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The Great Awakening

When Samuel Niles, a Narragansett Indian from Rhode Island, was about forty years old, he heard about a new religious excitement among neighboring Anglo-Americans. Soon he was drawn into meetings at a Westerly, Rhode Island, church, and made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. He received baptism, and gained admission to membership and communion, or the Lord's Supper, probably around 1743. Some sixty Native Americans joined the Westerly church in 1742 and 1743, but white missionary and pastor Joseph Park noted with concern that the Narragansetts met by themselves "for prayer and praise" a couple nights a week. They were starting to function as a separate church. The gifted Niles wanted to begin "exhorting," or informally preaching, in the Westerly church meetings, but Park and other leaders did not like this idea. Park upbraided Niles and his supporters "for becoming noisy, by speaking and praying, in his meeting."

Tensions rose until Niles led a secession of native believers from the church in 1750. They met in Narragansett wigwams for their assemblies, which sometimes ran late into the night. Then they built a tiny meetinghouse, twenty-five feet square. Squabbles with white and Indian brethren alike whittled the church's numbers, but the Narragansett church appointed three of their own members to ordain Niles to the ministry. During the ordination service, there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, such that the Indian Christians wept, prayed, and cried out, all at the same time, for almost an hour. Another white minister worried that while the (apparently) illiterate Niles was well intentioned, he relied too much on the leading of the Holy Spirit instead of the Bible. He leaned too heavily, whites feared, on "feelings, impressions, visions, appearances and directions of angels and of Christ himself in a visionary way."[1]

This was the Great Awakening in the Narragansett Christians' world. The revivals of the mid-eighteenth century were transatlantic in scope and significance, and participants had a strong sense that they were part of a movement of God that was much larger than themselves. Widespread printed materials—including revival newspapers and cheap books—spread the word about revivals happening in America, in Britain, and on the Continent. They publicized the work of celebrity evangelists, headed primarily by the English Anglican itinerant George Whitefield, the wonder of the age. But the revivals also had specific local contours that revealed much about tensions over race, gender, and church practice.

Some traditional church leaders opposed the Great Awakening, seeing it all as frothy spiritual nonsense. Some welcomed the conversion of many to new faith in Christ, but worried about the destabilizing features of the revivals—they worried that if the awakenings went too far, they could disrupt traditional social lines built around ethnicity, gender, education, and age. But for many like Samuel Niles, the revivals inaugurated a life-transforming encounter of spiritual focus and authority. Sometimes they experienced transcendent dreams or visions, and received the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. For Samuel Niles and countless others who typically had no "voice" in Anglo-American culture, these were bracing, even revolutionary experiences.

The Great Awakening, the greatest upheaval in English America prior to the American Revolution, represented a remarkable confluence of a number of factors, some religious, others cultural. Participants saw the revivals as the work of God, by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the divine Trinity. Protestants in Britain and Europe had deep traditions of awakening going back to the early 1600s. Some regarded the Protestant Reformation itself as an outbreak of revival. In awakenings, large numbers of people experienced "conversion" by the power of the Holy Spirit, who convicted people of their sin and convinced them that the only way of salvation lay through faith in Jesus Christ, who had died on the cross to bring forgiveness of sins to those who would receive it. (Some also found their faith in Christ renewed during the revivals, even if they did not experience salvation for the first time.) Those who did not accept Christ's forgiveness were left to their own sin and guilt, which would rightly earn them eternal condemnation in hell, the awakening pastors taught. Salvation and conversion were works of the Spirit, given by the grace of God. Morality and religiosity remained important as signs of true faith, but in a certain sense, they did not matter. What mattered was being "born again" and made fit for heaven, as Jesus had taught in the Gospel of John, chapter 3. These were the distinctive beliefs of these Protestant Christians whom historians typically call "evangelicals."[2]

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Hannah Heaton, a farm woman from Connecticut, had also heard much about the revivals. Devout family members quizzed her about her spiritual state until she too entered her conversion ordeal. She had thoughts of suicide, fearing that she could never break through to salvation. She worried that if she went to pray alone, she might encounter her dark enemy, the devil. Indeed, one time she thought she felt the devil "twitch" her clothes. At night she would look out the window, thinking she might see the first glimmers of Jesus returning to earth in judgment. Finally, she went to a revival meeting and "the power of God came down." Many were crying out to be saved. In the midst of the noisy throng, she began to pray for mercy, and then she had a vision: "I thought I saw Jesus with the eyes of my soul," she wrote, "standing up in heaven. A lovely god-man with his arms open, ready to receive me, his face was full of smiles, he looked white and ruddy and was just such a savior as my soul wanted." Soon she experienced a peace and happiness unlike anything she had known before. "It seemed as if I had a new soul and body both," she testified.[3]

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What accounts for the timing of the Great Awakening? Participants would have pointed to God's role in precipitating the revivals, but there were clear earthly factors as well. In many of the colonies, there was a growing sense of cultural crisis leading up to the awakenings. This was especially true in New England, which had seemingly lost its way after the first two generations of English settlement. New Englanders were generally pleased with the outcome of the Glorious Revolution and the ouster of King James II and Dominion of New England governor Edmund Andros, but that success was followed by the botched Quebec invasion in 1690.

Then came the Salem witchcraft controversy and executions of 1692. Most of the accusations of witchcraft came from young women and girls against older women, many of whom were widows and may have had a reputation for irritability or unorthodox ideas. The judges in the trials admitted as valid evidence stories about the "specters" of the older women appearing to the tormented, demanding that they sign the devil's "book." Eventually nineteen accused witches were executed by hanging. (Another man was pressed to death with stones, and two dogs were also killed, suspected of being witches' "familiars" or demonic assistants.) The furor spread regionally, and more elite people began to fall under charges of witchcraft. Most shockingly, Mary Phips, the wife of the Massachusetts governor, was accused, leading William Phips to intervene. Court

proceedings stopped, and Massachusetts officials repudiated spectral evidence as inadmissible. Belief in witches and the devil did not go away, but Salem became the last mass witchcraft prosecution in American history.

