

“The Cause of Her Grief”: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England

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. . . the Second of *October*, about 9 of the clock in the morning, Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman came to my chamber window, and in her own Countrey language and tune sang very loud and shrill, going out to her, she used a great deal of respect toward me, and willingly would have expressed her grief in *English*; but I apprehended it by her countenance and deportment, whereupon I repaired to my host, to learn of him the cause, and resolved to intreat him in her behalf, for that I understood before, that she had been a Queen in her own Countrey, and observed a very humble and dutiful garb used towards her by another Negro who was her maid. Mr. *Maverick* was desirous to have a breed of Negroes, and therefore seeing she would not yield by perswasions to company with a Negro young man he had in his house; he commanded him will'd she nill'd she to go to bed to her, which was no sooner done but she kickt him out again, this she took in high disdain beyond her slavery, and this was the cause of her grief.

—John Josselyn, *Two Voyages to New England*, 1674

This is a story of a rape of a woman.

Indefinite articles saturate that last sentence deliberately. They mean to say: this is not *the* story, not the *only* story—not the only story of rape, not the only story of this woman. This is a story of a person whose sole appearance in historical documentation occurs in one paragraph of a seventeenth-century colonial travelogue. Given such paltry evidence, perhaps only indefinite articles capture the indefinite nature of this narrative.

The facts are few. The approximate date and location of the assault seem fairly certain: early fall 1638, not far from Boston, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The central characters are equally clear: the slave owner, Samuel Maverick, an English merchant; John Josselyn, an English traveler; two enslaved African women; and an enslaved African man. About the first two, at least, some evidence exists. Their sex, race, class, and literacy combined to ensure that some record of their lives survived their times. As for the other three, no written document other than the paragraph above mentions their existence. We know only what John Josselyn related: when he was a guest in Samuel Maverick's house,

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he encountered a slave woman anguished because another slave had raped her upon their owner's orders.¹

But fortuitous timing, if anything about this story can be called fortuitous, helps. In 1638 very few African slaves lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and a general scholarly consensus holds that they had all probably arrived that same year aboard the same ship, the Salem-based *Desire*.² The arrival of those first Africans in 1638 was unusual enough to warrant a brief mention in Governor John Winthrop's journal; he noted that a trading voyage to the West Indies had brought back "some cotton and tobacco, and negroes, etc., from thence, and salt from Tertugos," thus describing the first known slaving voyage to New England.³ Had the woman arrived even ten years later, her journey would have been impossible to trace with any certainty at all, since the *Desire* was only the first ship to engage in what became a prolific New England slave trade. Instead, the woman's presence among the first Africans in New England makes possible a reconstruction of at least some of her life.

It is a life in need of reconstruction. More than one thousand African slaves lived in New England by the end of the seventeenth century, and slave trading was a crucial part of the early modern market that joined Africa, the West Indies, and England (colonies and metropole) to make early New England prosper as the century progressed. But those captured Africans who lived and labored in the region during the seventeenth century have been, as one historian recently noted, "too often overlooked." A change is certainly afoot: scholars of the colonial North have certainly given attention to the region's African inhabitants, but they have tended to focus on the eighteenth century. The enslaved Africans of seventeenth-century New England have received almost no sustained attention; the last book to focus exclusively on the subject of Africans in colonial New England was published in 1942 and is now out of print.⁴

Certainly one reason for the relative lack of attention to Africans in early New England is the problematic state of surviving evidence. Recorded references to African slaves in seventeenth-century New England are often little more than a line or two, and multiple entries concerning the same slave are almost entirely lacking. Nameless Africans appear and then disappear in court testimonies, in deeds, in wills, in letters, in inventories, and

¹ Paul J. Lindholdt, ed., *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler: A Critical Edition of Two Voyages to New England* (Hanover, 1988), 24.

² See, for example, Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York, 1942), 17–18; George F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (Salem, 1927), 268; and Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 66–68.

³ John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, ed. Richard Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeadle (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 246.

⁴ Ann Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca, 2000), 119. On African Americans in the colonial North, see William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst, 1988); and George Henry Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York, 1866). This article joins a surge of interest in slavery in the North. Examples include John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore, 2003); Thelma Wills Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in New York City* (New York, 2004); and Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York, 2005). For helpful articles, see Robert C. Twombly and Robert H. Moore, "Black Puritan: The Negro in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 24 (April 1967), 224–42; Albert J. Von Frank, "John Saffin: Slavery and Racism in Colonial Massachusetts," *Early American Literature*, 29 (Dec. 1994), 254–72; and Melinde Lutz Sanborn, "Angola and Elizabeth: An African Family in the Massachusetts Bay Colony," *New England Quarterly*, 72 (March 1999), 119–29. See also the recent collection formed from the 2003 Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife: Peter Benes and Jane Montague Benes, eds., *Slavery/Antislavery in New England* (Boston, 2005). The 1942 book is Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*.

in diaries; their anonymity makes it very difficult to trace their lives with any certainty. That means stories such as the one Josselyn related have gone largely unexplored; an insistence on quantifiable evidence and on demonstrable change over time, combined with an inherent distrust of sources that report otherwise unrecorded events, has limited what scholars can do with documents about slavery in early New England.

Fortunately, many historians have demonstrated how to read documents against the grain, how to excavate “at the margins of monumental history in order that the ruins of the dismembered past be retrieved.”⁵ In this case, at the margins of colonial New England’s monumental history lies the life of an African woman whose presence there can be understood only by envisioning all the region’s earliest inhabitants as active participants in the rollicking seventeenth-century Atlantic world. Telling the story of “Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman” draws attention to the fact that African slaves and sexual abuse existed alongside Puritan fathers, Indian wars, and town meetings in colonial New England. It also deepens the narrative of early African American history, too long located almost exclusively in the South; this enslaved woman first set foot on North American soil, not in Charleston nor in Jamestown, but in the northern port of Boston.⁶ And race relations in early New England become tripartite—red, white, and black—when her story is included, complicating our understanding of early New England’s racial categories. No matter how brutally Native Americans were treated in New England, we have no evidence that any Englishman ever considered forcibly *breeding* an Indian woman.

One story of one rape opens a view into a larger world of Anglican-Puritan rivalries, of gritty colonial aspirations, of settlement and conquest in the early modern Atlantic world, of race and sexuality and how those two constructs combined to determine the shape of many lives. But there are more compelling and more human reasons to tell this story. This woman’s life deserves to be reconstructed simply because too many factors have conspired to make that reconstruction nearly impossible. Brought against her will to a foreign continent populated by peoples speaking unfamiliar languages, sold as property, raped, and then ignored in the public record, her story mirrors that of millions. Still, her individual resistance touches me; violated but not beaten, she “in her own Countrey language and tune sang very loud and shrill” to a passing stranger and thus ensured her life would be remembered.

That passing stranger was John Josselyn, an Anglican who came to New England in 1638 with two purposes: to visit his recently emigrated brother and to complete a fact-finding mission for potential investors and emigrants interested in the new colonies. His early presence reminds us that the synonymization of “Puritan” and “New England” did not occur in the minds of early modern settlers until much later—despite his arrival at the height of the famed great migration of Puritans, this was a young Anglican man, seeing what a still up-for-grabs New England had to offer. The son of an impoverished gentleman, Josselyn (like many other Englishmen of his class) may have seen North America

⁵ Saidya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1997), 11. See also Emma Perez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington, 1999), xii–xvii.

