

The Racial Politics of Resurrection in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World

Abstract: This essay examines the impact of the eighteenth century's developing rhetoric of racial difference on Protestant attitudes toward the religious salvation of Africans across the Atlantic world. As English colonies passed legislation that widened the legal and social gap between blacks and whites, missionaries and theologians called for more robust and wide-ranging efforts to evangelize African men and women. I show how speculation into the fate of bodies of color in the afterlife helped some Protestant authors navigate this apparently contradictory situation. Reading the work of two Massachusetts puritans (Samuel Sewall and Cotton Mather), and one Connecticut Anglican associated with the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (John Beach), I demonstrate that the fine details of these writers' eschatological and millennial schemes often belied their overt insistence that ethnic distinctions would be entirely transcended in the world to come. Each suggested, in his own way, that it was impossible to imagine that a resurrected body could be black, thereby underlining the subordinate status of Christians of color during mortal life.

Keywords: resurrection, afterlife, millennialism, religious conversion, African Americans, slavery, Cotton Mather, Samuel Sewall

On April 3, 1711, Samuel Sewall had dinner with his fellow justices of the Massachusetts Superior Court. He noted in his diary that the company “[s]pake much of Negroes” that day (2: 305). In the course of their discussion, Sewall raised the problem of whether Africans “should be white after the Resurrection,” prompting a vigorous debate at the table. John Bolt maintained that the question was inherently “absurd, because the [resurrected] body” would be translucent, and therefore “void of all Colour.” Sewall retorted that Bolt “spake as if it [the resurrected body] should be a Spirit,” reminding him of the risen Christ’s words to his disciples in the Gospel of Luke: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke

24:39). Sewall's diary entry on the conversation ultimately abstains from offering a firm conclusion on the whitening of resurrected black saints, although it does suggest that he considered it a serious possibility.

Twelve years later, Sewall's son Joseph preached a sermon that touched on the same idea. In April 1723, Boston was panicking over a series of arsons that had begun on March 30 and would continue for several weeks. Following a second fire three days later, "in Leverett's Lane[,] near the Quaker's Meeting House," the *Boston News Letter* reported that "a Negro Man Servant" had confessed to starting the blaze (4 Apr. 1723, qtd. in Hutchins). More fires followed, including one on April 13 that very nearly spread to "the Wooden part of Judge Sewall's dwelling House" (*Boston Gazette*, 15 Apr. 1723, qtd. in Hutchins). Enslaved men were assumed to be behind these further incidents, and Samuel Sewall himself counseled Governor William Dummer to advertise a reward for information leading to the apprehension of those responsible (Hutchins). It was in this context that Joseph's homily addressed the African inhabitants of the city, encouraging them to confess to the crimes or to identify the perpetrators. As Zachary Hutchins observes, Sewall linked this cooperation in the investigation to the remission of sins and a prospective setting aside of the "burdens" of their "black bodies." "The terms of forgiveness," Hutchins continues, "are framed by Sewall in the racialized language of Isaiah 1:18—'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" The language of Sewall's sermon stressed that accepting Dummer's offer would mean receiving enough money to purchase one's freedom. Hutchins explains that this prize is figured as a kind of "social ascension" or resurrection: by quoting Philippians 3:21 Sewall suggests that the African servant can exchange the "vile body" of the enslaved for the "glorious body" of the free man. The prospect of a literal blanching after death, I would add, was also in play.

These two episodes in the history of the Sewalls (a family actively involved in the slave trade) raise an interesting question, bringing together eschatology, soteriology, and the then still emergent category of racial difference. Did eighteenth-century Protestants believe that ethnic identity would be carried over into the world to come? In the early modern era, Christian apologists had highlighted pagan beliefs about life after death in order to defend their conviction that all humankind shared a common

origin. Horrified by Isaac La Peyrère's proposal that non-European and non-Semitic nations were descended from men and women who had lived before Adam and Eve, orthodox theologians claimed that pagan superstitions regarding resurrection, reincarnation, and the transmigration of souls were corrupted forms of ancient Jewish doctrines.¹ Through the 1600s, then, the concept of the afterlife was more closely linked to underlying similarities between peoples than to divergences between them.² By the 1690s, however, Europeans and Euro-Americans were finding it increasingly advantageous to draw distinctions between themselves and other peoples. This change was reflected in debates over postmortem existence. As skin tone gradually became an increasingly important marker of racial difference, some scientists and theologians came to the same conclusion as Joseph Sewall: blackness was an impediment and disfiguration that could not be permitted to enter heaven. Other thinkers adopted positions comparable to John Bolt's, emphasizing the brightness or transparency of all resurrected bodies as a means of downplaying the significance of ethnic distinction in the next life. Later in the century, during the age of revolutions, African American spiritual leaders would develop this position to further their own ends. Since skin color had no bearing on salvation, they insisted, blackness should not be viewed as a marker of inferiority.³

This essay will explore the dynamic disclosed by this last example. Eighteenth-century debates about the resurrection of men and women of African descent, I will argue, were closely connected to the increasingly vexing problem of their social and political status in the present dispensation. Although Protestant conceptions of the millennium and the afterlife were already bound up with assumptions of European cultural superiority, two new developments combined to intensify this association. First, around the turn of the century, the colonies of the British Atlantic began to codify racial distinctions more strictly. In Virginia, the marriage of English to African had been illegal since 1662, but a 1705 statute, *An Act concerning Servants and Slaves*, hardened the distinction between the two groups by stipulating that unlike their "christian white" counterparts, African and Native American servants were subject to perpetual, heritable enslavement, as well as harsher disciplinary measures (Henning 450). As the numbers of enslaved men and women in North America and the Caribbean continued to increase, other jurisdictions followed Virginia's lead in passing legislation that not only delineated the terms of slavery but also described

a widening gap between Africans and Euro-Americans in general. In New England this legal division was not as broad as it was farther south—both free and enslaved Africans could give evidence against white people in court, for example (Greene 179). The small number of slaves in the North meant that they and their enslavers “were densely enmeshed in the overlapping relationships that formed local communities” (Sweet 62). Nevertheless, slavery there was still characterized by the principle described by Orlando Patterson as “social death”—although they were present within the body politic, enslaved people were not full members of it, being barred from serving in the militia and from marrying whites (Sweet 63). This exclusion extended to the grave—Africans were usually buried in a “separate section of [a town’s] burial ground,” and in some places this proviso was legally compulsory (Jordan 132).

The second key context for my investigation cut across this growing separation of the races, without necessarily seeking to counteract it. As the eighteenth century progressed, both Anglicans and dissenters argued that English Protestants should take the conversion of Africans more seriously. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), founded in London in 1701, sent missionaries across British North America and the Caribbean to bring enslaved people into the Church of England. In New England, meanwhile, a new generation of ministers led by Cotton Mather challenged the long-standing complacency about the small number of African church members. The efforts of each of these parties met with resistance, as owners worried that the baptism and conversion of their human chattel would be taken as grounds for emancipation. As Heather Kopelson and Rebecca Goetz have shown, enslaved people across the colonies did indeed seek to take advantage of the ambiguity that their baptism created by petitioning civil and religious authorities for their freedom. While they could appeal to the Protestant conviction that all Christians were equal members of the collective “body of Christ” (Kopelson 7), this claim had to compete against the widely held belief that Africans (as well as Native Americans) were constitutionally predisposed to be imperious to the spiritual and social transformation that accompanied true conversion and were therefore trapped within a “hereditary heathenism” (Goetz 139). In an attempt to refute such prejudice and contain the politically revolutionary potential of African conversion, the SPG eventually settled on the position that spiritual and social freedom were separate, and

that the baptism of the enslaved did not necessitate their release (Glasson 81). Six colonies with high numbers of slaves had already passed laws that stipulated the same thing (Jernegan 506), and although the various New England jurisdictions would not join them, the principle was affirmed by Cotton Mather and other Puritan clergy (Kopelson 122). Nevertheless, the conversion of African men and women retained the ability to disrupt social hierarchies and conventions, especially following the recalibration of structures of religious affiliation during the New Light revivals of the 1740s (Sweet 108).

Writing and thinking about the fate of bodies in the afterlife provided eighteenth-century Protestants with another means of negotiating the potentially conflicting demands of inclusive evangelism and exclusionary racial codification. During this transitional period in the history of race, the question of the eschatological end of human diversity developed in parallel to the related matter of its origins. Mainstream scientists and theologians insisted on the genealogical unity of humankind but began to emphasize African divergence by offering a number of explanations for the darker skin tones of the continent's inhabitants. Similarly, authorities on the next world stressed that men and women of every nation would be resurrected and judged, then saved or damned. But they also developed theories that suggested that Africans would require special treatment during this process, including the whitening of their skin. Even those who denied that this alteration would be necessary sometimes set out visions of heaven or the millennium that privileged those of European descent. In doing so, these authors were not simply suggesting that the question of racial identity was a worldly problem that would be "transcended" in heaven. Instead, they were actively participating in the construction and coalescence of racial difference, as well as outlining the terms on which those newly marked as racially other should be integrated into Christian communities in the present.