New England's wars with Indians and the French became intertwined with the imagery and anxiety of the witchcraft panic. The devil was often described as a "black man" by the accusers, but to the English, "black" did not necessarily mean African—it could also mean Indian. Mercy Short, for example, was captured by Abenaki Indians in an attack on Salmon Falls, Maine, in early 1690. Her parents and several siblings perished in the raid, and Short witnessed torture and executions during her captivity. In 1692, when she began reporting assaults on her by the devil, she described the evil enemy as a "short and black man . . . not of a negro, but of a tawney, or an Indian color." Along with witches' specters, who urged her to sign a covenant with the devil, she saw "French Canadians and Indian sagamores among them, diverse of whom she knew." The devil's crew showed her a Catholic devotional text they used at their meetings.[4]

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War with France and its Indian allies and the debacle at Salem helped to convince the devout that New England was in a spiritual crisis. Puritan ministers warned congregations that pervasive immorality and lukewarmness risked bringing the judgment of God on their society. New England's seaport towns saw more and more immigrants who did not seem to care about the original Puritan mission. Harvard College, founded in the 1630s as a training school for Puritan ministers, maintained its Christian commitment in the early 1700s, but was increasingly marked by what proponents called "rational" theology and anti-Calvinism. Prospective Congregationalist ministers at Harvard now learned that a just and loving God must give all people a chance to be saved, instead of being consigned to the fate God assigned to them. Yale College was founded in 1701 in Connecticut by ministers hoping to make it a bastion of traditional Calvinist theology.

Seventeenth-century Puritans tended to focus on ethical problems and moral reform, with hope of cultivating an ideal godly society. In the early 1700s, the emphasis of preaching shifted toward people's inability to change their ways without a dramatic infusion of the Holy Spirit. Pastors called on their congregations to pray for an outpouring of the Spirit. As Jonathan Edwards's grandfather Solomon Stoddard put it, "The Spirit of the Lord must be poured out upon the people, else religion will not revive." Stoddard was the key early revivalist pastor in New England, and he saw a number of "harvests" in his ministry, well before the outbreak of the Great Awakening. New England witnessed a

significant regional revival in 1727 in response to a violent earthquake. But the 1734–35 revival led by Jonathan Edwards, in Stoddard's former Northampton, Massachusetts, church, is generally viewed as the first major event of the Great Awakening.[5]

One of the reasons for considering Northampton as the beginning of the Great Awakening was the sheer scope of the new revival. Edwards recorded that "there was scarcely a single person in the town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world." Edwards's compelling account *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* was published in London. Printed accounts of revival were one of the primary ways that those involved with the Great Awakening gained a sense of participating in a transatlantic work of God.

George Whitefield, the greatest itinerant preacher of the awakenings, was also a master of print and publicity. Whitefield was the single most important link of all the Anglo-American revivals. Converted at the University of Oxford under the influence of Methodist leaders John and Charles Wesley, the Anglican (Church of England) Whitefield soon became a fabulously successful itinerant preacher. He combined a personal background in the theater, innate talent for public speaking, and passionate Calvinist convictions to become the most dazzling preacher of the era. Crowds in the tens of thousands of people assembled to hear him preach all over Britain and America. (Critics always questioned those numbers, which Whitefield sometimes reduced in later estimates.) He forged a network of evangelical allies and supportive printers. Among the latter, perhaps none became as close to Whitefield as the non-evangelical Ben Franklin of Philadelphia, whose own renown was enhanced by his decades-long partnership with Whitefield.

Whitefield and Franklin had a warm if peculiar friendship, given that they had no "religious connection," as Franklin put it in his autobiography. Franklin saw Whitefield as a major opportunity in his publishing business, selling many Whitefield imprints, as well as some by Whitefield's opponents. By 1742, Franklin was even selling images of Whitefield alongside a number of imported goods from London. One of his newspaper ads listed such "fine mezzotinto and grav'd pictures of Mr. Whitefield" as well as fountain pens, brass ink bottles, pocket compasses, and other consumer goods.[6]

Many aspects of Whitefield's theology and methods struck critics as dangerous. He encountered opposition from a number of Anglican ministers and officials in England and the colonies, many of whom saw him as an "antinomian," or someone who preached lawless chaos. Whitefield's primary theological emphases were the "new birth" of salvation, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Anglican

critics insisted that infants were "born again" at baptism, but Whitefield and his evangelical allies taught that the new birth was a discernible, wrenching experience that each individual must undergo before she or he could have a reasonable assurance of salvation. Whitefield believed that the Holy Spirit had to bring about conversion, for lost and corrupt people would not choose to be saved on their own. The Holy Spirit would continue to lead believers, even giving them detailed guidance about passages of Scripture, if a person would only pray and listen. His antagonists saw this confidence as dangerous individualism, threatening the authority of churches and ministers, some of whom Whitefield and the new evangelicals regarded as unconverted.

Whitefield saw his greatest preaching successes during a fall 1740 tour of New England. As was his habit, Whitefield started off his visit by meeting with the resident Anglican commissary, Timothy Cutler, a former Yale rector who had converted to Anglicanism in the 1720s. Cutler wanted to know why Whitefield, who remained an Anglican, cooperated with all Protestant denominations. Whitefield replied that he "saw regenerate souls among the Baptists, among the Presbyterians, among the Independents, and among the Church [Anglican] folks,—all children of God, and yet all born again in a different way of worship." In an era of intense intra-Protestant strife, this kind of interdenominational cooperation was unusual. It gave Whitefield many more supporters than a more exclusionary minister would have enjoyed. His interdenominational bent also made him many enemies.[7]

Those touched by Whitefield's ministry ran the gamut from elite politicians to servants, slaves, and Native Americans. Whitefield once met with Massachusetts's governor, and then immediately preached to a "great number of Negroes on the conversion of the Ethiopian [Acts 8], (at which the poor creatures, as well as many white people, were much affected)." Calling the blacks in his audience "poor creatures" signals Whitefield's paternalistic attitude toward African Americans. On one hand, Whitefield gave blacks personal attention at a time when many whites worried that Christianizing them (especially slaves) might give them subversive notions about liberty. On the other hand, Whitefield never repudiated slavery, and he went on to become a slave owner himself, and even agitated for the introduction of slavery in Georgia, a colony where slavery was originally prohibited.[8]

As congenial as Whitefield found New England's Puritan legacy, he was concerned by the resistance he encountered among Congregationalists at places such as Harvard College. In published statements that would come back to haunt him, Whitefield said that Harvard was spiritually negligent, with discipline at "too low an ebb," while students and professors chased after faddish

books. By the end of his New England tour, he had determined that the "generality of preachers talk of an unknown, unfelt Christ. And the reason why congregations have been so dead, is because dead men preach to them." Even some of his more moderate supporters were turned off by such judgments.[9]