⁶ Rhode Island merchants dominated the African slave trade to North America for most of the eighteenth century. Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700–1807* (Philadelphia, 1981), 25.

as a place where he could regain the status his father, through lack of business acumen, had lost.⁷

His brother Henry Josselyn was already in the region, trying to do just that. Henry had allied himself early in the seventeenth century with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, one of the earliest speculators in New England and an early supporter of the Virginia Company. The wealthy, Anglican Gorges had hoped to establish a quasi-feudal colony in New England, and he had obtained the rights to the entire region—from Philadelphia to Quebec—as early as 1622. But his inability to lure workers willing to labor in a feudal system, combined with the steady success of the Puritan-run Massachusetts Bay Colony, stymied his colonial ambitions. The latter obstacle earned most of Gorges's wrath; as his venture failed, he became an ardent and lifelong enemy of the Puritans. Henry Josselyn came to New England under Gorges's protection sometime around 1630, serving first as an agent and then as a commissioner, suffering through all of Gorges's defeats and sharing his disappointments. This Josselyn eventually gave up hope of claiming land in southern New England, deciding to avoid conflicts with Puritan authorities by moving north. He settled in Maine, but he had not gone far enough—soon after settling, the beleaguered Henry found himself fighting Massachusetts Bay Colony attempts to annex the region. Perhaps understandably, Henry Josselyn's stance toward Puritans soon mirrored that of his benefactor.⁸

John Josselyn came to share his brother's antipathy to Puritans. Fraternal loyalty aside, Josselyn embarked on his voyage to America keenly aware that Puritans were gaining power and confidence in England and that the rank and privileges his father had once taken for granted were threatened. New England turned out to be no better. Puritans dominated the new settlements, and Josselyn found them less than cordial. He was undoubtedly relieved to stay with Samuel Maverick, a fellow Anglican and a staunch thorn in the side of Massachusetts Bay Colony leaders. Landing in Boston, July 20, 1638, Josselyn went immediately "ashore upon *Noddles Island* to Mr. *Samuel Maverick* . . . the only hospitable man in all the Country, giving entertainment to all Comers gratis." The "only hospitable man?" Witness the words of a disgruntled Anglican wandering the wilds of the city on a hill.⁹

John Josselyn was thirty years old when he met Maverick and the enslaved woman. He apparently spent the first part of his life attaining the education appropriate for an impoverished gentleman's son, which clearly included some scientific training. Such training may have led Josselyn to believe he approached Africans with a more objective eye than most. Certainly, Josselyn's dedication of his *Two Voyages to New England* to "the Right Honourable, and most Illustrious . . . Fellows of the Royal Society" suggests he hoped to interest readers espousing the new scientific world view. The work is filled with asides regarding Josselyn's accumulated scientific knowledge. He noted, for example, that though "many men" believed "that the blackness of the Negroes proceeded from the curse upon Cham's posterity," he knew that Africans simply had an extra layer of skin, "like that of a snake." Josselyn had discovered this extra layer, before coming to New England, while

⁷ Lindholdt, ed., *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler*, xiv–xv.

⁸ Miller Christy, "Attempts toward Colonization: The Council for New England and the Merchant Venturers of Bristol, 1621–1623," *American Historical Review*, 4 (July 1899), 683–85; Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), 5–9; Lindholdt, ed., *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler*, xviii.

⁹ Lindholdt, ed., *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler*, 12.

conducting an experiment on a “Barbarie-moor” whose finger became infected from a puncture wound. Josselyn, in attempting to cure the man, lanced the finger, probed the wound, and discovered that “the Moor had one skin more than Englishmen.” The fate of the patient’s multiskinned finger remains unknown. Still, the story helps clarify what Josselyn thought of the woman when she came crying to his window, visibly upset even within her snakelike skin.¹⁰

Josselyn made his transatlantic voyage on the well-armed “*New Supply, alias, the Nicholas of London*, a ship of good force, of 300 tuns . . . man’d with 48 sailers, [carrying] 164 Passengers men, women, and children.” The young traveler enjoyed his trip. Two days out of Gravesend, passengers dined on fresh flounder; Josselyn noted that he had “never tasted of a delicater Fish in all [his] life before.” Six days later, the gastronome tasted “Porpice, called also a *Marsovious* or Sea-hogg,” which sailors cut into pieces and fried. Josselyn thought it tasted “like rusty Bacon, or hung Beef, if not worse; but the Liver boiled and soused sometime in Vinegar is more grateful to the pallat.” An innocent abroad, this Josselyn, delighted at the novelty of food and travel.¹¹

But delighted innocence is only part of his story, a part that masks Josselyn’s origins in a class and a society deeply invested in the maintenance of a strictly stratified social order. When Martin Ivy, servant to one of Josselyn’s companions and only a child, a “stripling,” was “whipt naked at the Cap-stern, with a Cat with Nine tails, for filching 9 great lemons out of the Chirurgeons Cabin,” Josselyn expressed no sympathy, only amazement that the boy had managed to eat the nine lemons, “rinds and all in less than an hours time.” Similar indifference swathes his description of the violent ducking of another servant “for being drunk with his Masters strong waters which he stole.” Josselyn was interested enough to note these occurrences, and gentleman enough to consider them normal. This same attitude greeted the enslaved woman when she chose to complain. His journal notes her complaint but then quickly moves on—the very next sentence describes his first encounter with North American wasps. Although at first “resolved to intreat [Maverick] on her behalf,” Josselyn ultimately did nothing to help the woman.¹²

Samuel Maverick found his visitor an enjoyable guest. When Josselyn’s ship suffered delays before embarking on a trip up the coast, Maverick refused to let his guest sleep on the boat: “when I was come to Mr. Mavericks,” Josselyn noted, “he would not let me go aboard no more, until the Ship was ready to set sail.” Perhaps Maverick enjoyed having a sympathetic soul around, someone who shared his religion and background. After all, the troubles Josselyn felt in touring New England were experienced daily by his host.¹³

Samuel Maverick, also the son of an English gentleman (and clergyman), had settled in New England sometime around 1623, loosely attached to the Gorges colonization plan; like Josselyn’s brother, Maverick had title to lands in Maine. He and another Englishman, David Thompson, settled further south and built fortified houses around what would become Boston. They were the first Europeans to settle in the area, but their settlement was neither peaceful nor secure; Maverick’s house was “fortified with a Pillizado [palisade] and flankers and gunnes both belowe and above in them which awed the Indians who at that time had a mind to Cutt off the English.” Indians did attack the fort, “but receiving

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 3, 129–30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5–7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7–8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

a repulse never attempted it more although (as they now confesse) they repented it when about 2 yeares after they saw so many English come over.” Thompson and Maverick were men determined to make money while perched on the edge of an unfriendly continent. We might admire their grit, were it not for the ruthlessness it engendered.¹⁴

