the necessary proposals, and to superintend the collecting and bringing over such free blacks to Sierra Leone, as might be willing to emigrate."\(^6^8\) The British government, what John Quincy Adams termed "our old Grandam Britain," it was agreed, would bear the cost of such emigration.

Thus encouraged, Peters returned to Nova Scotia with plans to organize the blacks for transportation to Sierra Leone, against a good deal of opposition from both blacks and whites, it turned out. The blacks were afraid of undertaking the hazards of a journey to a continent whence they or their forebears had been taken and sold into slavery, the whites feared that emigration would deplete a source of cheap black labor. However, nothing could now stop the venture, and Peters became John Clarkson's indefatigable assistant in organizing the embarkation. In August 1791, proceedings were set in motion to screen potential Nova Scotian black emigrants to Sierra Leone. John Clarkson, the younger brother of Thomas Clarkson, was chosen as agent for this task.

In interviews with the blacks John Clarkson was enormously impressed with their religious sense, their vision of a better future for their children, and their desire to seek a foundation upon which to build and transmit the heritage. One of these blacks was a slave named John Coltress who came, not to enroll himself personally, but his free wife and children. Clarkson said he found it heart-rending to see Coltress put the Atlantic between himself and his family in order to ensure "a better life for them." Peters himself took personal responsibility in rounding up candidates for the enterprise. Finally on January 15, 1792, the freedom armada of sixteen ships spread sail. Clarkson wrote jubilantly: "I am now under sail with a fair wind and fine weather, having on board 1190 souls in fifteen ships, properly equipped and I hope destined to be happy." The whole enterprise had cost nearly £9,600, a cost borne entirely by the British government.

Finally in March 1792, the party landed, haggard and buffeted by disease and weather. Sixty-five had died at sea and another hundred were too ill to disembark. But there was no mistaking the symbolic significance of the feat thus accomplished. Here is one description of the landing scene in which Thomas Peters
played a leading role:

Their pastors led them ashore, singing a hymn of praise...Like the Children of Israel which were come out again out of the captivity they rejoiced before the Lord, who brought them from bondage to the land of their forefathers. When all had arrived, the whole colony assembled in worship, to proclaim to the...continent whence they or their forbears had been carried in chains -

'The day of Jubilee is come; Return ye ransomed sinners home.'

Jupiter Hammon, an elderly slave, once wrote about liberty not simply as an expedient, feasible political project, though that would do, too, but as an ethical value that views the human being as a moral agent with responsibility for the challenges of history, a position from which it would be possible to effect the practical joining of the general cause of liberty with the specific imperatives of antislavery. Until then, human flourishing, what Aristotle calls eudaimonia, would remain partial and incomplete. Accordingly, Hammon appealed:

That liberty is a great thing we know from our own feelings, and we may likewise judge so from the conduct of the white people in the late war. How much money has been spent and how many lives have been lost to defend their liberty! I must say that I have hoped that God would open their

eyes, when they were so much engaged for liberty, to think of the state of the poor blacks, and to pity us.\textsuperscript{70}

Peters was ill with fever at the time of landfall, but he rejoiced openly at their safe arrival and the prospects that lay before them. He recovered early enough for his compatriots to elect him their speaker-general. However, Peters soon fell out with his people and was found hatching a plot to overthrow authority. Warned in advance, Clarkson called a public meeting of the settlers and before them threatened Peters as a mutineer. The scene then switches to Peters being accused of embezzling money owed to two orphans. In the subsequent trial before a jury, Peters was found guilty, made to give up the money and censored severely. He made to mend his ways, attended the nightly prayer meetings punctiliously, and testified regularly. Clarkson, disinclined to ignore an early warning, would also show up, determined to neutralize whatever remained of Peters' influence. Disheartened by Clarkson's growing influence among the settlers, Peters made a final desperate gamble. He challenged the people at a public meeting to decide between him and Clarkson, and was devastated to find no one move in his direction. "Isolated, threatened, sick at heart, Peters fell ill with the prevailing fever, and in the night of the 25th-26th of June [1792] he died."\textsuperscript{71} His cloudy ending, however, did little to diminish his achievements as a pioneer and symbol


\textsuperscript{71} Fyfe, \textit{History}, 1962, 41.
of freedom.

