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## The Economy of Evangelism in the Colonial American South

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The Economy of Evangelism in the Colonial American South

A Thesis Presented

by

JULIA CARROLL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2017

History

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Approved as to style and content by:

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Robert Cox, Chair

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John Higginson, Member

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Jennifer Heuer, Member

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Brian Ogilvie, Chair, History Department

## DEDICATION

To everyone who has encouraged me along the way;  
To AmyL, who made me listen to them, and if not to them, to her;  
To the people of the past, thank you for leading me to your stories.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my incredibly kind and talented committee members – Rob Cox, Jennifer Heuer, and John Higginson – for always making time to read, edit, and critique my work. These past two years they have each shone light on my academic strengths, identified and assisted me in sorting out any weaknesses, and helped me forge my own path as a historian. Their collective guidance has made me a better scholar, and I am truly honored to have had the opportunity to work with each of them.

Thanks to Professor Joye Bowman and the UMass Amherst Department of History for awarding me a travel grant in Summer 2016, thereby enabling me to visit archives and plantations in South Carolina and Georgia. Being physically present in the same latitude as the historical figures central to my research proved an invaluable tool in the development of my thesis; any semblance of the poetic found in this work is thanks to that trip. Thanks also to Professor Barbara Krauthamer for research recommendations.

Many thanks the Special Collections staff at the College of Charleston for their careful attention to my archival needs; to the kind folks at the Charleston Public Library who helped me figure out how to work the microfilm machine; to the archival attendants at the Bull Street Library who eagerly directed me to Whitefield's journals; and to the nice people at Bethesda who let me tour the property. I hope to visit again soon.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to my fellow grad students, whose friendship, humor, and integrity have sustained me during this journey. You are an inspiring force and I will be forever grateful that our paths intersected when they did.

ABSTRACT

THE ECONOMY OF EVANGELISM IN THE COLONIAL AMERICAN SOUTH

MAY 2017

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Eighteenth-century Methodist evangelism supported, perpetuated, and promoted slavery as requisite for a productive economy in the colonial American South. Religious thought of the First Great Awakening emerged alongside a colonial economy increasingly reliant on chattel slavery for its prosperity. The records of well-traveled celebrity minister and provocateur of the Anglican tradition, George Whitefield, suggest how Calvinist-Methodist evangelicals viewed slavery as necessary to supporting colonial ministerial efforts. Whitefield's absorption of and immersion into American culture is revealed in his owning a plantation, portraying a willingness to sacrifice the mobility of the disfranchised for widespread consumption of evangelical thought. A side effect of this was free and formerly enslaved individuals of African descent gained direct access to itinerancy in the post-Revolutionary Atlantic world, as evidenced by the multi-racial ministerial network of Whitefield's proslavery benefactor, Selina Hastings. Paradoxically, southern evangelicalism appealed to the disfranchised while perpetuating slavery as a socially normative, religiously-sanctioned institution.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“A historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly... I have to make the silences speak for themselves.”*

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past*

To travel over land within the coastal lowcountry of the American South is to bear witness to legacies stemming from distinct manifestations of eighteenth-century colonial thought. Flanking major interstate highways are large swaths of open fields, land once intended for agricultural production with labor provided by field hands of the unfree, now home to structures so familiar to present-day Americans they seem to have emerged from the soil itself. Stuccoed strip malls, hotel parking lots, chain restaurants with flashing neon signs, these enterprises which make up our concrete-and-asphalt American dream were built upon the backs of the disfranchised: indentured servants brought from the “old world” to the new, indigenous people squeezed out or pushed inland, Africans captured on one continent and released into bondage on another, British artisans-turned-mill-workers whose livelihoods depended on slaves’ labor across the ocean, disadvantaged sharecroppers who chose to work the land of someone else rather than taking the alternative path toward starvation. The modern commercialization of the landscape is a reflection of the past, a new skin on an old design attempting to mask harsh historical realities of colonial-era land acquisition, cultivation, and exploitation.

Beyond the outlet mall, adjacent to the gas station, down the road from the Cracker Barrel, you will find similarly familiar structures that come in equally diverse

shapes, sizes, and intent. A squat cinder block building here, a windowless metal structure resembling a small airplane hangar there; a traditionally whitewashed chapel or a plain-faced red brick building, both donning humble steeples; a sprawling hall built with local granite and stretching the length of a city block, showcasing dozens upon dozens of ornate stained glass windows; an arena-sized complex boasting stadium seating, a hip cafe, and shuttle buses to carry participants to and from multi-leveled parking lots; these days, Methodist, transdenominational, and nondenominational evangelical churches come in all shapes and sizes. With origins stemming quite literally from the fields of colonial America, what was once a new religious movement has been incorporated into the mainstream via a multitude of façades, demeanors, and adaptations of its previous self. As religious historian Jon Butler asserts, American Christianity did not flee its European roots so much as pursue them in new ways.<sup>1</sup> Methodist evangelism is as rooted in the red clay of the American South as its business-minded, plantation-owning counterparts. History shows these two entities to have been sometimes indiscernible, having sprouted contemporaneously and, as this paper will argue, from the same seed.

The tendency of non-religious historians to corral rich histories into a few tidy and predictable set of events occurring once per century – America’s allegedly Puritan foundations, the emergence of Protestant denominationalism during our so-called “Great Awakening,” post-Revolutionary abolitionist activism, Civil Rights-era struggles for racial equality led by Christian allies – both limits conceptualization of their sphere of influence and trivializes the gravity of historical events. If mainstream memory allots

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<sup>1</sup>Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): 99.

only enough space in its collective hard drive for a singular religious focus per century, religious historians have much work yet to do; history is never that cut-and-dried. Exploring intersections of seemingly disparate topics reveals commonalities and overlapping influences, reframing and enhancing the broader historical narrative.

This history looks at eighteenth-century Christian evangelism and the role it played in fostering, perpetuating, and normalizing plantation culture and economy in the colonial lowcountries of Georgia and South Carolina. It explores how a new religious movement like Methodism made space for the emergence of a uniquely American evangelism by allying itself early on with an economically-minded support system of local planters and British representatives. A religious movement whose ambassadors consciously embraced slavery as a social and economic necessity had far-reaching and enduring consequences in shaping Southern society as a whole. By considering the actions and influence of these evangelical pioneers and their wealthy associates, we can trace the emergence of an alliance between state-sanctioned segregation, an economy whose success hinged on marginalized people, and the promotion of a proslavery Christian ideology common to parties on all sides. By addressing this issue through the experiences and influence of a handful of proslavery religious leaders, we can trace the slippery slope between benevolence and exploitation and glimpse insight into early American notions of altruism as reconcilable with disfranchisement.

The so-called “First Great Awakening,” spearheaded in large part by the itinerant ministry of George Whitefield, is generally associated with the stripping away of ritual and hierarchy in exchange for a personalized religion.<sup>2</sup> However, scholars who tend to focus on the seemingly positive aspects of the Awakening overlook its immediate

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<sup>2</sup> Time period typically considered to have been about 1735-1760.

negative effects to disfranchised groups, particularly enslaved individuals of African descent. In claiming ritual and hierarchy as important elements for providing order to a society, they are likewise never fully extracted from it; when one form falls out of fashion, as it is bound to do, it is simply replaced by a different set of rituals and hierarchies. Southern plantation colonists succeeded in setting the terms of social hierarchy in large part because of the religious efforts of planters and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the plantation efforts of the religious. This hierarchical framework put white Christian elites at the top and “uneducated” (not Christianized) black slaves at the bottom. To better understand how this phenomenon occurred in the American South, I have anchored my analysis to the actions and sphere of influence of Whitefield during what I call the “long Great Awakening,” spanning the 1730s through the 1780s.

From secular historians to present-day evangelicals, people remember Whitefield as “the grand itinerant,” a former Anglican whose personality was larger than life and whose evangelical efforts made a lasting impression on Protestant evangelism. Less emphasized is his role as an influential ally to the creation of an elitist social structure, which historian Alan Galloway calls “the planter elite.”<sup>3</sup> Galloway argues that wealthy slaveholders living on “the southern frontier” formed the backbone of eighteenth-century planter elite and, in order to ensure efficiency and productivity of their plantations, they took up Whitefield’s call to Christianize slaves and subsequently gave birth to paternalistic ideology.<sup>4</sup> My argument builds upon this scholarship and considers that planters who Christianized the disfranchised did so as a means of affixing them to a life of immobility while offering them mobility through religious ideology. Galloway focuses

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Galloway, *The Formation of a Planter Elite: Jonathan Bryan and the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xix-xx.

his work on one particularly prominent family, the Bryans of South Carolina, as emblematic of the transformation from planters to evangelical planter elites, but others influential to Whitefield's ministry (and vice versa) will also be addressed in this work. Whitefield, Habersham, Oglethorpe, Huntingdon - historical figures immortalized in the names of Georgia counties and major Savannah thoroughfares - have been forgotten as colonists who profited from and perpetuated, inadvertently or not, the slave-based plantation economy.

Luckily for the historian, part of the ease with which we are able to remember Whitefield's enormous presence and personality is thanks to his self-chronicling decades worth of travels, much of which were published during his lifetime. Through a wealth of archived journals and letters, scholars have tremendous access to glimpsing the eighteenth-century Atlantic world and the early years of Methodism in America's southern lowcountry. Such first-hand accounts, although inherently one-sided, offer important insight into the process by which a relative unknown could rise to prominence during this period; how one person's upward mobility is reflected in their changing ideology, and how their change in ideology may have resulted in their mobility upward. Overlapping elements of altruism, religious ideology, and human rights pepper both private correspondence and publications meant for Whitefield's wide readership. He was a significant character not only in the development of the colonial South, not only because of his role as an inspirational religious leader to thousands, but because of his adept skill at crafting and delivering theological messages and social commentary that had widespread appeal among a diverse social strata.

My attempt with this work is to join the ongoing academic conversation on uncovering the complexities extant between early evangelicals and the burgeoning slave-based economy. While this effort relies heavily on eighteenth-century primary sources - journals, letters, property plats and maps - it would be incomplete and nearly impossible to have undertaken without a solid foundation of secondary scholarship, both for gleaning my own context and creating a framework for which to respond to the work of predecessors. Influential religious histories, some recent and some over a century old, have certainly been influential to this study. Far from exhaustive, a short list of the works referenced in the creation of this one includes (in no particular order): John Tyson's and Boyd Stanley Schlenker's scholarship on influential proslavery Methodists; Cedrick May's history of black evangelicals in the Atlantic; Christine Heyrman's assessment of public reception of nineteenth-century evangelists; Jon Butler's concept of a "sacralization" of the religious landscape. It would be shortsighted to view my topic only through lens of religious history, so the aforementioned collective has been further enhanced with consideration of work by colonial, trans-Atlantic, and economic historians Edward Baptist, Jane Landers, A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., Leora Auslander, E.P. Thompson, Arno Mayer, T.H. Breen, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Maya Jasanoff, Marx & Engels, R.H. Tawney, Lynn Hunt, Sven Beckert, and innumerable others. Through my absorption of this vast and renowned collection of scholarship, dots have been connected which appeal to my inherent interest in the powerful connections that can and should be drawn between religion, economy, and the development of the state.

This scholarship is not an attempt at a biography of Whitefield. Numerous well-written biographies exist and have been composed by far more seasoned scholars than

myself; to these scholars I am grateful, as their work has informed my own.<sup>5</sup> However, one shortcoming they tend to share lies in the absence of clearly articulating the mutually-beneficial relationship of evangelism and economy. With the exception of James Paterson Gledstone's 1901 biography, which employs quite condemning language against Whitefield for his decision to become a slaveholder, the monographs I surveyed expend little effort on analyzing his role as slave owner and plantation owner.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, none explicitly connect what I see as a compelling byproduct of Whitefield's circle of acquaintances, the unique trifecta of colleagues including himself, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, and freeborn African American, John Marrant. Hastings is considered by some to have been the fourth wheel of Methodism (Whitefield and the Wesley brothers being the other three) and was a staunch Calvinist-Methodist, proslavery evangelical who started her own ministry inspired and informed by Whitefield's. Marrant, whose religious conversion he credited to an encounter with Whitefield, became an itinerant minister who worked for Hastings after Whitefield's death. In their effort to expand the Whitefieldian legacy to opposite corners of the Atlantic, including Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, this curious alliance reveals a fluidity within eighteenth-century views of race and social status. The conclusion to this paper gestures toward the necessity for scholars to analyze how, if only for a moment, revolutionary-era proslavery evangelicals of the Atlantic approached the possibility of creating a legacy that transcended race and class.