Maverick had acquired a wife, more land, and a new house—probably equally fortified—by the time the enslaved woman arrived, for the death of David Thompson offered him opportunities he could ill afford to miss. Maverick’s marriage to Thompson’s widow sometime around 1628, when he would have been twenty-six, gained him control of Thompson’s tracts of land, including the “very fruitful” Noddle’s Island, more than one thousand acres in the middle of Boston Harbor and the site of the rape. The island was easier to defend than mainland settlements, since reaching it required crossing a long expanse of water in an exposed boat. Maverick built himself a fine house on the island he inherited from Thompson, even playing host to John Winthrop when the soon-to-be governor arrived in Boston to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony.¹⁵

European women, a scarce commodity, seldom stayed single long in early New England, so Amias Cole Thompson’s quick remarriage was far from exceptional. She was a good match for Maverick; the English-born daughter of a shipwright, she brought to the marriage at least two children and a fair amount of pragmatism. A surviving letter, sent in 1635 from “Nottells Island” details an attempt to obtain an inheritance her father had promised to her children with Thompson, showing both determination and literacy. Both those attributes would have served her well. Life on Noddle’s Island, or anywhere else in colonial New England, even given her husband’s relative wealth, was labor-intensive. Perhaps this explains the felt need for slaves. With a sparse nearby population pool from which Maverick could hire servants to help his wife with household duties and their children (in addition to adopting Thompson’s children, he fathered three of his own), chattel labor might have seemed an ideal solution.¹⁶

Even if there had been nearby families, it seems unlikely any of them would have sent their daughters to work in the Maverick household. Though the man was an early settler and wealthy, Massachusetts Bay Colony officials found him more annoying than respectful. From the beginning of the colony, Maverick insisted on being admitted as a freeman and having voting rights while he maintained ties to factions back in England who sought to overthrow the Puritan settlement and claim the colony’s territory for less religious purposes. Although his wealth earned him admittance in the early years—before laws were passed limiting voting rights to church members—Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities grew increasingly impatient with Maverick’s staunch Anglican and royalist leanings, occasionally banning him and more often censuring him. The treatment rankled. He later described the Puritan government as ruling “without the Knowledge or Consent of them that then lived there or of those which came with them.”¹⁷

¹⁴ William Sumner, *A History of East Boston: With Biographical Sketches of its Early Proprietors* (Boston, 1858), 69–75; Samuel Maverick, *A Briefe Discription of New England and the Severall Townes Therein together with the Present Government Thereof* (1660; Boston, 1885), 13.

¹⁵ Mellen Chamberlain, *A Documentary History of Chelsea, Including the Boston Precincts of Winnisimmet, Rumney Marsh, and Pullen Point, 1624–1824*, vol. I (Boston, 1908), 16; Sumner, *History of East Boston*, 9; Winthrop, *Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Dunn, Savage, and Yeandle, 36.

¹⁶ Elizabeth French, “Genealogical Research in England: Maverick,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 69 (1915), 157–59; “Mrs. Amias Maverick to Trelawny,” in *Documentary History of the State of Maine*, vol. III: *The Trelawny Papers*, ed. James P. Baxter (Portland, 1884), 76–78.

¹⁷ Thomas Prince, *A Chronological History of New England in the Form of Annals* (Boston, 1826), 321; Thomas

But the restrictive measures had little effect on Maverick, an ambitious man used to going his own way. Born in 1602, he was only twenty-two years old when he came to North America, willing to settle in a part of New England where no European had settled before, willing to live in a house that required a fortified fence and cannons. He was a merchant through and through—he traded furs with Indians and seems to have chosen to live in Boston because it lay at the mouth of both the Mystic and the Charles rivers, making it an excellent trade post. Living in such an isolated post was no easy feat—he reminisced some years later that the “place in which Boston (the Metropolis) is [now] seated, I knew then for some years to be a Swamp and Pond.” As for his wife, her courage and fortitude matched his. In 1635, the same year she wrote the letter mentioned above, Samuel Maverick was away in Virginia, buying corn and supplies for his land. Amias Maverick stayed without her husband for twelve months with her children and servants, running the household on an island three thousand miles away from her birthplace.¹⁸

One wonders what Samuel Maverick saw and did in Virginia that year. Clearly, it was a business trip—he returned to Boston with “14: heifers & about 80 goates (havinge loste about 20: goates by the waye).” And we know he did some sight-seeing in the southern colony. He observed to an interested John Winthrop that eighteen hundred Virginians had died while he was there and that “he sawe the bone of a whale taken out of the earthe (where they digged for a well) 18: foote deepe.” Ever the merchant with an eye for a deal, Maverick also bought two boats, one a forty-ton cedar pinnace “built in Barbathes” and “brought to Virginia by Capt. Powell, who there dyinge, she was sold for a small matter.”¹⁹

His trip also seems to have been educational. Virginia may have been one of the first places, if not the first, where Samuel Maverick saw African slavery in practice. Unlike New England, the southern colony had been settled by masses of single men determined to profit from the region’s resources by growing the most profitable crop they could. That they found their solution in tobacco, a terribly labor-intensive crop, only meant that they needed to find cheap and plentiful labor. The first slave arrived in that colony in 1619, present from the beginning of the colonial experiment. They would have been scarce when Maverick visited, but it seems possible he saw African slaves, at least some of whom were legally enslaved for life, along with their children. Was all that in his mind when he returned to New England with his ships and cows and goats and corn?²⁰

Or did other encounters give him the idea of breeding slaves? Perhaps we should wonder what Maverick might have talked about with the ship’s crew from Barbados. That is-

Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), 124–25; Maverick, *Briefe Description of New England*, 17.

¹⁸ Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 21; Prince, *Chronological History of New England*, 323; Maverick, *Briefe Description of New England*, 26. Samuel Maverick’s brother Moses helped his sister-in-law; he is listed in colonial records as having paid taxes on Noddle’s Island to the General Court in 1636. See French, “Genealogical Research in England.”

¹⁹ Winthrop, *Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Dunn, Savage, and Yeandle, 182. The identity of Captain Powell remains elusive. He may have been John or Henry Powell, ship captains who worked for an influential Barbadian merchant. See Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, 1972), 49–50, 58.

²⁰ Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 297.

land already had some connections to New England; Henry Winthrop, John Winthrop's son, was one of the first colonizers of Barbados—he hoped to make his fortune by growing tobacco, the island's speciality during the 1630s. Though the elder Winthrop was unenthusiastic about his son's interest in acquiring a fortune (and about the poor quality of the tobacco young Henry grew, which his father considered “very ill conditioned, fowle, full of stalkes and evil coloured”), they maintained a steady correspondence throughout Henry's stay on the island. Other writers shared similar news with friends and family in New England—through connections like those, Maverick might have already heard about the potential fertility of the soil, the economy, or the climate. We know that his beloved son Nathaniel settled early in Barbados, perhaps demonstrating by actions more than words what his father thought of the island's prospects.²¹

They would not have been alone in believing Barbados an incipient boomtown. Others heard the same news and had the same ideas. The 1630s were a time of trial and error and burgeoning success for English planters determined to profit from the island. African slaves were along from the beginning, though they became essential only after the 1640s, when the planters switched definitively from tobacco to sugar. Still, the first planter on Barbados brought with him ten black slaves, a trend that grew during the next decades.²² During the seventeenth century, most slaves taken from Africa on English ships went to Barbados, though some found their way to other places in North America and the West Indies. So perhaps the West Indian crew told Maverick about the slowly increasing numbers of African slaves that were just arriving in Barbados, or how cheap they were to purchase, or that any offspring they produced were included in the original purchase price. Perhaps there were slaves on the ship; perhaps Maverick saw some.