Questions of ethnic and religious distinction had, of course, occupied a central position in the eschatological and millennial models of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many early modern Protestants (though not Calvin himself) adopted Augustine's view that there would be a national conversion of the Jews before the end of time.⁴ Frustrated by the persistent threat of the Ottoman Empire, Puritan and Anglican ministers alike predicted that the last days would also witness the destruction of

Islamic power in the Levant (Matar 155–67). The proclamation of Matthew 24:14 that the gospel will be preached to every nation before Christ's return charged English colonialism in North America and the West Indies with eschatological significance. For some participants and observers, Puritan efforts to Christianize Indians in New England prefigured the founding of the millennial kingdom of God on earth. In each of these instances, the eschaton promised to resolve disconcerting ethnic and ideological differences—this expectation lay behind both Samuel Sewall's hunch that Native Americans might be descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel (*Phaenomena* 41) and Cotton Mather's lament that the Algonquians whom Eliot labored so hard to convert were "the veriest *Ruines of Mankind* . . . upon the face of the Earth" (*Triumphs* 78). Nevertheless, there was something unique about the way in which the eighteenth century would frame salvation of African people, and that idiosyncrasy centered on the problem of the black body.

I focus here on the treatment of this issue in the work of three authors: Mather, the senior Sewall, and the SPG missionary John Beach. These writers insisted that men and women of any provenance could be selected to join the resurrection of the just; at the same time, they were reluctant to imagine that risen bodies could be bodies of color. Each of them articulated this reluctance in a different way. Like many of his contemporaries, Sewall wondered if Africans might be turned white in the course of their resurrection. Mather, by contrast, appeared to reject this possibility by claiming that the bodies of all risen saints would be luminous and robed in white. Yet he consistently associated the sinfulness of enslaved people with their darker skin tone. His complex descriptions of the millennium, moreover, strongly implied that the great majority of the raised saints—the rulers of the next world—would be of European origin. Beach, finally, argued that the resurrection of Christian believers took place individually, rather than collectively, immediately following each saint's demise, rather than at the end of time. As a result, neither the resurrection of the flesh nor the earthly millennium had any place in his system: after their deaths, saved men and women would immediately enter heaven, where they would be given new, entirely spiritual bodies. By denying that resurrected saints would have a material form at all, Beach entirely obviated the troubling question of whether African believers would be resurrected, spiritualized, and empowered in their nonwhite bodies.

None of these writers subscribed to the modern idea of race as biological distinction. But in admitting that the salvation of Africans faced special obstacles, they prepared the ground for the formalization of that conceptual category. My argument here builds on a recent scholarship that underlines the significance of Protestant taxonomies of conversion for the development of race in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Writing on Barbados, Katherine Gerbner describes the gradual shift from a “Protestant Supremacy” that generally “excluded enslaved people from Christianity” to a “Christian Slavery” that integrated a limited number of Africans into Anglican congregations (3), while denying them the legal and political privileges reserved for their white equivalents (74–90). Rebecca Goetz outlines a similar process taking place in Virginia, though she stresses that metropolitan authorities and missionaries were always more eager to pursue the evangelization of enslaved people than were American planters (150). John Sweet, meanwhile, explains how the perception in colonial New England that “there was something strange about Christians of color” contributed to the persistent prejudice and oppression that African Americans faced across the northern jurisdictions, where slavery would eventually be abolished (142).

Despite this important work, the pertinence of beliefs about the next life to this transition remains underexplored. I will show how Sewall, Mather, and Beach’s writings on the subject extend aspects of the “social death” connected with slavery into the world to come. As they set out the terms on which it was possible to imagine enslaved people and other Africans living forever, they also reinforced an association between black bodies and human frailty that would only become stronger as the concept of biological racial difference solidified. The Christianized slavery that Mather and Beach advocated was premised on the idea that bondsmen and women could be brought into the church on less than fully equal terms (broadly the same structure was at play in Sewall’s understanding of the place that Africans in general occupied within New England society). This inequitable approach to evangelization attributed to black believers an inferiority that was only partially balanced by the prospect of their postmortem integration into the elect. In describing the conversion of people of color as a difficult undertaking that demanded careful oversight, Protestants risked eternalizing the imputed characteristics that African Christianization was supposed to redress: carnality, ignorance, recalcitrance. Most of all, they

linked the black body to mortality. Some authors, as we shall see, literalized this analogue, implying that blackness was not compatible with eternal life. In so doing, they anticipated a later development described by Andrew Curran, whereby French Enlightenment thinkers admitted Africans into the category of the human, only to ascribe a morbid “materiality” to their physical forms (224).⁵ Before black skin was a definitive marker of social and political exclusion in this world, it was a sign of qualified and contested acceptance in the next.⁶ By way of conclusion, I briefly consider the new model of rebirth that emerged in the course of the midcentury evangelical revivals. While the self-authorizing rhetoric of awakening empowered some black Christians to contest the way in which their conversion had been framed to that point, George Whitefield, one of the most influential white revivalists, persisted for the most part with the condescending approach explored in the rest of this essay.

“CAN THE ETHIOPIAN CHANGE HIS SKIN?”

Samuel Sewall consistently rejected the argument that the enslavement of Africans might help to effect their conversion. *The Selling of Joseph* (1700), his famous tract on the dangers of the slave trade, warned that the bringing of “Nigers . . . out of a Pagan Country, into places where the Gospel is Preached” was no justification of their capture and sale (2). “Evil must not be done,” Sewall explains, “that good may come of it” (3). In 1705, he arranged for the Boston reprinting of an article from the London *Athenian Oracle* that claimed that the trade was “a Disgrace to Christianity, and makes the Name of Christ to be blasphem’d amongst the Gentiles, and (in all likelihood) hinders the Propagation of the Christian Faith in the World” (2). Nine years later, when forwarding both these texts to the American secretary of the English Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), Sewall noted that there would “be no great progress in Gospellizing” until the “wicked practice of Slavery” was ended (*Letter-Book* 2: 39, qtd. in Hutchins). For him, the prospect of that cessation had important eschatological implications. Like many of his Protestant peers, Sewall believed that the conversion of growing numbers of Africans, Native Americans, and other pagans would be one of the key signs of the advent of the millennium. Unlike his friend Cotton Mather, he was not of the opinion that the kingdom of Christ on earth would be populated by a new, supernaturally

transformed type of human being—Sewall held that the resurrection and spiritualization of the dead would transpire at the end of the millennium, rather than at its beginning. But while life would continue along the same existential and biological lines, the geopolitical order of the planet would be completely overturned. *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica* (1697), the definitive statement of his millennial theories, explained how after the destruction of the Catholic Antichrist in both the Old and New Worlds, a global capital, the New Jerusalem, would be established in Mexico. After a collective conversion of the Jewish people and their migration to this new home, the stage would be set for a progressive Christianization of the entire planet and the salvation of most of its inhabitants.⁷ Not only would “Gentile” churches “in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America” be brought back to “Life from the dead” (*Letter-Book* 1: 325), but pagan peoples around the planet would be “rescue[d] . . . from that palpable Darkness and Death into which they are plunged” (*Letter-Book* 2: 80).

While Sewall held that the end of slavery would help to inaugurate this new world, he did not expect that it would be accomplished any time soon. Despite the claims of some modern readers, *The Selling of Joseph* cannot be characterized as an abolitionist text per se. Instead, its primary contention was that “the specific form of slavery practiced in the American colonies” was both morally questionable and financially risky, since it could not easily be established that the enslaved were legally taken captives of war (Stievermann 554n64). Sewall therefore always approached the question of slavery by way of the international warfare that led to its proliferation: only by examining the particulars of each conflict and “the idiosyncratic circumstances” of associated enslavements could the Christian purchaser determine whether his investment was legal and ethical (Hutchins). Once the Catholic powers had been finally defeated, however, the earth would witness the almost total suspension of fighting between nations. Whether or not the slave trade had been discontinued by that point, it would have no place in the millennium, as the grounds for its expansion would no longer exist. In the course of that blessed time, the *Phaenomena* suggested, the world would become a much smaller, much more connected place. The Americas, formerly the “[u]ttermost *parts of the earth*,” would then form the center of a global community of saints (2), which would extend to the four corners of the planet. For saints in England, Sewall claimed, the global position of Mexico was no more inconvenient than that of the old Jerusa-

lem. To prove his point, he traced the route that their ships might follow—stopping first at Barbados, then at Jamaica, before reaching the mainland at Veracruz, by way of the island fortress of St. Juan de Ulúa (42–43). In the next age, these hubs of the slave trade would become staging posts for pilgrims visiting the city of God.

