

## CHAPTER 1

# Gender, Race, and Class in the Colonial Era

New research in women's history during the colonial period has retrieved the diverse voices and experiences of Spanish, Mexican, American Indian, and African American women. A shift in emphasis toward the acknowledgment of a multicultural past is widening the lens to include the agency of marginalized groups that previously were only a sidebar in the Anglo-American historical narrative.

In colonial America and in Europe, people commonly believed that women were the "weaker vessel"—morally and mentally deficient and physically inferior to men. As the weaker sex, women were subordinate to men and subject to male authority—first to their fathers and then to their husbands. Patriarchal norms prevailed; within the family and society, men were the "head," the "governing body." Women were expected to be wives and mothers and to lead quiet, unassuming private lives, like that of the exemplary Anne Bradstreet, whose literary gifts remained hidden within the confines of her family. Women who violated the gendered norms of domestic constraints and, like Anne Hutchinson, developed a public identity risked communal censure and punishment. Anne Hutchinson's religious teaching combined with her challenge to ministerial authority resulted in a court trial and her banishment from the Puritan colony. Cloistered life for Spanish Catholic nuns in colonial Mexico utilized gender and religious controls to instill discipline, including controlling women who asserted their intellect. Known for her brilliance and creative writing, Sister Juana argued on behalf of female intelligence. Her punishment resulted in coercive silencing and the destruction of her library.

At marriage, the legal identity of a colonial Anglo-American woman was erased and became subsumed under that of her husband, in a tradition referred to as *femme covert*, from the French, meaning "covered woman." This tradition ensured that married women could not own or control property, obtain guardianship over their children, or sue or be sued in court. Husbands had complete authority over their wives and children; however, they were expected to be benevolent patriarchs. Protestant minister Benjamin Wadsworth counseled husbands to rule their wives with love and kindness.

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For most women, marriage, motherhood, frequent pregnancies, the care of large families, and responsibility for household production molded daily existence. Women were expected to bear many children. Pain, suffering, and even death in childbirth were considered part of female destiny. In a society characterized by frequent births, midwives played a critical role. Colonial women actively participated in the production of the food and goods on which family survival depended. Women sustained their families by spinning cloth, churning butter, making soap and candles, and tending chickens and cows. In addition to these gender-specific tasks, women were expected to have both the physical strength and multiple skills to participate in other household production activities. Wives also helped their husbands in shoe making, inn keeping, and flour production. Some widows and single women ran small businesses and taverns. Although their contribution to economic survival was vital, women's social status remained secondary and supplemental to that of men. Moreover, because women were believed to be destined at birth for maternal and domestic roles, education was perceived to be unnecessary. Although some colonial women were literate, an educational gender gap favored men.

Male control of religious institutions and instruction fortified the restrictions that constricted women's lives. Christian teachings stressed womanly virtue, humility, submission, modesty, and public silence. Although this perception would change, seventeenth-century women were still linked with Eve as bearing the primary responsibility for the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The Puritans considered the conversion experience possible for both men and women. Nonetheless, gendered assumptions about women facilitated the attribution of women as witches. Cotton Mather, the respected Puritan minister, recorded the Salem, Massachusetts, witchcraft trials. The majority of those executed, including Susannah Martin, were women. Puritan men also strictly enforced the ban on women speaking in public or assuming religious leadership. A rare expression of gender equity occurred within the Quaker religion. Women shared with men the right to speak at religious meetings.

A division of labor and authority by gender also prevailed among American Indians. Yet, in many significant ways, as Mary Jemison's narrative of her life among the Seneca reveals, Indian women's life experiences were different from those of European women. Indian women left no written testimony. The primary documents that survive are mainly observations of European explorers, missionaries, and male colonists. Because these writers lacked familiarity with indigenous people, much of their interpretations was biased and reflected European, rather than Indian, perspectives. Despite these limitations, the available evidence indicates that indigenous women possessed more power and authority than their colonial counterparts. Although earlier studies of cultural encounters between Europeans and Indian women portrayed a decline of power for these women, newer studies support cultural adaptation that reaffirmed female influence. Molly Brant's dual alliances with her native Mohawk tribe and British colonial officials exemplified her successful cross-cultural negotiations (see Chapter 2). But neither Indian women's nor men's authority could prevent the displacement, death, and tribal loss that accompanied colonial settlement.

Within colonial society, social relationships reflected a complex set of distinctions—the intertwining of race, class, and gender. Thus, although women were, in general, subordinate to men, elite white women shared with men certain privileges based on their race and class. Indentured servants and African American slaves were at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and their lives were limited by their oppression. Statutes in Virginia and Maryland outlawed interracial unions and penalized the children of unions of white men

and slave women by keeping them enslaved. Unusually gifted, Phillis Wheatley was emancipated from bondage by her Massachusetts owner. But the great majority of colonial slaves were not so fortunate and lived out their lives in slavery. Both indentured servants and enslaved women were vulnerable to sexual exploitation and had little or no defense against unwanted sexual advances. Indentured servants who became pregnant were subject to extended terms of servitude. Elizabeth Sprigs's letter, begging her father for help, provides testimony to the deprivation that indentured servants encountered.

