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Scholars of colonial America and the early republic have undoubtedly encountered a historiography which posits that slavery in the North took a more benign and less consequential form than its counterpart in the South, thereby drawing a distinction between societies with slaves and slave societies—a dichotomy associated with Ira Berlin.[1] Yet over the past two decades, historians like Thelma Wills Foote, Margaret Ellen Newell, Wendy Warren, and Jared Ross Hardesty have contested this idea, arguing instead that slavery was foundational to the political and economic institutions and cultures of the North.[2]

In *Bound by Bondage: Slavery and the Creation of a Northern Gentry*, Nicole Saffold Maskiell builds upon this historiographical development by challenging this mischaracterization of Northern slavery, which particularly endures in relation to New Netherland, the former Dutch colony that would become New York after the English takeover of 1664. According to Maskiell, this misperception persists because scholars misinterpret the actions of enslaved men and women who were occasionally able to benefit from the religious and legal institutions in the colony while under Dutch rule. Scholars view enslaved people’s ability to access these institutions, as well as the lack of a stringent slave code, as evidence “that the colony fully entered the broader slaveholding Atlantic” only after Dutch New Netherland became English New York (p. 4). *Bound by Bondage*, however, provides a convincing argument backed by exhaustive and meticulous research that rather than playing a minor or insignificant role in the region’s history, slaveholding activities in New Netherland led to the development of a conception of “mastery” among the Dutch gentry that formed the basis of their elite identity and created a common language which united them with the Anglo elite of (later) New York and New England. To this end, Maskiell uncovers a multigenerational and multiethnic network of Anglo-Dutch slaveholding gentry who were able to successfully use elite statuses built upon subjugation to navigate between Atlantic empires politically and commercially. They used the prestige and privileges af-
forded to them through “mastery” to establish legal regimes and surveillance networks that helped them accrue wealth and regional power while simultaneously perpetuating the bondage of Black men and women.

Maskiell skillfully untangles the intricate and expansive branches of prominent Anglo-Dutch slaveholding families in the Northeast—including the Stuyvesants, Livingstons, and Bayards—as well as the lineages of those they held in various states of unfreedom—such as the families of Diana, Flora, or Joe “the miller.” Despite the latter being a decidedly more difficult task due to the silencing nature of colonial archives, Maskiell embraces gaps in the historical records rather than shying away from them. By utilizing a methodology built on critical fabulation and reading sources against the grain, the author is able to reconstruct the lives of these men and women, thereby demonstrating that “enslaved laborers, acting on behalf of their captors, had access to these same familial and trade networks, and often established their own shadow networks alongside them” (p. 164). Most strikingly, Maskiell purposefully breaks from the standard historical practice of referring to individuals by their family names—a custom that reifies racialized legal systems in which white families were allowed their own surnames while the enslaved were not—and instead refers to all individuals by first names. With these methodologies, the author not only resurrects previously overlooked microhistories but also preserves them in a more ethical context.

*Bound by Bondage* is structured into seven chronological chapters, a choice that helps readers to follow along with the ever-growing and intermarrying Anglo-Dutch Northeastern gentry. Chapter 1 (1640s–60s), set in New Netherland, uses the examples of Petrus and Judith Stuyvesant and Jeremias van Rensselaer to show how ideas of race and slavery shaped conceptions of status and social hierarchy held by Dutch elites residing there. Although there were Black servants in the Dutch Republic during the early modern era, the lack of traditions of enslavement meant that for many Dutch men and women, their travel to or work with the Atlantic colonies was their first engagement with the brutality of slave regimes. Thus, in places like New Netherland, Dutch individuals learned how to become enslavers and began endowing characteristics and labor attributed to white colonists with a higher value than those associated with the unfree. Chapter 2 (1650s–90s) moves forward to the colony’s political transition from Dutch to English. Here, Maskiell shows how the elites used “wide-ranging networks of power and colonization forged through the trading of commodities, which came to increasingly include human beings” not only to endure the downfall of New Netherland, but to expand existing familial and commercial ties throughout New England, the Chesapeake, and the Caribbean during this period (p. 55). Chapter 3 (1680s–90s) maintains focus on elite Anglo-Dutch networks, using the extralegal trading activities of Tom and his enslaver, Robert Livingston, to demonstrate how these connections, which aided in the amassing of wealth and influence for the latter, were used to criminalize and limit the mobility of the former. These connections were also used to create a quasi-surveillance state throughout the Northeastern colonies with the purpose of expanding the elites’ control over the land and potential runaways. Chapter 4 (1690s–1710s) builds on this idea of a widespread Anglo-Dutch surveillance network that, when aided by tightening slave laws and a print culture of runaway ads, extended white mastery over the house to white mastery over public spaces.

In addition to the concept of “mastery” that Maskiell’s first four chapters show developing among colonial elites, a white culture of fear similarly unified the slaveholding gentry. This fear, expressed in the violence of domestic slavery and in public reactions to moments of rebellion such as the 1712 Slave Revolt, is explored in chapter 5 (1710s–20s). Chapter 6 (1730s–50s) emphasizes
that the Anglo-Dutch gentry in the Northeast were not simply provincial elites but men and women with global business ambitions who built upon the commercial and familial ties of their Dutch ancestors (harkening back to chapter 2). Finally, chapter 7 (1750s–60s) concludes with the stories of several self-liberators whose journeys of self-emancipation prove that, rather than living in isolation, enslaved men and women in the Northeast constructed their own cross-colonial connections much like those of the gentry who used theirs to keep the enslaved in bondage.

*Bound by Bondage*'s strength lies in the comprehensiveness of Maskiell's genealogical research when detailing the familial connections of the Northeastern gentry and the people they held in various states of unfreedom. This provides two specific functions. First, it shows that many of the elite who enacted slave laws or consciously contributed to a culture of racialization in colonial New York had Dutch roots in New Netherland. Their ancestors in the former colony had created and perpetuated racially coded systems of punishment and privilege to their advantage at the expense of the unfree. Secondly, outlining the marriages, families, and movement of both the gentry and the enslaved reveals the regional connections both groups could claim and occasionally use for the betterment of their position. Although at times the richness of detail provided by Maskiell obfuscates her historical analysis, the author makes a compelling argument that the system of slavery in New York was significantly shaped by its Dutch foundations and by a continuing Anglo-Dutch gentry united in a goal to preserve and expand its mastery over others. Moreover, Maskiell provides readers with a methodological example of how to ethically excavate histories from the archives while limiting the reproduction of their violence. Ultimately, *Bound by Bondage* effectively argues that New York and the areas formerly encompassed by New Netherland fully entered the slave-holding Atlantic before 1664, creating of a class of wealthy and politically powerful white elites who placed themselves in legal and commercial positions in which they could continue to subjugate and exploit freed and unfree Black men and women for generations to come.

Notes


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