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Lives and Labors: An Introduction to the Character Equiano and his Analogous Writer

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Introduction

Origins

The text of interest for this thesis is Gustavus Vassa’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (1789), a narrative credited with providing the first and most authentic imagery of the transatlantic slave trade from an African slave’s perspective, first-hand. This long studied work of what Paul Gilroy terms the Black Atlantic, has been the focus on intense scholarly debate and consideration following the discovery of archival evidence that shows that Vassa was at times recorded as being born in South Carolina, and not West Africa. The work of Vincent Carretta, literary historian of the eighteenth-century transatlantic, challenges the African origins of Gustavus Vassa therefore the historical accuracy of his narrative and instead views Vassa as a literary genius furthering readings of Vassa as the prototypical self-made man. The work of Paul Lovejoy, African Diaspora historian, instead reaffirms the historical accuracy of *The Interesting Narrative* assertion of Vassa’s self-proclaimed African birth. Lovejoy examines the likely probabilities and choices made by Vassa and those around him, therefore the problematic nature of Carretta’s historical evidences and scholarship. George Boulukus, researcher and professor in Eighteenth-Century British literature, bends toward Lovejoy, yet offers a third and thoroughly compelling probability. As stated in Boulukos’s article “Olaudah Equiano and the Eighteenth-Century Debate on Africa,” textual Equiano’s Englishifying self-identification’s “only consistent function is to offer a counterweight to essential or externally imposed categories of
identity” (243), meaning that at any turn Vassa-Equiano might have shifted his apparent identities in response to imposed identities. Boulokus continues examining how the challenges posited by the text are that while Equiano moves among a sense of decisive Igboness, pan-Africanism, and Englishness (242) he yet exhorts that the terms for English identity “should be applied consistently to all people, whatever their origins, in European countries and their colonies” (248). Boulokos focus is more relatable in my reading of The Interesting Narrative because, in part, qualifying for humanity seemed to be at times treated as eviscerating shell-games.

Boulokus’s valuable explorations also highlight the textual values of recognizing a “multi-faceted” (read changeable) identity, and situates The Interesting Narrative as a construct within abolitionist debates. As Boulokos states, the movement in the text resists pinning down (242). So too would the text’s alignment with historical documents, however strong or problematic. So, too, would the author’s alignment with the text. While possessing and managing one’s “identity” is a contemporary discussion, historically the challenges to owning one’s identity were just as real, if fewer and slower, and was a motivator for many Europeans moving to the New World. Anything like a public push for control of identity was especially fewer and slower for Africans, New World (Creole) or not. As a real and self-possessed African voice on the English literary stage, Gustavus Vassa was unprecedented. Without precedent, Vassa methodically represents life on the transatlantic as the true proving time-space for fundamental identification.
Because of the multilayered and complex role of Christianity as a driving force in colonization, understanding how to operate, at least rhetorically, within the frameworks of the religion were foundational to any public discourse. This would have been true of a literary image as well as a real sociopolitical figure. So while on the surface Equiano’s construction might reflect Franz Fanon’s “colonized mind,” Vassa actively, and confrontationally, constructs an African image and identity that utilizes and subverts Eurocentric literary conventions. In some effect, he attempts to dismantle the master’s house with the only rhetorical tools at his disposal, to arguable success.

What needs to be drawn out more clearly from the discussions among significant scholars on Vassa is that this text constructs _on_ the transatlantic itself a space-time where a slave can develop the kind of agency and expression represented in Equiano, making the colonies sites of convincingly lamentable and embarrassing limitations. The agency Equiano gains on the Atlantic allows him to call for England to acknowledge an obligation to Africans and Christians. While previous scholarly considerations have looked at tropes of family and religion in relation to this text, what I add is how the text creates specifically _surrogate_ family bonds that are authorized via Christian rhetoric. The agency and expression represented in the text are contingent on the Hand of Providence, a complex of chance and decidedly (free-will) Christian activity, supporting not only the capitalist self-determination (self-identification) that so flavored European commoners’ interest in venturing into the New World, but are then expressed through Christian familial structures. These
Christian structures, necessarily replete with active interest and sentiment, were obligatory to confirm nationalistic and social bonds between European Creoles and real civilization. These morally aligning structures confirmed relationships, including familial. Interwoven with nationalistic and familial bonds are moral consideration, commerce, and education. These characteristics, especially salient in ameliorating rapacious proclivities of the colonies and enhancing English economy, are not only good for Africans, but are good for Englishmen. Christianity is the threading that stitches together Equiano’s final identity as Afro-Briton.

*Who is Who?*

The *Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1789) was written by an African man who entered the early modern transatlantic English world as a slave. This text constructs the eighteenth-century transatlantic world of violence and unethical trade, chronicling the adventures of the protagonist as he transforms from a naive, timid, pagan, and illiterate African to a cosmopolitan, venturesome, Christian and literate Afro-Briton. The text became an important reference point for the British abolitionist movement, and today it is a seminal work of what scholars refer to as the early “Black Atlantic.” To clarify my approach, since the narrative falls under the purview of both historians and literary scholars, this text will be treated as a constructed narrative as opposed to “pure” autobiography. As such, I will treat the author’s life as influential to and reflective of the narrative construction of the text. The life of Gustavus Vassa, the author, is important to address in order to understand the context in which the
narrative featuring, what here *should* be considered, Vassa’s alter ego was written and received. For the sake of clarity, I will use Vassa to refer to the author of *The Interesting Narrative*, and I will use Equiano to refer to the literary character portrayed in the text. The author’s life offers insight into the realities of the slaving culture and economy of the English colonial world. Biographical exploration of Vassa’s life supplements the events of *The Interesting Narrative* regarding labor options and the potential for social improvement linked to particular skills and vocations. Vassa’s life should be considered when examining literary representations of opportunities and education allowed both fictional and real Africans access to greater social agency.