*Freedom and the Evangelical Convergence:*

It is this theme of freedom that we should stress again at this stage, and do so in terms of the Puritan roots of the idea of liberty, and the distinctive American contribution and its far-reaching effects. For the English Puritans liberty was important, so that, as John Milton (d.1674) expressed it, Christ the liberator has made possible "our worthy struggle for freedom." Nevertheless, liberty for the Puritans was qualified by discipline and restraint, and it matters little that it was self-discipline so long as it served as example by the elect few. Milton, who had a forceful pen in any case, broke a few reeds extolling the virtues of discipline. "The flourishing and decaying of all civil societies, all the moments and turnings of human occasions are moved to and fro as upon the axle of discipline. Discipline," he continues, "is not only the removal of disorder, but if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of virtue." In this scheme liberty is a scapegoat for license, whereas the balance of American Pilgrim thought, as was later expressed by Mark Hopkins in the mid-19th cent., was on the side of the "liberty and rights of the individual," which have their source in "the value which Christianity puts upon the individual, and fully carried out, must overturn all systems of darkness and mere authority." As Mary Locke pointed out, the principles of the American revolution were not particularly American or particularly new, for they had been in the air at least ever since the English revolutions against the Stuarts and their exposition by John Locke. Similar
ideas had been propagated by Montesquieu, and Scottish common sense philosophy, such as that propounded by Francis Hutcheson, had also preached against the slave trade on the grounds of the original right of every person to his or her own liberty. "In America, however, the ideas of liberty and equality took root and flourished with peculiar vigor, and it is in America that they produced their fairest fruit. It is therefore with special interest that one looks for their effect on the condition of the slave." 72

We may further narrow the issue and say that this sentiment of freedom for blacks had found some of its most eloquent expressions in the 18th century evangelical movement with which slaves identified themselves. A slave who was attracted to evangelicalism attributed his attraction to the promise of freedom. "I had recently joined the Methodist Church," the slave reported, "and from the sermon I heard, I felt that God had made all men free and equal, and that I ought not to be a slave." 73 Francis Asbury, the pioneer Methodist preacher in America, gave hints that he saw and welcomed the new conception of society in which blacks would have an equal share. A traveling companion of Asbury's was 'Black Harry' Hosier, a free black, who sometimes preached in his stead 74. At the Baltimore Methodist Conference in 1780 a resolution was adopted disapproving of members

72 Locke, Anti-Slavery, 1901, 49.


holding slaves and requiring traveling preachers to free their slaves. The stand was reaffirmed at the 1784 conference, though in 1785 the conference rescinded the rule about slave holding.\(^{75}\) At the 1787 Methodist Conference it was urged that white preachers should leave nothing undone "for the spiritual benefit and salvation of the negroes."\(^{76}\) Asbury himself took note of the spread of evangelical religion among the Africans, saying, "these are the poor, these are the people we are more immediately called to preach to."\(^{77}\) A Baptist preacher in Westmoreland County, Virginia, commented in 1789 on the spread of religion among the slaves, saying he was witnessing the signs of a spiritual revolution. "Oh," he exclaimed, "see God choosing the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."\(^{78}\)

Many Methodist churches reported having black members. Of the fifty-one churches represented at the 1789 conference, thirty-six reported having mixed membership.\(^{79}\) However, such reports should not be allowed to hide the fact white Methodists were not all united on the matter. Thus at Philadelphia's St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church a white trustee of the church in 1787, in the hush of the service, challenged a kneeling Absalom Jones, a black, and ordered him and

\(^{75}\) Quarles, op. cit.  
\(^{76}\) Hatch, *American Christianity*, 1989, 103.  
\(^{77}\) Cited in Hatch, *American Christianity*, 1989, 103.  
\(^{78}\) Cited in Hatch, *American Christianity*, 1989, 103. The reference is to 1 Cor. 1: 27.  
\(^{79}\) Quarles, op. cit.
other black worshippers to remove themselves to the gallery, the symbolic back of the bus, out of the way of whites. As Davis has pointed out, "Relatively few Negroes were accepted into eighteenth-century New England churches, and those few were often segregated both in worship and burial."