Or perhaps Maverick had already intended to use African slaves. He certainly knew about slavery before going to Virginia. Consider the relationship he had with Sir Ferdinando Gorges. Gorges had rights to Maine, but he was also a founding member of the Virginia Company and an investor in both the Bermuda and Guinea companies, organizations that showed no distaste for African slavery. Indeed, the Guinea Company was an early version of the Royal African Company, a slave-trading concern, and Bermuda had slaves long before Virginia did (interestingly, a “Captain Powells” was an active trader in Bermuda during the seventeenth century). Gorges's grandson, another Ferdinando Gorges, became a successful sugar planter in Barbados and also an active shareholder in the Royal African Company. Maverick knew at least one of these men—the first Gorges—and was probably acquainted with others of that ilk. He aspired to join their ranks, and he may have seen slaveholding as his means of doing so.²³

Last, but far from least, we should also consider the influence of other European powers on a young man such as Samuel Maverick. Spain and Portugal had extensive and well-documented experience in the African slave trade by 1638; by one estimate, each of those empires had already transported 150,000 African slaves to their Atlantic colonies by the mid-seventeenth century.²⁴ Maverick, as a savvy merchant, would have known this. He

²¹ A. B. Forbes, ed., *Winthrop Papers, 1498–1628* (5 vols., Boston, 1929–1947), I, 356–57, 361–62, and esp. II, 66–67; French, “Genealogical Research in England,” 158–59.

²² Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 71.

²³ Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (New York, 2001), 10–20; Virginia Bernhard, “Beyond the Chesapeake: The Contrasting Status of Blacks in Bermuda, 1616–1663,” *Journal of Southern History*, 54 (Nov. 1988), 546–49.

²⁴ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 71.

would also have known Dutch merchants active in the early seventeenth-century Atlantic world, including the early slave trade. In 1637, one year before the rape, they captured Elmina from the Portuguese, thus solidifying control of one of the most prominent slave forts in West Africa. They were also prominent actors in early New England, due to the proximity of the colony of New Netherlands. Samuel Maverick certainly encountered Dutch merchants while he lived in Boston, and certainly some of them would have had slaves on board their vessels. Slavery was everywhere in the early modern world, even in New England; just three years after the rape, Massachusetts wrote slavery into its Body of Liberties, ordering that “there shall never be any Bond-slavery, Villenage or Captivity amongst us, unless it be lawful Captives taken in just wars, [and such strangers] as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us.” Far from exciting repugnance, Maverick’s purchases and actions seem to have inspired codification.²⁵

Still, Maverick’s specific motivations and inspirations for buying slaves remain murky. We know only that by 1638, two years after his return to Boston from Virginia, he owned at least three Africans: two women and a man, of unknown age or ethnicity. Almost certainly the rape victim came from Africa, as her age (she was still young enough to reproduce, perhaps an adolescent) and her linguistic abilities (she could not speak English) combined to suggest a limited time in the Americas. The other female slave seems to have come from the same area, since the two women spoke the same language and apparently shared understandings of their relative status. Their exact point of origin is impossible to identify. In the early seventeenth century the majority of slaves left land from ports in West Africa’s Slave Coast, Gold Coast, or the Bight of Biafra, but a point of departure was no indication of birthplace; forts served as points of consolidation for caravans that came from all over the continent.²⁶

When speaking of the origins of captured Africans, we are too often reduced to generalities. Slaves left the continent after spending, on average, about three months in the coastal forts. Their mortality rates were extremely high even while they were in Africa; one in five died either on the march or while waiting in the prisons, long before ever setting foot on a ship.²⁷ Some scholars have posited this experience and the voyage that followed as the key factor creating a new cultural identity: African American. But to assume an automatic sense of community at this stage of captivity is perhaps premature; remember the words of Richard Ligon, an early visitor to Barbados, explaining why slaves did not revolt: “They are fetched from severall parts of Africa, who speake severall languages, and by that means, one of them understand not another.” Shared experiences, but not shared histories.²⁸

Solidarity of a sort was forced on slaves during the next stage of their trip. Mortality rates for the middle passage in the seventeenth century ranged from 10 to 30 percent during the seven- to eight-week journey across the open Atlantic Ocean, crammed into

²⁵ Johannes M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (New York, 1990), 13–19; Pieter Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580–1880* (Brookfield, 1998), 17–20; “Body of Liberties, 1641,” in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. III, ed. Elizabeth Donnan (New York, 1969), 4.

²⁶ David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 2000), 246–50.

²⁷ Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), 130; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (New York, 2000), 62–64.

²⁸ See Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1976), 42–43; Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1673), 46.

the holds of wooden ships, trapped in excrement, vomit, and sweat.²⁹ Stuffed into the ship's steerage in temperatures sometimes rising to about 120 degrees, the slaves jostled for room and steeled themselves for the nightmarish weeks or months to come.³⁰ Rather than face the unknown horrors ahead and the known terrors at hand, some opted for the only escape they could manage. Weighted by chains, unable to swim, they threw themselves into the swells—a last grim display of human independence. John Josselyn sampled flounder and porpoise during his transatlantic trip; Samuel Maverick's slave woman was almost certainly not so lucky.

Her voyage must have ended in the Caribbean islands, the first stop for most seventeenth-century slave ships headed anywhere in the Americas except Brazil. Dehydrated, weakened, possibly abused, most slaves needed sprucing before going ashore. Brought on deck in the bright tropical sun, they saw their sores masked with a mixture of iron rust and gunpowder. We know that slavers hid the omnipresent diarrhea by inserting oakum—hemp treated with tar and used for caulking seams in wooden ships—far into an afflicted slave's anus, far enough to avoid detection during the invasive bodily inspections potential buyers inflicted on the human goods. Samuel Maverick's slave woman may have sat on the deck and experienced these practices, may have watched sailors throw overboard those too sick to be disguised. Did she consider herself lucky to have survived so long? Did she care? Did she know where she was? Did the Caribbean setting feel strange and new, or did the relief of seeing dry land, any dry land, make these unknown islands feel welcoming?³¹