But Sewall did not quite imagine a *total* global unification during the millennium. Following the final defeat of the papacy, the city of Rome itself would be excluded from “the Privileges of Christ’s Kingdom” (38). That spiritual “*Babylon*” would be either literally or politically destroyed, subject to “an absolute Desolation,” or a “cursed, and hatefull” existence. The destiny of Africa and her progeny was more uncertain. Sewall was convinced, as we have seen, that Africans would form part of the international community of saints that would be established then. Yet he also wondered if theirs might prove to be a special case. *The Selling of Joseph* (now notoriously) insists that physiological differences, “disparity in . . . Conditions, Color & Hair,” would prevent Africans from forming “orderly Families” within New England, and thereby contributing to the “Peopling” and civilizing “of the Land” (2). The pamphlet also makes several references to dark skin as a potential obstacle to “the Promised Conversion” of Africa: “Black Men . . . have been distinguished by their Colour” for “time out of mind,” Sewall observes, immediately after citing the prophet Jeremiah’s rhetorical question—“*Can the Ethiopian change his skin?*” The speculative proposition with which this article began—would black men and women “be white after the Resurrection?”—aptly summarizes his dilemma. If that postmortem blanching were indeed to take place, then it would set a limit to African integration into Christendom during the millennium before the general resurrection of the dead took place. Even after the abolition of slavery and a thousand years of peace, black skin would still be a marker of a certain “disparity” that would have to be cast off before the saint could enter heaven.

That possibility haunted Sewall’s interactions with the African inhabitants of Boston, who occupied a marginal and contested position in the town. While he traded in enslaved Africans for at least thirty years (Hutchins), he also approved of attempts to bind them more closely to Puritan social conventions. In 1711, he noted with pleasure that two “Negro women” had been among the recent intake of new members into his church. Their “Relations” of their spiritual experiences, he observed, had

proved “very acceptable” (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 2: 329). When, in 1705, the Massachusetts government drew up a bill banning the “fornication, or Marriage of White men with Negroes or Indians,” he objected, fearing that it would prove “an Oppression provoking to God” (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 2: 143). In mitigation, he managed both to “g[e]t the Indians out of the Bill” altogether and to add a clause that prevented masters from forbidding their slaves to marry someone of their own “nation” (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 2: 143n1). After trusted local servants died, Sewall remarked on their positive qualities.⁸ Following the demise of his own black servant Boston in 1729, he prepared a “good Fire” and bottles of “Sack” for the mourners (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 3: 394). The “long Train” that “follow’d [the coffin] to the Grave” on the day of the funeral included “about 150 Blacks, and about 50 Whites” (including “several Magistrates, Ministers, [and] Gentlemen”)—testament to the “general Love and Esteem” in which the judge’s employee was held (*New England Weekly Journal*, 24 Feb. 1729, 2). But Sewall also made a habit of recording unhappier episodes involving Boston’s black residents: the murders, infanticides, and suicides that seemed to confirm his opinion that Africans were not well adapted to life among white Christians.⁹ Furthermore, he would play a prominent part in the events leading up to the legislation of a stricter Boston city slave code in 1723. During the civil unrest in the spring of that year, the Sewall family home on Newbury Street would twice nearly be burned down—the second attack, Zachary Hutchins observes, occurring on the evening of Joseph’s provocative lecture on the “burden” of blackness. The following day, April 19, new laws were passed that tightly controlled the ability of black slaves and servants to associate with each other.

Despite his professed respect for individual Africans in service or bondage, Sewall was worried by the prospect of large numbers of free people of color living in New England, and the events of 1723 doubtless confirmed him in his fears. In *The Selling of Joseph* he had observed that “few” white Christians “can endure to hear of a Negro’s being made free,” and claimed that “they can seldom use their freedom well” in any case (2). Liberated Africans would be an alien and debilitating presence within the colonies, “a kind of extravasat Blood” diverted into the wrong part of the “Body Politick.” During the millennium, the social and political problems associated with out-of-place people of color would be more or less solved: the slave trade would be ended, and a Christianized Africa would offer them

a suitable home. Yet even then, something of their troublesome otherness would remain: Why else would Sewall entertain the possibility that African bodies would need to be resurrected white? He rejected the position taken by the English physico-theologian William Whiston, who held that blackness would have to be “taken off” at the beginning of the millennium, following Africa’s “general conversion to Christianity,” because it was the product of a curse placed on Lamech, the murderous scion of Cain mentioned in the fourth chapter of Genesis (121). He also stopped short of the esthetic argument offered by the editor of the *Athenian Mercury* (forerunner of the *Oracle*), who suggested that “the colour of Night” was so objectively “frightful . . . and horrid” that it would have to be left “behind . . . in the darkness of the Grave.” Still, Sewall seems to have thought that blackness might savor too much of death and disorder to be brought into eternity. Notwithstanding his own efforts to bring a greater degree of regularity to the lives of African Bostonians, he suspected that their redemption would not be complete until their alterity had been supernaturally erased. Christian slavery troubled him not only on account of its hypocrisy, or due to his reservations about its stability as an institution. Sewall also discounted the concept because he doubted that attempting to integrate a people of a lawless disposition into a structured society was any way to bring them closer to God.

One final episode from Sewall’s journal illustrates this last point perfectly. In October 1701 he was feuding with the Mather family over Increase’s controversial presidency of Harvard. In common with the Massachusetts General Court and the College’s Corporation, Sewall believed that Increase was neglecting his duties in Cambridge by commuting back to Boston to minister to his congregation there (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 2: 44). On October 20, Cotton very publicly claimed that the judge, who “pleaded much for Negroes” and their rights, “had used his father worse than a Neger” in this matter (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 2: 43). Sewall was greatly put out by this, but resolved to make amends. Sending Mather Senior “a Hanch of very good Venison,” he archly noted in his diary that he hoped this generosity did not constitute another instance of “treat[ing]” the minister “as a Negro.” Despite his eagerness to reconcile with his friends, Sewall also wondered whether the Mathers’ harsh treatment of him might not have a deeper spiritual significance. Cotton had made his accusations from inside Richard Wilkins’s book shop, but his loud voice had carried into the

street. Did this mean that Sewall had been “slain” in the street, like the two witnesses whose death and resurrection were described in Revelation 11? If this were so, then Sewall (who tended, as we have seen, to interpret the prophecies of that book politically, rather than literally) could expect to enjoy a renewed influence in New England affairs after this humiliation. Perhaps his argument with the Mathers was a sign of the imminence of the millennium, as the slaying of the witnesses was often understood to be. Given this context, it is striking that Sewall’s lofty sense of his own potential should be closely linked to the pejorative power of the word *Neger* or *Negro*. If that term denoted social death and spiritual exclusion, then it was only fitting that Sewall’s resurrection “as one of Christ’s Witnesses” should follow an unjust accusation that he dealt with Africans more fairly than he did his friends. Only at the end of the eschaton prefigured by the slaying of the witnesses would the stigma of blackness be removed. For now, Sewall knew, it was important to maintain a clear distinction between those who were marked by it, and those who were not.

“THE OBEDIENT NATIONS”: NON-EUROPEANS
IN COTTON MATHER’S MILLENNIUM

The Negro Christianized (1706), Cotton Mather’s primary statement on the conversion of black slaves and servants also associated unconverted Africans in New England with social and spiritual death. As he chastised white enslavers in the province and across England’s empire for their lack of progress in gospelizing their enslaved charges, he warned them that “[a] SOUL . . . that neither knows nor likes the Things that are Holy and Just and Good . . . is in *Great Folly wandering down to the Congregation of the Dead*” (15–16). “The uninstructed *Negroes* about your houses,” he continued, “appear like so many *Ghosts* and *Spectres*,” accusing their masters of spiritual manslaughter, of spilling “[t]he *Blood* of [their] *Souls*.” Mather’s solution to this problem was significantly different from Sewall’s. Although he, too, had some reservations about the practice of enslavement and slave trading,¹⁰ Mather disagreed with the judge about the potential for Christianizing the institution of slavery. If owners would only recognize that the religious education of their slaves was their responsibility, then the unfortunate situation in which the enslaved found themselves could be redeemed. This process, he explained, would require the head of the house-

hold to approach the religious education of his slaves and servants in more or less the same way as he would that of his own children.¹¹ But Mather also stressed that conversion and baptism would not entitle enslaved men and women to emancipation (26–28).¹² Indeed, he suggested that Christian slaves would be much more *Serviceable*, . . . Obedient[,] and obliging” toward their masters (20).

Mather knew that it was important for his pamphlet to anticipate this common objection, as he had ambitious hopes for it. As well as attempting to place the text “in every Family of New England, which has a Negro in it” (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 1: 564–65), he also sent copies “unto the most eminent Persons, in all the Islands” of the English Caribbean (1: 570). He was confident that his evangelical plan, which emphasized catechistical instruction, the inculcation of practical piety, and slaves being permitted to keep the Sabbath properly, was well suited to the task of awakening enslaved Africans across the Atlantic world. A few months after its publication, he wrote to Sir William Ashurst, president of the nonconformist missionary organization the New England Company, ambitiously hoping to “procure an *Act of Parliament*” for the promotion of his particular “Design of Christianizing the *Negroes*” (1: 571, 570).