### ANNE HUTCHINSON, *Trial* (1638)

Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) arrived with her husband and children in the Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay in 1634 and soon attracted a following of women and men to her informal religious meetings. She challenged both orthodox religious tenets and male authority. The following document is from her 1637 trial, at which she was found guilty of holding unacceptable religious beliefs and infecting others with her views. From the orthodox Puritan perspective, her particular theological offense was her emphasis on salvation as an inward covenant of Grace. This led her to question whether the Puritan “elect,” including male religious leaders, who were outwardly pious were actually saved.

Declared guilty of heresy, she was banished from the colony and ultimately settled with her family in the Dutch colony of New Netherland (later known as New York). In 1643 she was killed in an Indian attack. Her trial and banishment reflected more than orthodox outrage at her non-conformist beliefs—it expressed disapproval of her transgression of prescribed gender roles. As a religious instructor, she violated the ban against women assuming religious authority as well as speaking in public, to mixed audiences of men and women. What evidence did the court offer that Hutchinson's behavior was inappropriate for a woman? What defense did Hutchinson provide. In what way would her audience of men as well as women further destabilize gender roles?\*

One Mistris Hutchinson, the wife of Mr. William Hutchinson of Boston (a very honest and peaceable man of good estate) and the daughter of Mr. Marbury, sometimes a Preacher in Lincolnshire, after of London [was] a woman of haughty and fierce carriage, of a nimble wit and active spirit, and a very voluble tongue, more bold than a man, though in understanding and judgment, inferior to many women. This woman had learned her skill in England, and had discovered some of her opinions in the Ship, as she came over, which has caused some jealousy of her, which gave occasion of some delay of her admission, when she cunningly dissembled and coloured her opinions; as she soon got over that block, and was admitted into the

Church, then she began to go to work, and became a woman very helpfull in the times of child-birth, and other occasions of bodily infirmities, and well furnished with means for those purposes, she easily insinuated her selfe into the affections of many. . . . But when she had thus prepared the way by such wholesome truths, then she begins to set forth her own stuffe, and taught that no sanctification was nay evidence of a good estate, except their justification were first cleared up to them by the immediate witnessse of the Spirit, and that to see any work of grace (either faith or repentance, &c.) before this immediate witnessse, was a Covenant of works: whereupon many good soules, that had been of long approved godlinesse, were brought to

\* From John Winthrop, *The Short Story of the Rise, Reign and Ruin of the Antinomians of New England* (London, 1644).

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renounce all the work of grace in them, and to wait for this immediate revelation. . . . Indeed it was a wonder upon what a sudden the whole Church of Boston (some few excepted) were become her new converts, and infected with her opinions, and many also out of the Church, and of other Churches also, yea, many profane persons became of her opinion, for it was a very easie, and acceptable way to heaven, to see nothing, to have nothing, but waite for Christ to do all; so that after she had thus prevailed, and had drawn some of eminent place and parts to her party (whereof some profited so well, as in a few months they outwent their teacher) then she kept open house for all comers, and set up two Lecture dayes in the week, when they usually met at her house, threescore or fourescore persons, the pretense was to repeate Sermons, but when that was done, she would comment upon the Doctrines, and interpret all passages at her pleasure. . . .

COURT: What say you to your weekly publick meetings? can you shew a warrant for them?

HUTCH: I will shew you how I took it up, there were such meetings in use before I came, and because I went to none of them, this was the speciall reason of my taking up this course, wee began it but with five or six, and though it grew to more in future time, yet being tolerated at the first, I knew not why it might not continue.

COURT: There were private meetings indeed, and arte still in many places, of some few neighbours, but not so publick and frequent as yours, and are of use for increase of love, and mutuall edification, but yours are of another nature, if they had been such as yours they had been evil, and therefore no good warrant to justifie yours; but answer by what authority, or rule, you uphold them.

HUTCH: By Tit. 2 where the elder women are to teach the younger.

COURT: So wee allow you to do, as the Apostle there meanes, privately, and upon occasion, but that gives no warrant of such set meetings for that purpose; and besides, you take upon you to teach many that are elder than your selfe, neither do you teach them that which the Apostle commands, *viz*, to keep at home.

HUTCH: Will you please to give mee a rule against it, and I will yield?

COURT: You must have a rule for it, or else you cannot do it in faith, yet you have a plaine rule against it; I permit not a woman to teach.

HUTCH: That is meant of teaching me.

COURT: If a man in distresse of conscience or other temptation, &c. should come and ask your counsell in private, might you not teach him?

HUTCH: Yes.

COURT: Then it is cleare, that it is not meant of teaching men, but of teaching in publick.