Someone bought her from the slave ship, and probably at a bargain price; we know that slightly later in the century, a young woman brought only 80 to 85 percent of the price a young man might command in the Caribbean slave market. Ten years after the rape, Richard Ligon described sales of slaves in Barbados this way: "When they are come to us, the Planters buy them out of the Ship, where they find them stark naked, and therefore cannot be deceived in any outward infirmity. They choose them as they do Horses in a Market; the strongest, youthfulest, and most beautifull, yield the greatest prices. Thirty pound sterling is a price for the best man Negro; and twenty five, twenty six, or twenty seven pound for a Woman." This is an early version of a "scramble," a sales method in which prospective buyers rushed on board a ship, seizing and laying claim to all slaves they could reach. A terrifying experience, certainly, to be inspected and purchased by strangers. And for some it must have been emotionally draining to see shipmates carted off in different directions without any hope of seeing them again. And yet, the sale of "Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman" may have involved at least one person from her ship: her companion, the woman Josselyn called "her maid," who used a "very humble and duti-

²⁹ It is difficult to estimate slaves' shipboard mortality in the early seventeenth century, since the slave trade was not professionalized until the later decades of the century. For a one-in-three estimate for 1663–1713, see Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 185. Other scholars suggest that earlier trips were less deadly, as market needs did not yet force maximum efficiency from each trip. A 5 to 10% mortality rate was more typical for early seventeenth-century slaving trips across the Atlantic Ocean, when the Dutch still controlled the trade, according to Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (New York, 1972), 245. A 20% mortality rate for the early seventeenth century is posited by Klein, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 136–37.

³⁰ Kenneth F. Kiple and Brian T. Higgins, "Mortality Caused by Dehydration during the Middle Passage" in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, ed. Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman (Durham, 1992), 321–25.

³¹ Daniel Mannix, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518–1865* (New York, 1962), 128–29.

ful garb . . . towards her,” was apparently sold with her. Were they marketed as friends? Sisters? Or as a queen and her servant? Was it luck that they were grabbed together? Josselyn does not say. We do know that somehow, at some point, they were both bought and brought to isolated Providence Island. And it was from that small volcanic island located one hundred miles off the east coast of Nicaragua that the first group of African slaves embarked for New England aboard the *Desire*.³²

A surprising group controlled Providence Island: English Puritans. The colony was founded in 1630, the same year as the Massachusetts Bay Colony, by many of the same people. Although we too often forget that Puritans went to the West Indies, they did so, and with lofty ambitions; the Caribbean colony was expected to be the premier example of Puritan society, a city on a hill with good weather and fertile soil. In the valleys between the volcanic ridges that descended from the towering peak to the Caribbean shores, island proprietors hoped to use slave labor to grow goods destined for a European market. The two Puritan regions maintained frequent contact, comparing growth and progress. The biggest difference, of course, was slavery, a labor system for which these Puritans showed little distaste.³³

From the colony's inception, slaves were crucial, as the founders decided to grow cotton and tobacco on large plantations. Accordingly, Providence Island colonists—Puritans, remember—imported slaves in relatively large numbers; by the time “Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman” left in 1638, captured Africans made up almost half the colony's population. That racial balance only exacerbated the insecurity felt by the English planters over their precarious position, alone in the western Caribbean, surrounded by Spanish territorial claims. As it happens, they were insecure for good reason. Slaves first took advantage of their numbers to flee into the island's hilly interior, a steady stream of black fugitives populating the hills above Providence Island's white settlements. And then they got bolder. On May 1, 1638, Providence Island slaves carried out the first slave rebellion in any English colony. Soon after, frightened colony authorities began selling slaves off the island. Despite the sales, when the Spanish conquered the island in 1641, they found 381 slaves and 350 English colonists; the previous year the governor of the colony had warned that the island's slaves threatened to “over-breed us,” a phrasing that finds echoes in Josselyn's account.³⁴

But Samuel Maverick's slave woman had left long before that. She arrived in Boston in 1638, probably part of that cargo of “some negroes” aboard the *Desire*, commanded by Salem's William Pierce, also eventually a slaveholder; he later died on a return trip to Providence Island, shot dead by the Spanish soldiers who had recently captured the place. The *Desire* was large, one hundred and twenty tons of merchant ship, built and armed in Marblehead, Massachusetts. And it was fast: it once made the trip from Massachusetts to

³² Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 111; Ligon, *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, 46; Winthrop, *Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Dunn, Savage, and Yeandle, 246.

³³ Karen O. Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630–1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (New York, 1993), 26, 325–35. Kupperman notes that Providence Island colonists overcame Puritan unease over slavery through hubristic reasoning: an “inward turned logic allowed the company dedicated to Providence to assume that God had provided perfectly acclimated heathens to work in tropical fields. If God had not intended their use, why did he make Europeans ill-suited to such labor conditions, while Africans worked so well under the hot sun?” *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁴ Karen O. Kupperman, “Errand to the Indies: Puritan Colonization from Providence Island through the Western Design,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 45 (Jan. 1988), 75–81; Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 170–72. For the quotation from Gov. Nathaniel Butler of Providence Island, see *ibid.*, 172.

England in just twenty-three days.³⁵ We do not know how fast it traveled to New England from the Caribbean—but we might imagine the dread the slave woman felt on reboarding a ship, and the memories it must have brought back of the horrendous Atlantic passage she had already endured. A reluctant world traveler. Did she believe she was going home, having paid her dues in sweat and blood? Did she board the ship believing she was about to repeat the middle passage? Can we imagine the courage it would take to believe that and yet keep moving forward?

The trip to New England, on a far less crowded boat and for a far shorter time, may have alleviated some of her anxiety. But think how strange she must have found Boston, a marginal outpost of wooden homes, peripheral not only to the slave trade but also to most of the world. Noddle's Island, when she arrived, was a woody and isolated place—a 660-acre coastal island, hilly and marshy and so overgrown with trees that inhabitants of Boston went there to cut firewood. Boston in 1638 was scarcely more; growing rapidly (two years after the founding of Harvard College), as yet it was “rather a Village, than a Town,” Josselyn noted, “there being not above Twenty or Thirty houses.” But it seems safe to assume that the vegetation would have startled the woman less than the fact that other Africans (aside from the two in her household) were nonexistent, probably for the first time in her life. In the West Indies, she would probably have engaged in agricultural labor alongside other Africans. She had likely lived far enough from the overseers to understand that slaves were one group, the whites another. She might have felt some ease in the nights, sleeping among people who had shared the same horrible experiences. But in New England she probably slept near her owners, probably inside their house. And during the day she labored with them on domestic duties, perhaps side by side with Amias Maverick, certainly alongside white servants.³⁶

Not that this common space bespoke familiarity or friendliness. Race set her apart in seventeenth-century Boston, where hers was one of only a handful (if that) of black faces. As she walked among the pale English, perhaps she heard comments in a language she could not understand and felt stares whose meaning was only too clear. Children might have thrown stones at her and laughed at her color. They would have done so in England, and this was, after all, only a new England.³⁷ How can one assess the emotional toll of such isolation or the pain of that most debilitating of feelings: loneliness? In a world where kinship and connections meant everything, what did such solitude feel like?

Race was not the only factor that could earn ostracism, but it mattered immensely. English children throwing stones in Boston would have had reason to fear people of a different hue, for New England in 1638 had just recently emerged from the violent and bloody Pequot War. The same colonization process that spurred wars and raids in Africa brought similar effects to North America, as Native Americans were threatened and displaced by the arrival of English settlers—a reminder that Samuel Maverick's fortified house was a necessity, not a whim. The Pequot War began with a now-infamous surprise

³⁵ Winthrop, *Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Dunn, Savage, and Yeandle, 352–57. Pierce's slave, a woman, apparently attempted to burn down his house while he was away on a trip. See James Duncan Phillips, *Salem in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1933), 96–97.