Whitefield's concern about unconverted ministers became a hallmark of the radical wing of the evangelical movement. Historians have often spoken of the debates over the Great Awakening as dividing "Old Light" critics from "New Light" supporters of the revivals, but reactions to the Great Awakening actually ran along a continuum from staunch opposition, to cautious support, to radical zeal. Moderate evangelicals were happy to see great numbers of conversions, but they worried that extremists would disrupt the churches and jeopardize pastors' traditional authority. Whitefield and his key pastoral ally Gilbert Tennent of New Jersey—whose most famous sermon was "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" (1740)—helped to create the radical impulse by their talk of unregenerate pastors. Many of America's denominations assumed a parish model, in which a person attended the nearest church of the denomination with which they identified. Tennent and Whitefield fostered a new market-mindedness among American churchgoers. If you did not like your parish church, or if you suspected your pastor was unconverted, then you had the right to seek fellowship elsewhere.

Some radical evangelicals took their zeal, and their criticism of pastors and churches, further than Whitefield and Tennent intended. While Whitefield was comfortable with a certain level of spiritual fervor in his meetings, the radicals saw wondrous, egalitarian scenes in their meetings unlike any others in eighteenth-century America. Whitefield's assistant Daniel Rogers had worked as a tutor at Harvard but left to join the itinerant's traveling cohort in 1740, and soon he experienced the new birth. Rogers went on to lead his own round-the-clock revivals in his hometown of Ipswich, Massachusetts. In those meetings, Rogers not only permitted but affirmed the exhortations of female converts whom he regarded as filled with a spirit of "prophecy." At a New Year's assembly in 1742, Rogers recorded that the Spirit of God came as a "spirit of supplication and intercession and prophecy, by which I here mean a person speaking the truths of the Word or gospel by the immediate help—or influence of the Spirit of God." He said that this spirit was in a woman named Lucy Smith, who apparently addressed the meeting for two hours.[10]

Bathsheba Kingsley of Westfield, Massachusetts, even went a step further than Lucy Smith and began itinerating as an evangelical preacher. Having received "immediate revelations from heaven" to do so, Kingsley stole a horse and rode through the region proclaiming the gospel. She repented for her indiscre-

tions before the Westfield church in 1741, but in 1743 she was back in trouble, appearing before a ministerial council that included Jonathan Edwards. She told the ministers of her intimate relationship with God, and how she was often "caught up" in the Spirit, receiving dreams and spiritual impressions as guidance. Edwards noted with dismay that she rambled about telling people of her revelations, but Kingsley asserted that she was a "proper person to be improved for some great thing in the church of God; and that in the exercise of some parts of the work of ministry." The council agreed that she had "almost wholly cast off that modesty, shamefacedness, and sobriety and meekness, diligence and submission, that becomes a Christian woman in her place." Edwards called her a "brawling woman." Not wanting to deny the reality of the Spirit's work in women's lives, however, the council did not punish her severely, only insisting that she stop assuming pastoral authority, and that she limit her testimony to private settings.[11]

Kingsley's case, and Lucy Smith's prophesying, remind us that one hundred years after Anne Hutchinson's trial, New Englanders were still wrestling with the tensions created by individual Christians' experiences in the Spirit. Moderate evangelicals had a high view of clerical authority and decorum, which meant that pastors controlled the right of public speaking and testifying in meetinghouses. Yet the moderates also believed that individuals—women or men; rich or poor; white, black, or Indian—could relate to God directly by the Holy Spirit, who dwelled in the bodies of believers. In theory, a pastor might know a great deal about the Bible and theology, yet he might have missed the most important thing—the new birth. A poor woman, man, or child might have experienced the new birth and know God in a more immediate way than the unconverted pastor. This created space for people like Smith and Kingsley to speak publicly, regardless of how it might violate conventional church boundaries. Moderate evangelicals did not believe a true work of the Spirit would disrupt traditional, biblical order in the church. Radicals like Daniel Rogers believed that the awakenings were inaugurating a new era of the Spirit, in which even women might prophesy.

The radical evangelicals also testified to a range of transcendent, mystical experiences in the Spirit, including dreams, spirit journeys, trances, fits, miraculous healings, and in some rare cases, speaking in "tongues," or the language of the Spirit. It is difficult to know just how common these experiences were, as we may assume that many of them were not recorded for posterity. But these spiritual manifestations became key tests for a person's reaction to the Great Awakening. Radicals pointed to them as confirmation of the Spirit's presence; moderates regarded them warily and downplayed their significance; antirevivalists

seized upon these experiences as evidence of the revivals' illegitimacy. Hannah Heaton's vision of Jesus as a "lovely god-man," then, was hardly unique. Heaton emphasized that she saw Jesus with the eyes of her soul, yet some even reported seeing Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, with their "bodily eyes." The physical sighting of divine beings was a species of vision that only the most radical evangelicals were willing to accept.[12]

The Great Awakening's ferment spawned hundreds of Separate congregations, some of them basically informal prayer meetings (like that of the Westerly Narragansetts), some officially breaking away from sanctioned churches and opening one of their own. But people could not open their own churches in New England without government permission, so Separate churches and pastors were subjected to fines and harassment. Many of them did not last long. Separate leaders generally upbraided their existing pastor for not adequately supporting the revivals, or for banning popular itinerant preachers from their pulpits. They also worried that churches had been admitting unconverted persons to full church membership. In Norwich, Connecticut, moderate evangelical pastor Benjamin Lord endured a separation in his church in 1745, when some thirteen members, including future Baptist minister Isaac Backus, withdrew from his church. Those who left explained that they did not regard Lord as supportive of the awakenings, and that the church did not require a testimony of conversion for admission to membership. Some resented Lord's prohibition of itinerating Separate preachers. One of the withdrawing members, Mary Lathrop, declared that the scrupulous members had a right to seek out the best church for them. "By covenant I am not held here any longer than I am edified," she asserted.[13]

Following his withdrawal from the established church, Isaac Backus (like many Separates) began to have doubts about the long-standing practice of infant baptism. Baptizing infants had been the predominant Christian practice for more than a millennium, but certain Protestants on the Continent and in England had become "Anabaptists," or just Baptists, believing that only converted adults were proper candidates for the ritual of baptism. Baptizing infants had been understood to give children quasi-official status in the churches of New England, but not full membership. By the mid-1600s, the growing number of baptized but unregenerate parents in New England had led to the Halfway Covenant (1662), under which unconverted parents could have their own children baptized. But to Baptist critics, infant baptism compromised the "purity" of the churches. In 1751 Backus came under the influence of a number of baptistic Separates, who convinced him that the scriptural norm was believer's baptism by immersion in water. Backus repudiated his own baptism as an infant

and received believer's baptism. In Baptist practice, only those who could give a clear conversion testimony would receive baptism, which served as the gateway to membership.