HUTCH: It is said, I will poure my Spirit upon your Daughters, and they shall prophesie, &c. If God give mee a gift of Prophecy, I may use it. . . .

COURT: Yes, you are the woman of most note, and of best abilities, and if some other take upon them the like, it is by your teaching and example, but you shew not in all this, by what authority you take upon you to bee such a publick instructor: (after shee had stood a short time, the Court gave her leave to sit downe, for her countenance discovered some bodily infirmity).

HUTCH: Here is my authority, Aquila and Priscilla, tooke upon them to instruct Apollo, more perfectly, yet he was a man of good parts, but they being better instructed might teach him.

COURT: See how your argument stands, Priscilla with her husband, tooke Apollo home and instruct him privately, therefore Mistris Hutchinson without her husband may teach sixty or eighty.

HUTCH: I call them not, but if they come to me, I may instruct them.

COURT: Yet you shew us not a rule.

HUTCH: I have given you two places of Scripture.

COURT: But neither of them will sute your practise.

HUTCH: Must I shew my name written therein?

COURT: You must shew that which must be equivalent, seeing your Ministry is publicke, you would have them receive your instruction, as coming from such an Ordinance.

HUTCH: They must not take it as it comes from me, but as it comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, and if I tooke upon me a publick Ministry, I should breake a rule, but not in exercising a gift of Prophecy, and I would see a rule to turne away them that come to me.

COURT: It is your exercise which draws them, and by occasion thereof, many families are neglected, and much time lost, and a great damage comes to the Common-Wealth thereby, which wee that are be trusted with, as the Fathers of the Common-Wealth, are not to suffer. . . .

*Forasmuch as you, Mrs. Huchison, have highly transgressed & offended, & forasmuch as you have soe many ways troubled the Church with yor Errors & have drawn away many a poor soule & have upheld*

*yor Revelations: & forasmuch as you have made a Lye, &c. Therefore in the name of our Lord Je: Ch: & in the name of the Church I doe not only pronounce you worthy to be cast out, but I doe cast yow out & in the name of Ch. I doe deliver you up to Satan, that you may learne no more to blaspheme, to seduce & to lye, & I doe account you from this time forth to be a Hethen & a Publican & soe to be held of all the Bretheren & Sisters, of this Congregation, & of others: therefor I command yow in the name of Ch: Je: & of this Church as a Leper to withdraw yor selfe owt of the Congregation; that as formerly you have dispised & contemned the Holy Ordinances of God, & turned yor Backe on them, soe you may now have no part in them nor benefit by them. . . .*

Then God himselfe was pleased to step in with his casting voice, and bring in his owne vote and suffrage from heaven, by testifying his displeasure against their opinions and practices, as clearly as if he had pointed with his finger, in causing the two fomenting women in the time of the height of the Opinions to produce out of their wombs, as before they had out of their braines, such monstrous births as no Chronicle (I thinke) hardly ever recorded the life. Mistris Dier brought forth her birth of a woman child, a fist, a beast, and a fowle, all woven together in one, and without an head. . . .

**SOR (SISTER) JUANA INES DE LA CRUZ, *Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess, Sor Filotea De La Cruz* (1691)**

Sor (Sister) Juana Ines de la Cruz (c. 1648–1694) subverted the gendered Spanish assumption of female intellectual inferiority. Her defiance occurred in a Mexican convent during the same time period that Anne Bradstreet modestly was combining poetry writing with wifely duties and motherhood. In contrast to a life of marriage and maternity, Sor Juana chose to live in a convent where unmarried women could reside in a protected environment. She lived an intense life of the mind, and her affirmation of intellectual and artistic creativity subverted male claims that demeaned female intelligence. She boldly defended the unequivocal right of women to acquire knowledge. Her poetry and playwrighting as well as her prodigious acquisition of knowledge attracted the attention of church officials. In time, the bishops forced her to end her writing and dismantle her library. Although she used a different name,

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she addressed the following letter to the bishop who eventually succeeded in making Juana conform to standards of quiet contemplation and, at least outwardly, nonintellectual docility.

How did Sor Juana gain information from the pursuit of ordinary domestic chores such as cooking? What does this tell you about the quality of her intellect? What arguments does she advance on the right of women to use their intellectual potential?\*