Like Sewall, Mather described African phenotypes in pejorative terms. While *The Negro Christianized* underlined his belief that the complexions of black men and women were no more than the result of “the long force of the African *Sun & Soyl* upon them” (24), it also drew a connection between darker skin and smaller intellectual capacity through an allusion to an ancient Greek proverb: “It may seem, unto as little purpose, to *Teach*, as to *wash an Æthopian*. But the greater their *Stupidity*, the greater must be our *Application*” (25).¹³ The instructional appendix to the text makes the same association with reference to the preparation of adult slaves for baptism. “[T]is to be hoped,” Mather advises, “that the *Elder Servants*, as *Black* as they are,” will nonetheless be ready to be christened after a relatively short period of education (45).

Notwithstanding remarks like these, Jan Stievertmann has argued against the tendency of earlier scholars to link Mather with the kind of color-fixated racism that coalesced later in the eighteenth century (515). Not only did Mather resist the developing Enlightenment tendency to organize “humanity into a hierarchy of racial groups inherently unequal in their abilities and capacities” (568); he also opposed more traditional at-

tempts to account for ethnic variation, which centered around the idea that peoples of color had degenerated from “an original state of whiteness” (532). The extensive entry on Genesis 1 in his massive scriptural commentary *Biblia Americana* maintained that Adam’s skin “shone like the *Ruby*” formed as it was from “a Red . . . Sort of Earth” (1: 375). Whiteness was therefore just one among the many varieties of pigmentation that had developed from humanity’s antediluvian rubicundity due to environmental differences. In fact, Mather knew that the pinkish-gray people described as “white” were a relatively small minority, globally speaking. He observed, moreover, that the transoceanic emigration of European peoples appeared to be complicating received notions of national appearance: “[T]he biggest part of Mankind, perhaps, are *Copper-Coloured*; a sort of *Tawnies*. And our *English* that inhabit some Climates, so seem growing apace to be not so much unlike unto them” (*The Negro Christianized* 24). From God’s perspective, finally, the phenotypical differences between the various peoples of the planet were of no consequence. “The God who *looks on the Heart*,” he explained, “is not moved by the colour of the *Skin*; is not more propitious to one *Colour* than another” (24–25). If the main body of his pamphlet attempted to convince enslavers that European and African believers would receive the same blessings in the next life, the educational and devotional material appended to it attempted to communicate the same point to the enslaved themselves. In the second of the two catechisms, “*Negroes of a bigger Capacity*” (36), were assured that they were as capable as any one of participating in the resurrection of the just: “If I am a true Servant of JESUS CHRIST,” the catechumen is instructed to repeat, “My Body will be Raised from the Dead, at the Day of Judgment. I shall then be Happy, with Angels, in the City of God for ever” (39).

However, it is possible to read against the grain of Mather’s argument here. Despite these claims, he did not in fact view the salvation of Africans and Europeans in equal terms. In order to understand how and why this was the case, it is important to heed Stievermann’s observation that *The Negro Christianized* must be approached as a millenarian text. For Mather, the global conflagration that would inaugurate the millennium was potentially “only years away” (566). It would therefore have made little sense for him to contemplate the political abolition of slavery, as Samuel Sewall had done. Instead, his pamphlet asked Christian bondsmen and women to accept their situation for just a short while longer, certain as he was that

most of them “would live to see the end of the existing world order and would have to face the apocalyptic day of judgment along with everyone else” (Stievertmann 566). Given this restricted timeframe, attempting to reform the existing system of Atlantic slavery, rather than overturning it altogether, was the most likely means of maximizing the number of converted slaves. Stievertmann concludes from this line of reasoning that Mather was sure that “old differences in earthly station,” including those related to ethnicity, “would be abolished” in the world to come (567). As I will argue now, both the response of an important early reader to *The Negro Christianized* and the model of the millennium set out in Mather’s other writings suggest otherwise.

On August 15, 1706, a few weeks after the publication of the tract, Reverend Nicholas Noyes of Salem wrote to Mather in response to the latter’s request for a tally of the families in the town with African servants. In addition to his answer (“about 27”), Noyes included a poem in praise of Mather’s book and of his mission to the black servants and slaves of New England. The first half runs as follows:

You plant like Paul, you Water like Apollos,
 You set fair Coppyes, happy he that follows.
 You bid fair for it, let Heaven make it doe;
 And by your hands, wash the Æthiopian toe.
 Christs grace & blood applyed, makes white within,
 And clenseth from the Guilt & Stain of Sin.
 The resurrection whiten will the Skin;
 The great refiner & the blessed fuller,
 Will one day make the Saints all of a coler.
 And all be blacker than the Sons of Cham,
 That are not Whitned by the Spotless Lamb.
 (“To the Rev. Cotton Mather” 484)

Here Noyes compares Mather to Paul and Apollos, who carried the gospel to the gentiles in the early years of the church. Picking up on *The Negro Christianized*’s reference to the Greek proverb about washing an Ethiopian, he describes Mather’s evangelisation of New England’s African inhabitants as a kind of internal cleansing, in which “Christs grace” leaves slaves spiritually “white within.” This sanctification foreshadows their literal, physical whitening at the beginning of the millennium, when God will “make the

Saints all of a color.” The second half of the poem underlines Noyes’s sympathy with one of the primary messages of the pamphlet: masters who “use their Slaves as if they had no Soules” risk their own soul’s damnation. Like Mather, Noyes holds that slavery is acceptable in the present dispensation, but also warns slaveholders that in the next world the distinction between master and slave will no longer hold. There, Noyes points out, election and reprobation will cut across social classes and ethnic groupings:

And they of all men only shall be free,
 Christ bought, & brought out of Captivity.
 The Slaves of Sin & Satan then shall stand
 Bound hand & foot, though here they did command.
 The pious Master and the pious Slave,
 The Liberty of Sons of God shall have. (485)

This vision presents the next world as a place where the injustices and inequalities of life on earth will be resolved: the pious slave will be rewarded, just as the wicked master will be punished. However, Noyes also suggests that the phenotypical distinctions that were increasingly central to the practice of slavery in England’s empire would remain in place. Although those who were masters in this life might be consigned to captivity in hell while their charges were granted the freedom of heaven, whiteness would remain the marker of liberty, blackness the sign of bondage. What’s more, Noyes’s admission that it was difficult to convince most owners (“Mammons fools”), and by extension most Christians, to take the conversion of Africans seriously suggested that the final number of black men and women who would be saved was in danger of being comparatively small. Noyes hoped that Mather’s campaign would redress this issue (his own eschatological writing maintained that Revelation’s first resurrection referred to a “time of Reformation” toward the end of human history, when the “Elect” would be drawn “from all parts, and Quarters of the World” [*New-Englands Duty* 64]). But his poem ultimately underlined his belief that it was impossible for Africans to be saved *as Africans*: only white bodies would be admitted into the kingdom of heaven.

Mather disagreed with Noyes on the nature of the millennium.¹⁴ Most likely, he did not share his colleague’s opinion on the physical whitening of raised black saints, either. Still, Noyes’s response to the *Negro Christianized* complicates the idea that Mather’s vision of the world to come was en-

tirely racially neutral. Unlike Noyes and Sewall, Mather rejected the allegorical reading of Revelation 20: 4–6 that read the “First Resurrection” described there as “a meer Political Resurrection” (*Problema* 408), or revival of Christianity’s influence in this world. Instead, he believed that it referred to the literal return to life of the “converted,” those who had experienced the transformative power of divine grace during their mortal lives (“Latin Preface” 93). These “raised saints,” clad in the “white and splendid Robes of Priesthood,” would serve as the rulers and ministers of the new world that would emerge from the ashes of the old one. During the millennium, they would provide spiritual counsel and political direction to the “changed saints”—those believers alive at the Second Coming who would then be translated into immortal, sinless bodies without dying first. While the latter group and their descendants would continue to dwell on the earth, working the soil and building houses and communities (*Threefold Paradise* 289), the former would make their home in the “*HOLY CITY*” of the new Heavenly Jerusalem, where they would be rewarded with a degree of honor and influence proportionate to their efforts on behalf of the gospel in the world that was (258). For St. John of Patmos’s prophecy to be fulfilled in its fullest sense, Mather argued, it was crucial that those who had suffered for the cause should return to life and power “in their own Persons” at the onset of the millennium (rather than vicariously, through “Successors” living later than them in secular history) (*Problema* 407). This position carried important implications for the ethnic makeup of his raised saints or “overcomers.”