Vassa constructed a compelling public image for himself through the literary figure of Equiano. The clearly autobiographical elements of the text made and continue to make for an apparently reliable depiction of gruesome scenes, which are represented as typical in the colonies. The claim of eye-witness experiences solidified the veracity of the text, making the text a powerful tool in the fight against the slave system. In such scenes, inhumane and unjust acts wreaked by Europeans on Africans during transport, bondage, and even freedom are represented as commonplace in the colonial world. *The Interesting Narrative* is a compelling representation of colonies in the New World as places of exploitation of varied people with varied backgrounds, including lower class Europeans by wealthy Europeans, while deploying religious rhetoric to both condemn and elevate realities and possibilities of transatlantic life. The images of the text brought to the English public’s consciousness the particular
savagery of the slaving system, especially in the colonies, and the diffusive cruelty that was sewn through the inhumane treatment of Africans there. The text keenly highlights colonial vices in images of abuse of African laborers inhabiting this world. In short, the text makes an argument that the colonies are savage, unprincipled, and anti-Christian, making them un-English in nature.; and this pernicious anti-Christian nature did and would continue to turn its attention to Englishmen thus the text implicitly argues that the corruption of the slave trade affects all peoples within the colonial world.

_Governing the Ocean_

The early modern transatlantic, specifically the eighteenth century, was comprised of the continents surrounding the Atlantic basin including the Americas, West Africa and Europe. Specific European countries and their metropoles were the principal centers of government, and imposed and expanded their commercial and political presence in the Americas and West Africa through violent means. Living on the Atlantic Ocean (rather than in the colonies) West Africa, or Europe meant that an individual needed to be aware of the nationalistic shifts within this malleable and precarious region, to be able to read the natural environment, and to be judicious, possibly capricious in carrying out their fealties, and certainly adaptable. _The Interesting Narrative_ represents a transatlantic world where race and social characteristics were less confining than in the colonies or the metropole, though still evident and significant on the seas. On the sea, a laborer had different pressures and
opportunities than in the colonies. These pressures and opportunities can be imagined as especially pronounced for skilled slaves, more possibilities for freedom came with the pressures of perilous natural world and fluid maritime politics. Though the opportunities and value systems that were found on the ships throughout the transatlantic world were often numerous and supportive of extra-national interest, the opportunities were still complexly interacting with the nations to which the ships were tied. In the case of Equiano’s crew, the complex interactions were most significantly tied to the auspices of the English crown. English men at sea continually encountered violently competitive nations, violently emerging colonies, and diverging religious ideologies and legal structures. It was important to the survival of these men at sea to be abreast of these changes and differences, and for these men to approach with relative liberality those with whom they lay their apparent loyalties.

Since surviving the weather and competing against “privateers” was a priority, Africans working on ships, whether as chattel or free men, were frequently living in better social conditions while laboring on the sea than their counterparts who were laboring in the colonies. This is evidenced by fewer reported beatings, opportunities to develop marketable skills, and to earn money. This continued to be true a century later as scholar Brian Rouleau writes that “abusing [Black seamen] might provoke the ire of officers and jeopardize the safety of all aboard a vessel dependent upon cooperation” (396). Here Rouleau discusses the interaction between black seamen and their white counterparts, who often sought to be violent toward their black shipmates. What preserved a sense of wellbeing for the black shipmates was that
survival of the crew trumped racial indignation. Rouleau does not by any means suggest that a meaningful sense of equality pervaded the feel of seafaring vessels. Rather, what Rouleau reveals is that the transatlantic world depicted in *The Interesting Narrative* was not experiencing improvement for slaves, but rather was worsening. In the years succeeding Vassa’s text, attitudes in the colonies toward Africans deteriorated and laws tightened. Equiano already lived in a world that was producing various forms of “Black-codes,” and the seas offered more freedom. Rouleau continues that “what appeared to gall many white American men about the maritime labor was precisely its potential to reverse the generally dependable racial hierarchy” (398). Rouleau explains the historical conditions of early American mariners, men who lived during the eighteenth century. These men would have shared maritime experiences similar to those represented in Vassa’s text, affirming the images in *The Interesting Narrative*. This is important to consider because the conditions in which these white men lived offer a measuring stick through which we can make evaluations about what we could expect of a person who is autonomous or who has agency.

*It Came with Them and for Them*

The changes in the transatlantic world, though not exclusively controlled by European metropoles, were principally driven by European interests. The legal and cultural systems that governed the colonies and emerging nations of the Americas were rooted in European laws, cultures, and religious denominations. So while
dynamics of power relations in the Americas were inconsistent, the orientation was
definitely toward European supremacy. Of course European militaries played critical
roles in expanding and maintaining control in this environment, and as such espoused
some practicalities that were not shared in private or public spheres. Seafaring skills
were more immediately a must, and to various degrees took precedence over race.
The historical moment represented in *The Interesting Narrative* offers the view that
“the British army and navy were open to all talents in ways that most occupations
were not. Competence mattered more than color” (Caretta 7). This is important
because so much of Equiano’s early history is staged with the Royal Navy, and his
the genesis and significant augmentation of his education take place there. 

*Repeating that Same Ol’ Theme*

Because the clerical, monarchical, and commercial powers residing in the
metropoles had a vital, though at times tenuous, hold on the colonies, affirming the
bond between metropole and colony influenced the themes in the literature produced
during the transatlantic period. Adventure narrative constructed non-Europeans as
exotic and inferior by nature. While attributing bravery and curiosity to Europeans,
these narratives also strategically othered indigenous peoples, Africans, and nativized
creole populations. Conversion narratives constructed non-Christians (i.e. non-
Europeans) as savage, intellectually deficient, and resistant to spiritual growth.
Reformation narratives, performing a similar function as narratives of conversion,
advanced adherence to particular Christian sects as a means of purity. Along those
same veins of rhetoric there is the captivity narrative. This class of narrative is characterized by tales that are initiated through the abduction of a protagonist who lives in an idyllic environment. After the abduction of the main character, the reader finds the captive redeemed through acts of faith and observance of God’s will. Equiano, as an African, inverts the captivity. Captivity narratives were tales in which a person, often a woman, was abducted by a non-European, usually Native Americans in the transatlantic, typically transported and kept in bondage for a time. In the case of Equiano (a character more likely to be “othered”), it is he who is occupies the place of the familiar characters usually reserved for English and Anglo-American characters, being abducted from his ideal African home and forced into a world of “savages” (this time in the form of white slavers). Equiano also establishes a new English home with his captors. The Interesting Narrative constructs an image of the colonies as rapaciousness, sexually exploitative, and filled with brute violence; all of which stifle, if not obliterates, the growth of unassuming Christianity. The inversion here is that is it the ways of Europeans are foreign, illogical, and unchristian to an African man. And rather than simply performing the “savage as critic” voice, which is written by white men to criticize the state of European civilizations (i.e. Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals”), Equiano moves quickly and naturally from one decidedly civilized state to mastery at the center of a European civilization, taking a wife and advocating for the careful and inclusive spread of that particular European thought and economy. An African in control of these images and the outcomes are markedly different
Lastly, Equiano employs elements of anti-slavery narratives. These narratives variously sought for the abolition of slavery, full emancipation and inclusion of slaves in colonial or English politics, and some, including Equiano’s text, even suggested “repatriation” of Africans and descendants of Africans to Africa. To construct Equiano, Vassa initially reinscribes the racist rhetoric used by a paternalistic England. By producing an infantile image of Africa, implying pending growth, he shifts the view of Africa from being simply inferior. Vassa’s aim outside of the text was more toward gaining fairer treatment for slaves rather than for immediate emancipation, which matches Equiano’s apparent initial subordination of emancipation to inclusion and guidance, reiterating a somewhat quotidian view of an infantile Africa. Toward the end of the text, Equiano reminds the readers of the cruelties of the colonies and argues that slavery as ultimately detrimental to the progress and morality of Europe.