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<sup>5</sup> Including work by Jessica Parr, Stephen J. Stein, Thomas Kidd, James Paterson Gledstone, and John Gillies.

<sup>6</sup> James Paterson Gledstone, *George Whitefield M.A., Field Preacher* (New York: American Tract Society, 1901): 390-391.

This work is not an effort at defaming the character of any of the proslavery individuals mentioned. However, it would be dishonorable to the victims of slavery to not remain a steadfast critic of historical figures who at some point in their lives arrived at a proverbial fork in the road, one leading toward slavery and the other away, and made a conscious decision to hold their fellow humans in bondage. Some religious historians have a tendency to explain away the paradox of slaveholding Christians as “products of their time.” I vehemently unsubscribe to this oft-repeated trope, especially considering that the slaveholders who are the subject of this paper went to great lengths to ponder Biblical injustices such as the narrative of exiled Jews and the crucifixion of an innocent, perhaps divine, man; the injustices of slavery did not escape their awareness. That said, I would be a bad historian to not acknowledge the possibility of validity in the argument that once a generation or two of white people knew no other way of life their ongoing participation within an economy based on slavery was the preferred alternative to starving or going broke. Generations who inherited this flawed economic system were “products of their time” inasmuch as they may have felt helpless to alter a societal framework deeply entrenched in slavery, a sentiment which we begin to see with Whitefield’s early justification for purchasing his own Carolinian plantation. However, by virtue of anti-slavery representatives coexisting in a world of proslavery factions, it is obvious that all slaveholders at some point made a choice to ignore ethical dilemmas contrary to their economic aims and consumptive tendencies. This is particularly true when considering the pre-revolutionary era, because the chattel-based economy had yet to dominate as it would in the subsequent century.



Still, scholars who write off unethical actions of historical figures, especially those as revered and idolized as America's "founding fathers" (of which Whitefield is sometimes included), insult the intelligence of not only themselves but also their respective fields. Such excusing does great disservice to the individuals who lived and died through and by slavery. It implies that we, the inheritors of the legacies of slavery, should be allowed or even expected to explain away harsh realities. A quick look around today's American landscape, socially and spatially, proves these realities are not imagined and are in need of further investigation; one way to undertake such an investigation is to begin untangling the complexities of its roots. To this latter point, this history *is* an attempt to add to the ongoing conversation surrounding the origins, manifestations, and effects of proslavery evangelism during the long Great Awakening. From planters proselytizing to their slaves in hopes of keeping peace on their property, to Whitefield's reliance on the immobility of the disfranchised to secure mobility for himself and his theology, to Marrant's willingness to work under proslavery Hastings and her post-Revolutionary, proslavery Atlantic ministry, a striking paradox exists. Scholarship on these topics tends to segregate such histories and downplay their connectivity, but it is my intention to highlight overlaps and put these narratives into conversation by acknowledging their codependency as a part of the same history of eighteenth-century American evangelism.

To some extent, the personalization of evangelical Christianity did on a micro level what had been occurring for two centuries on a macro level within The Church of England: pursue, interpret, and repurpose theology for the benefit of those in power. Of course, this is a crude oversimplification of religion, but it is true that in Whitefield and

his wealthy proslavery associates we see an evangelical missionary collective whose efforts came to rely immensely on the exploitation of slave labor, a shift embraced as a means for social mobility or suppression depending on the subject. From such dynamic and complex relationships came the cementing of slavery as a normative element of early American society, the plantation economy fast becoming both a state- and religiously-sanctioned ideal in which landowners of the lowcountry South and beyond could aspire. Faith and noble piety aside, an innovative syncretism of religion, economy, and the state occurred on colonial plantations, in the broader community, and eventually in law, changes which endured as another awakening experienced in the American South.

Published nearly a century ago, R.H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* asserts that conventional religious teachings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fast became ill-equipped to handle the rapidly changing world. Cleverly casting "Religion" in the role of a rational actor of history, his remarks are most relevant to the topic of this history: "In an age of impersonal finance, world-markets and a capitalist organization of industry, [Religion's] traditional social doctrines had no specific to offer, and were merely repeated... they should have been thought out again... and formulated in new and living terms."<sup>7</sup> Alas, no such revision took place: "It did not occur to [Religion] to point out that, as a result of the new economic imperialism which was beginning to develop in the seventeenth century, the brethren of the English merchant were the Africans whom he kidnapped for slavery in America," and rather than participating in any retrospective analysis Religion opted to hold tight "the comfortable

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<sup>7</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1926): 185.

formula that for the transactions of economic life no moral principles exist.”<sup>8</sup> It is in the spirit of these words that this history has been written.

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<sup>8</sup> Tawney, 184-185.

## CHAPTER 1

### ARRIVALS

By the mid-eighteenth Century, major Western European powers had long since mobilized their forces and moved across the Atlantic to lay claim to lands inhabited by others. With regard to the eastern coastline of the North American continent, to the north were the French, to the far south the Spanish, and in between were predominantly English, German, Dutch, with Eastern Europeans dappled here and there. Throughout were the land's original inhabitants, many of whom had been either enslaved or pushed farther inland, and Africans, some free but most held in bondage. It does a disservice to the understanding of history to assert that some overarching agenda for European colonization was calculated at the outset; it was not. Yet it is not incorrect to conclude that by the mid-1700s, after over a century of haphazard settlement up and down the eastern shore of the Atlantic landmass dubbed "America," colonizing parties began solidifying efforts within their respective camps in an attempt to yield great profits from their holdings.

It is important to begin with scholarship that has had long-lasting effects on the study of America's religious history. Jon Butler's 1990 publication *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* makes several groundbreaking claims upon which many scholars, present company included, have built their arguments. At its core, Butler's main claim is that the traditional Puritan narrative of America's Christian founding does not do justice to the complexity of its history. America did not flee its

European roots so much as pursue them in new ways, and it was through a diversity of eclectic processes that Christian proselytizers contributed to the development of religion in the English colonies.<sup>9</sup> Since the so-called “New World” did not yet have an ecclesiastical order, it was much like a blank slate where Christianizing forces were able to start from scratch.

As compared with the Old World, Butler writes, relationships between religion and government changed. Denominational authority replaced that of the state, creating a top-down hierarchy within Anglican congregations and a bottom-up approach among other denominations. These changes are attributed to the increased construction of Anglican churches which he famously dubs the “sacralization of the landscape,” with variations based on culture and Old World traditions of the colonial populous.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously was the development of “squatter” communities, organized groups of people who chose to live far from organized churches and were unwilling to pay taxes to the Church of England.<sup>11</sup> The result of this dissention was the creation of parishes and a refinement of denominational differences among the religious offerings. The top-down Anglican hierarchy led to the ultimate failure of Anglicanism in colonial America; colonial inhabitants saw the bottom-up approach of less heavy-handed denominations as more appealing.

### **Awakenings Defined**

The so-called First Great Awakening was an era of widespread Protestant awareness driven by evangelical ministers who promoted the personalization of

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<sup>9</sup> Butler, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 105.

Christianity. In doing so the traditional church hierarchy was stripped away, leaving the individual empowered to connect with God and away from the oversight of any church elite. The legacies of the earliest Methodists are very much present in society today, from numerous Wesleyan colleges and universities to a variety of Methodisms that run the gamut: conservative evangelical, progressive liberal, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.), serpent-handling Pentecostal Holiness; the list goes on. Since the missionary work of eighteenth-century evangelicals targeted people outside any particular religious tradition, it was especially focused on converting indigenous people, poor whites, and African slaves. The multiplicities of Methodisms existing today are a reflection of much earlier diversity and a willingness to extend Christian messages to anyone willing to hear.

Scholars have traditionally dated the First Great Awakening as having begun in the 1730s and lasting until about the 1750s (or around the time of the Seven Years War), with a so-called Second Great Awakening occurring after the American Revolution. However, this demarcation is somewhat dissatisfying because it leaves a several-decades gap between periodizations. People did not suddenly stop participating in religion for three decades, and it is worth questioning if this periodization might account for holes in scholarship on Revolutionary-era evangelists, the early development of African-American itinerant ministries, and evangelicals who were women. While it is true that between 1750 and 1790 two wars ravaged landscapes in the American north and south, we should not let those occurrences halt analysis of religious activity existing during this time; archival silences do not have to detract from our work but can instead be a challenge to enrich it.

## **Evangelical Arrivals**

In late 1735, the brothers Charles and John Wesley set sail for America with the goal of converting inhabitants at the newly-founded colony of Georgia. General James Oglethorpe, having recently founded the colony on behalf of England, encouraged the recruitment of a minister to the colony who would direct proselytization efforts toward the “heathen” Indians and un-Christianized European settlers.<sup>12</sup> For over three months and along with about a hundred other passengers, among them some Moravians and dozens of English emigrants, the Wesleys traversed the Atlantic and finally landed at Savannah. John Wesley kept a journal during his time in the colonies, much of which depicts frequent travel through the region around Savannah where he chose to focus his outreach on rural areas.<sup>13</sup> For him, travel was often a grueling experience; on more than one occasion he recounts his guides losing their way in the woods, resulting in their having to sleep either in or near a swamp on the bare ground with little to no food or water.

A bit self-critical and equally self-conscious about his presence in the colony, Wesley remarks in his journals that upon arrival to a new locale his efforts were frequently ill-received. On one particular occasion he decided to challenge a man to give an explanation as to why he was so unkind to him, and his response was as follows: “I like nothing you do; all your sermons and satires upon particular persons... I will never hear you more. And all the people are of my mind. For we won’t hear ourselves be abused... they say they are Protestants... but as for you, they cannot tell what religion

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<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Marshall, *John Wesley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965): 15.

<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, *An Extract of the Reverend Mr. John Wesley's Journal, from his embarking for Georgia, to his return to London* (Bristol: Pine, 1765).

you are of. They never heard of such a religion before. They do not know what to make of it.”<sup>14</sup> No doubt this sort of reaction to his work in the colonies played a major role in his departure less than two years after his arrival.

Perhaps Wesley was looking in the wrong place for eager ears. He writes of finding Christianity in a few seemingly unlikely spots, including among dozens of African slaves in Charleston. He had hoped to preach to the “fifty Christian Negroes” belonging to a Mr. Skeene, but due to transportation issues he was unable to travel to meet them.<sup>15</sup> Of the several more intimate exchanges with locals he succeeded in encountering, two in particular stand out.

First, he met a young female slave who had been exposed to Christianity in Barbados, having grown up there in the home of a minister.<sup>16</sup> At the time of their meeting, she had only been in South Carolina for a few years and, no longer belonging to a minister, had since ceased going to church. When she attended church in Barbados, she did so in the role of caretaker to the minister’s children and claimed to not understand much of what she heard in church. Wesley saw her as a prime candidate for conversion because she spoke and understood English well, and was already somewhat familiar with Christianity. He proselytized a Methodist message to her that promised “If you are good, when your body dies, your soul will go up, and want nothing, and have whatever you can desire.”<sup>17</sup> In his words, “The attention with which this poor creature listened to instruction is inexpressible. The next day she remembered all, readily answered every

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<sup>14</sup> Wesley, 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



question, and said she would ask him that made her to show her how to be good.”<sup>18</sup>

While it is unclear what became of this young slave, it would be a worthy pursuit to try to find out more of her story. Was her religious awakening long-lasting or short-lived? Did she return to a plantation where Christianizing of slaves was well- or ill-received? Were there any encounters with subsequent evangelicals who toured the colony?

The second noteworthy interaction occurred during the same stint in the Charleston area, on the plantation of a Mr. Belinger. Wesley encountered an individual of indigenous and Spanish descent, as well as several other slaves who were allegedly familiar with and eager to hear Christian messages. They lamented their isolation, apparently being far outside Charleston and with no church nearby but claiming that if there was one within five or six miles they would be willing to walk - even crawl - to attend services.<sup>19</sup> Having had such promising experiences among the slave populations he met with, Wesley mused that “perhaps one of the easiest and shortest ways, to instruct the American Negroes in Christianity, would be first to enquire after and find out, some of the most serious of the Planters. Then having inquired of them, which of their slaves were best inclined and understood English, to go to them from plantation to plantation, staying as long as appeared necessary at each.” He goes on: “Three or four Gentlemen in Carolina I have been with, that would be sincerely glad of such an Assistant; who might pursue his work with no more hindrances than must everywhere attend the preaching of the Gospel.”<sup>20</sup> And so the idea was planted.