I began to study Latin grammar—in all, I believe, I had no more than twenty lessons—and so intense was my concern that though among women (especially a woman in the flower of her youth) the natural adornment of one's hair is held in such high esteem, I cut off mine to the breadth of some four to six fingers, measuring the place it had reached, and imposing upon myself the condition that if by the time it had again grown to that length I had not learned such and such a thing I had set for myself to learn while my hair was growing, I would again cut it off as punishment for being so slow-witted. And it did happen that my hair grew out and still I had not learned what I had set for myself—because my hair grew quickly and I learned slowly—and in fact I did cut it in punishment for such stupidity: for there seemed to me no cause for a head to be adorned with hair and naked of learning—which was the more desired embellishment. And so I entered the religious order, knowing that life there entailed certain conditions (I refer to superficial, and not fundamental, regards) most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, I deemed convent life the least unsuitable and the most honorable I could elect if I were to insure my salvation. Working against that end, first (as, finally, the most important) was the matter of all the trivial aspects of my nature that nourished my pride, such as wishing to live alone, and wishing to have no obligatory occupation that would inhibit the freedom of my studies, nor the sounds of a community that would intrude upon the peaceful silence of my books. These desires caused me to falter some while in my decision, until certain learned persons

enlightened me, explaining that they were temptation, and, with divine favor, I overcame them, and took upon myself the state which now so unworthily I hold. I believed that I was fleeing from myself, but—wretch that I am!—I brought with me my worst enemy, my inclination, which I do not know whether to consider a gift or a punishment from Heaven, for once dimmed and encumbered by the many activities common to Religion, that inclination exploded in me like gunpowder, proving how *privation is the source of appetite*. . . .

And what shall I tell you, lady, of the natural secrets I have discovered while cooking? I see that an egg holds together and fries in butter or in oil, but, on the contrary in syrup shrivels into shreds; observe that to keep sugar in a liquid state one need only add a drop or two of water in which a quince or other bitter fruit has been soaked; observe that the yolk and the white of one egg are so dissimilar that each with sugar produces a result not obtainable with both together. I do not wish to weary you with such inconsequential matters, and make mention of them only to give you full notice of my nature, for I believe they will be occasion for laughter. But, lady, as women, what wisdom may be ours if not the philosophies of the kitchen? Lupercio Leonardo spoke well when he said: how well one may philosophize when preparing dinner. And I often say when observing these trivial details: had Aristotle prepared victuals, he would have written more. And pursuing the manner of my cogitations, I tell you that this process is so continuous in me that I have no need for books. And on one occasion, when because of a grave upset of the stomach the physicians forbade me

\* Sor. Juana Inez de la Cruz, "Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess, 1691, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden, as seen in *The Western Women's Reader* by Schlissel and Lavender and published by HarperPerennial.



to study I passed thus some days, but then I proposed that it would be less harmful if they allowed me books, because so vigorous and vehement were my cogitations that my spirit was consumed more greatly in a quarter of an hour than in four days' studying books. And thus they were persuaded to allow me to read. And moreover, lady, not even have my dreams been excluded from this ceaseless agitation of my imagination; indeed, in dreams it is wont to work more freely and less encumbered,

collating with greater clarity and calm the gleanings of the day, arguing and making verses, of which I could offer you an extended catalogue, as well as of some arguments and inventions that I have better achieved sleeping than awake. I relinquish this subject in order not to tire you, for the above is sufficient to allow your discretion and acuity to penetrate perfectly and perceive my nature, as well as the beginnings, the methods, and the present state of my studies.

**ANNE BRADSTREET, *Before the Birth of One of Her Children* (c. 1650)**

Although Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) is now considered the seventeenth century's leading colonial poet, she did not write for publication. She wrote privately, for her family, in part because Puritan culture limited married women's roles to the home and family. In the following poem, Bradstreet addressed the possibility that she might die in childbirth. During the colonial era, death during childbirth was a significant threat. What did Bradstreet mean by the plea that her "babes" be protected from "stepdam's injury"? For whom is the poem written?\*

*All things within this fading world  
have end.  
Adversity doth still our joys attend;  
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and  
sweet,  
But with death's parting blow are sure  
to meet.  
The sentence passed is most  
irrevocable,  
A common thing, yet, oh, inevitable.  
How soon, my dear, death may my steps  
attend,  
How soon it may be thy lot to lose thy  
friend,  
We both are ignorant; yet love bids me  
These farewell lines to recommend to  
thee,  
That when that knot's untied that made  
us one  
I may seem thine who in effect am none.  
And if I see not half my days that are due,  
What nature would God grant to yours  
and you.*

*The many faults that well you know I  
have  
Let be interred in my oblivion's grave;  
If any worth or virtue were in me,  
Let that live freshly in thy memory,  
And when thou feelest no grief, as I no  
harms,  
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine  
arms;  
And when thy loss shall be repaid with  
gains  
Look to my little babes, my dear  
remains,  
And if thou love thyself, or lovedst me,  
These oh protect from stepdam's injury.  
And if chance to thine eyes shall bring  
this verse,  
With some sad sighs honor my absent  
bearse;  
And kiss this paper for thy love's dear  
sake,  
Who with salt tears this last farewell did  
take.*

\* From Anne Bradstreet, *The Poems of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet* (Boston, 1758).

**ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA, STATUTE OUTLAWING INTERRACIAL UNIONS (1691)**

This statute tells us as much about the definition of race as it does about the process of enslavement. Passed to end the development of an interracial free community, the legislation reflects the power whites assumed over people of color and the construction of permanent racial enslavement. In New Spain, a range of racial classifications developed and helped address the need for population growth while still preserving the privileged position of Spanish whites. The construction of polarized categories of white and black characterized Anglo-colonial America. Laws against interracial unions passed the status of an enslaved mother on to her children, thereby increasing the number of slaves. Some laws sought to guard the sexual purity of white women from interracial sexual relationships. In actuality, the greatest numbers of interracial sexual unions occurred between white men and women of color.

In the following statute, the lawmakers punished interracial children with thirty years of bondage. What objectives did the statute seek to accomplish? What do terms such as *abominable mixture* and *spurious issue* tell us about English colonists' construction of racial categories?\*

[1691] . . . for prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may encrease in this dominion, as well as by negroes, mulattos, and Indians intermarrying with English, or other white women, as by their unlawfull accompanying with one another, *Be it enacted* . . . that . . . whatsoever English or other white man or woman being free, shall intermarry with a negro, mulatto or Indian man or woman bond or free shall within three months after such marriage be banished and removed from this dominion forever. . . .

*And be it further enacted* . . . That if any English woman being free shall have a bastard child by any negro or mulatto, she pay the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, within one month after such bastard child shall be born, to the Church wardens of the parish . . . and in default of such payment she shall be taken into the possession of the said Church wardens and disposed of for five yeares, and the said fine of fifteen pounds, or whatever the woman shall be disposed of for, shall be paid, one third part

to their majesties . . . and one other third part to the use of the parish . . . and the other third part to the informer, and that such bastard child be bound out as a servant by the said Church wardens until he or she shall attain the age of thirty yeares, and in case such English woman that shall have such bastard child be a servant, she shall be sold by the said church wardens (after her time is expired that she ought by law serve her master), for five yeares, and the money she shall be sold for divided as if before appointed, and the child to serve as aforesaid.

[1705] *And be it further enacted*, That no minister of the church of England, or other minister, or person whatsoever, within this colony and dominion, shall hereafter wittingly presume to marry a white man with a negro or mulatto woman; or to marry a white woman with a negro or mulatto man, upon paid of forfeiting or paying, for every such marriage the sum of ten thousand pounds of tobacco; one half to our sovereign lady the Queen . . . and the other half to the informer.

\* From the Assembly of Virginia, Act XVI, April 1691, in William Waller Henning, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, 13 vols. (New York: 1823), 3: 86–87; and Assembly of Virginia, chap. XLIX, sec. XX, October 1705, in Henning, 3: 453.



**COTTON MATHER, *The Wonders of the Invisible World:*  
Trial of Susanna Martin (1692)**

A series of witchcraft trials were held in Salem, Massachusetts, during 1692. The highly influential Puritan minister Cotton Mather (1663–1728) recorded the proceedings described in this document. As alleged witches and accusers, women played a major role in the trials. The allegation that women were morally weak and easily seduced by the devil had deep roots in European history, and the accusation of witchcraft frequently resulted in death. Why does Mather seem surprised by Susannah Martin's insistence of her innocence? What particular manifestations of "She-Devil" behavior did Mather believe Susannah Martin manifested?\*

I. Susanna Martin, pleading Not Guilty to the Indictment of Witchcraft brought in against her, there were produced the evidences of many persons very sensibly and grievously Bewitched; who all complained of the prisoner at the Bar, as the person whom they Believed the cause of their Miseries. And now, as well as in the other Trials, there was an extraordinary endeavor by Witchcrafts, with Cruel and Frequent Fits, to hinder the poor sufferers from giving in their complaints; which the Court was forced with much patience to obtain, by much waiting and watching for it. . . .

IV. John Atkinson Testify'd, That he Exchanged a Cow with a Son of Susanna Martins's, whereat she muttered, and was unwilling he should have it. Going to Receive this Cow, tho' he Hamstring'd her, and Halter'd her, she of a Tame Creature grew so mad, that they could scarce get her along. She broke all the Ropes that were fastened unto her, and though she was Ty'd fast unto a Tree, yet she made her Escape, and gave them such further Trouble, as they could ascribe to no cause but Witchcraft.

V. Bernard testify'd, That being in Bed on a Lords-day Night, he heard a scrabbling at the Window, whereat he then saw Susanna Martin come in, and jump down upon the Floor. She took hold of this Deponents Feet, and drawing

his Body up into a Heap, she lay upon him near Two Hours; in all which time he could neither speak nor stir. At length, when he could begin to move, he laid hold on her Hand, and pulling it up to his mouth, he bit three of the Fingers, as he judged unto the Bone. Whereupon she went from the Chamber, down the Stairs, out at the Door. This Deponent thereupon called unto the people of the House, to advise them of what passed; and he himself did follow her. The people saw her not; but there being a Bucket at the Left-hand of the Door, there was a drop of Blood found on it; and several more drops of Blood upon the Snow newly falled abroad. There was likewise the print of her two feet just without the Threshold; but no more sign of any Footing further off. . . .