These saints, Mather always insisted, would be “fetched out of *Many Nations*. . . . Even, the *Indians*, and the *Negro’s*” (*Terra Beata* 35). But he could be less certain about the *number* of Africans, Native Americans, and Asians who would qualify for this honor. For most of his career, Mather predicted that the church would be in a “*Happy State*” in the years immediately preceding the millennium (*Problema* 371). This period would witness both the Christianization of the entire “Israellitish Nation” and the conversion of large numbers of pagan “Gentiles” from lands “far and near.” Yet this optimism about the future of the church on earth was always in tension with his expectation that the end of the world was nigh. By the mid-1720s, he would renounce his earlier conviction that the Second Coming would be preceded by the mass conversion of the Jews, thereby signaling his expectation that Christ could come back at any moment.¹⁵ Furthermore, his ex-

citement at the fact that the gospel had now been preached in almost every “*Speech or Language*” on the planet (*Terra Beata* 41) was consistently tempered by his disappointment in the lack of progress of Protestant missions to the pagan nations (“is it not a lamentable thing,” he observed in 1721, “that so near unto our selves, there should be so many *Ungospelized Plantations!*” [*India* 18–19]). So while he continued to believe that it was possible that increasing numbers of pagans would be saved in the short time left before the eschaton, his later writings often tended to imagine Christ returning to an embattled church and a divided world. Yes, the living elect would then be “gathered together from all Parts of the Earth,” from “the Midst of wicked and perverse Nations,” to preserve them from the conflagration that would kill the rest of humankind (“Latin Preface” 87). But in the next world these latter-day converts would be numbered among the junior cohort of the elect: the changed saints. The ruling raised saints, by contrast, would inevitably be chiefly drawn from countries where there had been Christians for many years—from Europe and the Levant.

In this respect, then, the millennial earth would witness a continuation of the abortive foreign missions of this world, as the largely European resurrected saints brought God’s word to the nations. Taking on the role of the angels of the former world, they would guide the changed saints living on the New Earth below, flying back and forth with ease from their other duties in the celestial city. It is not hard to see that from Mather’s perspective, this ministry would perfect a number of relationships that were laden with difficulties in the present dispensation on earth: that of British metropolis and outlying American colony, pastor and congregation, missionary and native inhabitant. His description of the new “*Kings of the Earth*” returning to heaven after “the Execution of their *Commission*, . . . in a much more Illustrious Manner, than the Old Conquerors” returned to Rome, carries unmistakably colonial overtones (*Threefold Paradise* 287). What, then, are we to make of Mather’s repeated emphasis on the shining brightness of the “*Garments of Light*” in which the raised saints would be clothed (*Lampadarius* 24)? Did he share Sewall’s suspicion that resurrection would make saints of color white? In fact, Mather quite clearly stated that those who returned from the dead would be denuded of ethnic and sexual distinction. They would “so *Putt on CHRIST*,” that there would “be *neither Male nor Female*, nor any more Difference, between them, than between *Jew and Greek*” (*Threefold Paradise* 265). Yet their relationship with

the changed saints would still admit of a racial dynamic. *The Negro Christianized* promised that Christian enslavers and pious enslaved would soon “be together in the *Heavenly City*” (20). But this projected equality was a figurative simplification of Mather’s actual opinion. Instead, any black slave or servant converted in the last days of the present dispensation would most likely join “the Obedient *Nations*” of the next age, who would live on for many years on earth before being translated to their celestial home. Though freed from the yoke of bondage, they would still be subject to correction by the dazzlingly clad risen saints, most of whom would have originally been European.

Mather’s conviction that this ruling hierarchy would be established very soon had a significant impact on his advocacy of evangelism toward the enslaved, as the differences between his millennialism and Sewall’s demonstrate. The judge’s critique of the ideology of Christian slavery and his speculation about the resurrection of black bodies were both rooted in his uncertainty about the proximity of the millennium. Although Sewall hoped that the Anti-Christ would be destroyed and bondage abolished relatively quickly, he could not be sure when these events would transpire. He was therefore disinclined to endorse any defense of slavery (including its legitimization through the conversion of the enslaved) that might result in a significant increase in the number of Africans in New England. If the eschaton took more time to arrive than expected, the presence of these troublesome aliens in the colonies might turn into a long-term political problem. Mather, on the other hand, could support the Christianization of the institution of slavery and offer converted bondsmen and women effusive guarantees about spiritual equality in the next life, because he was certain that all sociopolitical complications were about to melt away beneath the aegis of rulers assembled from generation upon generation of Euro-Christian saints.

For the same reason, he could also reject the emerging concept of black racial difference more fulsomely than did Sewall, whose warning about a “disparity” in physiological “Conditions” comes much closer to modern racism than anything Mather himself wrote (Stievermann 564n84). Where Sewall’s “inchoate” millennium of mortal men and women might take many years to overwrite these perceived distinctions between Africans and other peoples, Mather’s supernatural kingdom of Christ promised to bring the whole population of the planet together almost instantaneously.

neously. In a late sermon on this prospect he observed that “[d]ifference of *Complexion*, the *first Rise* whereof we know not, is no Objection against our being all *Children of the same Father*” (*Renatus* 9). Not only were “all the Rational Beings who are to be found in *Mankind* . . . the *Offspring* of the *First Adam*” (9), but all the saints, of whatever nation, who truly accepted Christ, the “*Second Adam*,” would “be the *Heirs* of that Glorious World [to come]” (27). That common destiny, Mather argued, ought to determine the way in which black slaves and servants were treated in mortal life (“*Thy Negro* is thy *Brother*,” he insisted [9]). Yet the potentially revolutionary implications of this claim were safely contained by his expectation that most African saints would not be placed among the governors of the new earth.

Although this implication may have been lost on some New England churchgoers, Mather’s pastoral writings on the salvation of individual believers reflected the racial cast of his resurrection theology more directly. When addressing the deaths of white ministers or church members, he presented their place among the raised saints as a continuation of, and reward for, their Christian work in this life: “Be patient, O Faithful ones! God intends an inconceivable Advancement for you. . . . *Highly Advanced* shall [you] be, when [you will be made] companions of *Angels*, and be *Raised out of the Dust*, and be set with those *Princes* and *Nobles*. . . . Oh! How *highly Advanced*, when all [your] *Faithful Endeavours* and *Atchievements* [*sic*] will be Proclaimed with Honour in the *City of God*” (*A Faithful Man* 15).¹⁶ The salvation of Africans and other people of color, on the other hand, he typically framed as the escape of a white, pure soul, from a benighted, sinful, and suffering body: “[T]hough your *Skins* are of the colour of the *Night*, yet your *Souls* will be washed *White* in the *Blood of the Lamb*; and be Entitled unto an *Heritage in Light*” (*A Good Master* 54). Even though he did not associate the resurrection of slaves with a literal whitening of their skin, his rhetoric still suggested that black bodies had to work harder before their souls (“as white and good” in his eyes “as those of other Nations” [*Small Offers* 58]) would be ready to receive salvation. His pietism demanded that “the *Kingdom of GOD* must be first set up” in the hearts and minds of prospective saints, before they could be “*Received* into His *Heavenly Kingdom*”—only through devoting their lives to practical, philanthropic godliness could Christians hope to participate in the resurrection of the just (*Brethren* 9). This standard applied equally to the enslaved as to their enslavers. But while the English were encour-

aged to adopt the “MAXIMS of PIETY” (10) through the practice of self-control, slaves, and by extension all black people, needed European mentors to “*Form & Mould their Souls for the Kingdom of God*” (*The Negro Christianized* 31). Even as Mather’s Christian universalism stressed Africans’ humanity, it also suggested that they needed to be civilized and disciplined to be included within the global community.

JOHN BEACH AND IMMATERIAL RESURRECTION

While it saw the conversion of Anglo-American colonists to Anglicanism as its primary remit, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was also exercised by the goal of Christianizing enslaved Africans across the British Atlantic. As its missionaries struggled to convince plantation owners to permit the religious education of their bondsmen and women, they grappled with the same question that troubled Mather and Sewall: What was the relationship between the liberty promised to the enslaved in the afterlife and their present status as human chattel? Shortly after the SPG’s inception, most of its members settled on a strategy of insisting that the baptism of the enslaved did not compromise the legality of their bondage. As the first half of the eighteenth century progressed, the society continued to emphasize the alignment of its interests with those of enslavers (from 1710, it would become a slaveholding institution itself, as it inherited a sizable sugar plantation on Barbados from Christopher Codrington). Yet many owners would resist its mission, particularly in colonies such as South Carolina and New York that were home to large numbers of slaves and/or free black people. These regions were confronted with a problem that was much less of an issue in New England, with its comparative low population of Africans: the potentially disruptive presence of large congregations of black Christians, many of whom might be able to read.