In the Fall of 1737 John Wesley chose to leave the colony. During his second year there he purportedly became engaged in a love affair with a woman who ultimately

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<sup>18</sup> Wesley., 37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 38.

rejected him in favor of another man. In a state of uncharacteristic emotional distress, Wesley used his ministerial powers for ill by publicly embarrassing her through denial of the communion. Finding himself in a legal battle over his reaction to her rejection of him, Wesley apparently felt he had no other option than to leave for good. Throughout his voyage and upon his return to England, his faith in himself and his God was thoroughly shaken, and he perceived many of his efforts in the colonies to have been in vain. In light of his own portrayal of his failures, his role as a colonial religious leader has largely been interpreted as such. However, while he may have considered his work in the colonies to be a failure and a reflection of his own lack of an authentic spiritual awakening, his interactions with local slaves shows that he perhaps had an impact on the future of their Christianization; an evangelical presence in the southern lowcountry was just taking root.

### **Evangelical Arrivals, Take Two**

Eighteenth-century English missionary George Whitefield was many things. He was first and foremost a subscriber to and minister of the Christian faith. Born at an inn during the month of December - an irony with a significance not lost on him - his father died early and his mother remarried into what Whitefield referred to as “an unhappy match.”<sup>21</sup> Somewhat begrudgingly he worked at his family’s inn but wished he was enrolled at Oxford like others his age, and finally through luck and circumstance he was permitted to attend.<sup>22</sup> Following his ordination and graduation, and while pursuing his M.A., he began preaching around the region. Religious historian Thomas Kidd writes of

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<sup>21</sup> Whitefield’s journal (1969 ed.), 27, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 17, 19.

Whitefield's invitation to preach in London, first at the Tower and then at the Ludgate Prison, as experiences which propelled him to early fame among Oxford's Methodists.<sup>23</sup>

Upon the Wesleys' return from Georgia, they began encouraging other ministers to go to the colonies, and Whitefield decided to take up their call. Considered to have been a "holy experiment" of the Georgia Trustees, going to Georgia appealed to Whitefield's sense of evangelical duty.<sup>24</sup> An adventurer willing to cross the Atlantic Ocean on behalf of his deity, his country, and with the hopes of continuing the missionary work of his recently-departed friends, he would have little trouble surpassing their efforts. A far more charismatic leader than Wesley, gregarious and full of energy, the twenty-something Whitefield eagerly set out to fill the void left by the Wesleys. The first thing he did was work to establish an orphanage at Savannah, and in 1740 the Bethesda Orphan House began to take shape. This project would occupy much of his attention and fundraising efforts for the rest of his life, and despite numerous organizational and financial setbacks it achieved a moderate success until his death.

Whitefield arrived in the British colony of Georgia in 1739 and died just outside of Boston in 1770. In those three decades he crossed the Atlantic half a dozen times, splitting his time between Britain and its North American colonies, namely Georgia and South Carolina. Much of his efforts were spent preaching to audiences large and small, and he would accept donations in goods or funds on Bethesda's behalf. Despite relentless travel and equally relentless ill health, he became a leading evangelical in British America. It has been estimated by some, his acquaintance Ben Franklin included, that he routinely preached to American audiences in the tens of thousands, and he was arguably

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<sup>23</sup> Kidd, 40, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 42.

one of the most well-known individuals on either side of the Atlantic for over three decades.<sup>25</sup>

Crossing an ocean to parts unknown - even today but most certainly a few hundred years ago - took bravery and heart, fueled by a deep-seated desire to fulfill one's destiny. In the case of the Wesleys and Whitefield, that destiny was to preach their version of Christian gospel and hope to have some positive effect in the lives of people they encountered, although the terms of what defined a "positive effect" varied from audience to audience. But in consideration of the logistics of eighteenth-century itinerancy, to attempt such a feat during this time was, if nothing else, radically ambitious. Whitefield's ambition, though at times reckless, surpassed that of the Wesleys which is why he produced more dramatic results in the colonies than did they. Depending on what archival resource you pose the question "So, what do you think of Whitefield?" interpretations of his ambition and enthusiasm ranged from laudable to teetering on a sort of mania. Benjamin Franklin worked with Whitefield as his printer and later became his friend. He characterized their relationship as "civil" and "sincere on both sides," writing in his autobiography that Whitefield was "in all his conduct a perfectly honest man... my testimony in his favour ought to have the more weight, as we had no religious connection."<sup>26</sup>

However, there were plenty of "men of the cloth" who disliked and distrusted Whitefield, perhaps due in part to his celebrity but particularly for his theological stance. One such example is American-based minister, George Gillespy, who published a pamphlet titled *Remarks Upon Mr. George Whitefield, Proving Him a Man under*

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<sup>25</sup> John Bigelow, ed. *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co, 1868): 257.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

*Delusion*.<sup>27</sup> Printed, ironically, by Ben Franklin, Gillespy's laundry list of allegations against Whitefield attempts to undermine his beliefs in by painting him as an excessive enthusiast, illogical and uninformed of proper Christian thought.<sup>28</sup> This type of criticism would become a somewhat regular affair for Whitefield to endure from fellow ordained colleagues who saw themselves as following the proper path of religiosity. Whitefield's archive of correspondence is full of direct responses to dissenters as well as letters complaining to friends of the frustrations of dealing with the Gillespys of the world.

George Whitefield and John Wesley, though rooted in the same Methodism, diverged over the issue of how to achieve salvation. The Calvinist-Methodist ideals to which Whitefield subscribed and promoted consisted of a combination of predestination and heart-centered conversion, or "rebirth," whereby someone could convert to Christianity in the absence of doing good works, instead self-declaring justification of conversion by faith alone. This sort of thinking removed power from The Church and put it in the hands of individuals, and this sort of power was threatening, thus Whitefield's thoughts on how a person could achieve salvation created a tension between himself and his Anglican support system. By preaching in public spaces, he was stripped of the right to preach within the walls of numerous churches on both sides of the Atlantic; by not changing his ways and respecting the hierarchical structure of the Anglicans, he made himself enemies of the old church guard; by discounting the role of good works in reaching salvation claiming justification by faith alone, he inadvertently positioned himself against fellow Methodists, including the Wesleys.

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<sup>27</sup> George Gillespy, *Remarks Upon Mr. George Whitefield, Proving Him a Man under Delusion* (Philadelphia: Franklin, 1744).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Regardless of any theological rifts between them, the founding Methodists held one fundamental element in common: a willingness to preach in the open and to make Protestantism accessible to people everywhere. This approach coupled with a unique flavor of missionary zeal created quite a fuss on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite their internal rifts, Methodists collectively became a source of frustration for the Church of England, who would learn early on that they - especially Whitefield - could not be counted on to play by the rules when it came to executing traditional ritual and adhering to regulations set in place by the church or the state. As for Whitefield, he could not really have cared less about church hierarchy outside of answering to God, and it is perhaps on this ground that he had little trouble finding like-minded planters in the coastal lowcountry.

## CHAPTER 2

### (IM)MOBILIZING FORCES

The vast expansion of slavery in the United States was concurrent with the emergence of Evangelical Protestantism, with the growth of slavery helping to make evangelicalism the “hegemonic pattern of American religion.”<sup>29</sup> In the former, humans are justified as commodities for purchase and sale at the market, a type of economic exchange requiring state-sanctioned violence for greatest efficacy. In the latter, evangelicals “pedaled” religious doctrine as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market, an exchange which was enhanced by state support but executed with far less violence than the former. How did these two institutions reconcile fundamental differences, to the extent that there were any, and lay the groundwork for Protestantism to emerge as the hegemonic American faith?

Karl Marx maintained that a perpetual reinvention of self is necessary for a thriving capitalist system. Some religious historians, myself included, argue that this characteristic is shared by both American slavery and Protestantism, which is in part what has made them both so powerful when operating within capitalist frameworks. By adopting local practices like slavery proslavery evangelicals, who initially were outsiders looking in on plantation society, adapted their theological scaffolding in order to benefit Christianization missions, thereby affixing foreign religious identities to domestic economic practices. Through this process of integration into American plantation life, evangelical thought adopted habits of its environment and was likewise adapted to fit its

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told* (New York: Basic Books, 2014): 200.

environment. Thus, Southern plantation slavery received the evangelical stamp of approval early on in its evolution as a mainstay of the Atlantic-world economy.

In *Formation of the Planter Elite*, Alan Galloway asserts that some members of the emerging eighteenth-century planter elite encouraged the Christianization of their slaves in the hopes of creating a more peaceful and productive labor force. Heyrman considers nineteenth-century Methodist evangelism and claims that it was initially rejected by southerners so underwent a series of reinventions of self before it finally took root among an otherwise irreligious and indifferent populous.<sup>30</sup> It appears to me that, in considering mid-late eighteenth-century evangelism, it is necessary to use a hybrid of approaches. In the pre-capitalist and pre-revolutionary colonial South, proslavery Methodist evangelicals were eagerly received by some (but not all) landowners who were seeking stability in an unstable economy. As Whitefield and his American allies became more mentally invested in the Christianization of those belonging to the lower strata of society, slaves in particular, they likewise became more financially invested in their subjugation for what was portrayed as a greater good of the colony.

### **Freedom of Movements**

“Men did not become capitalists because they were Protestants, nor Protestants because they were capitalists... there was no inherent theological reason for the Protestant emphasis on frugality, hard work, accumulation; but that emphasis was a natural consequence of the religion of the heart in a society where capitalist industry was

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<sup>30</sup> Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997): 6.



developing.”<sup>31</sup> It is important to consider these words of Christopher Hill when assessing eighteenth-century proslavery evangelism, especially as it was picked up by an increasingly paternalistic planter base whose efforts to grow the economy employed a manipulation of the physical, mental, and spiritual movements of enslaved bodies. In the eighteenth-century American south, plantation owners began amassing great wealth through utilization of an immobile labor force. The planter elite subjugated fellow humans for economic purposes, coerced them into a collectivity of immobile bodies then quite literally forced them back into mobility as laborers. This see-saw between mobility and immobility was entirely motivated by the plantation owner’s drive for profit; within the confines of ownership, slaves can hardly have been considered as mobile in any real way.

I define mobility as the voluntary physical movement of a person or group of people from one location and toward another, either physically or figuratively, and it has historically relied on immobility for its own success; the relationship between the two is paradoxical, both competitive and complementary. Then as now mobility is associated with freedom: the freedom to move within and outside of established society as one pleases, the freedom to think, the freedom to act. Such ideals were and continue to be aligned with wealth, refinement, and being a member of the affluent elite. The actions and influence of someone like George Whitefield shows how the mobility of one person led to and relied on the immobility of many, directly playing a part in the immediate and future marginalization of disfranchised people, particularly individuals of African descent living by choice or by force in the South.

