

Richard A. Bailey. *Race and Redemption in Puritan New England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 224 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-536659-4.

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Red, White, and Black in the “Citty Upon a Hill”

Many studies of New England Puritanism have focused on how this theological system shaped European-American society and relations among white Puritans in the region. *Race and Redemption in Puritan New England* instead explores Puritanism’s impact on interactions among Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans. By expanding the scope of the Puritan “Citty upon a Hill,” Richard A. Bailey, an assistant professor of history at Canisius College, has produced an important contribution to our understanding of the intersections of race and religion in colonial New England. To this end, Bailey has interwoven classic studies of Puritanism by historians such as Perry Miller, Edmund Morgan, and Frances Bremer with research on race and race theory by Barbara Fields, Ira Berlin, Joanne Pope Melish, Winthrop Jordan, Daniel Richter, and others.

A key argument in *Race and Redemption* is “that race was created by all New Englanders out of the spiritual (and at times physical and social) freedoms offered to Native Americans and Africans as whites wrestled with assimilating people of color into their lives and worldview” (p. 7). This worldview, which was shaped by Puritan theology, provided a means to cope with the difficulties imposed by life in the American wilderness. Yet, at the same time, it engendered tensions. Consequently, as whites came to dominate the New England landscape, both in numbers and in military power, they “relied on their seemingly contradictory theological convictions to make religious sense of their social realities” and they organized their society in ways that separated whites from people “who differed from them physically and culturally” (p. 7). Moreover, for influential Puritans like John Winthrop and Cotton Mather, the increasing white population and the decreasing Native American population signified the will and plan of God and were part of the “cosmic struggle of good and evil in the wilderness” (p. 32).

White Puritans were acutely aware of physical differences. They described Native Americans as “tawny,” “copper,” “tanned,” or surmised that their skin was artificially colored by paints). When writing about Africans, the words “black” or “Negro” usually were appended to their names, while those of mixed race were identified as “mulatto” or “mustee.” More problematic were the meanings that were attached to these physical differences. For example, some Puritans prayed for African souls to be washed white and they wondered if blacks would become physically white after the Resurrection. Native Americans and Africans were both regarded as inferior to whites in every way, including their spiritual natures. Indeed, African adults were often catechized with white children, implying that they possessed childlike learning capabilities. Additionally, some sources referred to Indians as “savages” or “barbarians” and Africans as “creatures” or “brutes.” In view of this, it is not surprising that during the Salem witch craze in 1692, people regularly attested to Satan’s presence in the village based on sightings of a black man or a black animal, a black man who resembled an Indian, or a red rat. Still, despite this alleged unholy alliance with the devil, there was hope of salvation for people of color.

Bailey provides numerous instances of Puritan uneasiness (or dis-ease as he puts it) with the contradictions inherent in their worldview. For example, New Englanders of color were offered religious redemption or spiritual freedom, but social equality was extremely rare. To be sure, special catechisms were produced for Native Americans and Africans. The catechisms for Africans reinforced their state of bondage and encouraged them not to be discontented with their lot. Thus, the hope of Christian conversion became a means to defend racial slavery and incursions into Indian territories. According to Bailey, the real Puritan dilemma was not “the problem of doing right in a world that does wrong” as Edmund Mor-

gan proposed, but in the case of race relations, it was “the problem of making a world that does wrong appear to be doing right” (p. 25).

Inconsistencies and hypocrisies in the Puritan worldview became more apparent during the eighteenth century, especially for the growing numbers of African slaves. The following is illustrative: although slaves were regarded as property, in New England they had certain rights and privileges reserved for non-property. For instance, they could testify and sue in court and inquests would be held after the suspicious death of an African. Furthermore, slaves were allowed to join churches as full members, yet this seeming spiritual equality did not afford them release from their physical bondage. Bailey does not point out that this ambiguous status was not unique to Puritanism or to New England. Similar conditions existed for slaves in Dutch-controlled New Netherland in the seventeenth century. This state of affairs did not fade until several decades after the English takeover with the adoption of more stringent laws following slave revolts in the early eighteenth century.[1] Additionally, other religious groups engaged in ongoing efforts to baptize, catechize, and admit to communion slaves and Native Americans.[2] The Church of England’s Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, founded in 1701, was remarkably active in this regard. Nonetheless, it appears that New England Puritans were far more zealous about redeeming the souls of their slaves than were slave owners in other regions. This was especially true for the colonial South, where it was feared that slaves would become less compliant and more likely to use the biblical narrative to justify resistance.[3] In consideration of this, a broader, comparative study of race, redemption, and evangelicalism in colonial America which draws on existing regional and denominational studies as well as new research would prove fruitful. Certainly, Bailey’s methodology could serve as an excellent model for such a study.