**Upsetting the Natural Order:**

The importance we have just noted of evangelical doctrine in antislavery has been well examined by David Brion Davis in his critically acclaimed study of slavery in Western society. He observed that in classical Western thought, slavery was the natural condition of some people as opposed to others. Thus could Aristotle claim that "from the hour of their birth, some men are marked out for subjection, others for rule." In Aristotle's view the true slave was an organic extension of his owner's physical nature, with no will or interests of his own. Within the framework in which the West is able to imagine abstract states of perfection, slavery was a perfect form of subordination, the paradigm of ideal submission. Both Calvin and Luther shared that view, so that for them, too, Christian liberty had no effect whatsoever on the accepted notion that some people are born free and others slaves.

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80 Quarles, op. cit.


In his stimulating study of political theology, the Oxford theologian, Oliver O'Donovan, makes a different case for slavery not belonging with the self-understanding of Christendom, saying when Christendom emerged it exposed colonial slavery as a recidivist movement and pushed it to the fringes of European society. Colonial slavery, O'Donovan continues, was not allowed to re-enter Christendom's mainstream economic organization, which implies that colonial slavery was alien to Christendom. Yet the fact remains, as Columbus observed, that slavery belonged with Christendom and would, he contended, advance its universal colonizing drive. Besides, enslavement "in the name of the Holy Trinity," Columbus testified, was merely the perfect form of the submission which subjects owed to Christendom, with Spain at its center.

Thus did Christendom modify the classical views on slavery without challenging them, offering slaves instead the pious prospect of freedom and equality in another life as reward for being submissive and faithful to their masters in this one. In that way Christianity offered a mere placebo for an otherwise acknowledged moral injustice: the slave and her master are equally subject to sin, but, since the master is deputy for his slave before God, the slave must serve her master "as unto Christ." In fact, from the fruits of the slave's labor, the master

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83 Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 264. O'Donovan says that abolition required only "adjusting the 'colonial system', and did not involve imagining new patterns of organizing labour de novo, since such patterns were already in place and successful throughout Europe and in parts of North America."
could make moral exculpation by offering himself "a holy and living sacrifice, pleasing to God."

By setting up God as the ideal heavenly master to whom is due unquestioned submission, we have an evasive strategy that reduces human subjects to the status of notional slaves, and, secondly, a theology that intervenes to inscribe a defunct morality into the disadvantageous relationship between slave and slave-master. A theological warrant is thus furnished to guarantee in the social realm the preserving of the servile estate by absorbing it into a collectivist religious norm, and thus condoning what Bernard Williams has called the 'internalized warfare' of slavery and its illegitimate authority. Slavery, thus, had its dialectical sting drawn, and with that all its historical verisimilitude. In its place it acquired immunity and encouragement from the resulting social procrastination and moral indifference. Thus did theology allow the wheels to be knocked off clean in any meaningful drive for abolition, ensuring that the whole matter of antislavery is left to dissipate in a fog of personal piety. Even Hegel's contention that the 'problem' of slavery is that the more perfect the slave the more enslaved the master becomes is mere intellectual casuistry. No such qualms prevented Africans from continuing to be seized and put in chains. In fact, Hegel's view opens the door to the

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depressing thought that slavery existed only to bring unreflective white owners to a sense of reluctant but necessary enlightenment. It is the masters, not the slaves, who deserve our attention: we should pity them for not coming to their senses.