Structured as a spiritual autobiography, Vassa’s text portrays Equiano giving all responsibility to Providence for his successes. Providence is his one ultimate guide, though Equiano does exercise determination and choice throughout the narrative. This balance of Providence and free-will is important because Equiano’s audience was principally Christian and the primary advocates for the abolition of slavery were against it based on Christian principals. Equiano, as an African, seen as coming from a pagan and foreign culture to his English readers, needed to qualify his experiences within the context of subtly revisioned conversion narrative conventions.
Disclosure and Phasing In

Bearing in mind the sense of familiarity elicited by these various narrative genres, Vassa employed an assortment of conventions from captivity and spiritual conversion tales, to provide an image that was familiar and acceptable to the English public. However, *The Interesting Narrative* was also alienating because of role reversals and situational or character foils that illuminated his representation of the transatlantic period that used established literary tropes by inverting them. In the world represented here, entering the transatlantic world as an African from Africa certainly meant being forced into race-based slavery. It meant encountering a generally inescapable slave system in which the primary forms of labor were physically intensive and deadly. In the setting of *The Interesting Narrative*, slaves in the Caribbean were subject to such heinous treatment and demanding labor that they died at rates so high that the labor they provided needed to be replaced by purchase rather than by what has been referred to as natural increase, or giving birth (Vassa 106). For many slaves in Vassa’s world, labor meant death. Once freed from bondage, Africans were not free. Africans lived in a society where any white person with enough aggression and just enough money could claim a free African as property, or murder an African with near or complete impunity. Africans had no real legal identity (Rugemer 47). For these reasons it was especially important for Africans to be attached to a white person. As Equiano discovers, it was safer for an African to be a slave than to be free. In bondage to a white man, an African had some access to someone who possessed a legal identity. Equiano quotes and African that
“sometimes when a white man take away my fish, I go to my master, and he get me right; and when my master, by strength, take away my fishes, what must me do?” (Vassa 110), and observes that in even Philadelphia “were it not for the benevolence of the Quakers in that city, many a sable race, who not breathe the air of liberty, would be…groaning under some planters chains” (Vassa 122). If an African were wronged by a white person, and the wronged African’s hope for redress matched with desires of his master then the African had some hope for reparation through his master’s access to the law. In having an economic investment in the slave, there was some hope that the master would have the motivation to use the legal and social power at his disposal to provide at least the immediate safety of the slave.

The literary figure of Equiano represented a pure image of Africa--Africa as naive, proto-Christian, and ripe for commercial development. The rhetoric espoused by Equiano created space for England to convert the naive Africa into a wise companion, the proto-Christian Africa into fully realized Christians, and for England to engage with Africa in a kind of synergistic economic growth. Set in the colonies, the sanguine image of Equiano developed from a character who represented an inferior view of Africa into a character who represented the most European possibilities for Africa, linguistically, morally and socially, and economically. And because of the morally deleterious nature of the colonies, Equaino is finely juxtaposed with images of many of the Europeans represented in the text. Equiano had a fresh and direct Christianity, and his sensibilities represented the best qualities of Europe. And Equiano, having been educated and socialized with moral, capitalist
Englishmen, possessed fewer vices than the characters deprived by the colonial atmosphere, a feature the text implicitly highlights by showing how Equiano refrains from violence, raping slave women, and, most importantly, swindling and theft. The abolitionist movement contemporary to Vassa made use of Vassa’s representation of colonial depravity, to strengthen their position against slavery. The popularity of his writing, which leading Equiano-scholar Carretta has assessed through the lists of subscribers to The Interesting Narrative, showed that Vassa successfully captured the attention of a sizable and important reading public.

*A Little Contradiction*

While in the past scholars used Vassa’s literary text as an important historical account, Carretta’s recent scholarship has challenged the authenticity of some of the text’s claims, making Equiano scholarship a more vexed endeavor. The narrative was produced and accepted as autobiography, with some contentions contemporary to its production. The first fully self-written autobiography by an African in English, it purportedly depicted the first African perspective of the transportation of African people as cargo, known to history as “The Middle Passage.” Carretta, authoring *Equiano The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*, examines Vassa’s narrative against contradictory evidence that reveals that the author likely fabricated an African past. Rather than undermining Vassa’s credibility as an intelligent author, this revelation would show him to be even more politically literate and craftier than has been previously understood. In being born into slavery in South Carolina rather than
in Africa, Vassa’s literary feat comes from collecting stories from other enslaved Africans and extrapolating an accurate picture of Africa from them for his public. Carretta’s assertions present Gustavus Vassa as having constructed Equiano, expanding his previous identities. The fine particulars of Vassa’s motives can remain unclear, but because *The Interesting Narrative* was a key abolitionist text, with overt calls for cessation of the slave trade, it is more than reasonable to deduce that an African birthplace lent Vassa greater credibility. If we borrow from Carretta’s reasoning then in reconstructing the Middle Passage from first-hand accounts by his illiterate and bound countrymen and owning these accounts as his own, Vassa would have represented beautifully the plight of many unvoiced souls.