As Bailey progresses to the second half of the book, he places more emphasis on African slaves. This is not surprising since the numbers of Africans in British North America increased dramatically in the decades before the American Revolution, in contrast to the dwindling Native American population. However, in New England the numbers of slaves never approached those of the southern colonies. Most New England slaves worked alongside their owners in gendered divisions of labor, as was the case on small farms and households elsewhere in the colonies. In 1703 the Reverend Samuel Willard advised that servants and slaves should be considered as family members and disciplined only when

necessary. Even when punishment was needed, cruelty should be avoided. What is more, in some sources ministers and their families occasionally expressed feelings of concern and even affection for their slaves. Despite this high-minded advice, personal writings demonstrate that some religious people punished their slaves in inhumane and dehumanizing ways. Further, unlike white Puritans, slaves rarely had biblical names. Instead, they were given diminutive, shortened, animal-like, or, in jest, classical names to signify inferiority. Although discipline within the church was similar for blacks and whites, punishment for people of color was harsher in the civil courts and interracial marriage was illegal.

Jonathan Edwards exemplifies evolving Puritan perceptions about Africans and Native Americans. In his early writings, Indians were portrayed as children of the devil. Over the years Edwards came to regard them as his own spiritual progeny. For the most part, these changing perceptions were based on the confessions of faith and dying words of people of color as recorded by ministers. Black and Native American Puritans apparently viewed salvation in the same way as did white Puritans. Their statements usually relied on the language of the catechism, which essentially placed words in the mouths of Puritans of color. What Bailey does not mention is that these catechisms probably placed words in the mouths of white Puritans as well. Another unanswered question that arises—and which may be difficult to answer—is what did Native Americans and Africans have to say about Puritan redemption when there were no whites present to punish them for using words that digressed from the prescriptive format? In other words, was there a distinctive African American or Native American brand of Puritanism as was typical in other Christian denominations that sought to convert non-Europeans?

In 1741 Jonathan Edwards claimed that whites had a moral right to enslave Africans, but this right did not justify the slave trade or its cruelties. Thus, Edwards defended the institution in the colonies, while calling for an end to the Atlantic slave trade. Here Edwards foreshadows the views of some in the Revolutionary generation; Thomas Jefferson’s ownership of numerous slaves while attacking the slave trade in a draft of the Declaration of Independence comes to mind. For Edwards, however, it was Christian compassion and the possibility of salvation that made slavery acceptable. In sum, masters should be merciful, should provide for the slave’s basic necessities of life, should praise as well as punish and, finally, should teach essential Christian truths and urge them to repent. In this way, Edwards and others provided a place for Africans in the earthly community of saints

and in their visions of the millennial kingdom, which would remove their heathenism and inferiority. Samuel Sewall was among the few Puritans—or anyone else for that matter—who called for an end to slavery as early as 1700, yet he did not consider blacks to be the equals of whites. Nevertheless, as the colonial era drew to an end, northern evangelicals began to fuse Revolutionary ideology, Edwards’s theology, and the Golden Rule to call for an end to slavery (p. 131).

In his conclusion, Bailey reasserts Joanne Pope Melish’s contention that racial identities softened during the American Revolution. Unfortunately this relaxation did not last. Some heirs of the Puritans supported an end to the racial order and racism of their ancestors while others believed that race-based identities and categories offered the possibility of redemption to people of color. In short, many of the inconsistencies of the colonial era endured and some continue to the present.

Overall, this is a well-researched book that illuminates aspects of the Puritan experience that have not received significant attention before this. In view of this, *Race and Redemption in Puritan New England* should be considered essential reading for specialists in Puritanism in this region. Persons with more general interests in colonial America, religion, and race relations should also find this book to be valuable.

Notes

[1]. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998), 50-54; Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 18-36; Dennis J. Maika, “Slavery, Race, and Culture in Early New York, *De Halve Maen* 73, no. 2 (Sum-

mer 2000): 27-33; A. J. Williams-Myers, “The African Presence in the Hudson River Valley: The Defining of Relationships Between the Masters and the Slaves,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 12, no. 1 (1988): 81-98.

[2]. For French Protestant efforts in New York, see Paula Wheeler Carlo, *Huguenot Refugees in Colonial New York: Becoming American in the Hudson Valley* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 55, 61, 163-166. None of these Huguenots criticized slavery or the slave trade in their writings as Bailey has found for some New England Puritans. Elias Neau, an Anglican catechist and one-time Huguenot galley slave, established a school for slaves in New York in the early eighteenth century. But only a handful of New York Huguenots allowed their slaves to attend Neau’s school and it was feared that education and Christianization would lead to demands for freedom. Sheldon S. Cohen, “Elias Neau, Instructor to New York’s Slaves,” *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 55 (1971): 7-27. Also see Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 168-169.

[3]. Regarding Anglican efforts to Christianize slaves in Virginia, see John K. Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 261. In South Carolina the Huguenot minister Francis Le Jau, with funding from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, attempted to Christianize slaves, but was widely criticized by fellow Huguenots for doing so. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 216-219.

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