The German scholar, Ernst Troeltsch, argues that such philosophical abstraction and theological idealization of slavery ends up strengthening the institution in its social aspect. Both approaches stress "the responsibility of the master for the physical and spiritual welfare of his slaves, while the slave is exhorted to love and obey his master, since he serves God and not man. To this extent, at least inwardly, the nature of the slave relationship was neutralized by the claims of the ideal. Outwardly, however, slavery was merely part of the general law of property...which Christians accepted and did not try to alter; indeed, by its moral guarantees, [Christendom] really strengthened [slavery]."86

In the event, in spite of all this sophistry and its prevailing top-down view of history, the Old World philosophical infrastructure underwent a radical shakedown in its entrenched support of chattel slavery, making way for "the emergence of a widespread conviction that New World slavery symbolized all the

86 Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, tr. Olive Wyon, 2 vols., London: Allen & Unwin, 1931, reprinted, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, vol. i, p.132. Troeltsch recalls that religious doctrine had established the view that "the institution of slavery is a rod in the Hands of God, and in this sense namely, the law of the State, which keeps the slave in bonds, is also appointed by God; thus it may not be transgressed so long as it does not demand from the slave anything which displeases God." St. Augustine adds the predestinarian view of the natural inequality of humankind.
forces that threatened the true destiny of man." Davis adduced as one reason for what he calls "this remarkable shift in moral consciousness" regarding the iniquity of slavery, an institution that corrupted the wellsprings of true religion, the new evangelical faith in "instantaneous conversion and demonstrative sanctification." The emergence of an international antislavery opinion," he continues, "represented a momentous turning point in the evolution of man's moral perception, and thus in man's image of himself. Elsewhere Davis elaborates on this, stressing that "men could not fully perceive the moral contradictions of slavery until a major religious transformation had changed their ideas of sin and spiritual freedom; they would not feel it a duty to combat slavery as a positive evil until its existence seemed to threaten the moral security provided by a system of values that harmonized individual desires with socially defined goals and sanctions." It requires a moral breakthrough, as John Donne hinted, to grasp that although reason is God's viceroy, nevertheless it is easily seduced in matters of self-interest. It then shirks its duty to defend and instead is made captive. Consequently, it proves weak or untrue. The antislavery movement was a moral breakthrough in the sense of breaching reason's self-defences, and replacing it with a new ethic.

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87 Davis, The Problem of Slavery, 1975, 41.
88 Ibid., 46.
89 Ibid, 42.
90 Davis, Slavery in Western Culture, 1988, 292.
This new ethic produced the momentous religious shift that Davis has described, and it led in due season to the related idea, then gaining general acceptance, that ex-slaves and indemnified Africans would necessarily be the cornerstone of a new society distinguished by the ethics of lawful enterprise, personal integrity, social responsibility, the dignity of labor, and the values of personal religion and free public association, a new society that would as such constitute the most decisive culmination of antislavery and a moral endorsement of it. It left the way open for a social experiment based on a bottom-up view of the world, not a top-down view.

*New Light Religion: Pushing at the Boundaries:*

Many of these slaves had been converted to Christianity and had in turn converted Christianity to their world view. The precise connection with John Wesley and with 'New Lights' religious ideas is important to this radical transposition of Christianity. Wesley had assured the blacks of Birchtown that he would provide for their educational needs "while I live," and the first Wesleyan missionary in the province, William Black, preached extensively among the blacks, and such efforts found allies in black Methodist preachers themselves, such as Boston King, a former shipwright, and Moses Wilkinson, who would soon be active preaching among the settlers in Freetown. The enterprise of these preachers and their flocks led them to join religion with the cause of social reconstruction.