Later, even to the present, Afro-Briton and African-American writers, along with the greater community of writers and scholars have relied, on the descriptions in Vassa’s text as a reference point for building images of the Middle Passage during the slave trade. The images of barbarous conditions, death, and desperation of African slaves were an indignity and cruelty that lent themselves to the abolishment of slavery in England and England’s exit from its role in slave trade. As Carretta states in *Unchained Voices*:

>[T]he separate colonies had a great deal of latitude in the creation of internal legislation. From the perspective of Afro-Britons, one of the harshest ironies of the last half of the eighteenth century was the White colonists’ fierce defense of local legislative control as the bulwark of freedom from political slavery imposed by the Mother Country (4).
The English colonies, having developed momentum and their own religious and nationalistic self-interest, maintained varying forms of slavery and involvement in the slave trade. The forms of slavery in the colonies intensified and they began coding race-based slavery more deeply than has yet to be recognized in history.

The author of the text lived most of his life, after age twelve, by the name Gustavus Vassa, a name given him by one of his owners. Olaudah Equiano of the narrative received his name with the traditions of his native African people. At the close of The Interesting Narrative, Equiano was over thirty years old and had fully formed and enacted his affections and loyalty to the English. In the introduction to Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century, Carretta places Equiano in relation to more familiar names from the black Atlantic such as Phyllis Wheatley and Benjamin Banneker, and some lesser recognizable names like Ignatius Sancho and Venture Smith. All are figures in the Black Atlantic’s literary canon, among twelve other figures brought into his anthology, and share a theme of “liberation from either physical or spiritual captivity and often from both” within their literary works (1). This, as Carretta points out, is one principle that unites them all. Important to my discussion of this text is how the narrative arch of the events of Equiano’s life in The Interesting Narrative is particularly reflective of his particular “geographical, social, and temporal settings” (1).
Though, as previously indicated, I will principally work with this text as a piece of literature, it is important to understand this work in its historical context. In England, during the eighteenth century, Abolitionists movements were in full swing and the discussion about slavery was quite public. England attempted to suppress rebellion in the North American colonies that then became the United States, but failed and then had to manage subsequent tensions with the nascent United States and other colonies throughout the Caribbean. The threat of other European powers laying claim to English colonies and resources loomed continually.

*The Trinity: Reading, Writing, and Repentance*

Vassa represents the place and time in which Equiano labored most extensively as enabling and supporting his literacy: reading-writing literacy and spiritual literacy. Reading encompasses an ability to scan and understand text, to draw inference and make critical connections. The writing component encompasses the ability to compose a text that is comprehensible and relays information. In discussion of Vassa’s book, numeracy is included in reading-writing literacy because Equiano’s labor and education is dependent on mathematics, and the former is dependent on the latter. According to Arnold Packer, modern educational principals hold that “Solving problems in any domain requires a foundation of basic (reading, writing, listening, speaking)” (37). Yet academic alone could have been alienating.

Christianity, including its spread and “correct” practices, was a driving force in colonization in complex ways. Because of the multilayered role of Christianity,
understanding how to operate, at least rhetorically, within the frameworks of the religion were foundational to any public discourse. This would have been true of novel image as well as a real sociopolitical figure. So while on the surface Equiano’s construction might reflect Franz Fanon’s “colonized mind,” Vassa actively, and confrontedionally, constructs an African identity that utilizes and subverts generally Eurocentric Christianity affirming literary conventions. In some effect attempting to dismantle the master’s house with the only tools at his disposal.

Christianity can be conceptualized in relationship to social literacy, or as a stand in for social literacy, because the social landscape of the era was entrenched in Christian rhetoric. An important factor of identity in English society, one must understand the importance of Christianity and the behaviors and rhetoric expected of Christians. Understanding Christian behavior and rhetoric is something we might take for granted today, but many Africans contemporary to Equiano were largely immigrants with different religious and cultural histories. In addition, Vassa’s era was a pre or early missionary Africa. Many Africans had little exposure to Christianity, especially the form it took in Western Europe, particularly those living farther from the west coast of the continent. In order for an African to have socialized effectively with, and especially to be accepted by, the English, Africans needed to situate their identities and actions through the lens of Christianity. As colonial liberty was a bulwark to protect the institution of slavery, Christianity was a bulwark for the Christian constructs supporting an African’s humanity. Equiano’s Christian literacy
was tied to his ability to read and write skillfully, and so one was one critically dependent on the other.

*Changes and Thereafter*

The first chapter of this thesis aims to mark out the moments in *The Interesting Narrative* that represent how in a transatlantic context, labor directly informs educational possibilities, therefore subsequent labors and greater agency. Privilege will be given to representations of reading-writing literacy because, while generated through labor, this form of literacy develops a reciprocal relationship with Equiano’s other kinds of labor. This relationship provides and supports Equiano’s choices in bondage, manumission, and upward mobility. The second chapter will mark out moments when reading-writing literacy is also represented as laying the groundwork for subsequent social and Christian efficacy. While these chapters are split in their focuses, both chapters use evidence of the necessity for Christianity as a thread throughout the text, from his birth to his marriage. As the text moves it uses the developing as well as the spiritually literate and well-traveled figure of Equiano to censure participants and decision makers concerning the slave trade. The conclusion of this thesis suggest how the forms of literacy represented in *The Interesting Narrative* continue to be relevant today as questions of access, useful education, and social literacy continue to be addressed, in common politic.
Chapter 1: Equiano’s Surrogate Familial Bonds His Literacy

Who You Know, and How They Love You

Literacy as represented in the world depicted in The Interesting Narrative had yet to spread to the majority of the population. An African slave’s literacy was especially uncommon because, positioned on the lowest rungs of English societies, slaves were generally denied access to this skill. Our Equiano does learn to read, a considerable exception in the English world. Equiano’s education, like any then and now, nourishes his personal and commercial growth and is rooted in the supportive familial structures. For our protagonist, this necessitates a surrogate family.