VI. Robert Downer testified, That this Prisoner being some years ago prosecuted at Court for a Witch, he then said unto her, He believed she was a Witch. Whereat she being dissatisfied, said, That some She-Devil would Shortly fetch him away! Which words were heard by others, as well as himself. The night following, as he lay in his Bed, there came in at the Window the likeness of a Cat, which Flew upon him, took fast hold of his Throat, lay on him a considerable while, and almost killed him. At length he remembered what Susanna

\* From *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648–1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1946), 229–36.

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Martin had threatened the Day before; and with much striving he cryed out, “Avoid, though She-Devil! In the Name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Avoid!” Whereupon it left him, leap’d on the Floor, and Flew out the Window.

And there also came in several Testimonies, that before ever Downer spoke a word of this Accident, Susanna Martin and her Family had related, How this Downer had been Handled! . . .

VIII. William Brown testify’d, that Heaven having blessed him with a most Pious and prudent wife, this wife of his one day mett with Susanna Martin; but when she approach’d just unto her, Martin vanished out of sight, and left her extremely affrighted. After which time, the said Martin often appear’d unto her, giving her no little trouble; and when she did come, she was visited with Birds that sorely peck’d and Prick’d her; and sometimes a Bunch, like a pullets egg, would Rise in her throat, ready to Choak her, till she cry’d out, “Witch, you shan’t choak me!” While this good woman was in this Extremity,

the Church appointed a Day of Prayer, on her behalf; whereupon her Trouble ceas’d; she saw not Martin as formerly; and the Church, instead of their Fast, gave Thanks for her Deliverance. But a considerable while after, she being Summoned to give in some Evidence at the Court, against this Martin, quickly thereupon this Martin came behind her, while she was Milking her Cow, and said unto her “For thy defaming me at Court, I’ll make thee the miserablest Creature in the World.” Soon after which, she fell into a strange kind of Distemper, and became horribly Frantick, and uncapable of any Reasonable Action; the Physicians declaring, that her Distemper was preternatural, and that some Devil had certainly Bewitched her; and in that Condition she now remained. . . .

Note, This Woman was one of the most Impugned, Scurrilous, wicked creates in the world; and she did now throughout her whole Trial discover herself to be such a one. Yet when she was asked, what she had to say for herself? her Cheef Plea was, That she had Led a most virtuous and Holy Life!

### BENJAMIN WADSWORTH, *A Well-Ordered Family* (1712)

Within the Puritan community, the clergy provided the most advice on family governance. As a Congregational clergyman, Benjamin Wadsworth (1670–1737) emphasized that the husband was the “head” ordained by God to “rule and govern.” Harmony between husbands and wives and family stability were considered essential to social order. How did Wadsworth try to enforce this? What particular advice did he offer husbands?\*

#### **About the Duties of Husbands and Wives**

Concerning the duties of this relation we may assert a few things. *It is their duty to dwell together with one another.* Surely they should dwell together; if one house cannot hold them, surely they are not affected to each other as they should be. They should have a very great

and tender love and affection to one another. This is plainly commanded by God. This duty of love is mutual; it should be performed by each, to each of them. When, therefore, they quarrel or disagree, then they do the Devil’s work; he is pleased at it, glad of it. But such contention provokes God; it dishonors Him; it

\* From Benjamin Wadsworth, *A Well-Ordered Family*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1719), 4–5; 22–59.

is a vile example before inferiors in the family; it tends to prevent family prayer.

As to outward things. If the one is sick, troubled or distressed, the other should manifest care, tenderness, pity, and compassion, and afford all possible relief and succor. They should likewise unite their prudent counsels and endeavor comfortably to maintain themselves and the family under their joint care.

Husband and wife should be patient toward another. If both are truly pious, yet neither of them is perfectly holy, in such cases a patient, forgiving, forbearing spirit is very needful. You, therefore, that are husbands or wives, do not aggravate every error or mistake, every wrong or hasty word, every wry step as though it were a willfully designed intolerable crime; for this would soon break all to pieces: but rather put the best construction on things, and bear with and forgive one another's failings.

The husband's government ought to be gentle and easy, and the wife's obedience ready and cheerful. The husband is called the head of the woman. It belongs to the head to rule and govern. Wives are part of the house and family, and ought to be under the husband's government. Yet his government should not be with rigor, haughtiness, harshness, severity, but with the greatest love, gentleness, kindness, tenderness that may be. Though he governs her, he must not treat her

as a servant, but as his own flesh; he must love her as himself.

Those husbands are much to blame who do not carry it lovingly and kindly to their wives. O Man, if your wife is not so young, beautiful, healthy, well-tempered, and qualified as you would wish; if she did not bring a large estate to you, or cannot do so much for you, as some other women have done for their husbands; yet she is your wife, and the great God commands you to love her, be not bitter, but kind to her. What can be more plain and expressive than that?