³⁶ Nancy Seasholes, *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 355; Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 16; grant of Noddle's Island to Samuel Maverick, in records of a court held at Boston, April 1, 1633, oversized box 1, David S. Greenough Papers, 1631–1859 (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston); Lindholdt, ed., *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler*, 18.

³⁷ Jordan, *White over Black*, 6–15.

English attack on a native settlement near the Mystic River in present-day Connecticut, which saw between three hundred and seven hundred Indians shot or burned to death. As the fighting progressed, some of the Pequots were taken captive and sent into servitude among English settlers, while “fifteen boys and two women” were sent into Caribbean slavery on board the *Desire*. Captained by William Pierce, the *Desire* somehow missed its intended destination of Bermuda and headed instead to Providence Isle. Samuel Maverick’s slave woman boarded the ship on the return leg of that same journey. She thus arrived less than a year after the war ended, with the conflict only barely muted, one-half of New England’s first slave swap.³⁸

Those Pequot captives who remained in New England might have viewed her arrival with some interest. A lack of female servants had plagued New England colonies since their settlement, and female captives were considered an ideal solution to the problem. Racial stereotypes characterized Indian women as submissive and industrious, making them seem ideal domestic labor in Puritan households, and many were placed into a labor situation something like slavery, even if it differed from the experience of Africans. But Indian women did not share English enthusiasm for the project. Many of the women had lost their families to English violence during the war, and they were understandably unwilling to provide their enemies with domestic labor; flight was common. English violence toward female servants did little to encourage Indian women. The rape of an Indian servant by a colonist named John Dawe was well known; one woman subsequently captured during the war asked John Winthrop to ensure that “the English would not abuse her body.”³⁹

Maverick’s slave came to know rape and captivity; perhaps she felt some solidarity with the Native Americans she certainly encountered on Noddle’s Island, a key trade post. In the eighteenth century, Africans and Indians in New England did indeed forge bonds—even marriage bonds—as they found themselves simultaneously pushed to the peripheries of Puritan culture.⁴⁰ But the connections they forged in the seventeenth century are less clear. Native peoples held far more power during the initial years of encounter than they would after King Philip’s War in the 1670s, and so they may not have seen any similarity between their own situation and the plight of the first African slaves in New England. It is equally unclear how a captured African would have viewed Native Americans. Would an African eye, for example, have immediately distinguished them from English colonists? Or would all the foreign garb and the language and the customs—English and Indian—have been equally strange to “Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman?” A delicious irony if, despite the English settlers’ obsession with differentiating themselves from Native American peoples, African eyes could not tell them apart.

But eventually an English sense of superiority and aloofness must have been apparent to the woman. Race and religion were keys to this colonial experiment, and native New Englanders were neither white nor Christian. Surely, English attitudes toward them

³⁸ Winthrop, *Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Dunn, Savage, and Yeandle, 227; Michael L. Fickes, “‘They Could Not Endure That Yoke’: The Captivity of Pequot Women and Children after the War of 1637,” *New England Quarterly*, 73 (March 2000), 58–61.

³⁹ See Margaret Ellen Newell, “The Changing Nature of Indian Slavery in New England, 1670–1720,” in *Re-interpreting New England Indians and the Colonial Experience*, ed. Colin G. Calloway and Neal Salisbury (Boston, 2003), 106–36. Fickes, “‘They Could Not Endure That Yoke,’” 67–70.

⁴⁰ Daniel Mandell, “Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Intermarriage in Southern New England, 1760–1880,” *Journal of American History*, 85 (Sept. 1998), 468.

highlighted this fact. Consider the messages John Winthrop received concerning captive Pequots. A Captain Stoughton, who fought against the Pequots, sent some captives to Boston along with the following note:

By this pinnace, you shall receive forty-eight or fifty women and children . . . Concerning which, there is one, I formerly mentioned, that is the fairest and largest that I saw amongst them, to whom I have given a coate to cloathe her. It is my desire to have her for a servant, if it may stand with your good liking, else not. There is a little squaw that Steward Culacut desireth, to whom he hath given a coate. Lieut. Davenport also desireth one, to wit, a small one, that hath three strokes upon her stomach, thus: --|||+. He desireth her, if it will stand with your liking. Solomon, the Indian, desireth a young little squaw, which I know not.⁴¹

Intimate rhetoric, to be sure. Lieutenant Davenport knew the stomach markings of his desired servant so well, he drew them from memory. Steward Culacut gave his coat to another “little squaw” that he “desireth,” a proprietary gesture. Even the most benign reading of these lines cannot avoid noting the obvious sense of ownership these men felt, while a less benign reading finds sexual overtones throughout. It seems impossible to imagine the men writing in the same way about European women. Samuel Maverick’s sense of ownership was the same, only heightened by the fact that he did legally own the African woman, all of her, including her reproductive capabilities. And like any man on the move, he hoped to make quick use of his purchase.

His actions underscore his hurry. He bought the first slaves off the first slave ship to arrive in New England, thinking like so many others that owning human property would help him on his path to riches. “Desirous to have a breed of Negroes,” Maverick compelled his male slave to have sex with the female “will’d she nill’d she”—whether she wanted to or not. And the story is clear: Maverick knew she did not want to. He gave the orders to the slave man only after first “seeing she would not yield by perswasions.” Clearly he felt no shame about forcing a woman to submit to rape, since he himself told the story to Josselyn, a man he knew to be writing a report of his trip. Anyway, even if she protested, she was his property—property that, if forced to breed, could make him money.

Consider Samuel Maverick writing to John Winthrop only two years after the rape, concerned that a white, female servant of his had acted inappropriately.

Worshipfull Sir,—My service beinge remembered, you may be pleased to understand that there is a difference betwene one Ralfe Greene and Jonathan Peirse, each challenging a promise of mariage from a maide servant left with me by Mr. Babb, beinge daughter unto a friend of his. Either of them desired my consent within a weeke one of the other, but hearinge of the difference, I gave consent to neither of them, desiringe there might be an agreement first amongst themselves, or by order from your worship. The maide hath long tyme denied any promise made to Greene, neither can I learne that there was ever any contract made betwene them, yett I once herd her say shee would have the said Greene, and desired my consent thereunto; but it rather seems shee first promised Peirse, and still resolves to have him for her husband. For the better clearinge of it, I have sent all such of my peopell as can say any thinge to the premises, and leave it to your wise determina-

⁴¹ George Henry Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York, 1866), 7.

tion, conceivinge they all deserue a checke for their manner of proceedinge, I take leave and rest

Your Worships Servant at Commaund,

Samuel Mavericke

This is a different Samuel Maverick, concerned about the propriety of a servant's engagement, reluctant to let her commit to either man without a clearing of the matter. Such attention to details! Such obedience to custom! Did race make the difference in his consideration of sexual mores? Of course it did. If ever there was a reminder of the inextricable linkage of gender and race, here it is. The seeming illogic of his varying degrees of concern becomes utterly rational when Maverick's ideological assumptions replace our own.⁴²