Equiano’s narrative represents the power of literacy in the English world. Some commentary on Equiano examines this image more as a capitalist reconciling his race with his trade. In Geniuses in Bondage, Felicity A. Nussbaum’s chapter, “Being a Man,” investigates Equiano as a representation of an African male navigating “an emerging national masculinity steeped in racism” (56), and facing an “increasing white apprehension about black male sexuality” (62). She compares him to Ignatius Sancho, an Afro-British contemporary of Equiano who achieved literacy and freedom, though he did not reach the same social status as the historical Vassa (66). I believe that Sancho’s comparatively lesser status is likely because he did not labor on the transatlantic nor did he develop the confirming familial bonds developed in Equiano’s image.

In his book Equiano the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man Carretta focuses on how for the literary figure, Equiano, and the real figure, Vassa, the labor
and social context suggested that “the demands of the seafaring life” meant that skill
and affiliation subordinated race, allowing Equiano-Vassa to “transcend the barriers
imposed” by it (72). Accordingly, Vassa-Equiano’s fate was redirected because of
the “talent and skills he had developed while in the navy”10 (Carretta 96). His time in
the navy was attached to Lt. Pascal, known as Papa Pascal to Equiano. Carretta also
sees Equiano-Vassa as having established or “embraced a substitute family” (Carretta
73). Dutifully, because marriage is foundational to Christian life, though cautiously,
because his body is still a potential suspect of UnEnglishness, the end of the narrative
briefly refers to Equiano’s marriage.

What has not been clearly seen in my research are arguments that Equiano is
less a construction of nationality, such as in John Thornton’s exploration of African
Creolism, and more so a construction that is assumed into a surrogate family as a
verification of individual self and move toward legal self. The text thoroughly
grounds Equiano’s action in the embrace of family and his development toward being
family man. Reading Carretta and others though, familial bonds seem subordinate, or
almost peripheral to nationalistic, abolitionist, Christian, or pan-African concerns.
Rather than peripheral, however, these bonds are foundational to the rationality of an
African’s literacy and agency. The text centers Equiano’s ascension on the embrace
of family and his development toward being a family man. The catalyst for Equiano’s
ascension from abject servitude to man of honor is familial embrace.
The Sea Will Provide

In the transatlantic of the 1700s, labor provided possibilities for relationships and education that opened further opportunities. The reality of this setting is that it was continually in flux because of aggressively changing national, religious, social, racial (racist), and labor trends that exploded in unprecedented fashions; thrusting people of color, especially slaves, to the bottom. Amazingly, in this context few and unique opportunities existed for those Africans who labored on the transatlantic. The differences in transatlantic labors compared to colonial labors have stunning implications, including potential “loopholes” or pathways, for Equiano.

Taking advantage of these implications require Equiano be able to process commerce independently, and to turn a profit, to accomplish these things he needs to be literate. For the purpose of this thesis, literacy indicates reading, writing, and numeracy. The process of reading entails decoding and interpreting abstract symbols, while writing involves composing abstract symbols for others to decode or interpret. Reading-Writing literacy and mathematics have some significant dependence on each other, so for the purpose of this chapter I make little distinction between numerical literacy (numeracy) and reading-writing literacy. The reason I make this distinction is because the first is dependent on the latter. In “Democracy and the Numerate Citizen” author Patricia Cline Cohen confirms the rarity and importance of literacy in the 1700s, as represented in The Interesting Narrative, writing that “the vast majority of citizens in 1789 had quite limited numeracy skills, skills that got exercised the most (if at all) in the world of commerce and trade”(7-8), and “generally only boys headed
for the mercantile” (Cohen 10). What is more, our protagonist does not face the
limitations from the “abysmal state of arithmetic instruction in the colonies” (Cohen
10). Equiano’s labors and surrogate family provide him with private educations that
include numerical literacy.

*The Nativity Scene*

Separating him from his biological family, his first family, Equiano is
abducted. Despite Equiano’s lamentations, he makes little reference to his parents
after entering the transatlantic, stifling any development of images of these first
parents. Equiano becomes a metaphoric orphan. As an orphan, and being very young,
he *needs* a family. Equiano had the fortune of laboring in such a condition, place, and
time that he is inducted into a surrogate family. This surrogate family consists of the
pious brother, Baker, an eventually dissolute father, Pascal who nonetheless
provisions the Guerin Family, maternal or aunt-like figures who with their brother are
invaluable extended relations, and a compensatory second father figure, Queen.
Along the way, each of these relationships has a direct and augmenting influence on
his education.

*The Wretch Gains a Brother, and the First Day of School*

*The Interesting Narrative* employs fraternal and paternal rhetoric that
naturalizes the unexpected relationships that form between Equiano and a wealthy
English adolescent, and between Equiano and a successful Englishmen.
After being for “some time” in Virginia in a “much dejected state without having anyone to talk to, which made life [a] burden”, providence (which Equiano describes as “the hand of the Creator”) begins its work (Vassa 63). Purchased by Lt. Pascal as a gift for London cousins, Equiano is taken aboard Lt. Pascal’s trade ship, *The Industrious Bee*. At this point our protagonist “could smatter a little imperfect English,” enough to argue against being renamed by Lt. Pascal, henceforth ‘Papa Pascal’ (Vassa 64). Equiano’s rebellion is in part because he has yet to value the possibilities inherent in his new name.

While rife, from our perspective, with white supremacist and so dangerously patronizing and racist overtones, this naming is an attempt to align an African slave with Christian practice and carries with it a sense of paternal responsibility. Equiano describes his treatment on the ship as being nourishing and “very kindly”, the opposite of what he had experienced of “any white people before” (Vassa 64). It is in this context that the lonely, fearful and illiterate Equiano meets privileged servant Richard Baker.