Those wives are much to blame who do not carry it lovingly and obediently to their own husbands. O woman, if your husband is not as young, beautiful, healthy, so well-tempered, and qualified as you could wish; if he has not such abilities, riches, honors, as some others have; yet he is your husband, and the great God commands you to love, honor and obey him. Yea, though possibly you have greater abilities of mind than he has, are of some high birth, and he of a more common birth, or did bring more estate, yet since he is your husband, God has made him your head, and set him above you, and made it your duty to love and revere him.

Parents should act wisely and prudently in the matching of their children. They should endeavor that they may marry someone who is most proper for them, most likely to bring blessings to them.

#### MARY JEMISON, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1724)

Captured by Indians when she was fifteen, Mary Jemison (1743–1833) subsequently chose to live most of her life among the Seneca of New York. Since she was unable to write, oral interviews formed the basis of her autobiography. Her long years among Indians make her testimony an important corrective to the Eurocentric views of male missionaries who supplied most of the written evidence about Indian customs. What does Jemison's phrase "treated by them like a real sister" mean? What was her greatest sorrow?\*

\* From James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison; Deb-He-Wa-Mis*, 4th ed. (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), 52, 55–63, 67–70, 72–74.

## 12 Chapter 1 • Gender, Race, and Class in the Colonial Era

The night was spent in gloomy foreboding. What the result of our captivity would be, it was out of our power to determine, or even imagine. At times, we could almost realize the approach of our masters to butcher and scalp us; again, we could nearly see the pile of wood kindling on which we were to be roasted; and then we would imagine ourselves at liberty, alone and defenseless in the forest, surrounded by wild beasts that were ready to devour us. The anxiety of our minds drove sleep from our eyelids; and it was with a dreadful hope and painful impatience that we waited for the morning to determine our fate.

The morning at length arrived, and our masters came early and let us out of the house, and gave the young man and boy to the French, who immediately took them away. Their fate I never learned, as I have not seen or heard of them since.

I was now left alone in the fort, deprived of my former companions, and of every thing that was near or dear to me but life. But it was not long before I was in some measure relieved by the appearance of two pleasant-looking squaws, of the Seneca tribe, who came and examined me attentively for a short time, and then went out. After a few minutes' absence, they returned in company with my former masters, who gave me to the squaws to dispose of as they pleased.

The Indians by whom I was taken were a party of Shawnees, if I remember right, that lived, when at home, a long distance down the Ohio. . . .

It was my happy lot to be accepted for adoption. At the time of the ceremony I was received by the two squaws to supply the place of their brother in the family; and I was even considered and treated by them as a real sister, the same as though I had been born of their mother. During the ceremony of my adoption, I sat motionless, nearly terrified to death at the appearance and actions of the company, expecting every moment to feel their vengeance, and suffer death on the spot. I was, however, happily disappointed;

when at the close of the ceremony the company retired, and my sisters commenced employing every means for my consolation and comfort.

Being now settled and provided with a home, I was employed in nursing the children, and doing light work about the house. Occasionally, I was sent out with the Indian hunters, when they went but a short distance, to help them carry their game. My situation was easy; I had no particular hardships to endure. But still, the recollection of my parents, my brothers and sisters, my home and my own captivity, destroyed my happiness, and made me constantly solitary, lonesome, and gloomy.

My sisters would not allow me to speak English in their hearing; but remembering the charge that my dear mother gave me at the time I left her, whenever I chanced to be alone I made a business of repeating my prayer, catechism, or something I had learned, in order that I might not forget my own language. By practicing it that way, I retained it till I came to Genesee flats, where I soon became acquainted with English people, with whom I have been almost daily in the habit of conversing.

My sisters were very diligent in teaching me their language; and to their great satisfaction, I soon learned so that I could understand it readily, and speak it fluently. I was very fortunate in falling into their hands; for they were kind good-natured women; peaceable and mild in their dispositions; temperate and decent in their habits, and very tender and gentle toward me. I have great reason to respect them, though they have been dead a great number of years. . . .

In the second summer of my living at Wuishto, I had a child, at the time that the kernels of corn first appeared on the cob. When I was taken sick, Sheninjee was absent, and I was sent to a small shed on the bank of the river, which was made of boughs, where I was obliged to stay till my husband returned. My two sisters, who were my only companions, attended me; and on the second day of my confinement my child was born; but it

lived only two days. It was a girl; and notwithstanding the shortness of time that I possessed it, it was a great grief to me to lose it.

After the birth of my child I was very sick, but was not allowed to go into the house for two weeks; when, to my great joy, Sheninjee returned, and I was taken in, and as comfortably provided for as our situation would admit. My disease continued to increase for a number

of days; and I became so far reduced that my recovery was despaired of by my friends, and I concluded that my troubles would soon be finished. At length, however, my complaint took a favorable turn, and by the time the corn was ripe I was able to get about. I continued to gain my health, and in the fall was able to go to our winter quarters, on the Saratoga, with the Indians.