By the mid-1730s, people in bondage were more or less spread throughout the

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<sup>31</sup> M.J. Kitch, ed., *Capitalism and the Reformation* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1967): 7.

eastern seaboard. Even the self-proclaimed anti-slavery colony of Georgia is thought to have used slaves in the founding of Savannah in 1733.<sup>32</sup> General Oglethorpe, close associate of the Wesleys and Whitefield, is credited for the outright refusal to permit slavery in Georgia, not so much because he was a nice guy (which by some accounts he was) but because he thought slavery was contrary to both the gospel and English law and believed it led to idleness among the colonists.<sup>33</sup> But owning slaves was an expensive proposition. If the original purpose of Georgia was to establish a haven for the poor of England, logically Georgian residents would be unable to afford them anyway. Georgia's 1735 antislavery law was not created with the welfare of people of color in mind but created instead, unsurprisingly, for the protection of white interests.<sup>34</sup> And what of black people who were not enslaved? Early on, debate among colonial leaders and other vocal colonists for whether or not to admit free blacks into Georgia resolved that, since slaves were present just across the river in South Carolina, such allowances might increase the potential for Carolina runaways.<sup>35</sup>

Although the institution of slavery and any presence of black individuals were *technically* banned from Georgia, the historical record shows another reality. For example, scholar A. Leon Higginbotham writes of a common scheme occurring along the Savannah River, primarily in Augusta, where a "leasing" of slaves took place as a way to get around their illegal purchase.<sup>36</sup> South Carolinians found they could hire out their slaves as servants for short periods, then if the slave was discovered the real owner would come forward and reclaim them as a runaway; the court sanctioned this scheme by

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<sup>32</sup> A Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In The Matter of Color: Race & the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978): 223.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 216, 223.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 225; likely due to the Stono uprising having occurred the year prior just outside Charleston.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

returning the “leased” slaves to their rightful owners, and the whole process ensured no economic loss for the law’s violators.<sup>37</sup>

Conversely, Whitefield personified mobility. On one tour through New England he claims to have preached 175 times in 75 days, traveled 800 miles, and raised more than 700 pounds sterling in goods, provisions, and money for his orphanage.<sup>38</sup> Orphans were collected from all over the colony, relocated to Bethesda, and were provided basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing along with an education in Latin, theology, and a skilled trade. Having been granted by the British government 500 acres on which to construct his project, Whitefield chose a site several miles outside of Savannah proper “because the children will be more free from bad examples, and can more conveniently go up to the land to work... it is my design to have each of the children taught to labor, so as to be qualified to get their own living.”<sup>39</sup> By design, isolation and immobility was a built-in feature, appealing for the ministry itself. Another advantage to this level of isolation is evidenced by Whitefield biographer and religious historian Thomas Kidd, who cites an instance of “traveling slaves” working as “teamster[s] shuttling supplies from Charleston to Bethesda.”<sup>40</sup> The use of black workers (slaves) in the construction of Bethesda was against the law and Whitefield knew this, as evidenced by his claim in 1748 that he would not use slave labor in Georgia until it was made legal.<sup>41</sup> Thomas Kidd writes that it appears that the authorities did not notice slaves arriving to Bethesda, implying Whitefield knew this, too; he felt that nobody was interested in enforcing what

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<sup>37</sup> Higginbotham, 233.

<sup>38</sup> Whitefield, 502.

<sup>39</sup> Whitefield, 392 (Jan. 1740).

<sup>40</sup> Kidd, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Whitefield’s *Letters, 1742-1753*: 208.

he saw as a preposterous law.<sup>42</sup> In this we see Whitefield's inclination toward subverting local regulations in an effort to forge his own path toward sacralizing the colonial landscape.

### **Power in Christianization**

For decades prior to the arrival of the Methodists, the debate throughout the colonies over whether or not to Christianize or otherwise educate slaves was a tumultuous one. Official policies on what Christianization and baptism equated to changed over time, the initial choice being physical manumission of the slave but later incarnations limiting manumission to the figurative realm; salvation and freedom of the soul in the afterlife replaced freedom of the body in earthly life. Seventeenth-century New Amsterdam and Virginia held opposing views on the matter, the former taking a more liberal stance than the latter which, not coincidentally, had much invested in slave-based plantation agriculture. Dated 1667, a declaration out of Virginia asserts plainly that baptism unequivocally does not equal freedom, so planters should feel free Christianize their slaves.<sup>43</sup> This line of thinking became more commonplace throughout the colonies, and the conversation appears to have continued for the next five decades as evidenced by English Parliament's passing of the 1705 "Act Concerning Servants and Slaves." This document reiterated the now-established parameters for servants and slaves as corresponding to freedom and baptism, and also highlights what must have been another complication for slaveholders: the enslavement and retention of a person arriving to the colonies *already* a Christian. As one provision states, if a person was a Christian in their

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<sup>42</sup> Kidd, 190.

<sup>43</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619* (New York: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823): 260.

native country and is aged nineteen to twenty-four, they would live as a servant for the customary five years of service; if they were *not* a Christian in their native land, they would count as a slave and could be bought and sold notwithstanding a later Christian conversion.<sup>44</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this evolution of meaning was based on the needs of the business-minded; those who had the most to gain from owning human property, and keeping it indefinitely, obviously promoted its continuance. The justification for slavery as harmonious with Christian ideals is rooted directly in text from the Old Testament, based on what historian Charles Irons describes as “a description of Hebraic slavery that seemed to correspond perfectly to the labor patterns that emerged in the [Virginia] commonwealth during the late seventeenth century.”<sup>45</sup> The baptism-manumission debate among Christian slaveholders took center stage once they truly realized what was at stake: the loss of their human economic investments to religious liberation.

As mentioned previously, the main theological difference which set Whitefield apart from other evangelicals during this period was his belief that faith alone was enough to grant salvation. He viewed the Wesleyan and Anglican emphasis on good works as “a theological error... the root of many of the Anglican Church’s problems.”<sup>46</sup> If good actions do not matter in the long run, then what would be the point in taking any? Of course to pose this question is an oversimplification of Calvinist-Methodist ideology, but it may serve to illustrate how, if operating with this as an underlying premise, proslavery evangelism more easily took root among the slaveholding elite. However, for

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<sup>44</sup> Hening, 447-448.

<sup>45</sup> Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008): 25; an argument could be made that there is a problem with his use of the word “emerging,” as colonists may have drawn on the idea of usefulness of Biblically rooted slavery earlier in the century.

<sup>46</sup> Kidd, 82.

the historian whose job it is to consider how such tendencies did or did not translate into real-world outcomes, she must consider the tensions which enveloped Whitefield's stance on slavery.

Whitefield offered a sense of hope to mid-century landowners seeking stability within a fragile social order becoming increasingly reliant on subjugation of a particular group. His particular flavor of Christian theology resulted in strategic lifelong friendships with wealthy people, from colonial planters to British investors, many of which had largely rejected the Church of England and were seeking a new religious path. Mutually influential to one another, Whitefield and his peers prioritized what I call a "gospel first" attitude toward disfranchised groups, whereby they placed religious beliefs (and likewise the interests) of white elites ahead of the individual welfare of those viewed as belonging to a "lesser" race or class. Before a democratization of Christianity occurred in the American South, a mobilization took place among these forces debating who ought to become Christian and why.

### **Evolution of a Slaveholder**

During the dozen or so years he was most active in the colonies (1740-1753), we can trace Whitefield's evolution from quiet supporter to outright proponent of slavery. This change over time can be divided into three stages: first, Whitefield asserted that people who own slaves but did not Christianize them were depriving them of an adequate and fair education; second, he thought that Christianizing was the most ethical way to keep slaves; third, he determined that since slaves would be bought and sold in the marketplace whether or not he personally partook, by purchasing and keeping slaves he

could offer them a reprieve from a certain unfairness with which many plantation owners would subject them.<sup>47</sup> His attempt to make a logical argument for holding slaves may be a reflection of his travels through the colonies, having seen numerous places where slavery seemed to be “working” and having convinced himself that his grand ambitions for Bethesda would require an increase of productivity at and from the land, which would only be made possible by the incorporation of slaves into Georgian fields.<sup>48</sup> It is clear from letters he wrote to his peers that by 1751, on the event of slavery becoming legal in Georgia, Whitefield intended to make good use of the new law affording him the right to exploit resources in laborers of lands.

Whitefield’s oft-remembered and widely revered “Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina” offers a first-hand account of witnessing abuse of slaves in the region and reprimanding of plantation owners for treating their slaves badly.<sup>49</sup> However, a closer look at the document reveals a concern over the injustice to slaves not for being enslaved in the first place, but because their masters are allowing them to remain uneducated and un-Christianized. This warped prioritization of one individual’s personal faith over another’s lived experience is problematic for obvious reasons, but also for less obvious ones. Not only did enslaved and indigenous people have their own religions – indeed some African slaves arrived to the colonies as Catholics –

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<sup>47</sup> Whitefield *Letters*, 405.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>49</sup> George Whitefield, *Letter To the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina, Concerning Their Negroes* (Philadelphia: Franklin, 1740).

many may have been aware of Christianity and chose to reject it; if Whitefield was aware of such realities he chose to ignore them.<sup>50</sup>

The same year Whitefield's "Letter to the Inhabitants..." was published, an "Act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes and other Slaves in this Province" (May 1740), better known as the "Negro Act" came to the fore. This law redefined slaves as chattel, regulated behavior of both white and black people by placing restrictions on excess of abuse toward slaves and restricting certain freedoms previously enjoyed by slaves.<sup>51</sup> A document drafted as a reaction to the Stono uprising the year prior, explicit orders for slaves found outside their plantation unaccompanied by a white person to be subject to pursuance, apprehension, and correction by a white person.<sup>52</sup> Further, the Act allows for "every justice assigned to keep the peace" to intervene in "any assembly or meeting of slaves which may disturb the peace or endanger the safety of his Majesty's subjects... to search all suspected places for arms, ammunition, or stolen goods... secure all such slaves as they shall suspect to be guilty of any crimes or offences whatsoever, and to bring them to speedy trial..."<sup>53</sup> Modern parallels for similar implicit race-based restrictions of movement are easy to draw and, although presently outside the scope of this particular work, should be drawn and dissected with care.

Whitefield may have written a document remembered as offering a voice on behalf of the rights of slaves, but he never claimed to be anti-slavery. Through the years he came to encourage its incorporation into Georgian law, first as wishful thinking then

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<sup>50</sup> Mark M. Smith, ed. *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005): 76-79; for more on this, see Jason Young's *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2007) and John Thornton's "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1483-1750," *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 147-67.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, 20.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



later, contemporaneous to his prioritization of itinerancy over his role as Bethesda overseer, he appealed for its legalization in direct ways. Initially these efforts were either ignored or denied, but in 1747 he wrote an open letter stating “the constitution of the colony [Georgia] is very bad, and it is impossible for the inhabitants to subsist without the use of slaves. But God has put it into the hearts of my South Carolina friends, to contribute liberally toward purchasing, in this province, a plantation and slaves, which I purpose to devote to the support of Bethesda. Blessed be God! the purchase is made... One negroe has been given me. Some more I purpose to purchase this week.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, after a decade of trying to get make ends meet in Georgia without the use of slaves, he moved toward providing for his Savannah “family” using slave labor. He publicized this acquisition of property in land and people, and with his orphanage as one of the biggest employers at the time he implicitly threatened to relocate it to South Carolina if slavery was not ultimately made legal in Georgia. A master of utilizing the media outlets of his day, Whitefield made no secret about his excitement of his acquisitions nor did he suppress his relief when slavery was finally permitted in Georgia in 1752; once this was done he relinquished his South Carolinian plantation.

After some time in the colonies Whitefield came to see slavery as a part of the natural order of things, complementary to Christianity and essential to the success of his ministry. Furthermore, a self-awareness of his influence in the colonies is evidenced by the evolution of his status as itinerant minister, orphan manager, and plantation owner. Many scholars do not make much of his role in bringing slavery to Georgia, as he himself denied having had any real impact in its incorporation.<sup>55</sup> While it is true that his

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<sup>54</sup> Whitefield, *Letters, 1747-53*, 90.

<sup>55</sup> Whitefield, 405.

vocalizing any proslavery tendencies was not the main catalyst - many people desired slavery for the colony based on the growth it brought to Savannah's close neighbor, Charleston - there is no doubt that the opinion and subsequent encouragement from a well-traveled celebrity of the Atlantic would have carried weight in the colony.

Moreover, he was a Christian representative to the colony, and someone who rubbed elbows with elites on either side of the Atlantic; perhaps his opinion was worth a listen.

### CHAPTER 3

#### PROVIDENCE PLANTATION

In the midst of his relationship with America, at a time when Georgia had not yet embraced slavery, Whitefield purchased a plantation of just over 600 acres in the coastal lowcountry of South Carolina.<sup>56</sup> The archives have little to say about what went on there during the time he owned it (1747-1753), and there is minimal archival evidence of the plantation ever having existed under Whitefield's ownership, but indeed it did exist. It remains a mystery as to exactly why Whitefield let it go, but it can be reasoned that he decided he no longer needed it after slavery became legal in Georgia in 1752. When it came to public policy and self-interest, there is no escaping the fact that Whitefield was the embodiment of contradiction, most notably with regard to his conspicuous support for slavery.