Backus and other converts helped to inaugurate a new evangelical Baptist movement in America. English and Continental Baptists had been present in America since the early colonial period, but the Separate Baptists had little connection to those existing churches. New England Baptists planted churches in the backcountry, and they made significant inroads in the Carolinas and Virginia starting in the 1750s. Anglican missionaries reported with dismay the churning religious diversity of the American hinterlands. Charles Woodmason served the Anglican churches of the southern backcountry in the 1760s, and he found that although Anglican parsons were rare, the people were "eaten up by itinerant teachers, preachers, and imposters from New England and Pennsylvania—Baptists, New Lights, Presbyterians, Independents, and a hundred other sects." His denominational rivals played tricks on him, once setting fifty-seven dogs to fighting outside the meetinghouse while he was trying to preach. Some accused Woodmason of being a Jesuit.[14]

The rising religious pluralism spawned by the Great Awakening, in the face of continued state support for particular denominations, set the stage for a Revolutionary-era campaign for religious liberty. Separates and Baptists did not like having to pay religious taxes to support churches they did not attend. In many colonies it was difficult to obtain formal permission to preach or start a new church if you were not a clergyman associated with the official denomination (Anglican in the southern colonies, Congregationalist in New England). Already by the late 1740s, Connecticut Separates were calling for "universal liberty" of conscience for all Protestants in the colony, and an end to persecution of the Separates. A massive outcry by evangelicals helped win full liberty of conscience in Virginia in the 1780s. New England would take the longest of all America's regions to embrace religious liberty, as some northeastern states maintained their established churches well into the nineteenth century.[15]

As evangelical faith spread south—into the least-churched part of the mainland colonies—ministers had to deal more directly with the large African population and the cruel realities of slavery. George Whitefield had addressed the slavery issue in a 1740 letter to southern slave masters, in which he charged that "God has a quarrel with you for your abuse of and cruelty to the poor negroes." Whitefield declined, however, to address the question of whether it was morally permissible for Christians to own slaves. Several years later he answered the question by becoming a slave owner. Whitefield set a pattern that became common among moderate evangelicals, who raised questions about the prac-

tices of slavery and the slave trade but did not denounce the institution itself. Jonathan Edwards, Whitefield, and other key leaders of the Great Awakening owned slaves.[16]

As we have seen, slaves came from Africa with their own religious beliefs, and most of them did not come with much background in Christianity. When they did, that background was generally Catholic. Whitefield and other evangelicals sought to convert slaves and free blacks to Protestant Christianity, and made some modest inroads among them. Perhaps the greatest successes came among slaves in the Caribbean, by the efforts of Moravian missionaries. These German Pietist evangelicals, pioneers in eighteenth-century global missions, were the most intentionally interracial in their church practices, yet even some Moravian leaders became slave owners.

The Moravians also raised up remarkable Afro-Caribbean leaders, including Rebecca Protten of the island of St. Thomas. Protten combined her passion for the Moravian faith and her creole facility with different languages to become a trailblazer among Afro-Caribbean women. Protten married a German Moravian missionary, to the consternation of white planters. She eventually returned to Europe with her husband, who died en route. In Germany, Moravian leaders found her another husband, Jacob Protten, a man of mixed-race ancestry from Africa's Gold Coast. The Moravians also ordained Rebecca as a deaconess, giving her formal ministry responsibilities in the church. She must have been one of the first black women ordained to any church office in the history of western Christianity, "signaling the power of this form of evangelical religion to take any and all into its bosom." Rebecca and Jacob moved to the slave trading port of Christiansborg, on the Gold Coast, where she died in 1780.[17]

Whatever its limitations with regard to slavery and ethnic equality, evangelicalism literally gave voice to many African Americans and Afro-Caribbean people. A number of the earliest African American published authors were evangelicals, as were many early black and white antislavery advocates. Phillis Wheatley of Boston was the first published female African American, her first stand-alone poem appearing in 1770 on the occasion of George Whitefield's death in Newburyport, Massachusetts. She won her freedom from slavery in 1773, and although some of her writing accepted slavery as part of God's providential plan for saving the souls of Africans, in one pointed letter to evangelical Native American leader Samson Occom, she took exception to slavery and the "modern Egyptians" in the British empire who bolstered it.[18]

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That Wheatley's poem on Whitefield was published in London and in multiple American editions hints at how intertwined religion, publishing, and com-

merce were in the colonial Atlantic world. The Great Awakening secured those connections unlike any other event. Whitefield set the pattern: not only did he partner with a transatlantic network of publishers, but he sought to bring evangelical printed materials into every locale he visited. When he came to America in fall 1739, he carried boxes full of standard texts of evangelical and Puritan spirituality, including hymns by English evangelical writer Isaac Watts. Antagonists like Boston's Timothy Cutler attributed Whitefield's broad influence to his traveling and preaching, as well as his flood of publications, which were "reprinted and eagerly bought" by Bostonians. Cutler insisted that antirevivalist Anglicans must fight the "enthusiastic notions very much kindled among us and like to be propagated by his writings, dispersed everywhere, with Antinomianism revived." Those notions must be countered with solid Anglican texts, Cutler advised London authorities.[19]

Whitefield's published journals and sermons took on a life of their own, spreading revival even in his absence. A group of pietist Christians in Hanover, Virginia, heard about Whitefield's ministry in the early 1740s. Their revival meetings, led by a converted bricklayer named Samuel Morris, flourished when he obtained copies of Whitefield sermons published in Glasgow in 1741, brought to Virginia by a Scottish immigrant. Morris simply began preaching the Whitefield sermons himself. "I invited my neighbors to come and hear it," Morris remembered, "and the plainness, popularity, and fervency of the discourses, being peculiarly fitted to affect our unimproved minds, and the Lord rendering the Word efficacious, many were convinced of their undone condition, and constrained to seek deliverance." Morris and his followers soon built their own meetinghouse for reading sermons.[20]

