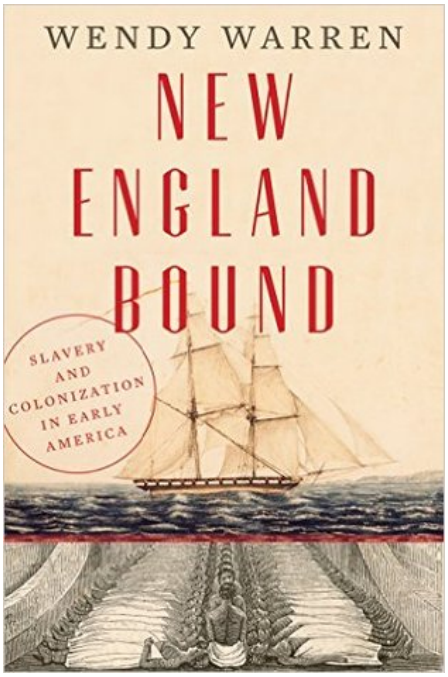

New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America

Wendy Warren

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The most important work on seventeenth-century New England in a generation.

In the tradition of Edmund S. Morgan, whose *American Slavery, American Freedom* revolutionized colonial history, a new generation of historians is fundamentally rewriting America's beginnings.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Wendy Warren's explosive *New England Bound*, which reclaims the lives of so many long-forgotten enslaved Africans and Native Americans in the seventeenth century. Based on new evidence, Warren links the growth of the northern colonies to the Atlantic slave trade, demonstrating how New England's economy derived its vitality from the profusion of slave-trading ships coursing through its ports.

Warren documents how Indians were systematically sold into slavery in the West Indies and reveals how colonial families like the Winthrops were motivated not only by religious freedom but also by their slave-trading investments. *New England Bound* punctures the myth of a shining "City on a Hill," forcefully demonstrating that the history of American slavery can no longer confine itself to the nineteenth-century South.

New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America Details

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From Reader Review New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America for online ebook

Linda says

Most Americans know about slavery on southern plantations, and about New England's role in achieving abolition. As school kids, most Americans learned about the horrors of plantation slavery, and were taught to take pride in the wisdom and perseverance of the Northern states as leaders of the abolition movement. What we weren't taught anything about was the institution of slavery in New England, where many Native Americans and the first Africans were enslaved within a decade of the founding of Plymouth Colony. More than a few studies of this topic have been published in the past decades or so and are gradually making inroads into the public's awareness of this hidden history. Wendy Warren's meticulously researched new book is a welcome addition to the discussion. Prominent 17th century families such as the Winthrops and the Mathers, and countless ordinary families either owned slaves, trafficked in them, or built their fortunes on the forced labor, deprivation, and pain of several thousand kidnapped individuals.

New England Bound draws upon such primary documents as court records, journals, and runaway slave notices to illustrate the breadth of this system in the context of the Triangle Trade. But more interestingly, the author has interpolated some of the ways in which the lives of those enslaved were impacted by the experience. For example, Indian captives were locally available but proved to be difficult to manage because, being natives, they had recourse to a network of kin; for this reason, they proved less reliable than Africans, and most Indians were sold/shipped off to the West Indies. Warren does a particularly effective job of presenting the psychological effects of being ripped away from one's family and social network to an alien environment oceans away. Slave laws prevented the forging of new connections (families, networks of friends) for these victimized people, whose sense of isolation must have been profound, whether they were island bound or working in a New England farmstead.

Writing in a flowing style, Warren provides much food for thought. She also looks into the earliest anti-slavery tracts, the very first written at the end of the century by none other than Samuel Sewall of Salem Witchcraft fame. Reading this book will forever change the reader's conception of America's first hundred years.

Kb says

This is a history of New England, and as such it was unfamiliar to me, barring typical images of pilgrims at Thanksgiving. (The myth of settlers and natives sitting down and eating together in harmony seems to be a carefully crafted fiction that belies the actual truth of colonization, where natives were "removed" and sent to the West Indies as slaves, then "replaced" by African slaves who helped with the work of colonization: mainly contributing to the running of households, but also labouring to clear land and performing other hard jobs.)

As a Canadian, my history lessons included learning about the seigneurial system, and the coureurs-de-bois who lived among the natives and facilitated the fur trade -- a kinder, gentler early history, which was superseded by the English system after Wolfe defeated Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. But I digress...