Religious-minded plantation owners, including ordained ministers like Whitefield and those who merely aspired to be, bolstered the slave-based economy already underway. Using what little evidence there is for his "Providence" plantation, I have included efforts to trace the process of its acquisition by Whitefield, productivity under his watch, and subsequent sale back into the hands of its previous owners. A narrative of Whitefield's Carolinian holdings does not presently exist, no doubt thanks to little archival evidence, but an attempt to create one serves to illustrate three important elements of early evangelical ministry: a willingness to engage deeply with the colony by

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<sup>56</sup> William McPherson, Land Survey, Dec. 1747. Accessed July 2016 via College of Charleston Library Archive.

crossing an unspoken border between itinerant visitor and slaveholding resident; an example of how the evangelical South veered toward slavery while abolitionist efforts were beginning to take shape in the revivalist North; and how such eighteenth-century divergences led to uniquely American atmospheres of faith.

### **Dividing Lands, Dividing People**

“Lying & being in Prince William Parish...,” this being on the mainland of South Carolina, the pentagonal mile Whitefield owned for six years then returned to the hands of the Bryan family was “known by the name of Providence...” and had been for some time.<sup>57</sup> Joseph Bryan, Sr. had called the plantation “Providence” during his life and perhaps it was he who named it.<sup>58</sup> A member of the Anglican church but with political views aligning more with Dissenters, the Bryan patriarch arrived from England around 1680, becoming a cog in the wheel of mass English immigration to and subsequent settlement in South Carolina’s lowcountry.<sup>59</sup> At the turn of the century he owned at least two hundred acres of land, and by his death a few decades later the family owned at least fifteen times that amount. Much of this land acquisition and development appears to have occurred on the mainland, opposite the waterways dividing colonists from the indigenous people of the area, the Yemassee Indians. Carolinian colonists had initially agreed to stay relegated to the barrier islands, known today as the Sea Islands, but relatively early on

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<sup>57</sup> Hugh Bryan, Document of Indenture, Sale of ~640 acres from George Whitefield to Mary Bryan (July 5, 1753): 1.

<sup>58</sup> Isabella Redding, *Life and Times of Jonathan Bryan, 1708-1788* (Savannah: The Morning News Print, 1901): 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; Galloway, 10.

they began to close in on more desirable Yemassee land and attempt to absorb it for themselves.<sup>60</sup>

It is easy to abstract the process of land acquisition by colonists during the Eighteenth Century. We imagine it was at the whim of a king on the other side of an ocean who bequeathed other people's lands as he so chose, or that indigenous people were somehow eager to relinquish space so as to maintain good relations with their imposing, unwelcome neighbors. To some extent these imaginings are rooted in reality, but it is important to not silence the agency of colonial-era prospectors in the processes required for possession and commodification of land. This is especially true in the case of colonial development of the lowlands of the American southeast, as it was a more complex affair than popular history cares to remember. For example, in the case of Bryan, initially agricultural pursuits remained second in order of priority with his main focus having been engaging in trade with the Yemassee.<sup>61</sup> He was not alone in this, as the trade relationship between Carolinian colonists and these particular indigenous people was based in large part on their procuring a key commodity for the Carolina traders: Indian slaves. Alan Galloway writes that the Yemassee people were so adept at gathering other people and forcing them into slavery that they wiped out neighboring indigenous populations quite extensively, particularly in what was then Spanish Florida, leading to a population reduction and subsequent inability to provide Carolina traders with what they saw as necessary human resources.<sup>62</sup> Fearing enslavement themselves and sensing the possibility of further encroachment on their land, a certain animosity developed between the Yemassee and white colonists and was perpetuated by the colonists, including Bryan

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<sup>60</sup> Galloway, 7, 12, 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

who had been known to sabotage, destroy, and trespass on various Yemassee properties.<sup>63</sup>

Although older histories recall Bryan as a colonist who succeeded at relations with indigenous people, winning for himself and his family “the undying friendship of the Yemassee Indians,” more recent scholarship shows that in the early years of the 1700s he was banned from engaging with them by colonial institutions whose purpose was preventing abuses and protecting Indians’ interests; Bryan defied this ban and continued to engage in trade.<sup>64</sup> In the decade leading up to the so-called Yemassee War, Bryan and others pressured their indigenous neighbors to relinquish their lands, much of which was located opposite the island properties of the colonists. Gally depicts the Yemassee War as sparked by the aforementioned injustices done and credits the overarching cause to the colonists’ increasing desire for Indian lands: “By provoking the Yamassees to war the traders forced the hand of the government against the Indians. When the Indians struck in 1715 the local militia struck back, knowing that the South Carolina government had to support them.”<sup>65</sup> The war officially ended in 1728, but with over a decade of struggle, discontent, and rapidly eroding trust between inhabitants old and new, the struggles remained at the periphery. It was at some point during this period of tumult amongst competing factions that Providence Plantation was born.

### **Surveying Landscapes**

In the latter days of 1747, surveyor William McPherson wrote “I have admeasured and laid out unto the Rever. George Whitfield a tract of land containing six

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<sup>63</sup> Gally, 12-13.

<sup>64</sup> Redding, 6; Gally, 12, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Gally, 13.

hundred and sixty acres...”.<sup>66</sup> The land plat itself, not much bigger than a sheet of notebook paper, shows a sketch approximating a pentagonal-shaped mile outlining 660 acres somewhere in the British colony of South Carolina and delineates in degrees the rough location of the odd-shaped tract. Extracted from some slightly larger mass belonging to the wealthy Bryan family, this land was originally owned by Joseph Bryan, Sr. along with a portion purchased by Joseph Jr.’s younger brother, Hugh.<sup>67</sup> Demarcating the property line by placing five sets of three stakes at each corner of the lopsided mass, McPherson listed the neighboring landowners: Stephen Bull; Joseph Bowrey; the deceased landgrove Edmund Bellenger; and Jonathan Bryan, the third Bryan brother, hugging two sides of the same corner.<sup>68</sup> If Whitefield was looking to surround himself with well-to-do individuals whose wealth stemmed from landholdings and profits made by way of their plantation enterprises, securing a few hundred acres in the company of these fellows put him in excellent company.

Fast forward a few years to the summer of 1753. Rather than observing a notebook-sized sketch of land, find instead a script-heavy piece of vanilla white parchment nearly two feet wide and over a foot tall. An indenture for the land’s sale, this time Whitefield to the Bryans, this document offers specifics not evident in McPherson’s survey, including the property name (“Providence”) and approximate location and structures possibly existing within its bounds.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, McPherson’s survey failed to mention the existence of any water sources aside from two small ponds at the periphery of the property, but in fact there were key adjacent waterways; the indenture

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<sup>66</sup> McPherson, Land Survey.

<sup>67</sup> Bryan, Indenture, 1.

<sup>68</sup> McPherson, Land Survey; perhaps the Belinger who owned the adjacent property is the same as mentioned in John Wesley’s account of slaves on plantations who wished there was a church nearby.

<sup>69</sup> Bryan, Indenture; for reasons that are not apparent, the document indicates that the land was diminished by twenty acres, referencing 640 acres returned to the Bryan family rather than the original 660.

references the land as “lying and being on the eastside of the Whalebranch or Pocotalago River in Granville County... bounding to the Westward on the said river...”<sup>70</sup> This description situates the property almost evenly between the thriving port city of Charleston and the upstart river town, Savannah, with the former sixty miles to the east and the latter fifty miles southwest. More importantly, the acreage was only a dozen miles to the nearest waterway leading to Port Royal, making it most accessible for both travel and importing or exporting goods.

McPherson’s omission of nearby water sources suggests that either accessibility to water was not a priority to the surveyor, his clients, or Whitefield, or that it was common knowledge that a water source would exist nearby so did not warrant mention on the plat of land itself. Although he might have overlooked mentioning any surrounding geographical details, one element of obvious importance to them is evidenced by the inclusion of specific types of trees. Besides having wealthy planters for neighbors, flanking the property appears to have been quite a variety of vegetation, including Pine, Red and White Oak, Gum, Hickory, Tupelow [sic] growing in dry land and within a small pond, and possibly Persimmon trees.<sup>71</sup> It is possible that highlighting these barrier trees was standard practice of eighteenth-century surveying, or maybe this inclusion leaves the plot’s interpreter to assume that the land might have been intended for some sort of timber farming, turpentine or tar production, or nut and fruit

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<sup>70</sup> McPherson, Land Survey.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



harvesting.<sup>72</sup> Whatever the prospective exports might have included, being close to a water source would have made transporting raw materials in bulk quite convenient.

From the plat alone we are left to speculate how the land was used, and how Whitefield intended to develop it to the extent that he actually developed it at all. The subsequent indenture offers an itemized list of property features leading to inference that there might have existed at Providence: houses, out houses, buildings, barns, stables, orchards, gardens, and trees.<sup>73</sup> As any land speculator can attest, property that holds potential for agricultural production and finds itself adjacent a water source is ideal for distributing goods and yielding a profit from the fruits of labor, be it theirs or that of someone else. In the case of eighteenth-century plantation magnates, the fledgling economic structure was heavily reliant on the labor of more than just a few people owned by other people forced to work on their collective behalf; Providence Plantation was no exception to this rule, and Whitefield was no stranger to reaping benefits from American slavery.

### **Significance of Providence**

Several ministers living in eighteenth-century colonial America owned plantations complete with slaves, including New England's own Jonathan Edwards. What makes Providence unique and worthy of study? Importantly, it offers unequivocal evidence that Whitefield underwent a change of self-perception, seeing himself at first as an outsider then later, through the ownership of Providence, immersed in American economy.

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<sup>72</sup> A current Google street-view of what I have determined to be the approximate location for Providence shows evidence of current timber farming. Traversing the circumference of the property in real life is nearly impossible, thanks to how the roads cut through and around the land, although in-person experience allowed me to verify that the Pocotaligo is presently but a tiny stream that runs beneath a highway, and a railroad line abuts the northwest side of the property.

<sup>73</sup> Bryan, Indenture, 2.

Founding and running Bethesda was not in the same league as his plantation; the Georgia Trustees funded that effort and it was for the greater good of Georgia, specifically. However, Whitefield's extension of colonial holdings to owning what appears to have been an established plantation, even if intending to support Bethesda with resources drawn from it, is an example of his conscious departure from one set of regulations in favor of adopting those more favorable to his cause. Galloway writes that "the paternalism of the southern master class was the product of the transformation from frontier to plantation society," and Providence offers a snapshot of the transformation of someone who was a religious figure first, a member of the master class second.<sup>74</sup> Based on his South Carolina holdings and his close association with other planters, the logical conclusion is that Whitefield acted as any of his peers would and filled Providence with bodies held in bondage.

Property records have much to teach us about popular culture. The case examined herein pays special attention to the presence of records tying one of the world's most influential religious leaders to a piece of land sought specifically for its location in a slaving colony. Direct study of Providence brings to life what Whitefield so eagerly made public: he took pride in owning not just any plantation but one where he was allowed to keep Africa's descendants in order to provide for Georgian orphans. I see this as both precursor to the conspicuous consumption theory applied to nineteenth-century plantation masters, and also the root of a Great Awakening-era "conspicuous evangelism," whereby evangelicals went to great lengths to make their presence known in parts unknown, and to ensure that people around them knew they were evangelicals. Having published several travelogues in the preceding decade, Whitefield was very aware of the power of his

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<sup>74</sup> Galloway, xix-xx.

written word and the role that media of the day in the English colonies and abroad; there is no doubt he knew the power associated with his public display for supporting slavery.

Whitefield's releasing of Providence back into the hands of his South Carolina friends is somewhat of a mystery that demands further research beyond the scope of this paper. What became of his slaves, their relationships to the land and to his ministry? If Whitefield believed in educating the disfranchised, we can assume that he proselytized to his slaves (although whether or not they were interested is another matter). In fact, as someone who promoted the Christianization of everyone he crossed paths with, it seems that owning two properties would have been optimal to his mission of reaching these disenfranchised inhabitants. If McPherson's survey helps us to visualize the plantation as it might have been upon Whitefield's purchase, the document of indenture shows what Whitefield opted to give up at the time of sale; unfortunately, neither tells us precisely why. Self-aware to a fault and arguably in constant pursuit of securing his own legacy, it is curious that there are few documents remaining that speak to his having owned Providence for six years.