Religious topics had long commanded a top position in the Anglo-American book trade, but Whitefield dramatically increased the scale of printing in both Britain and America. In each year from 1739 to 1745, Whitefield was the most-published author in the colonies. From 1738 to 1741, the output of the colonial presses increased 85 percent, with almost all of the growth coming from imprints by or about Whitefield. Similarly, in 1740 thirty-nine separate publications by or regarding Whitefield appeared from American publishers, which accounted for almost a third of their entire catalog that year.[21]

Not only were revival publications good business, but they played a critical role in conveying the impression that there was an unprecedented, cohesive awakening spanning the Atlantic. Writers and printers also tried to set boundaries between appropriate revival fervor and the ostensible frenzy of the radicals. Boston's Thomas Prince published the revivalist newspaper *The Christian History* for two years starting in 1743. The moderate Prince's timing was off, however, because by that stage of the revivals, only the radicals were still seeing

success in New England, and Prince was not eager to give attention to their triumphs. Accordingly, Prince struggled to find any news of moderate revivals to cover for the first half-year of *The Christian History*. When he did finally publish a new narrative from New England, it focused on Joseph Park's Rhode Island revival, which featured a number of conversions among Indians and blacks. But the account gave credit to arch-radical James Davenport's preaching in spurring the awakening.[22]

Davenport had only months earlier participated in the most notorious episode of New England's awakenings, a book- and clothes-burning at the New London, Connecticut, waterfront. He first called on his followers to burn dubious religious books, including works by moderate evangelical leaders such as Boston's Benjamin Colman. Then he turned his eye on the fancy clothes he saw in the New England port town, and soon "a lofty pile of hoop petticoats, silk gowns, short cloaks, cambrick caps, red heeled shoes, fans, necklaces, gloves, and other such apparrel" was prepared for the flames. Davenport pulled off his own pants and threw them on the smoldering stack, but one courageous woman thought this was outrageous, so she snatched his pants from the fire and threw them "into his face." The crowd sided with the woman, and the incident became a major humiliation for Davenport. To revival critics, it became emblematic of what the awakenings were really about: foolish chaos.[23]

For Thomas Prince, even having to mention Davenport's name was painful. Critics lambasted Prince for the piece, saying that the real design of the paper was to "maintain and propagate a spirit of disorder, enthusiasm and separation in the land." How could Prince publicize a Davenport-influenced event, when Prince had already joined moderate evangelical pastors in denouncing the radical preacher as unfit to speak in the region's churches? Prince did not attempt to respond, but he soon published an account of an awakening in Wrentham, Massachusetts, which the contributors noted was free of "trances, visions, revelations," censoriousness, or reckless exhorters.[24]

Regardless of the moderate evangelicals' struggles, the revivals went on, as did missions work among Native Americans. That work had been hamstrung by the vicious wars of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but the Great Awakening reignited evangelicals' commitment to reaching Native Americans with their gospel. In 1741, Presbyterian missionary Azariah Horton, operating under the auspices of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, began working among Montauk and Shinnecock Indians on southern Long Island, New York. A Scottish evangelical magazine, the *Christian*

Monthly History, subsequently published Horton's accounts of his ministry, further sealing the transatlantic cohesion of the revivals that evangelical publications fostered.

As Horton preached and visited "from Wigwaam to Wigwaam," he found that Indian women ("Squaws") showed the most spiritual interest. One woman told him how she had come under conviction of sin but that "the Lord Jesus appeared to her exceedingly lovely; and that the load of guilt she felt before, was now gone." One of the few Indian men to whom he ministered was on his deathbed, but he claimed that he "saw Christ, and hoped that he should go to a good place." Even here the radical-moderate tension concerned Horton, who clarified that he did not suppose that this man "saw Christ with his bodily eyes," but instead meant he saw Jesus with his heart. By 1743, Horton became concerned about the influence of radical exhorters who were "strengthening the interest of Satan." Horton wrote this the same day as James Davenport's book-burning in New London. Horton and Davenport were both natives of Southold, Long Island, and Long Island became one of the key battlegrounds between moderates and radicals for both white and Indian adherents.[25]

Jonathan Edwards also took up the banner of Indian missions when he was dismissed from his Northampton congregation in 1750 in an ugly controversy over its policy on admission to the Lord's Supper. From the early days of his pastoral career, he had expressed negative sentiments about the Indians' spiritual state, assuming that they were bereft of true religion, and unwittingly under the sway of Satan. "The devil sucks their blood," he said, and outside of accepting Christ, they could only expect condemnation in eternal hell. If Edwards's views sound strident to modern ears, it may help to remember that he had an aunt and two cousins killed in a notorious 1704 Kahnawake Indian raid on Deerfield, Massachusetts. His early pastoral career coincided with Father Rale's War in northern New England. But Edwards also had reasons to take a more positive view of Native American potential, especially because of converts made by his disciple, missionary David Brainerd. Edwards edited and published Brainerd's diary, which became one of the most influential missionary accounts in Anglo-American history. Edwards did not hesitate to affirm the sincere faith of Indian converts under Brainerd's watch. One Native American woman evidenced, in trademark Edwardsian terms, "a true spiritual discovery of the glory, ravishing beauty, and excellency of Christ."[26]

When Edwards and his family relocated to the mission at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, his sermons seemed rhetorically simpler than those at Northampton, but they remained theologically consistent. Unlike the views of Jesuit missionaries in New France regarding Indian spiritual practices, Edwards did not see

any glimmers of Christianity in native religion, but he did insist that all people were equal in sin and their need for salvation. He told the Stockbridge Indians that the English "are no better than you in no respect." New Englanders knew the gospel, but they had sinfully neglected to bring it to the Indians. Many whites in America called themselves Christians, but in reality they had "wicked hearts and live wicked lives, are the devil's people as well as the heathen. They are on the devil's side, not on [Christ's] side," he confided to them. The pastor denounced Dutch and English traders who preferred to keep Indians illiterate, and thereby easily duped, as well as the French Catholic missionaries who would not give proselytes the Bible in the vernacular. To be fair, Edwards did not seek to learn the Stockbridges' language, either.[27]