His wife must have shared those beliefs. Responsible, like most New England women, for all domestic concerns, it seems likely that Mrs. Maverick would have had more contact than her husband with the slaves in their household. Had she ordered that the woman be raped? Had she suggested it? Did she know? Is it fair of me to wonder if she felt any sisterly bond with the woman under her roof? Her own quick, second marriage to Maverick suggests she may have seen relationships in practical terms. On a frontier, after all, relatively few have time for romance. That pragmatism may have expanded to include her slaves. She must have understood her own marriage and her own status in the world at least partly in contrast to the position held by her slave women. Amias Maverick could not be ordered to have sex with a man; she was something different, and so were her daughters, and everyone on the island knew it. Thus is race, a social construction, made real.⁴³

That reality was ugly. Imagine the first time the man came to "perswade" the woman to have sex with him. Perhaps he came under duress. Maverick, after all, held both their lives in his hands. Did the enslaved man understand his own safety to be contingent on his agreeing to harm the woman? Did they even speak the same language? We know from Josselyn's account that the woman refused, even as she may have known that refusal was not an option. So perhaps the man suffered, too. Having watched slavers abuse women in the same ways she had witnessed and experienced, the slave man now found himself obligated, perhaps against his conscience, to use his own body to enact the same violence on an acquaintance. Resistance would have been pointless; even had he run away, Maverick could have bought another slave to "breed" with the woman. An impossible situation.

But maybe the man needed no threats and deserves no sympathy. Slavery could make men feel impotent, powerless—if not literally, certainly socially. Perhaps the man saw as irresistible the opportunity to reassert his masculinity. No matter how low his race placed him in New England's power structure, the woman's gender placed her a step lower still. Impregnating her may have seemed an excellent way to reassert the sense of self-worth and autonomy his environment consistently denied him. Or maybe he was simply a vio-

⁴² Samuel Maverick, "Letters to John Winthrop," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 7 (1865), 307. I am reminded of Else Barkley Brown's admonition to recognize that differences in class and race mean "that all women do not have the same gender." Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History," *Feminist Studies*, 18 (Summer 1992), 300.

⁴³ A long-standing and well-developed European discourse on non-European sexuality was employed constantly in encounters with other peoples. See Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004), esp. 12–49.

lent man, sold out of the West Indies for the very tendencies that made him willing to rape at his owner's request.⁴⁴ Or maybe, just maybe, he thought making a child was resistance itself; a thumb in the eye of a system determined to use Africans until they died.

Those questions can never be answered. But even certainty about the man's motives would not change the outcome.

The woman was raped, and she knew it was coming; Josselyn tells us that she had had warning. She waited, perhaps for nights, knowing that a man she lived with had orders to impregnate her, by force. An extra form of torture, the psychological before the physical, enacting the future attack from memory in her mind before living it in reality. Even if she had been lucky enough to escape the experience herself, she had undoubtedly seen and heard rapes of other women. She *knew* what to expect, in graphic detail. Alone, scared, isolated by race, culture, even language from those around her, she had to wait.

The attack itself remains shadowy. No amount of scholarship can uncover that encounter. I can only ask uncomfortable questions, verging on prurience, wondering how to reflect on the details of a rape without becoming what Saidya Hartman has cautioned us against, a "voyeur" of pain and terror. Speaking of nineteenth-century slave punishments, she reminded us that "only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and terrible." And yet, describing a rape without inquiring into its circumstances seems to draw the same curtain over the act that one historian did in the early twentieth century; he omitted "Josselyn's story of his interview with Maverick's servant girl," finding it "perhaps a little questionable for discussion here, even in this supposedly modern age."⁴⁵

More than a little questionable, this rape. Professional and personal reticence aside, to me it calls out for inquiry; the woman's cries to Josselyn demanded an investigation. And so, four hundred years later, perhaps we should wonder what rape looked like on Noddle's Island. Did it happen at night? Did the man or Maverick feel enough shame about their actions to want it done in the dark, hidden? If so, where would he have found enough privacy for the attack? In the abundant woods? Or in the house, where no one could have avoided hearing the screams and cries? Eighteen years later, a bill of sale listed the following structures on the island: "the mansion howse. Mill howse and mill bake howses and all the other . . . howses outhowses barnes [and] stables."⁴⁶ Signs of prosperity for Maverick, and of multiple locations for an attack.

How did the attack occur? When? Where? Did Samuel Maverick watch? Why didn't he do it himself? Did his skin crawl at the thought of racial mixing? Or at the thought of fathering children fated to be slaves? Did Amias Maverick refuse to allow another woman's blood to stain her marriage bed? Did the Maverick daughters know what was happening? Were they being raised by the woman now being attacked? Everyone in that house knew her name, a luxury we do not share. Did any of them question what was happening? What did her "maid" do?

⁴⁴ On African men's reactions to their feminization in the New World, see Edward Pearson, "A Countryside Full of Flames: A Reconsideration of the Stono Rebellion and Slave Rebelliousness in the Early Eighteenth-Century South Carolina Lowcountry," *Slavery and Abolition*, 17 (Aug. 1996), 22–50.

⁴⁵ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 3–4; Edward Rowe Snow, *The Islands of Boston Harbor: Their History and Romance, 1626–1935* (Andover, 1935), 237.

⁴⁶ "Indenture Between Samuell Mavericke and John Burch," in *Suffolk Deeds*, liber II (Boston, 1883), 325–27.

Did the woman fight back? Did she scream, this woman who “sang” so “loud and shrill” the next day? She must have struggled; a woman unwilling to “yield by persuasions” would not have given in easily to violence. Maybe the description of her troubled “countenance and deportment” the next morning referred to visible bruises, to blood, to tears. Or maybe she resigned herself to the attack, deciding not to make it worse for herself, terribly aware that no part of her body was safe from invasion. Resigned or not, afterward “she kickt him out,” an indication that she was beaten but not conquered.

Did she allow herself the luxury of tears afterward? Or was she too accustomed to life’s brutality? Was there water available to clean herself? (Questions of seventeenth-century hygiene suddenly take on new importance.) What was recovery like, in a household shared with other slaves (including her attacker) and servants? Maybe the other female slave offered a shoulder to cry on, one familiar face in a crowd of pale strangers. Or maybe, just maybe, the rape meant little to a woman fully immersed in one of the most violent enterprises the world has ever known. Maybe the woman, a proven survivor, took the rape in stride, just as she had the invasive bodily inspections done at every slave sale, just as she might have handled the oakum forced up her anus by greedy slavers hoping to hide the effects of the starvation regimen they had forced on their transatlantic human cargo.