Anxiety about slave conversion centered on social upheaval, but also extended to misgivings about the status of black Christians in the next world. Like their Puritan counterparts, SPG Anglicans often found themselves reminding others of the spiritual equality of all believers. In 1711, William Fleetwood, bishop of St. Asaph, attacked recalcitrant masters for not living up to the plain truth that their slaves were “equally the Workmanship of God, with themselves; endued with the same Faculties, and intellectual Powers; Bodies of the same Flesh and Blood, and Souls as cer-

tainly immortal: [a] People . . . made to be as Happy as themselves, and . . . as capable of being so" (15–16). Similarly, Thomas Wilson's *Essay towards an Instruction for the Indians* (1740), which became "the Church of England's standard handbook for promoting the conversion of black and Native American people" (Glasson 130–31), scorned those enslavers who attempted to convince their charges that "they [had] *no Souls*" (Wilson xxii). "[A]ll Men," Wilson insisted, "shall *rise again from the Dead* with their own Bodies, and give Account of their own Works" (119). Therefore, "all Christians" must be reminded "that this Life is the Time to choose *where* and *what* they are to be for ever" (123). Writing to London from South Carolina, missionary Francis Le Jau reported a troubling episode that confirmed the SPG's suspicions that some slaveholders struggled to accept these equitable visions of postmortem existence. One of his female "Neighbours," he informed the Society's secretary, had asked him if it were "possible that any of [her] slaves could go to heaven, & must [she] see them there?" (Klingberg 102, qtd. in Glasson 89). During the awakenings of the 1740s, alarmed enslavers articulated the related concern that revivalists were encouraging bondsmen and women in behavior that was above their proper religious station. Writing in the *South Carolina Gazette* in 1742, one author complained that rather than "teaching [Africans] the *Principle of Christianity*" New Lights were "filling their Heads with a Parcel of *Cant-Phrases, Trances, Dreams, Visions, and Revolutions*" (qtd. in Lambert 15). These instructional sessions, he added, were taking place "without public Authority, at unseasonable Times, and to the Disturbance of a Neighbourhood." While the promise of salvation after death could be employed to control and discipline bondsmen and women, the ways in which they accessed the spiritual world needed to be tightly regulated.¹⁷

This contested relationship between the SPG's mission, colonial social order, slavery, and Christian liberty in the world to come provides the context for the last work that I want to discuss: *A Modest Enquiry into the State of the Dead* (1755), an eschatological tract by Connecticut SPG missionary John Beach. A Yale graduate and former Congregationalist minister, Beach had converted to Anglicanism in 1732 and traveled to London for ordination by the bishop of London (Dexter 1: 240). On returning to New England later that year, he took up a position as missionary to his old parish of Newtown, as well as to neighboring Reading. As an Anglican priest in New England, Beach's main charge was to win converts among the Anglo-

American inhabitants of the region (Cotton Mather had complained about this aspect of the SPG's activities in 1715, noting that the Society "send forth . . . their missionaries . . . to maintain confusion in towns of well-instructed Christians," while ignoring entire "plantations in the southern colonies that are perfectly paganizing" [*Selected Letters* 186]). Yet it was also Beach's duty to pay special attention to the salvation of the enslaved Africans who lived in his district. Writing back to the SPG's secretary in 1749, he noted that his "parishioners [were] poor, and [had] but few negro slaves," before adding that those slaves whom he had converted "appear[ed] to be serious Christians" (Hawks and Perry 1: 253). By 1769, he could report further progress: Newton and Redding were now home to "about fifty negroes, most of whom" he had baptized (Hawks and Perry 2: 134). But for our purposes, Beach's most notable contribution to the conversation over the Christianization of Africans was a passing, but telling, claim made in the course of his intervention in a different controversy.

Through the 1700s, the Anglican church continued to be troubled by the heresies of mortalism and soul-sleeping, which had first emerged in England in the wake of the Henrician Reformation (Almond 40–41). Eighteenth-century mortalists argued that Protestant eschatology had been insufficiently purified of Roman Catholic beliefs. In particular, they were concerned that the spiritual states of reward and punishment in which the souls of the saved and the damned would await reunification with their bodies on the Day of Doom were too similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory. Their solution was to revive an idea that had been popular with radical Protestants (including John Milton and Gerrard Winstanley) in the seventeenth century (Young 69–70): between the hour of death and the end of the world, the human soul would "sleep" (or, alternatively, fall out of existence entirely); on the last day, each man and woman would return to consciousness through the resurrection of the body, in preparation for judgment and eternity (73). Mainstream Anglicans vehemently opposed mortalism on the grounds that it undermined the key Christian tenet of the natural immortality of the soul (immortality, for mortalists, was a contingent quality that would be bestowed on the material body following its resurrection). They were also worried about its rejection of immediate postmortem retribution for sinful behavior (78), as they believed the moral order of the world depended on the understanding that wickedness would be punished directly after death (79). Beach, for his part, was

especially exercised by this second point—so much so, that in making his critique of the mortalist heresy he traveled far beyond the limits of orthodoxy himself.¹⁸

In *A Modest Enquiry* he made three proposals that were as boldly simple as they were heretical, by the standards of the time: “there is no *intermediate State*” between the death of the individual and his or her personal resurrection (2); each saint would be given an entirely spiritual, rather than physical body when they were raised again (immediately following his or her death); and there would be no general resurrection of the dead at the end of the world. Beach “freely” conceded that he was “singular” in holding these “opinion[s]” (35). Yet he also explained that this was to be expected, since Roman Catholic resurrection theology had not been properly “examined” and reassessed “since the Reformation.” A careful consideration of the scriptural evidence would reveal that immediate resurrection was the teaching of the Apostolic Church: St. Paul, for instance, “expected . . . that Christ would give him the *Crown of Righteousness*” on the very day that he died (20). Another Pauline text (1 Cor. 15: 50) provided justification for Beach’s claim that the resurrection of each saint was noncorporeal: “*Flesh and Blood cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God*” (24). While most authors, including Cotton Mather (*Threefold Paradise* 227, 221) took this verse to mean that resurrected bodies would be composed of a purified and spiritualized matter, Beach used Paul’s words to support his conviction that the saints would be raised as insubstantial spirits and would never return to the material world after their deaths. In this way, he repudiated one of resurrection theology’s most widely accepted principles: the resemblance between Christ’s resurrection and the general resurrection of the dead. Jesus, he explained, was raised into a physical body as his redemptive mission required him “to tarry some time on Earth, . . . but we have no reason to think that our Flesh and Blood will rise again, unless we are to come and live upon Earth again” (24). Indeed, Beach made it quite clear that there would be no such return to life on earth, either before or after the Second Coming, which would “put an end to this present world” (15). His eschatological system left no room for the establishment of a redeemed society of saints that would retrospectively compensate for the vagaries of secular, fallen politics—a central premise of both Mather and Sewall’s scripts for the millennium. Instead, Beach stressed the alterity of life after death. Straight after their demise, saints would awaken in heaven, which he de-

scribed as “another world” (2) and a “foreign Country” (1), “invisible” to those still living on the earth.

The central politico-theological thrust of this argument was that belief in immediate postmortem judgment would produce a more orderly society. The conventional notion that souls would “wait for [their] Resurrection and Judgment until the End of the World, as Prisoners wait for their Trial till the Time of the *Sessions*” was likely to breed dissension and immoral behavior, “[f]or the farther off an Event is, the less it influences us” (37). But Beach’s heretical ideas also held significant implications for the racial politics of the next world. As I have argued, Protestant eschatologies that featured a millennium on earth tended to make an issue of the conversion of Africans—the assumption being that their integration into the global community of the elect would require special measures. In Beach’s system, however, the world to come was equally alien to all mortal men and women. To reinforce this point, *A Modest Enquiry* stipulated that the spiritual bodies the saints would possess in heaven would have none of the “present Properties” of their mortal forms (26). “In the Resurrection,” Beach explained, “we shall neither be *Male* nor *Female*; neither be Tall, or of low Stature; neither have Hands, Eyes, or Feet, or any other of these earthly Members” (26). Differences in pigmentation would also be redundant: “Our resurrection Bodies will not be white, nor black, nor brown, nor of any other Colour, consequently not Flesh and Blood, nor visible to men in an earthly Body” (26). Beach may have intended the three colors mentioned in this statement to stand for nothing more than skin tone or humoral complexion. But the immediate context, which includes the negation of gender noted above, strongly implies that he has more fundamental questions of personal identity in mind. In so far as he treats skin color as a contingent “property” of human bodies, rather than as a marker of essential, biological difference, Beach is typical of authors writing before the development of modern racial theory. Nevertheless, the fact that he even brings up the possibility of the persistence of skin tone in the next world, if only to reject it, is emblematic of the eighteenth century’s growing preoccupation with racial distinction. It was impossible to even *imagine* “a Body of Flesh . . . and Blood” that had “no Colour or Stature,” he insisted (27).

Beach was formally reprimanded for his unorthodox theories at a meeting of Anglican ministers held at Stanford in October 1757 (Mappen 470). He claimed there, somewhat disingenuously, that he had not intended to

disavow the resurrection of flesh. Though the local Congregationalist ministers continued to taunt him with the charge of heresy, Beach was soon reconciled with his Anglican colleagues, and settled back into the task that occupied him for most of his authorial career: arguing questions of soteriology, liturgy, and ecclesiology with his Congregationalist rivals. But his advocacy of an immaterial resurrection deserves to be seen as more than a curious episode in one man's career. While his unorthodox eschatology was condemned on all sides, it offered a solution to a problem that exercised Anglicans and nonconformists alike: How could the Christian obligation to evangelize the nations be squared with the concern that converted Africans, enslaved and free, would demand greater social and political freedoms?