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The most influential Native American evangelical convert in the eighteenth century was Mohegan pastor Samson Occom, who emphasized his background in "heathenism" prior to the coming of the Great Awakening revivalists. New Englanders had actually made a number of efforts, at Mohegans' and other Indians' request, to bring Christian education into their communities before the revivals, but Occom would recall the coming of James Davenport and other English pastors as a major break with the past. God used the awakeners' preaching "to bless and accompany with divine influences, to the conviction and saving conversion of a number" of Mohegans, Occom said. Occom went through a six-month conversion ordeal before making his "discovery of the way of salvation through Jesus, [being] enabled to put my trust in him alone for life and salvation."[28]

Occom began itinerating among the Mohegans, and Lebanon, Connecticut, minister Eleazar Wheelock took him on as a student. For decades Wheelock worked on abortive plans to start an evangelical Indian school, and Occom became his star pupil and key exhibit for the promise of Native American education. In the late 1740s, Occom moved to Montauk, Long Island, serving as a teacher and (unordained) pastor to area Indians, some of whom had become disaffected from missionary Azariah Horton. Occom wrote that "Enthusiastical Exhorters" from New England had abetted their falling away. Although Occom positioned himself against radical Separatism, he fostered a kind of de facto Indian Separatism of the kind seen under Samuel Niles's ministry in Rhode Island. Horton became discouraged with Indians' preference for Native American pastors, and soon requested a transfer to an Anglo congregation in New Jersey.[29]

In Horton's absence, Occom emerged as the key evangelical Indian pastor

in New England, traveling between Indian settlements on Long Island and in New England. He began receiving a stipend from the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, Horton's sponsoring agency. White-led ecclesiastical bodies were hesitant to ordain him, so he did not receive this recognition until a decade after he became the leading Native American minister on Long Island. In the 1759 ordination sermon, Samuel Buell, an influential white pastor on Long Island, compared Occom's ministerial successes to happenings in the Seven Years' War, which was reaching its height in North America. Both developments suggested that the prophesied "Latter-Day Glory" was dawning, Buell proclaimed. Missionary successes and the military defeat of Catholic powers brought thoughts of the last days to the minds of evangelicals.[30]

In spite of this recognition, Occom continued to feud with white pastors such as New London minister David Jewett, who in 1765 initiated a host of charges against Occom, trying to deprive him of missionary support. Ultimately Occom was forced to apologize for getting involved in political wrangling over a Mohegan land controversy in Connecticut. Although the Indian pastor's reputation was now damaged, Wheelock still thought he would be valuable as a fundraiser for the Indian school project. In 1765 Wheelock sent Occom to England for what became a lucrative three-year tour there. But upon his return, Occom found his wife and children nearly destitute, even though Wheelock had promised to look after them. Renewed charges of drunkenness and other sins flew against the Indian pastor. In a final indignity, Wheelock gave up on the plan for the Indian school, relocating the project to New Hampshire, where it became Dartmouth College and focused on white pupils. The disgusted Occom broke with Wheelock, writing that he was "jealous that instead of your seminary becoming Alma Mater, she will be too Alba Mater [white mother] to suckle the Tawnies." Using characteristic anti-popery language, Occom said that the school was "already adorned up too much like the Popish Virgin Mary." Wheelock had sent him as a "gazing stock" to England, only to betray the cause of Christian education for Indians upon his return. Occom and other evangelical Indians decided to relocate in the 1780s to a new Native American settlement, Brothertown, in New York. Although Brothertown was not that successful at attracting mass Indian relocation, many of its leaders had once attended Wheelock's Indian school.[31]

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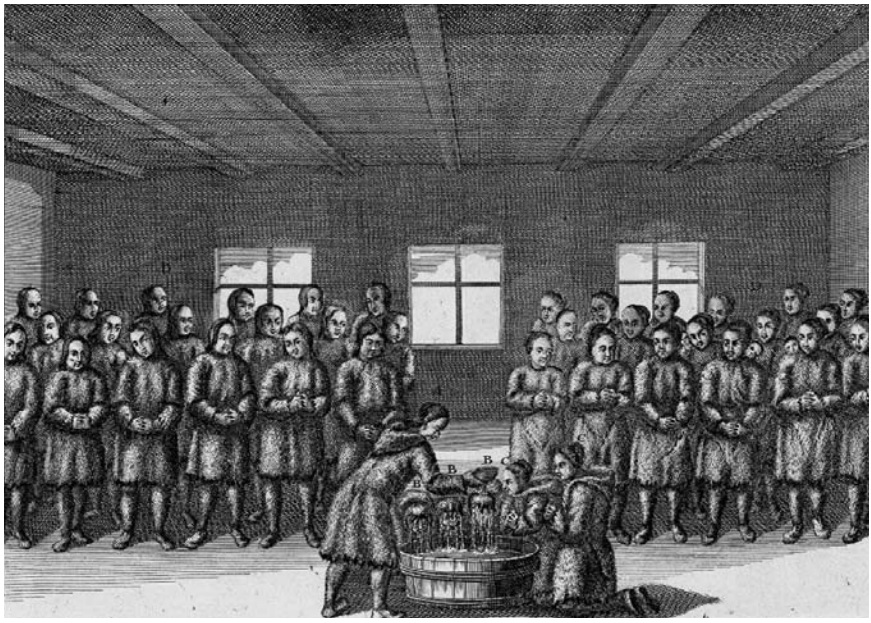
Occom and Wheelock's difficult relationship suggested both the promise and limitations of evangelicals overcoming ethnic boundaries in the era of the Great Awakening. The evangelical message held seeds of radical equality: whether

whites, blacks, Indians; slave or free; male or female; educated or uneducated; all stood equal before the cross of Christ. All believers could commune with directly with God, through the Holy Spirit. In episodes from female exhorters to early antislavery sentiments, these egalitarian impulses surged at times, and often fell away again. But as a catalyst for potential social change and democratic notions, the Great Awakening had few equals in early American history.