She had the power to thwart Maverick’s goals. She knew that getting pregnant could keep her from repeated attacks, knew that not conceiving essentially guaranteed them. She may have resisted to the end, refusing to conceive, denying Maverick and the slave man mastery over her reproductive labor. Did she conceive and then abort the child? By doing so often enough, she could have convinced her owner of her infertility, a bitter-sweet victory; abortion and infanticide were known and employed in the early modern world, sharp sticks having always been in abundance. The weapons of the weak are seldom pretty.⁴⁷

No record reports whether or not she conceived. We know the assault grieved her enough to make her cry “loud and shrill” to a stranger, John Josselyn, a visiting white man. Desperate and frightened, but also obviously angry and perhaps hopeful of reprieve, she turned to someone from whom—because of his nationality and skin color—she had reason to expect only more abuse. Interestingly, her response fit exactly what English law called for a rape victim to do. The procedure a woman was supposed to follow in early modern England to report a rape was elaborate and relatively unchanged from medieval times:

She ought to go straight way . . . and with Hue and Cry complaine to the good men of the next towne, shewing her wrong, her garments torne . . . and then she ought to go to the chief constable, to the Coroner and to the Viscount and at the next County to enter her appeale and have it enrolled in the Coroners roll: and Justices before whome she was again to reintreat her Appeale.⁴⁸

“Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman” came with hue and cry to complain, but a language barrier prevented her from explaining the situation, and centuries of ideology apparently

⁴⁷ On contraceptive and abortive techniques that may have been used by slave women, including herbs and “pointed sticks,” see Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650–1838* (Bloomington, 1990), 142. See also Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 114–15.

⁴⁸ *The Lawes Resolution of Women’s Rights; or the Lawes Provision for Woemen: A Methodicall Collection of Such Statutes and Customes, with the Cases, Opinions, Arguments and Points of Learning in the Law, as doe properly concerne Women* (London, 1632), 392–93.

prevented Josselyn from caring enough to do anything more than note the story, just one more colorful anecdote in a colorful travelogue. In 1672 he published his first book, *New-Englands Rarities Discovered*, which ends by describing Native American women as having “very good Features; seldome without a *Come to me*, or *Cos Amoris*, in their Countenance, all of them black Eyes, having even short Teeth, and very white, their Hair black, thick and long, broad breasted, handsome straight Bodies, and slender.” He ended with a poem containing these lines:

Whether White or Black be best
 Call your Senses to the quest;
 And your touch shall quickly tell
 The Black in softness doth excel,
 And in smoothness; but the Ear,
 What, can that a Colour hear?
 No, but ‘tis your Black ones Wit
 That does catch and captive it.
 And if Slut and Fair be one,
 Sweet and fair, there can be none:
 Nor can ought so please the tast
 As what’s brown and lovely drest. . . .

Though the poem was, according to Josselyn, originally written about a “young and handsome gypsie” and then changed to describe “the Indian S Q U A, or Female *Indian*,” the black-versus-white color rhetoric, along with the use of the word “captive,” seems curiously relevant to his encounter with the slave woman.⁴⁹

Josselyn lived until 1674. He died in England, having apparently decided New England’s pleasures were not for him. He never wrote another word regarding the woman, and he published the account of his voyages, *Two Voyages to New England*, some thirty years after his encounter, leaving unchanged his written opinion of Maverick, “the only hospitable man in all the Country.”

Though his official writings are fairly numerous, Samuel Maverick’s personal papers have long since disappeared; archives lack letters he wrote to his children, his diary, his personal accounts. We know that he died sometime between 1670 and 1676, probably in his early seventies, after a long and active life. He spent some years in New York, became a royal commissioner, and stayed an enemy to Puritan settlement. He also remained a part of the slave business; in 1652 he entered into an agreement with Adam Winthrop and John Parris (of Barbados) “for the delivery of a Negro in may next.”⁵⁰

Noddle’s Island also stayed in the business. Samuel Maverick sold the island to George Briggs of Barbados, who sold it to John Burch, also of Barbados, who sold it in 1664 to Sir Thomas Temple. The latter sold it in 1670 to Col. Samuel Shrimpton, a prominent Boston merchant whose portrait, which sometimes hangs in the Massachusetts Historical Society, also depicts, in the background, an African slave. All those men were connected to the slave trade.⁵¹ Lured by its ideal position in the harbor, slave traders and slave own-

⁴⁹ John Josselyn, *New-Englands Rarities Discovered in Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Serpents, and Plants of that Country* (London, 1672), 101–2, 99.

⁵⁰ French, “Genealogical Research in England,” 157; “Bond between Samuel Maverick and John Parris,” in *Suffolk Deeds*, liber I (Boston, 1880), 262.

⁵¹ “Notice of Sale from Maverick to Briggs,” oversize box 1, Greenough Papers; “Petition of Samuel Shrimpton, 1682,” Massachusetts Archives (microfilm), vol. 16, p. 309 (Massachusetts State Archives, Boston); Snow, *Islands of*

ers possessed the island continuously during the seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth.

In the twentieth century, landfill was added and Noddle's Island became East Boston, a working-class area just west of Logan airport. To get there today, take the blue subway line to the Maverick stop. Go, as I did, on a blustery midweek day in early October—the same time of year as the attack. Follow Maverick Street from Maverick Square right down to the docks, and look across the harbor to Boston's center, just as a scared African woman must once have done. Her story will stick in your mind; despite the omnipresence of her owner's name, it is "Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman" who haunts the spot.

At some point every historian decides how to frame her argument; I deliberately chose a method that makes visible the gaps in my evidence. As a result, perhaps this story is as much about the writing of history as about a rape. Researching in 2006, I am a beneficiary of historical schools that have called into question the validity of histories based on documents written by, and produced for, a minority of any given population. I have been taught to note that early New England's sources are largely written by and for white men, while remembering that before 1800, four-fifths of the females who crossed the Atlantic were African.⁵² Some of those women ended up in early New England, and their stories should be told.

In *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Natalie Zemon Davis explained that when documents relating to her characters ran dry, she "did [her] best through other sources from the period and place to discover the world they would have seen and the reactions they might have had." Davis described the finished project as part "invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past." Davis had more evidence than I do, to be sure, but her comment seems relevant to my narrative. Without imagination, how can we tell such stories? We are not scientists; we cannot test our hypotheses; we cannot recall our subjects to life and ask them to verify our claims or to provide more information on the topics they fail to discuss. We make our way among flawed sources, overreliant on written texts, hopelessly entangled in our own biases and beliefs, doing the best we can with blurry evidence, sometimes forced to speculate despite our specialized knowledge. The very beauty of history lies in that messiness, the fact that "unless two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened."⁵³

I don't *know* anything about the woman who ended up on Noddle's Island in 1638—indeed, I suppose it is possible that Josselyn made up the whole story for reasons we cannot fathom, or that he misunderstood the situation, or that I have misunderstood the situation myself. But I have chosen to believe Josselyn's version. Someone else, infuriated by my methods, can tell a different story; I embrace that possibility. In the meantime, I offer this: We have known, for a long time, a story of New England's settlement in which "Mr. *Mavericks* Negro woman" does not appear; here is one in which she does.

Boston Harbor, 239–40; Andrew Oliver, Ann Millsbaugh Huff, and Edward W. Hanson, *Portraits in the Massachusetts Historical Society: An Illustrated Catalog with Descriptive Matter* (Boston, 1988), 93.

⁵² Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 97.

⁵³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 5; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987), 20.