In *A Modest Enquiry*, Beach argued that the prospect of an imminent and personal Doomsday would encourage believers to focus on eternity, rather than on secular concerns. "What Folly is it," he asked, "for me to contend fiercely and eagerly about the Trifles of this World, . . . or to be much pleased with any earthly Accommodations, when the End of all these Things is at hand" (39)? The wider adoption of this otherworldly perspective, he added, would mitigate the resentment occasioned by social and financial inequality. There would be no need for anyone to "Envy . . . the Honors and Grandeurs" of their betters, when he or she would shortly receive a "*Crown of Glory*" in heaven (40). Baptized slaves, he thereby implied, would be much less inclined to agitate for freedom—his rejection of the earthly millennium and the general resurrection made it much safer to preach Christian liberty to them. In a later sermon, Beach noted that "an abused slave" who became a Christian might "in the next world become a glorious king, and be vastly exalted above his cruel master" (*Three Discourses* 18). The slave in question, however, would have to earn this elevation by performing his present "drudgery faithfully" and "in obedience to Christ." This stipulation was entirely in keeping with the SPG's position that the baptism of the enslaved did not necessitate their emancipation. But it may also indicate that Beach still clung to some aspects of the heresy that he had supposedly disavowed by the fall of 1757. Where the Society insisted that Christian conversion was not enough to bring Africans into the secular body politic, *A Modest Enquiry* had effectively applied this principle to the afterlife, too. Every believer, from whatever nation, would rise again, the tract insisted, but not to join a millennial society on earth, or to lead any kind of bodily life in heaven. African saints could then

be smoothly integrated into the “Congregation of the Righteous” (11), because the black bodies that had marked them out as a political problem in this life would have been definitively discarded. Whether or not Beach still secretly doubted the resurrection of the flesh in 1768, the three soteriological sermons he published that year make very few references to resurrection at all, even as a metaphor for the translation of the soul into heaven. By disconnecting personal salvation from the continuation of the same body into eternity, he suppressed the politically transformative potential of the evangelization of the dispossessed and the enslaved—a particularly important task in the wake of the midcentury revivals, when all sorts of marginalized people began to claim that their future in paradise imbued them with spiritual authority here and now.¹⁹

RACE, RESURRECTION, AND REVIVALISM

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the African Christian was still a primarily notional concept in the British Atlantic. Though both Anglicans and nonconformists had been advocating for a more concerted mission for decades, very few enslaved men and women across the Caribbean and North America had been successfully converted. As Protestant authors sought to change this situation, they unsurprisingly argued that winning souls for God must take precedence over any secular reservations about the social, political, and economic implications of their project. In the eternal world, they contended, every soul was worth the same. It was a scandal, therefore, that those who bought and sold human beings as chattel gave so little thought to the fact that they were trading in “reasonable creatures” who were as “equally capable of salvation” as themselves (Baxter 3: 557). The equality of all peoples in heaven had no bearing on their relative standing in this life. Christian politics, according to Anglican missionary Morgan Godwyn, was not grounded in “*Parity, but [in] Superiority*” (129)—it reinforced the rule of “*Kings and Magistrates*” and “*establishe[d] the Authority of Masters, over their Servants and Slaves*” (128). This line of argument was deployed by those who insisted, with Godwyn, that there was absolutely no obligation for enslavers to release enslaved men and women who converted (139–43). Yet it was also employed by others, including Richard Baxter (3: 559), who thought that masters should be encouraged to emancipate Christianized slaves.²⁰ Even Samuel Sewall, who was uncom-

comfortable with the idea of Christians being held in bondage, stressed what he perceived to be the comparative inferiority of the African people. Though many slaveholders continued to resist any attempt to get them to take the salvation of their captives seriously, the trade-off between dutiful servitude before death and total liberty afterward was a central feature of missionary rhetoric in the period.

The doctrine of resurrection, however, cut across this strict separation of mortal from immortal life. Protestant orthodoxy held that the same individual body that died would rise again. Though that frame would be spiritualized and cleansed of sin, something of its original substance would remain. This article of faith was invoked by Protestant missionaries of all denominations, but it presented them with a problem, too. People of color were subject to strict social controls across the British empire. Even in church, African converts were closely regulated and scrutinized (Sweet 111–12). How, then, could their unruly bodies be admitted into paradise? Protestantism's emphasis on individual conversion provided a practical answer to this question. Anglicans and nonconformists alike characterized black conversion as a drawn-out process that required close supervision and methodical instruction (Jordan 211–12). Having undergone a lengthy spiritual probation at the hands of white ministers and masters, Africans would be ready for redemption in the world to come. Yet even as Mather and his SPG equivalents were setting out this approach to proselytization, the rise of the plantation model of enslavement threatened to render it obsolete already. Mather's paradigm, in particular, required a relatively low ratio of black subjects to white instructors, and demanded that converted slaves be treated as part of their enslavers' religious household. As the number of bondsmen and women in New England rose sharply in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, most Africans were forced further toward the margins of society (Stievermann 561). The situation was even more pronounced in the southern and Caribbean colonies, where more and more slaves toiled in increasingly appalling conditions, and SPG ministers had to struggle ever harder to gain access to them. The fact that during the 1720s enslaved people in Georgia and South Carolina "outnumbered whites by more than two to one" (Berlin 68) made slaveholders there especially reluctant to contemplate the Christianization that might encourage insubordination among their slaves.

The three authors discussed here were all advocates of the evangeliza-

tion of Africans. But they were all sufficiently uncertain about the efficacy of Protestant attempts to bring men and women of color into the body of the elect to wonder if additional measures might be necessary to complete that task. Sewall and Beach contemplated the shedding of black skin through resurrection—in the blink of an eye, they suggested, God could remove the troublesome African otherness that mortal instructors might struggle for a lifetime to mitigate. Cotton Mather, for his part, described a millennium on earth in which the changed saints (including many Africans and other former pagans) would be tutored by the angelic raised saints before being deemed worthy enough to ascend to heaven themselves. In each instance, the lengthy and difficult process of conversion by instruction was supplemented by a supernatural intervention. As the eighteenth century progressed, more radical and evangelical Protestant groups would develop their own responses to the challenges posed by the Christianization of enslaved and free Africans. In the 1740s, Moravian missionaries in the Danish West Indies set out a new model of conversion that deemphasized literacy and the intellectual comprehension of doctrine in favor of a deep emotional connection with Christ (Gerbner 164–88). This heart-centered method would be adopted by the Baptist and Methodist preachers who proselytized the enslaved men and women of the American South over the next few decades (Sensbach 240). Meanwhile, radical black ministers would amplify the spiritual egalitarianism of the evangelical approach, building “separate and independent” religious communities of converted Africans across the Atlantic world (Brooks 46–47). Where Sewall, Mather, and Beach described postmortem or eschatological changes that would rectify the problem of ethnic difference, some evangelicals invested the emotional upheaval of the instant of conversion with a comparable potential. Though the Moravians were not opposed to African enslavement, their encouragement of black spiritual leadership “challenged the racial and religious hierarchies that undergirded . . . Protestant slave society” (Gerbner 178). African American preacher John Marrant went even further, arguing that resurrection’s promise of liberation applied to mortal existence as well as to eternity, and developing what Joanna Brooks has termed a “Lazarus theology” of political self-determination (106).