The religion of the Great Awakening crystallized changes in commerce and print, too. Whitefield and his followers forever clinched the Anglo-American connection between faith and publishing. In the process Whitefield himself became the most famous man in the colonies, putting an indelible imprint on early American culture, trade, and religion. But for converts like Samuel Niles, Hannah Heaton, and Samson Occom, the significance of the Great Awakening was not in social power, nor in cultural change. It was in the individual's ability to find a right standing before God. The experience of the new birth put many, though certainly not all, on a road of lifelong devotion to the precepts of evangelical faith. That kind of faith would have enduring consequences in American history.



Moravian Baptism, from *Short Account of the United Brethren Church* (1762). Photograph copyright 2014 by Hansmuller, Wikimedia Commons.

ITINERANT PREACHER GEORGE WHITEFIELD MINISTERS TO AFRICAN AMERICANS AND WOMEN IN PHILADELPHIA (1740)

From George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia* (London, 1741), 36–38.

Conversed also with a poor Negroe Woman, who has been visited in a very remarkable Manner. GOD was pleased to convert her by my Preaching the last Fall; but being under Dejections on *Sunday* Morning, she prayed that Salvation might come to her Heart, and that the LORD would be pleased to manifest himself to her Soul that Day. Whilst she was at Meeting, hearing one Mr. M—n, a Baptist Preacher, whom the LORD has been pleased lately to send forth, the Word came with such Power upon her Heart, that at last she was obliged to cry out; and such a great Concern also fell upon many in the Congregation, that several betook themselves to secret Prayer. The Minister stop'd,

"Phillis Wheatley, Negro servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston" (1773). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

and several persuaded her to hold her Peace: But the Glory of the Lord shone so brightly round about her, that she could not help praising and blessing GOD, and telling how GOD was revealing himself to her Soul. After some Time, she was taken out of the Meeting-House; but she fell upon her Knees, praising and blessing GOD. She continued in an Agony for some considerable Time; and afterwards came in and heard the Remainder of the Sermon.—Many since this, have called her mad, and said she was full of new Wine: But the Account she gave me was rational and solid, and I believe in that Hour the LORD JESUS took a great Possession of her Soul. Such Cases indeed have not been very common: But when an extraordinary Work is carrying on, GOD generally manifests himself to some Souls in this extraordinary Manner. And I doubt not, but when the poor Negroes are to be called, GOD will highly favour them, to wipe off their Reproach, and to shew that *he is no Respecter of Persons, but that whosoever believeth in him shall be saved.*

Preached in the Morning about eleven to 6 or 7000 People. Had great Freedom of Spirit, and cleared myself from some Aspersions that had been cast upon

my Doctrine, as tho' it tended to *Antinomianism*. But I abhor the Thoughts of it; and whosoever entertains the Doctrines of Free-Grace in an honest Heart, will find, they will in their own Nature cause him to be fruitful in every good Word and Work.—Many expressed how the Power of GOD was amongst them; and I believe GOD has much People in *Philadelphia* City. The Congregations are very large and serious, and I have scarce preached this Time amongst them but I have seen a stiring amongst the dry Bones.—At five in the Evening I preached again with the like Power, but rather to a larger Audience; and after Sermon rode ten Miles to a Friend's House, that I might be in readiness to preach according to Appointment the next Morning.—How differently am I treated from my Master? He taught the People by Day, and abode all Night upon the Mount of Olives. He had not where to lay his Head: But go where I will, I find People with great Gladness receiving me into their Houses.—*Lord, I lack for nothing: O prepare me for a Suffering Time, and make me willing, naked, to follow a naked Christ. Amen. Amen.*

PENNYPACK AND *PHILADELPHIA*

Friday, May 9. Preached at *Pennypack*, about three Miles Distance from the House where I lay, to about 2000 People. Eat a little Dinner. Came to *Philadelphia* about two in the Afternoon.—Agreed with Persons to build my Negroe Schools on the Land which I have lately purchased; preached in the Evening with great Freedom and Power; and afterwards began a Society of young Men, many of whom I trust will prove good Soldiers of JESUS CHRIST. *Amen, Lord Jesus, Amen and Amen!*

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Saturday. May 10. Tho' GOD has shewn me Things already in this Place, yet to To-day I have seen greater. I preached twice with Power, and to larger Congregations than ever: And in the Evening went to settle a Society of young Women, who I hope will prove wise Virgins.—As soon as I entered the Room, and heard them singing, my Soul was uncommonly delighted. When the Hymn was over, I desired to pray before I began to converse: But, contrary to my Expectations, my Soul was so carried out that I had not Time to talk at all. A wonderful Power was in the Room, and with one Accord, they began to cry out and weep most bitterly for the Space of half an Hour. They seemed to be under the strongest Convictions, and did indeed seek JESUS sorrowing. Their Cries might be heard a great Way off. When I had done, I thought proper to leave them at their Devotions. They continued in Prayer (as I was informed by one of them afterwards) for above an Hour, confessing their most secret Faults: And at length the

Agonies of some were so strong, that five of them seemed affected as those that are in Fits.—The present Captain of our Sloop going near the Water-side, was called into a Company almost in the same Circumstances; and at Midnight I was desired to come to one who was in strong Agonies of Body and Mind, but felt somewhat of Joy and Peace, after I had prayed with her several Times. Her Case put me in Mind of the young Man whom the Devil tore, when he was coming to JESUS. Some suchlike bodily Agonies, I believe, are from the Devil; and now the Work of GOD is going on, he will, no doubt, endeavour by *these* to bring an evil Report upon it.—*But, O lord, for thy Mercy's Sake, rebuke him; and tho' he may be permitted so bite thy Peoples Heel, fulfil thy Promise, and let the Seed of the Woman bruise his accursed Head. Amen. Amen!*

ANGLICAN MINISTER THOMAS BARTON DESCRIBES HIS MINISTRY TO THE DIVERSE POPULATION OF PENNSYLVANIA (1764)

From William Stevens Perry, ed., *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church, vol. 2—Pennsylvania* (Hartford, Conn., 1871), 366–70.