Wendy Warren's research looks at the history of slave-holding and the slave trade as it affected New England (mainly Boston) from the earliest colonizers to approximately the year 1700. The book makes use of (and liberally quotes) original sources. Reading it gives me, an outsider, new insight into what I think of as "the American psyche". By that I mean I have gained new understanding of the present by reading about the past. Today's political leaders are not very different from their early New England counterparts. (However, the most interesting knowledge I gained was that the slave trade included Indians [Native Americans] as well as Africans.)

The writing was mildly irritating at times, with speculation and editorializing that came across as patronizing. I believe the intent was to emphasize that the suffering of the enslaved must always discredit any and all complaints of enslavers. However, there are times in the book when the point feels overstated.

But in spite of occasional annoyances, the amount of information on the subject made it worth reading.

Sue Tretter says

Fascinating book and at the same time frustrating because so little is known of the "little people" whose names are mentioned. I was fortunate in that she writes several pages about a slave of one of my ancestors, Henry Bartholomew. The enslaved man, John, committed suicide and thus warrants attention yet so little is know about him, his original name, where he originated, how he came to be enslaved, what prompted his suicide, and what benefits did he hope to gain through suicide.
Ms Warren can't "reclaim" lives but she does seek to use a variety of primary sources to provide in the case of John a "snapshot". The process leaves one thankful for the snapshot but wishing for more, a full-length documentary perhaps. Largely, she succeeds and the book is very rewarding, given the limitations of original documents.

Ian yarington says

I thought it was good and well written but not sure it was all I thought it would be. Certainly good and worth the read because it's hard to find a true and honest representation of the slave trade. I feel like everything academic on the slave trade tries to paint certain pictures and doesn't get into the facts that much. This book sticks to facts within an anecdotal writing style.

Zachary Bennett says

I am at a loss as to what the original argument of this book is. From what I can tell, Warren's thesis is that slavery existed in colonial New England, and that New Englanders were intimately connected to slavery economically. For some readers, this may upend stereotypes of slavery being a southern US institution. However, for those aware of the historiography, such an argument is hardly novel. Lorenzo Greene's Negro in Colonial New England (1942), William Pierson's Black Yankees (1988), and Joanne Melish's Disowning Slavery (1998) among other have covered the topic of slavery in early New England. Warren uses dramatic prose to compensate for her weak thesis, making it seem that slavery was central to New England society when it definitely was not: for example she says at one point the estimate that there were 100 African slaves

in all of New England is wrong, and more likely that it was 200. This overlooks how minuscule 200 people were in a population of thousands. Part of me is surprised this was nominated for the Pulitzer, but part of me is not because what the book lacks in a substantive contribution to the historiography is a flashy, PC-guilt trip theme that resonates with lots of Americans these days. Warren discounts that people across the Atlantic World did not abhor slavery like we do today. Inequality was the norm. Life was cheap. If the book was steeped in the literature it would not have taken such an anachronistic moral position. Also, there is woefully little about indentured servitude here, which was a probably larger percentage of New England's unfree labor, and would have been a fruitful point of comparison.

For lay readers, this book is a useful one because it nicely summarizes an episode in American history few are familiar with. As for academics, of which Warren is one, who measure a work based on its original contribution to the field, this book is a much hyped disappointment.

Elaine Messineo says

Tons of information based on documentation. It changed my whole perspective on slavery around the world and in particular early America.

Gary Foss says

This text sheds a lot of light on the early history of slavery in the United States, particularly that in the area described by the title, though by necessity the author spends a due amount of time discussing the nature of the slave trade in the rest of the "New World" (a term that really should always be presented with quotes) for context. She gives a good amount of attention to the enslavement of native peoples as well as the importation of Africans, a much overlooked aspect of the slavery system in contemporary minds. Her focus pre-dates the period of slavery (the cotton trade era) that is the version that most Americans think of when the subject arises—when it does at all, that is.

Where I think this book might err is in the amount of speculation that the author engages in. Historical records are often sketchy and need to be filled out in any history, even one nearer in time and more heavily documented than a subject centuries ago and sometimes intentionally obscured or simply hazy by merit of shoddy records, missing documentation, etc. However, Ms. Warren spends an awful lot of time presenting possible interpretations of the extant records. She waxes rhapsodic upon the ambiguities and implications of pronouns, wonders about the possible thoughts of those mentioned in the records that are available, and generally dedicates a lot of the text to possibilities and implications where a more objective appraisal would likely be more appropriate. The possibilities and implications would be left up to the reader in an historian more confident in his/er ability to present the history meaningfully.