Curiously, if ever there were paper records connecting Whitefield directly to the ownership of people, those records are suspiciously silent. Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote that "the unearthing of silences, and the historian's subsequent emphasis on the retrospective significance of hitherto neglected events, requires not only extra labor at the archives... but also a project linked to an interpretation..."<sup>75</sup> and that "historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on

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<sup>75</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995): 58.

the distribution of archival power.”<sup>76</sup> Researching Providence offers an opportunity to listen to the silences of the archives, to glean interpretations of these silences on their own terms while also pondering the reasons for their lack of volume. Since Whitefield was a notoriously bad record keeper, what he did while owner of Providence, how many slaves he held or purchased in that period, are to be determined as of yet.<sup>77</sup> It can only be assumed that once slavery was made legal in Georgia, Whitefield had no further use for his South Carolina holdings so removed and relocated his mobile property sixty miles south to Bethesda.

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<sup>76</sup> Trouillot, 55.

<sup>77</sup> Further study of Whitfield’s land holdings, 1747-1753 (“Providence Plantation”), is the subject of a future project, specifically how Providence and succeeding plantations may have shaped religious and racial mindsets in and around what is today Yemassee, SC, still a stronghold for conservative fundamentalist evangelicalism.

## CHAPTER 4

### ECONOMY OF EVANGELISM

Eric Williams' book *Capitalism and Slavery* argues that racism was a consequence of slavery, that in Europe's colonies unfree labor was the reality at some point for all colors and creeds. Chronicling the progression of labor exploitation by European elites from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth centuries, Williams shows how the colonizing factions' relatively unsuccessful enslavement of American Indians led to a collective determination that African slaves would be most effective for their purposes. Similar to Whitefield's argument for why enslaving Africans was necessary for Georgia's success, Williams writes of a perceived inexhaustibility of Africans as resources - both in quantity and quality - which reigned supreme in maximizing exploitation of labor for purposes of mass production.<sup>78</sup>

With property ownership and means of production comes a certain power, political and social, and many of the first successful religious-minded plantation operators went on to become representatives in government or were otherwise politically influential. By proselytizing to slaves and other disfranchised groups in an effort to create a "win-win" scenario for the dominated and dominators, wealthy paternalistic planters merged religious tendencies with their desire to create a more productive labor force. In *Persistence of the Old Regime*, Arno Mayer writes that the feudal elements of European society, among both the political and civilian realms, perpetuated their dominance effectively "because they knew how to adapt and renew themselves," that through

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<sup>78</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1944).

*selectively* adapting and assimilating new ideas they did not endanger their collective status.<sup>79</sup> If the eighteenth-century American landscape was free of class hierarchy familiar to European colonists, how did they determine their status?

### **Constructing Class**

In early modern Europe, religion and class were merging on micro and macro levels. Scholar Arno Mayer writes that the mirror of Nobility's adaptation to changing social orders was the lesser class's emulation, a skill in which the bourgeoisie was adept.<sup>80</sup> It fast became the ambition of the bourgeoisie to mimic aristocratic lifestyles, a practice which Mayer makes analogous to industrial and financial capitalism's insertion into preindustrial society.<sup>81</sup> The power of surnames, prefixes, and other "badges of distinction" can be seen throughout Europe, and such marks of recognition especially coveted by commoners.<sup>82</sup> In a "keeping up with the Joneses" sense, aspiring elites sought to send their sons to the same colleges as that of the nobility, and for their part the schools themselves had a hand in directing and redirecting student interests away from the "unworthy" industrial trades and toward the well-respected, honorable services to the Church, military, and law.<sup>83</sup> Mayer shows that the twentieth-century tendency to place landowners at the top of the social hierarchy with banking, trade, and commerce supporting, can be directly correlated to tendencies of preceding centuries.<sup>84</sup>

Consideration of Mayer's theories of adaptation and emulation is critical for two reasons:

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<sup>79</sup> Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981): 12, 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 82, 83.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

first, for approaching an understanding of the emergence of class in colonial states, with Christian evangelism playing an important part; second, because adaptation and emulation are characteristics shared by religion.

One way the elite ensured a place at the top was by identifying “outstanding” individuals of the obviously lesser classes and bringing them into their fold, adding a tangible value – and perhaps an implicit relatability – to their collective.<sup>85</sup> The elite’s emphasis on “gentlemanly” rather than productive formal education exemplifies a selective adaptation or compromise to shift the societal weight to their side. We see this in the previously-mentioned anecdote of Whitefield’s disdain for working at the family business, as he clearly ranked of the prospect of attending Oxford far higher than continuing down the path of manual labor. In a localized way, similar patterns can be found on plantations themselves, especially among slaves held at rice plantations of the coastal lowcountry.<sup>86</sup> Slave hierarchies developed within the plantation framework, the plantations developing their own sense of hierarchy within greater society; to be an overseer was more reputable than to be a field hand, to work in “the big house” more desirable than in the hot and dangerous rice paddy. More broadly, America itself began fighting its way to the top of the Atlantic colonial hierarchy, literally during the Seven Years War, and both literally and ideologically in the American Revolution.

Another snapshot of class creation offers a snapshot of the process of class creation is seen in the example of the South Carolinian Bryan family. They existed in a somewhat liminal state, financially better off than many but not nearly at the level of European aristocracy described by Mayer. However, if we apply the adaptation/emulation

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<sup>85</sup> Mayer, 81.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Joyner, *Down By the Riverside* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

framework to Galloway's scenario, it is possible to refer to the Bryans as early-American bourgeoisie. They strove to emulate the evangelical piety of Whitefield, who in turn emulated them, both parties adapting Christian language to justify their social and economic endeavors. What Mayer calls the "agglutinating force of the ritual, mystique, and patronage," requisite elements for merging privilege and religion culminating in political leverage required for class domination, was made real in America in the actions of planter-evangelicals and evangelical-planters.<sup>87</sup>

### **Commodifying Evangelism**

If considering religious sensationalism as connected to the power given a commodity, George Whitefield absolutely personified the commodification of religion. To the table of emerging Enlightenment sensibility he brought a certain art, his delivery of theological messages thickly laden with all three of Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion.<sup>88</sup> His biographers, whether writing in the 18th or 21st centuries, remain transfixed on his skills of oration and well-crafted prose. Even his friend Ben Franklin, who adamantly avoided engaging with any particular religious dogma, partook in consuming his delivery of Christian messages. Of the eloquence with which Whitefield spoke, Franklin wrote "every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turn'd and well plac'd, that, without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleas'd with the discourse..."<sup>89</sup>

To many, Whitefield was an unabashedly hopeful, almost utopian evangelist. His private letters and published journals highlight his tendency to try to see the best in people. Even his depictions of "negroes" are surprisingly respectful (inasmuch as one can

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<sup>87</sup> Mayer, 87.

<sup>88</sup> Ethos, Pathos, Logos.

<sup>89</sup> Franklin, 258.



expect from a person who promotes holding people in slavery); it is on this point perhaps his biographers mistakenly dismiss his actions and invoke the dreaded “product of his time” characterization. As can be inferred from almost excessively polite, kind language evidenced in writings, he consistently displayed a tone of warm familiarity toward his reader and appears to have tried to practice what he quite literally preached. Through a combination of his flair for the poetic, his natural charisma, and inventive use of media outlets of the day, Whitefield had a knack for being able to speak to all sides of an argument while simultaneously showing support for two sides of the same coin.

It would not be inaccurate to call eighteenth-century evangelism one of the first consumer goods. It was pedaled by vendors who had a vested interest in its purchase, whether based in altruism or secular interests. The Wesley brothers may not have had the success they were hoping for when touring through the colonies, but they did lay the groundwork for Whitefield’s success, if only as a refreshing presence. With the Wesleys working in England and Whitefield in the colonies, open-air preaching flanked the east and west sides of the Atlantic, along with invitation-only meetings at homes of the elite. Whitefield’s celebrity status gained him entry into the inner circles of numerous Counts and Countesses, and in the 1740s through his association with Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, he became the private chaplain to her and several of her friends. Thanks to printers like Benjamin Franklin, evangelism via pamphlets, books, and open letters made the public consumption of evangelical messages much easier than in previous years. For better or worse, people saw in these messages something complimentary or contradictory to their own causes or sociopolitical ideals, but in either case evangelism was fast becoming a hot topic of conversation and consumption throughout the British

empire. What were the effects of religion as an object to be consumed and discussed in a public way?

### **Conspicuous Evangelism**

Conspicuous consumption is a theory based on the idea that a person owns a luxury item in order to show off their wealth, side effects of which may include inflating the real price of the item and distorting the economy as a whole; capital which would otherwise be reinvested to yield greater profit is lost to whims of extravagance. A portion of Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* addresses the relationship between nineteenth-century paternalism and a planter's willingness to invest a large sum of money in slaves.<sup>90</sup> The authors inquire as to the root cause for the high prices of slaves during the height of American slavery's economic prosperity and attempt to determine whether this was due to slave ownership equating to prestige for the owners, thereby driving prices up, or if the very ownership of slaves brought prestige because their price was high.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately Fogel and Engerman conclude that nineteenth-century planters who held slaves for purposes of conspicuous consumption were in the minority, thus the theory of conspicuous consumption cannot offer an explanation for causality since owning slaves proved to be highly profitable and not just for show.<sup>92</sup>

Arguing against the contention "that southern slaveholders were a 'precapitalist,' 'uncommercial' class which subordinated profit to considerations of power, life-style,

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<sup>90</sup> Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Little, Brown, & Co.: 1974).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 71, 253, 254.

and ‘patriarchal commitments,’” Fogel and Engerman claim that by the nineteenth-century slaveowners were “hard, calculating businessmen.”<sup>93</sup> The point, they say, is not determining whether the nineteenth-century “slavocracy” valued its power and patriarchal commitments, but whether such pursuits conflicted with, undermined, or complimented the pursuit of profit. Considering their work, I am inclined to ask: could a similar analysis be applied to planter evangelicals of the 18th century? If using Whitefield’s ministerial network as a case study, perhaps so. For example, at Whitefield’s death in 1770, his wealthy benefactress and fellow Calvinist-Methodist evangelist, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, inherited Bethesda Orphan House and all property associated therein.<sup>94</sup> By this point Whitefield had amassed 50 slaves and had plans to purchase more in order to assure his Georgia holdings would remain self-sufficient.<sup>95</sup> Hastings was advised by her representatives in Savannah, a place she had never visited, to further invest in slaves in order that Bethesda might repay debts owed by Whitefield and, hopefully, become profitable.<sup>96</sup> Scholar J.R. Tyson writes that not only did Hastings take on more slaves, she directed that a young woman slave be named after her.<sup>97</sup> While we can only assume this instruction was followed, the request alone is an example of how evangelism and consumption could manifest in unpredictable ways. Hastings’ intention to have a conspicuous presence at the plantation-orphanage by way of her enslaved property proves an explicit merging of evangelism, slavery, and economics in order to create profit and further a unique and evolving brand of evangelical paternalism.

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<sup>93</sup> Fogel and Engerman, 71, 73.

<sup>94</sup> Boyd Stanley Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Faith and Society* (Durham: Durham Academic Press, 1997): 85.

<sup>95</sup> Whitefield, *Letters*, 496.

<sup>96</sup> William Piercy to Selina Hastings, March 19, 1773 (College of Charleston Library Archive, Charleston, South Carolina). Accessed July 2016.

<sup>97</sup> J. R. Tyson, “Lady Huntingdon, Religion and Race.” *Methodist History*, 50:1 (Oct. 2011): 33.

Given external factors like the Revolutionary War and lack of adequate archival documentation, we cannot yet prove whether Selina the slave became a profitable investment for Selina the slaveholding evangelist, but we can conclude that the latter attached prestige to ownership and to ownership the expectation of profit. Based on the Methodist approach to the Christianization of slaves, we can also assume Selina the slave might have been converted, or was probably encouraged to do so, by her presumably Christian overseers; she may have even been baptized. These early evangelicals left a legacy that was more than happy to accept slavery as a part of the collective reality, especially if it meant the creation of a thriving orphan house and a hope for the future of Methodism in America.

There is a grotesque irony in aspiring to amass a collection of people with the distinct purpose of exploiting them so as to provide goods and resources for other people, and it is at the core of this irony that the link between evangelism and capitalism is rooted. The growing elite class capitalized on their bourgeois desires for self-promotion and status enhancement, solidifying their social and business networks among their rising class, a one-way street for the benefit of the nobility and imbalanced in perpetuity with the less-affluent members of society. Itinerants who sought to find or make a seat for themselves near the top of the hierarchy did so by way of approving of slavery and partaking in its bounty.