*Paternity or Pederasty?*

Papa Pascal seems to favor Richard Baker and Equiano’s relationship, leaving them to their own devices or arranging comfortable lodgings for the two. For Vassa’s reader, Papa Pascal’s paternal connection to Baker was probably viewed as natural. He had known Baker for years, as he had “lodged with [Baker’s] mother in America” (Vassa 65). As an older male who had a relationship with Baker’s mother and with Baker’s father being absent from the text, his bond with Baker can be read
as a father-son construction. By taking Baker aboard ship, and arranging for Baker to spend time with favorable people, to the exclusion of other men aboard ship, suggests that Papa Pascal took special interest in the boy. What is startling here and should not be ignored is that Papa Pascal shows favoritism with violent sexual implications. Papa Pascal represents the auspice of the father for the protagonist and his friend, but this fatherhood is perverted, in the modern sense. He perverts the relationship by intimating bodily function and consumption, playfully threatening to first eat “Dick”, his personal name for Baker, and to follow that with eating Equiano (Vassa 65-66). Eating the boys hints at the consumption that characterizes the colonies through which the boys travel, and turns out to be more menacing than not because the colonies actually do consume Baker, and continually attempted to consume Equiano. This consumption can also be read as a sexual. Papa Pascal both jokes about eating Baker, and “made [Baker] eat with him in his cabin” (Vassa 65). “Made” suggests the possibility of coercion. One could wonder about such a coercion of a young lad into a private setting. While in the reality of the transatlantic the punishment for sodomy or homosexuality might have included death, in the privacy of a captain’s cabin, as it is only Baker who is made to eat with Papa Pascal, the risk of discovery or punishment is likely low. Though subtle, such intimations do not make it clear whether their relationship violates the norms and laws that attempt to govern the seas from a distance. Considering Louis Crompton’s records of ship life, we could wonder if Papa Pascal “Bugard him or to that effect”\textsuperscript{11} (Crompton 291). After all, anti-sodomy laws were made for a reason. The existence of sodomy laws suggest that there were either
inordinate concerns and/or sodomy happened with enough frequency to warrant legal proceedings. Setting that possibility aside, Papa Pascal in other ways undermines colonial conventions to Equiano’s benefit.

*Father Knows Best*

Baker and Equiano had almost unlimited access to each other because of the confined and quasi-nomadic nature of transatlantic labor. Like a good and moral brother, Baker takes Equiano to church (Vassa 67). Soon after visiting church, Equiano’s linguistic pursuits intensify and Baker “instructed [Equiano] with pleasure”(Vassa 68). Unlike with other men in the colonies, with Baker Equiano is able to “make free” (68). And because of Papa Pascal’s affection toward the two boys, they are granted a fair amount of free time, which consisted of educational excursions, among other things.

*Kissing Cousins*

Though Baker comes from a privileged and propertied background, the character cannot have missed that physical proximity to Equiano was going to be protracted and frequently remote from the stabilizing forces of church, country, and kin. Both Equiano and Baker are in similar stages in life, as much as can be said about a member of an elite class and a slave, and the risks faced by the two are starkly analogous, and the two go “through many sufferings together on shipboard” (Vassa 65). Suffering likely meant, intense loneliness, toil, deprivation in food and sleep, and responding to the caprices of weather and Papa Pascal.
It is in the context of intense physical labor, isolation, and propinquity the two develop a relationship in which Baker is Equiano’s “agreeable companion, faithful friend” with whom a “friendship was cemented... cherished till [Baker’s] death” (Vassa 65). The freedom and openness of Baker’s treatment fosters the growth of a fraternal bond between the two. Baker, who was “not ashamed to notice, associate with, and to be the friend and instructor of one who was...a slave,” helps Equiano comprehend his new world (Vassa 65). Without the racially strenuous labors and dangers of the colonies, the two boys reach an eighteenth century romantic intensity, forming an intimate bond that skirts the edges of romance, in the modern sense. The boys, “have[ing] many nights lain in each other’s bosoms when...in distress” (Vassa 65), move from the disparity of each other’s background to an acute connection in the present.12

The bond between Equiano and Baker is profoundly intimate. This applies to the amount of time spent together, their conversations and their shared physical spaces. “Bosoms” carry nuances of secrecy and close physical proximity. Throughout this text, other moments of physical contact between Africans and Englishmen were flagrantly violent, with African bodies being on the receiving end of all brutality. Yet, with Baker, Equiano develops a tender, enduring, and fulfilling relationship.

Both boys are subject to apparent life and death struggles that are imposed by nature. The geography of the sea, from a literary perspective, is poetically unstable, capricious, and representative of the unknown. Inversely, it is through laboring in this
environment that Equiano finds abiding connections that would move him toward freedom.

Entering this unstable environment, Baker had “never been at sea before” (Vassa 65) as a wealthy and landed slaver, Baker had likely never related meaningfully to a slave before (Vassa 65), especially in the familiar way he does with Equiano. In this narrative’s colonies, there was little reason for a white youth with an “excellent education”, as represented in Richard Baker, to strike up a meaningful relationship with an “ignorant, a stranger, of a different complexion, and a slave” (Vassa 65). Yet, the two boys develop a familial intimacy, facilitated by the auspice of the mischievous (or lascivious) Papa Pascal, and it is with well-educated Baker that Equiano’s verbal communication leaps, reading begins, and his English identity starts to form.

We should keep in mind that despite their intimacy, Baker does not represent abolitionist sentiments. In fact, as indicated, “this dear youth had many slaves of his own”(Vassa 65). Narratively, slaving does not seem to tarnish Baker’s character. More importantly, Baker embraces one who is a stranger and a slave, literally and literally. So despite being a slaver, Baker relates fraternally to Equiano by finding comfort with him.13 This is personal, not political. Baker’s textual purpose is not to serve as an abolitionist, but to show readers the power of brotherhood.
It is while crossing the Atlantic to Europe that the two become intimate friends, and upon their arrival to England their bond intensifies. Baker is Equiano’s “best interpreter” in cultural and religious ideas through England and through Turkey (Vassa 68). Baker takes Equiano out on informative jaunts about the towns, initiating Equiano’s Christian discipleship, expanding his vocabulary, rooting in the norms and expectations of real England. Before Equiano could really begin his education, Baker helps open Equiano’s reasoning by assuaging what Equiano “very much feared” and what burdens his “mind with agony” (Vassa 65-66). Through Baker, Equiano begins to accept the logic that governs his new world. Equiano’s thirst for literacy begins with the Talking Book motif historically used by an Anglo-African writer (Vassa 68). A motif that presents images of Africans interpreting reading as an act of mystically listening to books, wishing the books to speak to them. With Baker’s dutifully leading, it is in this relationship that books and reading are demystified, and Equiano is able to form a logical desire.