Mr. BARTON to the Secretary.
(EXTRACT.)
Lancaster in Pennsylvania, Nov^{r} 16th, 1764.
REV^{D} SIR,

This mission then takes in the whole of Lancaster county (80 miles in length and 26 in breadth), part of Chester County and part of Berks, so that the circumference of my stated mission only, is 200 miles. The County of Lancaster contains upwards of 40,000 Souls; of this Number not more than 500 can be reckon'd as belonging to the Church of England; the rest are German Lutherans, Calvinists, Mennonists, Moravians, New Born, Dunkars, Presbyterians, Seceders, New Lights, Covenanters, Mountain Men, Brownists, Independents, Papists, Quakers, Jews, &c. Amidst such a swarm of Sectaries, all indulged and favored by the Government, it is no wonder that the National Church should be borne down. At the last Election for the county to choose Assemblymen, Sheriff, Coroner, Commissioners, Assessors, &^{c}., 5000 Freeholders voted, and yet not a single member of the Church was elected into any of these offices. Notwithstanding these and the like discouragements, I have the satisfaction to assure the Hon^{ble} Society that my people have continued to give proofs of that

submission and obedience to civil authority, which it is the glory of the Church of England to inculcate; and whilst faction and party strife have been rending the province to pieces, they behaved themselves as became peaceable and dutiful subjects, never intermeddling in the least. Suffer me to add, Sir, that in the murder of the Indians in this place and the different insurrections occasioned by this inhuman act, not one of them was ever concerned. Justice demands this testimony from me in their favour; as their conduct upon this occasion has gained them much credit and honour. Upon the whole, the Church of England visibly gains ground throughout the province. The mildness and Excellency of her Constitution, her moderation and charity, even to her Enemies, and (I hope I may be indulged to say), the indefatigable labours of her Missionaries, must at length recommend her to all except those who have an hereditary prejudice and aversion to her. . . .

The Presbyterians are in much disrepute with all the other Sects and seem to be at a stand. They gain no accessions except from the Importations of their own Society from the North of Ireland, and yet what is strange Numbers of their young Men are daily emancipated by the Colleges of New England and the Jersey who are Licens'd by their Presbyteries, and sent by scores into the world in search of a Flock. But they are a people who are unsteady and much given to change, fond of Novelty, and easily led away by every kind of Doctrine. This disposition will ever be a bar to their encrease. The Seceders are making great Havock among them and are proselyting them by thousands to their opinions. These last, however, are a set of Men who under a Monarchial Government I think cannot subsist long. Their interest upon their own principles must undoubtedly destroy itself.

The Church of England then must certainly prevail at last. She has hitherto stood her Ground amidst all the rage and wildness of fanaticism; and whilst Methodists and New Lights have roamed over the Country, "leading captive silly women" and drawing in thousands to adopt their strange and Novel doctrines the Members of this Church (a few in Philadelphia excepted) have "held fast the professions of their faith without wavering," and if deprived, as she is, of any legal establishment in her favour, and remote from the Immediate Influence and direction of her lawful Governors the Bishops, she has stood unmoved and gained a respectable footing, what might be expected if these were once to take place?

The Establishment of Episcopacy in America has been long talked of and long expected; and I humbly beg the Hon'ble Society's pardon if I should take the liberty to observe that this could never in any former time be introduced with more success than at present. Many of the principal Quakers wish for it in hopes it might be a check to the growth of Presbyterianism, which they

dread, and the Presbyterians, on the other hand would not chuse to murmur at a time when they are obliged to keep fair with the Church whose assistance they want against the Combinations of the Quakers who would willingly crush them. I hope to be indulged if with all humility I should further observe that it is thought the lands lately belonging to the Romish Clergy in Canada, are sufficient to support a Bishop in America, and a number of Missionaries in the new Conquests without adding to the burden of the Mother Country; and that His Majesty if properly applied to would be graciously pleased to appropriate them to this use. These things perhaps have been already mentioned to and considered by the Society. But the Affection which I bear to the Church of England would not suffer me to omit any hint that I thought might be an advantage to her.

As it will be my highest ambition in life to spend and be spent in promoting the Kingdom of Christ, I shall think it the duty and Glory of my office whenever a door is opened to preach the "Glad tidings of Salvation" to the unenlightened Heathen around me. But the time for doing this seems yet at a distance. The Indian war still rages; and the fierceness and barbarity of these faithless wretches at present strike a dread and terror upon any attempts of this kind. Colonel Boquet is now at the Head of a large Body of Troops in the heart of their Country; and it is hoped will reduce them to such terms as they will not for the future dare to violate. Whenever this is done, Missionaries may be able, under the influence and direction of Heaven to bring Numbers of these poor Infidels to the knowledge of the true God and to embrace the Gospel of his Blessed Son. Notwithstanding the hardships and difficulties that must unavoidably attend this great work I shall never refuse to bear my part in it when prudence and a prospect of success shall invite to it. I have already a very laborious part in the Vineyard as will appear from the following view of the different Churches under my pastoral care.

The town of Lancaster contains about 600 houses, and is a very respectable and wealthy place. It has a large and elegant German Lutheran Church, a Calvinist Church, a Moravian Church, a Quaker Meeting, Presbyterian Meeting, a Popish Chapel, constantly supplied by Jesuitical Missionaries, besides the Church under my care which is a Stone Building with a handsome Steeple and neatly finished within. . . .

At these Churches I officiate Sunday about alternately, and have never to my knowledge been absent once, even in the severest weather except detained by sickness, to which I was always happy enough to be a stranger till of late. I have baptized within this twelvemonth 115 Infants, 12 White Adults and 2 Black ones. Four or five of these were Converts from Quakerism. The rest were such whose parents had belonged to the Church, but dying early they neglected this

Sacrament till roused to consider the great necessity of it. They all came to the Font well prepared, and were able to give a good account of their Faith. The Catechetical Instructions to my young people are never omitted; and here I have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of the Catechisms sent for their use, for which in their name I return many thanks. They were very acceptable, and I am persuaded will be useful. . . .

Besides these stated duties I am often called 10, 15, or 20 Miles to visit the sick, bury the dead, &c., which greatly adds to my fatigue. My Itinerancy also bears heavy upon me in my present state of health. . . .

PHILLIS WHEATLEY ON SLAVERY (1774)

From Phillis Wheatley to Samson Occom, Feb. 11, 1774, from *Boston Post-Boy*, Mar. 14, 1774, p. 3.

Reverend and honored 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 reigned so long, is converting into beautiful Order, and reveals more and more clearly, the glorious Dispensation of civil and religious Liberty, which are so inseparably united, 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 honor upon all those whose Avarice impels them to countenance and help forward the 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.