Perhaps a more generous approach would be to look at the topic through the lens of scholar Leora Auslander. Focusing on material culture of the Revolutionary period, her *Cultural Revolutions: Everyday Life and Politics in Britain, North America, and France* offers a unique perspective for understanding the role early American consumer culture

had in creating a shared national identity.<sup>98</sup> Challenging T.H. Breen's dubbing of the American Revolution a "consumer revolution," Auslander argues instead for a "cultural revolution," with a newfound accessibility of goods and advertisements having led to new ways of thinking about them, the placement of objects giving way to a rise in production of social meaning and relationship to the self. For Auslander, it was the sensationalism surrounding the acquisition of goods which convinced people of the power of material things, and in a diverse Atlantic world culture had to be reappropriated to create radical change. Metaphorically placing this theoretical skin atop American evangelism offers three interpretations: for the lesser classes, the sensationalism around acquiring a guarantee for salvation in the afterlife convinced people of the power of Christianity, and of Whitefield as a portal for spiritual insight; of the sensationalism surrounding Whitefield, the man and his messages became objects for consumption, underscoring his self-perceived authority as messenger for God; for Whitefield, the sensationalism around his itinerancy convinced him of the power of God working through him, and the success of Christianity's spread rested on Bethesda's self-sufficiency such that he might remain mobile.

The idea of a shared identity stemming from cultural revolution and materialism can be applied to Appalachian Christian communities. In his book *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry*, Scott Rohrer argues that evangelical culture influenced the way that people from different ethnicities and economic interests interacted, creating religious melting pots whose key ingredient was evangelism. For Rohrer, religion was initially a uniting force rather than a dividing one,

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<sup>98</sup> Leora Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions: Everyday Life and Politics in Britain, North America, and France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

particularly among the well-intentioned Moravian upstarts which are the focus of his work. However, with the passage of time and increased engagement with the material world Appalachian Moravians, once so adamantly opposed to material gains and indifferent to slavery, consciously moved to embrace notions of wealth using slavery as a means to attain it.<sup>99</sup>

While it is never set in stone that a ruling elite will remain in power, it is possible to say that they attempt to make this the case through calculated maneuvering and manipulating the psyche of “lesser” classes in order to make their rule inevitable, a self-fulfilling prophecy. This rings especially true when considering the development of hierarchy and class in colonial America. Did European colonists who might have otherwise been lost in the hierarchical shuffle set out to the colonies in an effort to make a name for themselves? Returning to Galloway’s assessment of the Bryan family, whose desire for increasing landholdings only barely surpassed their desire for religion, we see an ever-narrowing intersection of profitable agrarians and clerics, each uniting under the common aim of exploitation for the greater good.

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<sup>99</sup> Scott Rohrer, *Hope’s Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005): 139, 140.

## CHAPTER 5

### OF LEGACIES AND LAND

In the decades surrounding the Revolutionary period, capitalism found a strong toehold in American society based on the shared characteristic of being able to operate within parameters of liminality, thereby allowing for new religious frameworks to adapt, evolve, and persist. With years of hopeful planning that Bethesda might grow exponentially, in the course of three decades Whitefield had amassed over 2000 acres of land and many slaves in order to create what he saw as necessary space for the orphanage and, hopefully, an adjoining college. At the time of his death he owned a total of 50 slaves, with plans for purchasing more in order to assure his Savannah holdings would be self-sufficient.<sup>100</sup> Bethesda's stationary nature and its reliance on immobile laboring bodies supported Whitefield's mobility as an itinerant minister. By embracing the immobility of slavery he secured alliances with Christian proslavery elites, several of which would take up his charge as evangelical to the Atlantic. However, the Revolutionary War would create unforeseen outcomes, including a diversifying of the ministry to include several African-American preachers working under his proslavery Calvinist colleagues.

#### **Of Whitefield's Bethesda**

Three years after Whitefield's death, planter and slave trader William Piercy wrote a letter to Hastings' from Bethesda. Working as her representative in the colony, he

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<sup>100</sup> Whitefield, *Letters*, 496.

described the state of disarray in which he found the orphanage: one building (the main house, probably) was incomplete and in need of further construction and a new roof, and there were no linens or furniture remaining.<sup>101</sup> Blaming the orphanage's problems on the former manager, James Wright, Piercy proposes that the best solution will be to increase the amount of slaves to do the work needed to get the plantation back in order: "Nothing can be done to purpose without a large increase of negroes... there is an absolute necessity of double the number of the whole... if it is in your Ladyship's power to make a large increase I believe everything might be carried on extensively and gloriously."<sup>102</sup>

About two months later, Piercy wrote Hastings again to inform her that he had consulted with his friends, all of whom agreed that an increase of slaves was the only answer to Bethesda's problems. In an apparent effort to appeal to her pocketbook, he proposed a way to achieve the goal without costing her any money: he would buy the slaves himself; in actuality he had already purchased them. Assuring her the slaves would pay for themselves in three years, and explaining that he did it "for the good of the college" (the hopeful direction Bethesda was headed) and because he "could not bear the thought of drawing upon [her] for any large sums."<sup>103</sup> Having spent 2000 pounds sterling of "his money," a claim which becomes more questionable over the subsequent years' correspondence, Piercy sugarcoats his undermining of Hastings' authority as Whitefield's rightful heiress with their friend Habersham's securing of "six prime negroes" and plans to cut a canal for the growing of rice.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Piercy to Hastings, March 19, 1773.

<sup>102</sup> Piercy to Hastings, 4.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> Piercy to Hastings, May 28, 1773.



At first, Piercy ended his letters to the Countess with a signature similar to Whitefield's and perhaps common among this group of evangelicals, including a hopeful prayer for the well-being of the recipient and the text "Your Ladyship's most devoted and faithful servant..." Over the course of their first year working together from opposite sides of the ocean, Piercy's religious language becomes even more vivid, detailing to Hastings how the Lord was working in their favor. However, by the end of that first year it is apparent that Hastings' patience for Piercy is waning, perhaps for his having gone rogue at the outset, and he repeatedly attempts to win back her favor with updates on new slaves acquired, their usefulness, and profits made for Bethesda.

Although the letters accessed for this paper were one-sided on his part, it is easy to get a sense for how the relationship declined, and by October of that same year he confronts her head-on with weasel-like maneuvering: "The difference in judgment is relative to the manner of my purchasing the slaves to improve your Ladyship's plantation. I simply thought it was the best step... this estate will take good care of itself and yield your family every supply as long as you please without distressing you in the least degree."<sup>105</sup> However, the Countess was distressed and, as her response must have stated, wanted to put a temporary stop to Bethesda and donate all its property to the province for reimbursement.<sup>106</sup> Piercy, who had the advantage of actually being in Georgia to handle Bethesda's affairs, would not hear her request and appealed to her to not be deterred by God's challenges and promised a reimbursement to her soon; of course, that reimbursement never made it across the pond.

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<sup>105</sup> Piercy to Hastings, Oct. 29, 1773; Hastings' side of the conversation was not immediately accessible for this research project.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

Piercy and Hastings corresponded for eight years, and throughout that time it appears that Piercy held onto Bethesda for the sake of a relationship with the Countess (which never came to fruition) or, perhaps more likely, as a matter of self-preservation in the colony before and during the Revolution. In 1781 Piercy writes of the ravages of war on Bethesda, including the linens and furniture plundered, and some slaves carried off or killed.<sup>107</sup> With that he quit the colony and presumably returned to England.

Undoubtedly amusing to read, the letters written by Piercy to Hastings are some of the only documents that trace a narrative of Bethesda during The Revolution. However, more importantly for the purposes of this history, they offer a (perhaps incomplete) epilogue to Whitefield's ministry and legacy as a slaveholding plantation owner. In 1774, Piercy notes Bethesda is selling rice for 300 pounds, enough to - at least he claimed - cover the debts left behind by Whitefield, although it is doubtful his immense debts were ever paid off.<sup>108</sup> He requested "a woman for Bethesda" for various tasks and overseeing of the slaves, and also asked for a teacher, minister(s), anyone to help preach to and convert the men there; he cites 90 men on site, although their status as slave or free is unknown.<sup>109</sup> Ten months later Piercy writes of the use of "slave orphans" in laboring at the orphanage, although it is unclear whether these were white, black, or indigenous children.<sup>110</sup> Finally, in one of his last letters post-war, the ever-benevolent Piercy writes to Hastings "a part of your slaves were removed from Georgia that I might save that part of your property from the unheard of and unusual ravages of war. I obtained leave for them to stay at one of Mr. Elliot's plantations which lay upon the road

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<sup>107</sup> Piercy to Hastings, 1781.

<sup>108</sup> Piercy to Hastings, March 25, 1774.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Piercy to Hastings, Jan. 16, 1775.

to save the expense of a tavern while they remained there in order to be advertised for sale which took up near a month and they were publicly advertised in the papers for three weeks and sold... it would be very strange indeed if the London Merch. Had not heard of it.”<sup>111</sup> Clearly Hastings never trusted Piercy, and he seems to have given her ample reason to not.

### **A New Evangelical Era?**

The aforementioned letters offer key insight into the world of proslavery evangelicals. Piercy’s mimicking of Whitefield in employing religious language, his ongoing connection with Hastings, his steadfast resolve for hanging onto Bethesda for as long as possible implies that he fancied himself Whitefield’s shoe-filler. Having nominated himself in 1771 as a candidate for joining Hastings’ circle of itinerants, later dubbed the Lady Huntingdon Connexion, Piercy worked to attain her patronage for over a year until she – having few other options at hand – finally agreed.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1770s and 1780s Hastings came to employ other individuals in the name of her ministerial efforts, including people of African descent. Boyd Stanley Schlenther writes that while Hastings’ deliberate extension of slavery caused abolitionist-minded Quakers like Anthony Benezet to implore her to renounce the practice, her theological views hindered her doing so; Calvinism led her to “throw on to God the responsibility for any social action.”<sup>113</sup> Unlike her predecessor Whitefield, Hastings concern for the salvation of

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<sup>111</sup> Piercy to Hastings, 1781.

<sup>112</sup> Schlenther, 87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

slaves “was strangely muted, certainly when compared with all her other missionary projects.”<sup>114</sup>

Yet, Hastings took an interest in employing black ministers to preach throughout the Atlantic, and in one of the least explicable paradoxes of the Eighteenth Century a marriage came to exist between proslavery Calvinist-Methodist elites and free and formerly enslaved Africans and African-Americans. Hastings both fostered proslavery ideology while supporting the creative efforts of her subordinates, from preaching to compositions of life narratives to poetry. Among these individuals were David Margate, John Marrant, and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, each her ministerial protégés, and she also supported the poetry of Phillis Wheatley. Wheatley wrote and recited a poem at Whitefield’s funeral, “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, 1770,” of which ten editions were published, among them a London edition that served to establish her work and her reputation internationally.<sup>115</sup> Historian Ryan Hanley writes that “not only did [Hastings] patronise Gronniosaw, paying for the publication of [his] *Narrative*, but she also supported the publication of African-born enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects* the following year. Both Gronniosaw’s and Wheatley’s texts were dedicated to her. Hastings’ name can also be found among the list of subscribers to Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* as late as 1789.”<sup>116</sup>

The relationship between evangelical proslavery patroness, Selina Hastings, and freeborn African-American, John Marrant, is a curious one that demands further exploration. While in-depth historical inquiry will be served better in the context of a

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<sup>114</sup> Schlenther, 91.

<sup>115</sup> William H. Robinson, *Phillis Wheatley in the Black American Beginnings* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975): 15.