One of the roles Baker plays in Equiano’s literacy is in aiding his language acquisition, as Equiano is “not being able to talk much English” upon meeting Baker (Vassa 66). Baker’s friendship and instructions were necessary for Equiano to develop a linguistic framework for reading. Relationships, as represented through Baker and Equiano, set a slave down a road to literacy.
The Mamas and the Papas

Papa Pascal starts as an ideal father figure. Initially, he is generous, providing Equiano food and a comfortable place to rest. He is liberal, allowing much freedom between the boys to travel and learn, and provides Christian discipline in not sparing the rod in teaching Equiano his new Christian name, one that harkens back to an iconic noble (Vassa 64), as well as offering Equiano maternal influence. Papa Pascal is commercially astute and courageous, both in running a trade ship and advancing his position as a naval officer. And he seems equally as fond of the free, white Baker as he is of his enslaved African, Equiano.

Papa Pascal demonstrates apparent paternal interest in the youths in arranging lengthy accommodation in which the provisional brothers are fostered together under the roof of Papa Pascal’s close friends. “With great kindness and attention,” the mother\(^{15}\) washes Equiano’s face, and teaches “[him] every thing in the same manner as she did her own child, and indeed in every respect treats [Equiano] as such” (Vassa 69). It is during several months with the unnamed maternal figure that Equiano’s emotional distress “which in young minds are not perpetual were now wearing away” (Vassa 70). Under this maternal care, Equiano begins to heal, and his familial and linguistic self is expanding. He is ready to meet more kinfolk and to begin the arduous road to true literacy.
Summer Vacation

Equiano’s first time with Papa Pascal’s relations is more like a child sent to summer with relatives rather than a slave having a first peek at his servitude. He first meets Papa Pascal’s male “relation” who arranges Equiano to stay with his own two sisters. The sisters were “amiable ladies, who took much notice and great care” of him (Vassa 71). The brother and sisters will be referred to as the Guerin family. These relations of Papa Pascal nurse Equiano through bouts of illnesses as any good relation would do for each other. For Equiano and Baker these women can be viewed as aunts.\textsuperscript{16}

After months, they return to Papa Pascal and Baker is allowed to leave with another ship. Equiano expects his separation from Brother Baker to be temporary (Vassa 72). The anti-Christian colonial world cold, greedy, and bellicose in some unknown way dashes Brother Baker fatally (Vassa 80). Considering Equiano’s later experiences with battle, and considering that Equiano witnesses the brutalization of Englishmen at the hands of Englishmen in the colonies,\textsuperscript{17} there is something foul to be inferred about Brother Baker’s death. Yet without any details of Baker’s death, it is fit to say that Baker is simply eliminated by the colonies, reminding the reader dissolution of family that is one of its traits.\textsuperscript{18}

Equiano, in his loyalty and affection, is grieved twice over by discovering his first true companion’s death as it comes with the profound disappointment of meeting a woman who is reported to be his sister (Vassa 80). A sister, who at times was his “only comfort” and that “being in each other’s arms...and bathing each other
with…tears” was an enduring memory (Vassa 47), and shares characteristics with Brother Baker’s bosom. In the same passage as Brother Baker, Sister is torn from him. Equiano “loved and grieved for [Baker] as a brother,” as he loved and grieved for his sister (Vassa 80). Both figures are now torn from the text, leaving Equiano to cleave more intensely to his surrogate family that eventually demands Equiano’s spiritual completion and literacy development (Vassa 78).

Between Baker’s final departure, Equiano “embraced every occasion of improvement” and “took up every opportunity to gain instruction [in reading and writing], and had made very little progress” by the time he arrives for a second stay with the Guerin family (Vassa 78). In the transatlantic he had begun learning to read and write. Equiano had been under the tutelage of his instructor and best interpreter. The foundation groundwork has been laid.

*Papa’s Side of the Family*

The reason that Papa Pascal purchased Equiano was as a gift for his relations, the Guerin family. After two years at sea, Equiano arrives for a significant stay at his original destination. Constructed as providence, Equiano’s new labors find him subject to masters interested in his literacy development and wellbeing. Equiano arrives to the Guerin family having become “a stranger to terror of every kind,” able to “speak English tolerably well,” and he “perfectly understood everything that was said” (Vassa 77). Equiano would not have been of as much use to the Guerin family had he not known English, and it would have delayed his development. The promise
he shows leads the Guerin family to act. Empathetic to his anxiety, Miss Guerin “insisted on it” until Mr. Guerin, reluctantly “complied with her request” (Vassa 78). The Guerin family formally becomes his relations through god-parenting.

Miss Guerin, impressed with Equiano, welcomes him into her home again. Unlike other visits, she decides to send Equiano to school. She does this knowing that Equiano is an asset to her cousin and is surely aware that Equiano would be returning to sea. Her fondness for her natural relation and for Equiano granted him significant support as he, in some sense, studied in London. The Guerin family “took great pains to teach [Equiano] to read” (Vassa 79). Equiano also acquires a Bible, and Miss advocates for and arranges Equiano’s baptism. Equiano’s baptism can be read as a formal induction into the Guerin family through the institution of god-parenting. In educating and baptizing Equiano, the Guerin family supports a vital set of skills for him and clarifies the parental image of the Guerin family. The skills they provide him would open commerce to him. Contradictorily, fortunate and unfortunate, Equiano must return to the transatlantic. He returns with an affirmation of familial connection and material for his educational development.

*Play For Keeps*

In the historical world represented in *The Interesting Narrative* slaves in the colonies were considered blessed just to keep the Sabbath, so extended periods of exploration and repose, as a rule, were not given to slaves in the colonies. Equiano experiences a fair amount of “time at play” (Vassa 70), visiting Isle of Wight and
finding the “inhabitants very civil” (Vassa 85). This continues contrasting the transatlantic and Euro-English in opposition to the English colonial places represented in The Interesting Narrative. The transatlantic and Europe are contrastingly inviting and permissive of intellectual growth, curiosity and moral development. It is during this time that Equiano, having received “valuable presents” 24 (Vassa 79), “endeavored to improve…both [reading and writing]” (Vassa 91).