The agent of such New Light ideas in Nova Scotia was Henry Alline, "neither college learned, nor authorized by the presbytery," an itinerant preacher.
from Rhode Island. He arrived in Nova Scotia in April 1776, proclaiming "liberty of conscience" and announcing that the Spirit of God was commencing a revival-type "troubling of the waters" (John 5:4). In his short life (he died in 1784 in New Hampshire at the age of 36), Alline had stirred the province, and had set church and state fairly by the ears. He shunned established denominations, whom he called "a crowd of professors" led by "legal professors," those preachers and clergy who followed the letter of the law but were deaf to its spirit. By contrast, New Light converts received their anointing from the Spirit and consequently took their authority from God, not from earthly powers. Alline's converts set up chapels as independent congregations in numerous parts of the province. However, their radical social views attracted the attention of legal and ecclesiastical authorities. The New Lights repudiated the old line religious and political consensus whereby church and state collaborated in the pursuit of a law-abiding, religiously respectable community of citizens, and instead demanded that the state be precluded from any role in religious and spiritual matters. The Church of England as the established church reacted to the New Lights by calling them political subversives and religious heretics. Thus, for example, did Charles Inglis, appointed bishop in 1787 after Nova Scotia was created a diocese by Royal decree, charge the New Lights with having "threatened to subvert all order and national religion," saying they were "almost to a man, violent Republicans and Democrats

[in other words, Americans]," and hinted darkly that they were plotting "a total Revolution in Religion and Civil Government."92 He alleged he could catch a faint odor of Thomas Paine's malevolent influence on Alline and his followers.93 By raising the specter of sedition, Bishop Inglis justified adopting the political instrument to deal with a theological challenge. A national religion, he implied, was entitled to national protection.

However, Christianity as national religion rather than as personal conviction and social responsibility was deemed by the blacks a tool of oppression and exclusion, besides being an offense to conscience. In Bishop Inglis' allegation of the New Lights as a political threat, we have an instance where New Light ideas are construed in terms of antistructure. It was a recognition that New Light ideas would appeal to outcasts and ex-slaves, and in such a society the perquisites of established office would be nullified. Anyone raised on such perks could not see revival religion except as popular insurrection, as anointing black insubordination with religious approval. As Rawlyk expressed it, drawing on Victor Turner's analysis, New Light exhortation caused people to experience "an anti-structural liminality," a ritual of status reversal, the means whereby devotees could break

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away from their "innumerable constraints and boundaries." Inglis responded by composing special prayers and having the government authorize their use throughout the province, "to impress the minds of people with sentiments of reverence - both towards magistrates and their office...These sentiments will when duly impressed Contribute much to the peace and order of society and produce a ready obedience to lawful authority for conscience sake." Preaching in that scheme of things was not a sacrament of religion simply, not just a means for regeneration, but a rule of enforcement, in fact a branch of law. As Inglis said, the object was reverence for magistrates and their office, not the cure of souls, and so he had the magistrates empowered and soldiers deployed to restrict and arrest Nonconformist preachers and advocates. As a consequence, William Black, the Methodist preacher, had his meeting and congregation broken up and scattered by soldiers.

These hostile measures did nothing to dampen enthusiasm or restrain enterprising religious agents. For the blacks, religion and freedom were in any case too closely intertwined for them to give up one or the other. Since the authorities licensed religion as a national enterprise and outlawed that form of religion identified with antistructure, they assessed theological opinion in terms of its social significance only, and required society to regulate it by legal force. According to this understanding, any genuine religious system stands by the force of social

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95 Cited in Walker, Black Loyalists, 1976, 66.
custom, with religion functioning to bind and promote society, and to deem devout
civil loyalty more important than personal faith. So the New Lights were judged
seditious, for they wished to overthrow authority in church and state and to replace
it with a warmed over personal religion. Alline had declared that it was Christ, not
George III, who alone merited unquestioning obedience, and that the spiritual
warfare that he was waging had primacy over the wars of nations. In the
atmosphere of the events of the Revolutionary War, Alline's claims carried, or
were made to carry, political meaning. His appeal to God and to freedom was
accordingly dismissed as bogus. Stripped of its pious veneer, the New Lights were
deemed a functional menace. Establishmentarianism inclines too easily to
functionalism, and functionalism tires too easily of theology.