Nonetheless, this is a good read for those interested in the origins of slavery in the United States, not just in New England. Three stars might be somewhat unfair on my part. 3.5 or 4 (rounded up) would probably be just as valid. I'm going to leave it at 3, however, because for some reason I don't think generosity is a virtue when it comes to this particular subject matter. A colder, harsher, more fact-based history would almost certainly be a better treatment of the subject, and as such the somewhat "soft" presentation of ideas in this text left me a bit cold. It's the "hard" historian in me, if you will.

Vel Veeter says

And it’s got a pun in the title! A not very funny pun. Hrm, a slavery pun does feel a little gross.

Anyway, this was a finalist for the Pulitizer this year and so my local library picked up a copy and put it on Overdrive. It was a relatively short listen (read) and offers a sober, straight-forward assessment of New England colonies’ role in the slave trade. One of my favorite books ever is Changes in the Land by William Cronin, which details the New England colonies’ role in deforestation and this book has a similar goal and effect of challenging the mythical history of the puritans. Like other works by Sacvan Bercovich, Perry Miller, and their like, this book basically suggests that the New England had a significantly larger role in the establishment and perpetuation of the slave trade than is generally discussed, that their positioning themselves as moral leaders in this country is fraught, even and especially by their terms, and that historical alternatives were both argued for and available at the time.

Some moments that made me think through this: apparently there was a specific need for laws in Connecticut to stop people from “freeing” their older slaves when they were not particularly useful to them anymore to keep from having to pay for their care. There was a fairly popular sentiment that slavery was not only the will of God, but also a mark of meekness/suffering that could help ensure promising afterlife…an old argument to be sure, but one especially nefarious given Calvinist doctrine of the Elect and the Preterite limited salvation. What else? Oh, the old gem of not wanting to free slaves because of how mad slaves would be at them. But what was especially interesting was looking into the history of the enslavement of Indians in New England.

Overall, this is well-researched and carefully argued, but it’s not wonky or too specific. It’s history meant to be read and it’s quite readable.

Laura says

Huh. This was not exactly what I was expecting. Warren does a brilliant job illustrating how deeply slavery was woven into the economy and culture of colonial New England. We (especially New Englanders like me) often tend to think of New England (and much of the North in general) to be somehow less complicit in slavery than the South. This, of course, is completely untrue--New England was built on a slave economy, and the Atlantic slave trade was as crucial to its beginnings and successes as the eventual cotton trade was to Southern economic growth.

This book is essentially a catalogue of various events and records--lawsuits, court cases, stories of crimes carried out by slaves and colonists, the wills of slaveholders, land disputes, stories of slaves who successfully or unsuccessfully sought their freedom. In relaying all these details, Warren depicts New England colonial life as it was, where slavery, both visible and distant (i.e. New England's deep connections to sugar plantations in the West Indies), was both commonplace and accepted

I found the book a bit dry, and the tone, at times, a little too matter-of-fact. There were moments when it felt like the writing was a bit too much from the point of view of the colonists, which made it very uncomfortable to read. It's obvious that the book is intended to shed light on the history of slavery in the north--which it

does--but sometimes it felt like an impartial recounting of events, which was sometimes off-putting. The bulk of the writing was just incident after incident, with little reflection or broader analysis. Sometimes I got a bit lost in the names and dates.

Still a worthwhile read, one that helps illuminate how deeply racism and white supremacy is embedded in American history (and the American present). Many New England colonies may have outlawed slavery before the Civil War, but its lasting damage, and the legacy of violence it left, had already been done.

Joyce says

Public library copy (my own library!) Studying New England history, stumbled upon the fact that there is a history of slavery in New England, and thus found this book which was published this year. What I didn't realize is that this book is about the English colonies, not the early American New England.

This author did a lot of work in writing this book. The first thing that jumped out at me was her incorrect use of 'a' instead of 'an' before words starting with a vowel sound. This is a scholarly work. I was surprised.

I read the whole book, notes and sources, everything. I really wanted to know what she had to say. I learned much, and am grateful for the sources, many of which I will access for my own research. But there are two things I cannot get around: 1) the prevalence of the author's opinion in the writing, which would be great if it were historical fiction, and 2) the use of generalizations; taking isolated events from a few places in New England, and generalizing that all of New England is the same.