<sup>116</sup> Ryan Hanley, “Calvinism, Proslavery, and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw.” *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:2 (2015): 373.

separate project, this work would be remiss to not mention the main tension worthy of future scholarly pursuit. Religious historian Cedrick May is one of the only scholars who has written about Marrant specifically, so his work is referenced heavily here. First, he posits that Marrant initially engaged with Hastings despite her proslavery tendencies because of certain doctrines which might have appealed to his sense of identity, as well as offering explanations for certain hardships he experienced during his life.<sup>117</sup> May sees Marrant as using Methodism as a legitimizing force, a starting point for discussing religion in places that otherwise banned its discussion, such as among certain southern plantations whose masters did not subscribe to Whitefield's earlier promotion of the merits of Christianizing slaves. Crediting Marrant with incorporating "an implicit critique of the American slave system" into his evangelism, May asserts that Marrant "adapted and developed Huntingdon theology in ways appropriate [to his audiences]" and "realized Christianity's potential to be an organizing force that could oppose tyranny."<sup>118</sup> Still, May acknowledges that Marrant knew he would sacrifice his funding by being particularly vocal of his antislavery sentiments.

At some point Marrant diverged from the Connexion's emphasis on scholastic doctrine and began preaching against it, suggesting that "common folk could glean the meaning of Scripture, independent of established church authorities."<sup>119</sup> Ironically, this was Whitefield's argument, too, one which seems to have been lost on Hastings and more conservative members of her Connexion. This break may have signified the beginning of the end for Marrant as a Hastings operative, and by the time he began his outreach to

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<sup>117</sup> Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008): 66.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 71, 72.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

people living in Nova Scotia – some of whom might have been Black Loyalists – his funding sources began to dry up, the Connexion’s interest in funding his efforts waning. Although May does not satisfactorily explain how Marrant and Hastings reconciled their differences over slavery, he does credit Marrant with helping to “change the way black people viewed themselves in relation to religion.”<sup>120</sup>

As evangelicals continued adapting their theological messages to fit the needs of the slaveholding population, evangelism reinvented itself as it was taking root in new places and new ministries. In an ironic twist that traditional Anglicans surely did not expect, John Wesley would go on to create great swells for the abolition movement of the late-1700s, as well as promoting efforts at reaching those disenfranchised people of England who were at the bottom rung of capitalism. He may have conducted open-air sermons under the cloak of the Church of England but would ultimately create his own branch of Christianity through openness to all, with a special focus on those the Church left out: women, black people, and poor people. While Heyrman argues that southerners favoring evangelicalism was never inevitable, it seems that a shared ability for adaptation and reinvention is what allowed both to not just survive, but prosper.<sup>121</sup>

### **Further Awakenings**

By the end of the American Revolution, much of Atlantic society was operating in a world of revolutions, themselves subject to perpetual adaptation. Socioeconomic and cultural plasticity necessitated instability, and the reverse was also true. Attributing much of this behavior to the nature of revolution itself, historian Jane Landers traces shifting

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<sup>120</sup> May, 83.

<sup>121</sup> Heyrman, 26, 28.

political and religious currents as experienced by Atlantic Creoles who experienced both positive and negative side effects of being caught in a cycle of instability. In her book *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*, Landers relays narratives of oppressed individuals who forged successful outcomes out of a willingness to risk danger, find an opening, seize the moment, and free themselves from bondage, literally and figuratively.<sup>122</sup> Individuals who quite literally embodied their liminal status, both racially and culturally, rarely saw an end to their requisite adaptation, but rather one adaptation after another.

Caught between free and enslaved, a member of society and not, this instability made forging communities a challenging but not impossible task. For Creoles, it was often hard to distinguish friends from enemies due to pervasive fluidity among people, whether in wartime or peace.<sup>123</sup> Joining an extant religious community might have been out of the question for them in the slaveholding Protestant colonies of Georgia and South Carolina, but Landers writes of individuals and families who found safe haven in Spanish Florida, at least for a time.<sup>124</sup> The Catholic Church played an important role in this alternative colonial society, a “multicultural world... Spanish only officially” where fugitive slaves could request religious sanctuary and Spanish colonial leadership was required to protect potential Catholic converts, especially those who were seeking the “true” faith not offered to them by their Protestant owners.<sup>125</sup> Becoming a member of the

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<sup>122</sup> Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 13.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-37.

Catholic Church equated to freedom, offering to formerly disenfranchised people a chance at gaining affiliation, brotherhood, protection, and status.<sup>126</sup>

It is worthy to consider if parallels can be drawn between Creoles finding safe haven in liminality and black evangelicals finding similar space beneath the paternalistic leadership of a proslavery Calvinist. Societal uncertainty makes for strange bedfellows, and Landers' description of Creoles needing to remain fluid as a matter of survival poses the question for the Marrants, Gronniosaws, and Wheatleys of the eighteenth-century Atlantic. Hanley writes that Gronniosaw's social and connective relationships were "conducted with individuals whose interests in the slave trade were well established," that at the time of publication for his narrative his family was "financially dependent on the good favour of many individuals then being criticised for owning slaves."<sup>127</sup> Hanley asserts, as have others, that any anti-slavery sentiment extant in Gronniosaw's *Narrative* would have been hidden deep within the text; the same would probably have been true for her other protégés. Perhaps there were hidden proslavery messages, or perhaps that is wishful thinking on the abolitionist side of hindsight. Either way, these particular individuals of African descent found some comradeship in the Connexion, and their ability to find some semblance of mobility within that movement remained a radical act in its own right.

If the emotionally-charged preaching and informal nature of evangelicals' outdoor ministry meetings turned off some people, the reception among others was most favorable, particularly among African-Americans. Christine Heyrman suggests that conversion among African-Americans was slow to get going, hindered by white

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<sup>126</sup> Landers, 40.

<sup>127</sup> Hanley, 375.



perceptions of their “ecstatic responses” as “[defying] control” and creating an unsettled feeling among white society.<sup>128</sup> By the 19th century, as more whites adopted evangelical ideologies they judged blacks as prone to delusion and misinterpretation of evangelical messages, thus incapable of understanding the “true” religion. However, the reality was that these free-thinking African-Americans were melding ancestral traditions with Christianity and making something altogether new, an “enduring power of ancestral religious traditions” among them. Beginning in the pre-Revolutionary period and continuing through the 19th century, colonial America saw a pluralism of ethnicity within denominations, with regionally distinct “revivalism” appealing to more emotional and sentimental religious audiences.

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<sup>128</sup> Heyrman, 52.

## CONCLUSION

*Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,  
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatch'd from Africa's fancy'd happy seat:  
What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?  
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd  
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:  
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?*

*Phillis Wheatley*

*~1773*

*(Published in William Robinson's Phillis Wheatley in the Black American Beginnings)*<sup>129</sup>

The lack of hierarchical framework in the south made space for embracing a general sense of anti-authoritarianism, out of which grew new secular and religious structures and institutions. Consequences of our collective “Great Awakenings” include a sacralization of independence, much like that of the sacralization of landscape previously described by Jon Butler, and featuring the melding of religious and political authority. The question of being or becoming American loomed large during the time in which Whitefield lived, and we see through his evolution from minister to plantation owning itinerant a tension around how best to engage with colonial society.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, the question of what was within the bounds of embodying the ideal evangelical Christian – Methodist, Moravian, or otherwise – was ever-changing, and some regions more than

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<sup>129</sup> Robinson, 41.

<sup>130</sup> Auslander, 95.

others grew to embrace the institution of slavery. Enlightenment-era thought and expression challenged old and cushioned fledgling structures, and from this came new religious moulds, each tailored to fit regionally-specific needs; again, adaptation reigns supreme. Indeed capitalism, slavery, and evangelism all share an important fundamental characteristic: the ability to thrive within a space of the unknown, their frameworks continuously expanding and shifting within ever-broadening surroundings.

By the time Whitefield arrived in Georgia in the late 1730s, the groundwork was laid for him to steer the more religious-minded planters toward a pro-Christianization view. By making himself and his theological messages accessible to many, he had broad appeal and was seen as relatable, either through charismatic leadership, a willingness to be vulnerable to some criticism, or both. It was determined in his immediate circle that Christianizing slaves was important for their salvation and that of their owners, the latter of which bettered their own hopes for salvation by way of fulfilling the Christian duty of evangelizing. Equally important, or perhaps moreso, was that some planters hoped Christian slaves would result in calm and productive plantation relations. Thanks in large part to its intimate relationship with slaveholding planters, the driving forces of the fledgling capitalist system, eighteenth-century Methodism played a major role in the development and perpetuation of slavery and race-based prejudices in the American South, not just in the immediate future of the eighteenth century, but with effects lasting well into the nineteenth (and arguably today as well). This relationship is often either overlooked or misinterpreted by scholars of this era, and with the exception of James Paterson Gledstone's century-old critical commentary of Whitefield's proslavery

tendencies, there are limited dissenting opinions about the role of Methodism in helping cement Christianity to slavery.

Education empowers, and it implies mobility. Information enters the mind, is processed, and may remain stationary or be applied outwardly to achieve some greater purpose. Those who move freely but are not allied with the elite are seen as threatening and are moved out of the way by mobilizing forces to immobilize others. This might involve the temporary, *involuntary* mobility, as with people forced into moving toward a life of slavery or indentured servitude, but this mobility does not last. Furthermore, *movements* require a certain level of pioneering leadership whose job it is to mobilize their compatriots to join them on the other side, literally or figuratively, of wherever it is they presently exist. Immobilized people have always found ways to create movement within and, if successful, outside their immobility.

It is noteworthy that the ramping up of evangelical Christianization efforts occurred in the few years surrounding the Stono slave uprising, perhaps as a reaction to and anticipating similar events which had yet to occur; keeping the peace within and among their property was a priority for slaveholders. Inasmuch as an owner of another human being can show benevolence to their captive while simultaneously perpetuating their enslavement, it does appear that some planters of the Great Awakening era believed their actions to be in the interest of their slaves, by virtue of their actions being in the interest of themselves. Of course, the effects of promoting a shared religious ideal by one side of a fundamentally inequitable relationship to the other did not pan out the way the planters had hoped. Slaves continued to rise up, run away, adopt and adapt Christian

messages for their own purposes, and ultimately some went on to start their own congregations, both within and outside the bounds of enslavement.

If capitalism, slavery, and evangelism share the ability to thrive within a space of liminality, so too do the people involved in each system. Where socioeconomic hierarchies and paternalistic dogmas are presumed to be accepted and normalized, they are actually in a perpetual state of motion; people and their Movements are not static. Where the affluent elite, either secular or religious, try to expand their domination of physical and figurative landscapes, those affected by their whims will continue to react and occasionally push back. Shifting their collective weight within ever-broadening surroundings, the less affluent will evermore adapt, evolve, and persist.

This work has been an attempt to highlight some of the overt and covert ways in which colonial-era evangelicalism supported and perpetuated slavery, as well as consideration of how the economic impacts of slavery may have shaped early American religiosity. Its purpose is to offer an overview of the interconnectedness of stereotypically disparate topics, and to highlight themes that are to me necessary to a well-rounded understanding of the origins of American evangelism. These connections are, as far as I am aware, lacking in many narrative religious histories, which tend to focus on slavery and economy but less religion, or slavery and religion but less economy. Methodist evangelism has had a strong presence in every century since the nation's founding, and much of its Great Awakening-era dynamism tends to be taken for granted in modern scholarship.

My research here scratches only the surface of rich histories yet to be done. In the interest of emphasizing southern evangelism as having an important impact in the

Atlantic system, my approach here has been to synthesize broad trends rather than focus on one or two particular aspects in detail. However, numerous approaches exist for tracing the development of post-revolutionary transatlantic Methodisms, including in-depth investigation of the process by which preachers like John Marrant made space for antislavery ministry within a proslavery framework, as well as studying how the legacies of proslavery evangelicals have or have not been portrayed accurately in secondary scholarship. On the point of legacies, of particular interest to me are those of a spatial nature, especially the footprints of plantations still very much present in the southeastern lowcountry; it is impossible to drive around the area near Providence Plantation and not see the physical history of slave labor. Equally striking is the abundance of churches in the area, a reflection no doubt of the evangelical efforts discussed herein. Many towns lying between the cities of Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia are economically poor (but rich in churches) yet are paradoxically surrounded by tourist destinations and golf resorts; the juxtaposition is staggering, though not surprising.

Evangelism is inherently conspicuous. Indeed that is the point, to proselytize outwardly, obviously, shamelessly. People who embody their work in a very personal way transcend divisions which may have once demarcated the personal from professional, now hazy at best. When religion is a big part of making one's living, the professional easily bleeds into the personal, and vice versa. If "God and profit sat side by side" in the mid-Seventeenth Century, it is curious to see how the same sentiment adapted itself to fit into the next round of revolutions a century and an ocean away.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Auslander, 54.

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