The more radical forms of evangelical revivalism afforded enslaved and free people of color a means of challenging the racialization of Protestant conversion. As Brooks has shown, the New Light rhetoric of awakening

could be adapted to underline the potentially “sacred” quality of black life in and of itself—independent, that is, of any “racial transfiguration” (180, 143). More commonly, however, revivalists adopted the mainstream Protestant position that framed the conversion of Africans as a partial alleviation of the ethnic alterity that the next world would (supposedly) eliminate altogether. Writing in 1740 to the planters of Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, the prominent evangelical itinerant George Whitefield criticized the traditional method by which the proselytization of their bondsmen and women had been attempted. Baptizing slaves, and teaching them “to read and write,” only imposed “outward Restraints” on them (*Three Letters* 15). True conversion required a complete interior rebirth—a standard that applied equally to black and white people, who were “just as much . . . conceived and born in Sin” as each other. But although Whitefield stressed that “there [was] a vast Difference between civilizing and christianizing” people of color, he still believed that leading enslaved people to heaven would involve aligning them more closely with English culture. Africans and Europeans, he argued, “are naturally capable of the same Improvement,” but this claim primarily applied to those Africans “born and bred up” among English planters (15). Advocating the legalization of slavery in Georgia eleven years later, he told a colonist there that it would be “[b]y mixing with your people” that the slaves would “be brought to JESUS” (*Works* 405). Members of Whitefield’s circle made comparable claims. In an anonymous 1743 pamphlet addressed to black bondsmen and women who had been recently converted in South Carolina, the English Baptist Anne Dutton informed her readers that Christ had gathered “his believing Sheep, of divers Nations, Stations, and Conditions . . . into *one Fold*” (6).²¹ Yet she also noted that it was the privilege of Europeans and Euro-Americans, “[w]e that were in Christ before *you*,” to welcome “*you despised Negroes*” (6) into the body of “our JESUS” (9). While Whitefield and Dutton did not address the transformation of African bodies as directly as did Sewall, Beach, or Mather, the vision of heavenly equality that they offered prospective black candidates was as qualified as those other authors’ was. Each of these writers claimed that ethnic distinction would not matter in the next life. Like the majority of their Protestant peers, however, they did not imagine a celestial world in which racial difference had been transcended, but rather one in which that disruptive otherness had been contained.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Roger Williams on Algonquian beliefs (192–97); John Ogilby on beliefs of the Egyptians (93) and the Malagasy (699–700); and Bernard Picart on Jewish (41), New Mexican (306), Virginian (310), and Floridian Indian (314–15), as well as Peruvian (334–35), South Asian (341), and African (451) doctrines.
2. As Colin Kidd explains, seventeenth-century Protestants were still more exercised by religious than racial difference. Scrutinizing pagan beliefs and practices for “glimpses . . . of an ancient unified religious culture” (77), they hoped to reconcile the existence of Native Americans and other far-flung peoples with the biblical account of early world history.
3. In her book *American Lazarus*, Joanna Brooks explores the work of John Marrant and Prince Hall, two pioneers of a literary tradition that “asserted the sacred significance of black . . . experience” (179–80). Both Marrant (134) and Hall (143) explicitly rejected the association of blackness with sinfulness and whiteness with salvation.
4. For a helpful overview of the development of this theme in Protestant eschatology, see Crome. As Crome explains, those Puritans who looked for a national conversion of the people of Israel before the millennium were particularly closely influenced by the posthumously published biblical commentaries of the Anglican cleric Thomas Brightman (1562–1607).
5. Achille Mbembe’s conceptual history of Africa and blackness from the age of Atlantic slavery onward delineates a similar process, through which the figure of “[t]he Black Man” in the abstract comes to symbolize mortality, suffering, and “the *scandal of humanity*” (53, 54).
6. In making the claim that “black” skin tone was critical to these eighteenth-century authors’ treatments of race, my argument may appear to contradict the work of Sharon Block, who stresses that epidermal coloring was not “consistently . . . [understood] as *the* sign of racial identity” until “the beginning of the nineteenth century” (2). Until that point, she claims, constitutional differences between different ethnic groups were parsed through reference to a flexible set of parameters, including humoral distinctions and climactic variations (10–11). As a result, the term *black* was not yet exclusively associated with a particular race or skin color, although it was the word most usually deployed “to describe African-descended people” (62). Block’s research into the color terms used in newspaper advertisements for the recapture of escaped slaves and runaway servants stresses the complexity and incohesion of American thinking about race before the revolution. But she also notes that older forms of human classification, including “humoral understandings of complexion,” were increasingly unable to satisfy “Anglo-Americans’ growing need to differentiate and rank New World residents” (11). In this respect, this essay’s account of the development of race in the eighteenth century is entirely compatible with hers.
7. Like many Protestant authors, including Cotton Mather and the influential An-

glican millenarian Joseph Mede (1586–1639), Sewall expected that Satan would make one final attempt to overthrow the kingdom of God at the end of the millennium, using the tribes of Gog and Magog as his proxies. Revelation 8:20 described these “nations” as being located in the “four corners of the earth.” For Sewall, this seemed to imply that they would be gathered from unconverted people in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America (*Phaenomena* 52). This argument was a key part of the *Phaenomena*’s critique of Mede’s eschatology. There Sewall strongly refuted Mede’s proposal that the Americas would be excluded from a premillennial conflagration so that the satanic forces of Gog and Magog could be drawn from the continents’ Native inhabitants (43–49). Instead, he insisted that the progressive Christianization of the Western Hemisphere was part of God’s plan for the redemption of the world.

8. On March 24, 1704, Sewall mourned the accidental death of “Arthur Mason’s Negro” as a great loss, due to the man’s “being faithfull and in his full strength” (*Diary of Samuel Sewall* 2: 96). On Christmas Day the following year, he noted the burial of Captain Belchar’s “Coachman, a very good Servant” (2: 150).
9. See, for instance, *Diary of Samuel Sewall* 1: 311, 1: 379, 2: 142, 2: 333, 2: 340, 2: 359. In these cases, Africans had been found guilty of serious crimes (or else killed themselves, as in the last example). Sewall also recorded acts of violence against black servants and slaves. See 3: 32, for example.
10. For a useful summary of Mather’s complex position on slavery, which recognized its contravention of natural law but ultimately affirmed that the enslavement of non-Christians was permitted by the Bible, see Stievermann 551–54.
11. Mather suggested that in large households, where the paterfamilias might not have time to teach his slaves himself, the task could be entrusted to his sons and daughters (*The Negro Christianized* 29).
12. As Stievermann notes, Sewall tied himself to the contrary position (that Christian slaves were a legal contradiction in terms) by republishing the *Athenian Oracle* article on the subject (557–58).
13. Though a proverb about the futility of attempting to wash off a dark complexion has been associated with Aesop ever since an attribution made by Erasmus in 1515, it is first attested in the work of Lucian, the second-century Syrian satirist (Massing 182–83). The earliest example of a full story illustrating the saying can be found in the fourth-century Aesopian fables of Aphthonius of Antioch, where we read of a man who believes that the black skin of the Ethiopian slave he has just purchased is not permanent, but is rather the result of the neglect of the slave’s former master (183). The moral of the story, of course, was that it is extremely difficult to alter ingrained qualities or habits. Mather was likely also thinking of Jeremiah 13:23, which was “often cited in connection” with the Greek proverb (181): “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.” Samuel Sewall quoted the first part of this verse in *The Selling of Joseph* (2).
14. Mather’s *Problema Theologicum* (1703), the most comprehensive statement of his

early eschatological thinking, was written initially to attempt to convince Noyes that the thousand-year rule of the saints on earth had not yet taken place and would follow the personal return of Christ and a literal resurrection of (some of) the dead (Mares 348). Noyes's own *New Englands Duty and Interest* (1698) described the millennium as a "Second Reformation" of the church before the Second Coming and resurrection (68).

15. As Reiner Smolinski points out, Mather's change of outlook on the conversion of the Jews involved adopting the allegorist, preterite perspective of commentators such as Henry Hammond and Richard Baxter, an approach to this issue he had previously completely rejected ("*Israel Redivivus*" 385). With these writers, Mather came to believe that the prophesied redemption of Israel had already been accomplished through the Christianization of thousands of Jewish men and women in the first century of the church (387).
16. Mather presented this promise in his 1705 funeral sermon for the poet and minister Michael Wigglesworth. Nearly twenty years later he made a comparable claim following the death of a sixteen-year-old member of his church, Rebekah Burnel: "MY Friends, There are Methods of PIETY to be taken, which if they be taken, Our *many days of darkneß*, will be Days wherein we shall see a *Marvellous Light*. . . . Our *days of darkneß*, will be all Spent, [and *never Spent!*] in the *Inheritance of the Saints in Light*" (*Light in Darkness* 11, 12).
17. The following year, Boston minister Charles Chauncy made a similar complaint in *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, a lengthy critique of the revivals. There he observed that "Negroes," as well as "Women and Girls" had lately "taken upon them to do the Business of *Preachers*," by pretending to have a special commission from the spiritual realm (226). These "exhorters" (226), he argued, disordered both civil society and "the *mystical Body of CHRIST*" (227).
18. In the same year that Beach published *A Modest Enquiry*, noted mortalist Edmund Law (later bishop of Carlisle) presented the case for the doctrine "in two appendixes to the third edition of his *Considerations on the theory of religion*" (Young 74). Attempting to excuse his tract eight years after its publication, Beach claimed that his intention had been merely to prevent "the notion of the soul's sleeping, or insensibility after death" from spreading in America (*A Friendly Expostulation* 36).
19. For Beach's opposition to revivalism, see Mappen 467. As Travis Glasson notes, this suspicion of the New Light awakening was shared by most of his colleagues in the SPG (118–21).
20. The Quaker George Fox thought that converted slaves should be released after "considerable term of years" (16).
21. Having previously suggested that Whitefield was the tract's author, Stephen J. Stein definitively attributes it to Dutton on the strength of a passing reference in an excerpt from the writings of Scottish Presbyterian James Robe, published in

Thomas Prince Jr.'s evangelical magazine *Christian History*, Dec. 1743. See Stein 485–86.

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