My back was up throughout several chapters, in defensive of my native New England. I do not doubt that any of the facts presented are true. I came away from the book with more questions than answers. I would like to know which of the slave traders and slave owners were patriots and which were loyalists, and left New England when the Revolutionary War started. I would like lists of names, backgrounds as to where they were born and raised, how they acquired their wealth, and where they died (if they stayed in New England).

The book is hard to read because the subject is difficult. It is not too dry, it is readable. I recommend it to anyone interested in this subject, mainly because it opens the subject up wide, causing the reader to think.

Rachel Burdin says

Really interesting and insightful book about slavery in New England. Warren lets everyone involved--white New Englanders, enslaved Africans, and Native Americans --speak for themselves, as far as she is able, and in doing so, drives home their humanity (for better, or for worse).

Catherine says

Wendy Warren's *New England Bound* is a delight - a warmly written, intensely thoughtful, and radically insightful look into the slavery that bound New England to the rest of the Atlantic World. Warren casts her net widely. She not only examines the structures and lived experiences of African enslaved persons, but Indian enslaved persons, too, and refutes the idea that New England was not a slave society by demonstrating

how embedded it was in making slavery possible in the Caribbean.

Warren also brings a wonderful empathy to her writing, wondering aloud about the human cost - the loneliness, fear, and isolation - suffered by those who were enslaved. As readers, we are challenged to recognize the humanity in everyone in this book. It is too easy to hold enslavers at arm's length and to assume we would not do the same things in their shoes; it is too easy to assume that African and African-descended people did not feel for their families as people do today; it is too easy to clear our mental landscapes of Indian people. Warren's book challenges us to do more, and better, at every turn. A fabulous book.

Stan Prager says

Review of: New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America, by Wendy Warren
by Stan Prager (6-26-16)

Early on in New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America, a telling story is related that dates back to 1638, not even two decades removed from the Mayflower, of an English colonist near Boston who owned three enslaved Africans – two women and one man – that he sought to turn into breeding stock. When one of the females refused, he ordered the male slave to rape her in an attempt to impregnate her. The rape victim went out of her way to report what had occurred to another Englishman nearby, who in his written account of their conversation seemed to show some sympathy; however, his very next journal entry was a humorous description of his encounter with a wasp. [p7-8] It is clear that as property she otherwise lacked recourse under the circumstances. What does this one unusual anecdotal incident at the dawn of the colonial New England experience really tell us? It turns out that it is far more instructive than the reader might at first suspect, as Princeton University Professor Wendy Warren's fascinating new contribution to the history of slavery in colonial North America reveals in the pages that follow.

While many fine works of history in the past several decades have rightly restored the long-overlooked role of New England in the triangle trade that was central to the growth of slavery in the colonies, little attention has been paid to slavery as it actually existed in those northern colonies prior to abolition. The standard tale is that slavery never really caught on there, largely because the region lacked the climate and the crop for the plantation agriculture it was best suited for, and as such this untenable anachronism gradually faded away. There is so much truth to that summary that few have bothered to dissect the actual slave experience while it thrived in New England, albeit on a much smaller scale than in the southern colonies and the West Indies. This neglect has badly shortchanged the historiography of the origins of human chattel slavery in colonial North America.

By moving the focal point away from the traditional emphasis upon the Chesapeake, South Carolina, and the Caribbean, Warren has surprisingly uncovered how much slavery in New England actually had in common with slavery in those other more familiar locales. The rape story she opens with is unexpectedly emblematic of the institution of African slavery in the Americas. Slave women had no rights as property, and therefore no control over their own bodies, which meant they could indeed serve as breeding stock, a financial boon in Virginia even in Jefferson's time as slavery became less profitable in the Chesapeake while prices soared for field hands on the cotton plantations of the deep south. It also meant that they could be compelled to sexual relations with their owners, which is why, as South Carolina's Mary Chestnut drily noted in 1861: "Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives & their concubines, & the Mulattos one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children . . ." That meant of course that English common law needed to be turned on its head, so that the children of slaves were condemned to inherit the condition of