As such, Inglis was regularly intervening to arrest the slide towards
Nonconformist deviation and its sharp tendency towards antistructure. When in
1791, for example, he visited a black community, he was shocked to learn that
Joseph Leonard, the black preacher, had not merely been leading services and
preaching and teaching doctrine, but was actually dispensing the sacraments,
baptizing children, and administering the communion. Inglis remonstrated with
him. Leonard responded to the bishop's strictures by asking instead to be ordained
and granted separation and independence from the whites. Leonard would thus take
his religion with him into antistructure. The bishop thought Leonard's errors could
be remedied with better instruction; Leonard felt it was not instruction he needed
but separation and independence. It is a classic primer of antistructure, with
Leonard's version of spiritual regeneration claiming rights that the officials insisted never existed, at least not so that social outcasts could receive unimpeachable warrant. Such conflicting views proved that "the more limited the options for approved participation in the cultural mainstream, the more refined and satisfying become the alternatives to those excluded from the approved norms."96

In that impasse, Christianity continued to appeal to blacks by offering them a chance to stand before a God who welcomed them as the equals of anyone else, a pointed challenge the officials could not ignore, or suppress for that matter.97 That is why blacks combined their project of freedom with their religious mission. They would travel to seek freedom, yes, but also to preach the gospel of human dignity and political reform. It is significant that the modern missionary movement began largely as the initiative of freed slaves and ex-captives, and carried the message of abolition as the real expression of the message of Christianity. In that scheme, Christianity as religious doctrine was reconnected with the social cause of former slaves, and became thereby a religion of antistructure. The system it subsequently encountered in Africa of chieftaincy rule and hereditary privilege it deemed as antithetical to the interests and goals of the new humanitarianism, with its irrevocable commitment to antislavery.

Colonialism, for its turn, tried to soften or even neutralize this commitment


97 Rawlyk, Ravished by the Spirit, 1984, 84-85.
by seeking accommodation with the chiefs and native rulers. It led colonial administrators to attempt dividing Christianity's spiritual interests from its social and economic interests and to place the religion under conditions of private quarantine. The public space so sequestered from Christianity would be placed at the disposal of chiefs and Muslim emirs under the policy of "indirect rule" preferred by the colonial administration. Thus administrative policy sowed seeds of deep discord between an indigenous Christianity and European colonialism, and with its successor in secularism. Even the notional ideological identity between mission and empire could not dispel that discord completely.

**Conclusion: Freedom & Pathos**

And so, to follow the story now to its conclusion, there they were back in Africa, far from being "thrown intirely(sic) out of the scale of notice," with the challenge to make liberty fruitful and multiply. They would build projects of social rehabilitation and ethical example on the foundations of liberty. Thomas Jefferson's grab-bag formula of "emancipate and deport" took no account of the social possibilities of liberty for blacks except in separation. For him, political liberty had its uses only in preserving existing social arrangements based on race pedigree, inherited status, and economic wellbeing. The blacks, by contrast, appreciated liberty for what it would do to the stigma of race and the chains of enslavement. They had allies in many officials who were roused to include blacks in the scales of notice and bring about freedom. For example, Governor Harrison of Virginia, determined to make good the promise of freedom to the blacks who worked to
capture Yorktown, said that he would lay before the legislature a bill that would give "to those unhappy creatures that liberty which they have been in some measure instrumental in securing to us."

It was with official assurances of a similar nature that a group of blacks, former slaves, renegade republicans, and wards of officialdom came to Sierra Leone as pilgrim saints. With their coming a turning point was reached. The Christianity they brought with them would take root and flourish in tropical Africa, not simply because they brought it but because in their hands the religion underwent a fundamental change. Christianity in their possession was cleared of the mists of ruling genealogies that earlier encumbered it in the stuffy chambers of chiefly etiquette. The typical scene in that chiefly environment was for a missionary personality to arrive laden with gifts of European merchandise and for him to be ushered into an ante-chamber to wait his turn to be introduced to the chief or ruler. In the meantime, the European visitor would expend gifts and presents before discovering that the natives had no intention of cutting a deal. Disconsolate but still hopeful, the European would return the next day, or more usually the next year or so, in a resolute, if by now a more forlorn, effort to secure the ruler's conversion. Contact was rarely made except with local weaklings or on vague, illusory promises. If the ruler was really astute, she would extract favorable trade concessions in return for notional political access. It was not uncommon, thus, for rulers even to demand compensation for the offenses of other European traders - the tradition of collective responsibility is a very versatile one, it turns
out. Christianity simply languished in this cat-and-mouse game. And then, finally, the same slaves, or their descendants, whose capture and sale had supported, and justified, chiefly power would arrive back as bearers of the Gospel, their extorted status as slaves the most powerful incentive for their mission whose central premise is that no human being deserved to be made slave because no human being was made such by God. Who best to champion that cause than former slaves, or those likely to be enslaved?