### ELIZABETH SPRIGS, *Letter from an Indentured Servant (1756)*

Europeans too poor to pay their own passage to America often became indentured servants. Elizabeth Sprigs's letter is one of the few primary sources that describe the conditions of female indentured servants. As can be seen from her letter, servitude and poverty molded a miserable and precarious existence. Beyond this story of distress, we know nothing of her personal life and even whether she survived her ordeal. What evidence does Sprigs give of her desperation and helplessness? What does her style of the writing tell you about her education and social status?\*

#### Maryland, Sept'r 22'd 1756

Honred Father

My being for ever banished from your sight, will I hope pardon the Boldness I now take of troubling you with these, my long silence has been purely owing to my undutifulness to you, and well knowing I had offended in the highest Degree, put a tie to my tongue and pen, for fear I should be extinct from your good Graces and add a further Trouble to you, but too well knowing your care and tenderness for me so long as I retain'd my Duty to you, induced me once again to endeavor if possible, to kindle up that flame again. O Dear Father, believe what I am going to relate the words of truth and sincerity, and Balance my former bad Conduct my sufferings here, and then I am sure you'll pity your Destress Daughter, What we unfortunate English People suffer here is beyond the probability of you in England to Conceive, let it suffice that I one of the unhappy Number, am toiling almost Day and Night, and very often in

the Horses drudgery, with only this comfort that you Bitch you do not halfe enough, and then tied up and whipp'd to that Degree that you'd not serve an Animal, scarce any thing but Indian Corn and Salt to eat and that even begrudged nay many Negroes are better used, almost naked no shoes nor stockings to wear, and the comfort after slaving during Masters pleasure, what rest we can get is to rap ourselves up in a Blanket and ly upon the Ground, this is the deplorable Condition your poor Betty endures, and now I beg if you have any Bowels of Compassion left show it by sending me some Relief, Clothing is the principal thing wanting, which if you should condescend to, may easily send them to me by any of the ships bound to Baltimore Town Patapsco River Maryland, and give me leave to conclude in Duty to you and Uncles and Aunts, and Respect to all Friends

Honored Father

Your undutifull and Disobedient Child  
Elizabeth Sprigs

\* From Elizabeth Sprigs, "Letter to Mr. John Sprigs in White Cross Street near Cripple Gate, London," September 22, 1756.

**PHILLIS WHEATLEY, *Letter to the Reverend Samuel Oocom* (Feb. 11, 1774)**

Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753–1784) was brought to the colonies from Senegal, Africa, and purchased by John and Susannah Wheatly in Massachusetts when she was about eight years old. Her gift for poetry manifested itself when she was still a child. She was taught to read by one of her owner's daughters and also studied Latin and Greek. Women poets were almost unheard of during this time period. For an enslaved young woman, the production of poetry written in the classic or elegiac manner was completely unprecedented. Wheatley's example of poetic achievement defied white racist and gender assumptions about African women. Wheatley's poem commemorating the death of the well-known Methodist preacher George Whitney in 1770 received critical acclaim. A collection of her poetry was published in London in 1773. Unfortunately, hardship and poverty molded her adult life. Married to a free black man, she died at age thirty-one as a result of the complications of childbirth.

Although abolitionists appreciated her poetry, some contemporary scholars are critical of what they claim was her social acquiescence to white cultural standards. In fact, her poetry followed conventional British standards and themes, but as the following letter demonstrates she also condemned slavery. How would you interpret this letter?\*



Phillis Wheatley (Library of Congress)

Rev'd and honor'd Sir,

I have this Day received your obliging kind Epistle, and am greatly satisfied with your Reasons respecting the Negroes, and think highly reasonable what you offer in Vindication of their natural Rights: Those that invade them cannot be insensible that the divine Light is chasing away the thick Darkness which broods over the Land of

Africa; and the Chaos which has reign'd so long, is converting into beautiful Order, and [r]eveals more and more clearly, the glorious Dispensation of civil and religious Liberty, which are so inseparably Limited, that there is little or no Enjoyment of one Without the other: Otherwise, perhaps, the Israelites had been less solicitous for their Freedom from Egyptian slavery; I do not say they would have been contented without it, by no means, for in every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance; and by the Leave of our modern Egyptians I will assert, that the same Principle lives in us. God grant Deliverance in his own Way and Time, and get him honour upon all those whose Avarice impels them to countenance and help forward vile Calamities of their fellow Creatures. This I desire not for their Hurt, but to convince them of the strange Absurdity of their Conduct whose Words and Actions are so diametrically, opposite. How well the Cry for Liberty, and the reverse Disposition for the exercise of oppressive Power over others agree, —

I humbly think it does not require the Penetration of a Philosopher to determine.—

\* *The Connecticut Gazette*, March 11, 1774.