perpetual servitude from their mothers, regardless of whether their fathers were slave or free. This was codified in Virginia in 1662 as Partus sequitur ventrem but Warren reminds us that it was already clearly understood as such in Massachusetts in 1638. [p156]
Interestingly, Warren also reveals that a 1690 Connecticut law mandating a curfew for “Negroes” managed to presage portions of the slave codes popular in the south by several decades. Massachusetts adopted a similar ordinance. [p201] The ambivalence towards the cruelties inherent to slavery is nevertheless also evident. When it became clear that owners were freeing slaves when they became too old or infirm to profitably toil as units of labor, Connecticut passed a law in 1702 directing slave-owners to care for elderly slaves, whether or not they had been freed, something otherwise left to arbitrary custom in the south. [p176] But apparently those in New England were not immune to the cruel and unusual punishments inflicted upon wrongdoers who happened to be African slaves: Increase Mather chillingly reports that in 1681 the enslaved Maria, convicted of arson and murder, was burned alive at the stake. [p199] Regardless of geography, slaves were often underfed, and sometimes resorted to theft for sustenance. In Connecticut in 1699, a slave who stole “a bisket” on the Sabbath suffered the medieval punishment of thirty lashes and a brand to the forehead. [p211] Whipping and branding became quite common in the Antebellum south. Also echoing another common practice in the south, Warren reports that in 1698 hunting dogs were employed to track down a “Negro.” [p207-08] Warren reminds us that Amerindians were also enslaved, although this was much less widespread, but tellingly a 1697 broadside seeking a runaway Native American slave also neatly anticipates the runaway slave advertisements later so common in newspapers below the Mason-Dixon. [p212]
It is in her coverage of Amerindian slavery that Warren falls short, if only because she seems to promise more than she delivers. The slavery of Native Americans, who were often sold to the West Indies, is a little-known element of early Americana and probably deserves a book-length treatment of its own. Given the scant number of pages Warren devotes to the topic, she might have best simply left it alone. Yet, this is perhaps only a quibble when one considers how well the author succeeds in demonstrating that slavery was indeed integral to all geographies of the English colonies and was shockingly similar in its elemental form both north and south. That New England always seemed to harbor a certain sense of guilt about the immorality of slavery –and that it eventually acted to bring this heinous practice to an end – perhaps mitigates some of its culpability in perpetrating this great evil, yet by no means can that serve as an excuse to overlook or forgive its deep complicity in it. Every student of the history of the institution of slavery and of early American history would benefit from reading Warren’s fine book.

My review of New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America, by Wendy Warren, is live on my book blog https://regarp.com/2016/06/26/review-...

Ran says

This meticulously researched work resituates slavery back into 17th-century New England, starting with the early New England settlement and commerce, including the Winthrops and Samuel Maverick. According to Warren, "... there has remained something exceptional in both the popular and the scholarly understanding of early colonial New England, an exceptional absence. Put plainly, it is this: the tragedy of chattel slavery - inheritable, permanent, and commodified bondage - the problem that dominates the narrative of so many other early English attempts at colonization in North America and the Caribbean, hardly appears in the story of earliest New England." (3) And Warren sets about demonstrating with great detail why slavery is an integral aspect of understanding colonial New England life.

New England's commerce and settlement were tied into a greater transatlantic system between sugar in the West Indies and markets in Europe. New England's indigenous population remained a problem for settlers (inhabiting valuable lands for agriculture - which produced food for the West Indies). Warren calls this settlement policy "removal and replacement," in which Native Americans were sold into transatlantic slavery (removed) and Africans were brought in for labor (replaced). But she mentions that the labor of the Northeast was household labor. "This was, in fact, a paradox of New England slavery: while the Boston merchants and the Salem captains were providing the Atlantic slave trade with its fuel, investment capital, and were key players in pressing the Atlantic economy into the form of modern capitalism, the slavery practiced at home was not the forging of capitalism. Slavery in New England, at least when one got away from the docks, was often simply household labor in a household economy, even late into the century." (133) Warren's argument is at the forefront of historical research these days. Many Early American graduate students will be intrigued to see the fruit of her work.

Ai Miller says

I really really enjoyed this--it was concise and not boring, it created empathy and space for all kinds of experiences, and it's a trade history publication that talks directly about settler colonialism! I could see this being really incredibly useful in undergraduate courses or even just to start conversations with folks outside the academy (it could be a really excellent book club book, for example!) Obviously there are limitations to its scope, and I've read reviews about sourcing she doesn't use, but I think it's a really solid introduction to enslavement in New England and fighting the dominant narratives about that.