One story, full of human pathos, makes the point memorably. Soon after arriving in Freetown, a Nova Scotian settler ventured out into the country, arriving in the village from where fifteen years previously he had been taken captive and sold into slavery. "An elderly woman seemed much affected by the sight of this N[ova] Scotian, and spoke to her companions with much agitation. At length she ran up to him and embraced him: she proved to be his own mother."98 In such situations, the authorities commented on the moving nature of such reunions and, where the aggrieved found reconciliation, on the importance of forgiveness as a force for social progress, recognizing that forgiveness of that order cannot be imposed. Thus, a Muslim chief in Futa Jallon, otherwise commended for his "amiable character," allowed "Christianity to be good in many respects, [but] expressly objected to the forgiving of injuries, as a virtue unattainable, and

therefore not to be required."\textsuperscript{99}

Whatever the final issue, in these indigenous circumstances mission came to represent a structural adjustment of world view in the transition from medieval missions to modern missions. We should explore its implications in detail elsewhere, but here it suffices to repeat that the new kind of religious history embraced by this reorientation involves a break with dynastic rights and their encasement in chiefly caste.

Thus, in these new circumstances, then, we would have to forego the habit of looking to chiefs and rulers as the symbols of legitimate order and stability and instead turn to those traditionally at their beck and call. John Adams had once observed that the African Americans were "the most obscure and inconsiderable that could have been found on the continent," with reference to the role of Crispus Attucks, an African American, in the Boston Massacre of March, 1770, when the British fired on a crowd in Boston and killed him and two others, with eight wounded.\textsuperscript{100} The story of such African Americans is permanently inscribed into the annals of the American Revolution, and that is as it should be. However, its equally important aftermath in the consequences entailed in shifting of the antislavery strategy to Africa deserves our equally respectful attention.

This essay seeks to contribute to our understanding of the extra-mural


effects in Africa of that American antislavery strategy. If that strategy succeeded in Africa, it would deal a body blow to the slave trade and slavery, and thus demonstrate the agency value of former slaves. By the same token, if the cause of abolition in Europe and the New World was destined for success, that is, if abolition was an idea whose time had come, as Quaker abolitionists contended in the 1820s and later,\textsuperscript{101} then a successful antislavery movement in Africa would give it trans-Atlantic validity. Antislavery would as such become a universal movement of human rights, and the structures of gain, domination, and advantage that lived off it would be dismantled in the wake of the new social radicalism. Perhaps that was the cause that inspired the likes of Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles, and although they had Africa in mind, they could scarcely have imagined the full implications of where the path would lead when they embarked on it so innocently. And without such unintended consequences, history, especially the history of missions, would be merely an echo. As John Oman, the Cambridge theologian, said, God does not send His rivers like arrows (in a straight line) into the sea.

\textsuperscript{101}It should be remembered that already in the seventeenth century Quakers were busy circulating anti-slavery opinion. In 1688 such opinions were being voiced among Germantown Friends. One George Keith entered his protest at a monthly meeting in Philadelphia in 1693. In 1696 the Yearly Meeting adopted a measure to prohibit the importation of slaves and urging action for their moral and spiritual welfare. William Penn, the founder, also directed that action be taken in that direction. Locke, \textit{Anti-Slavery}, 1901, 32. Similarly, in 1746 John Woolman, the Quaker leader, was campaigning on behalf of slaves. \textit{The Journal of John Woolman}, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951, 21ff.