Letters from Papa Numero Dos, and Numbers, Too

Papa Pascal is assigned a new ship and crew, and Equiano meets the ship clerk Daniel Queen who gains Equiano’s filial affections. Queen reciprocates, as he “fortunately this man soon became very much attached…and took very great pains to instruct” (Vassa 91). This attachment meant preference, time, and energy. Equiano continues that “while I was in the Aetna particularly, the captain’s clerk taught me to write, and gave me a smattering of arithmetic as far as the rule of three”25 (Vassa 91). Papa Pascal is permissive of Equiano’s relationship with a man who is “forty years of age and well educated” (Vassa 91). Supporting contributions from Equiano’s godparents, well educated Papa Queen teaches Equiano “to read in the Bible,” and helps him to analyze passages he “did not comprehend” augmenting the power of the Guerin family’s gift (Vassa 92).

Through Papa Queen, Equiano expands his skill-base. “[Daniel Queen] taught me to shave and dress hair a little” (Equiano 91). Equiano would eventually use this skill to sustain himself or supplement his later labors as a mariner. By being in
transatlantic seclusion with the paternal interest of Papa Queen, Equiano’s skill set and knowledge diversifies, including understanding laws that empowered and limited him as well as, to a lesser degree, empowered or limited Europeans.\(^{26}\)

Equiano “almost loved him with the affection of a son,” with Equiano being filially associated with Papa Queen’s name and a suggestion of an inheritance,\(^ {27}\) Papa Queen telling Equiano that the two “never should part”(Vassa 91-92). While on the transatlantic, Queen, like Baker, is free to share his affections with Equiano and to advance Equiano’s literacy. Papa Queen, like Baker, disappears into the colonial space, but to a less ominous end. Unlike Papa Pascal, who resurfaces sans integrity.

_Papa Don’t Leave, I’m in Trouble Deep_

The colonies have consumed Baker, laying claim to Baker’s life during his tenure aboard the Preston (Vassa 80), and now began to work on Papa Pascal. Though Papa Pascal “respected [Baker] very much,” and despite the relational expectations between Baker and Papa Pascal, when the dead Baker’s belongings were returned to Papa Pascal, he has little sentiment, leading him to give to Equiano Baker’s belongings without a word or much apparent thought (Vassa 80). For Equiano the belongings are cherished memorabilia (Vassa 80) signaling their connection and, probably, his fitness for English life. Papa Pascal’s response then foreshadows danger to Equiano. After having taken much care and interest in Baker, Papa Pascal dismisses the boy’s death with nary a word, suggesting erosion of his ability to care for another Christian, Englishman, and son. As Equiano later points out, the colonies
“debauch men’s minds” and “violates that first natural right of mankind” (Vassa 111). Papa Pascal eventually succumbs to the debauching influence of the colonies, attempting to dissolve their relationship and Equiano’s affection by sale.

One could wonder if Equiano and Baker’s intimacy, stimulated by the sexually evocative paternal auspice of Papa Pascal, was nothing more than a protection for Papa Pascal’s investments. That he always intended to do this. I argue that Papa Pascal is weakened by the colonies. He did after all sanction schooling and baptism for Equiano. That sense of fatherhood has now fallen to duplicitous commerciality resulting in the death of a Christian lad, reneging on familial commitment, and the sale of another Christian lad. With the selling of Equiano, the image of Pascal degenerates.

Papa Pascal’s relationships with Baker, a social investment with economic implications, and with Equiano, an economic investment with social implications both turn from genuine interest to a conflation of disposable progenitors of wealth rather than progenies. Rather than allowing for the natural growth of familial affection, so apparent in each of these relationships, greedy Pascal abandons both “inseparable” boys; Baker, to death, and Equiano, to a cruel master.
**Will Get Along Fine Without You, Eventually**

Though abandoned, Equiano is able to assimilate intimacy fostered by Papa Pascal and his time with confidant and personal tutor. Equiano has developed fluency in English, reads, writes, calculates, and has developed social aptitude.

Entering the transatlantic an illiterate and friendless slave with weak English skills, Equiano is still trying to make sense of the mashed up world he has come to live in, and was accelerated by his relationship with Baker (Vassa 65). It is a thing of curiosity whether Equiano would have developed a strong enough grasp of the language to support his release from bondage. My response to this is: he would have possibly developed a strong enough grasp, but gaining a family was indispensable to real freedom and prosperity. His relationship with Baker was the first familial, amorous or fraternal, bond that he developed in this world. And it is distinctly his relationships with Baker, Pascal and the Guerin family that set him down his road. Along the way Equiano would continue throughout the text to decry oppressive “cruelties of every kind” as the only mainstays for slaves throughout the colonies (Vassa 104).²⁸

**No Bosom for the Weary**

In the world of *The Interesting Narrative*, relationships involving Africans were frequently destroyed or undermined. Africans were separated traumatically from people they cared about, according to whatever “merciless lords choose; and probably never more during life see each other” (Vassa 61 and 110). These separations,
Equiano observes, are commonly forced on African slaves who have attempted to form family units. African Diaspora scholar Karen Morrison writes that “laws in many Anglo-American regions denied the existence of such formal bonds” as marriage (56). Meaning, simply enough, even a relationship that has been ordained as divine and unbreakable in the higher of Christian courts, the colonies exclude Africans from forming. This was about control. A well-grounded belief was spreading that literacy made slaves more difficult to control. This is reflected in the historical South Carolina Act of 1740, also known as the Negro Act of 1740. The South Carolina Act, among other things, outlines punishments for people teaching slaves to read and write. It is sensible to read this act, established in the colonial system represented in The Interesting Narrative, as represented in Equiano’s disparaged “bloody West India code” that he witnessed in “different islands” (Vassa 109-110), “no less than fifteen” different islands (Vassa 111). These visits broaden the scope of Equiano’s concerns by representing as commonplace what can be imagined as peculiar to an island or isolated locale. This is not one island in an enigmatic archipelago. Greed and irreverence governs this economic system, stratifying race, class and religion in unprecedented ways as well as destroying godly bonds and Christian bodies.  

It is the spirit of the colonies that compelled Papa Pascal to sell Equiano, violates the bond that stopped Papa Pascal from separating with Equiano because Equiano said, simply, “it would break my heart” (Vassa 72). Yet, while the colonies would scar Equiano, they would not keep him. Literacy, numeracy, commerciality,
social reach, and Christianity, give Equiano a critical edge in labor choices. His bondage is compromised.

*A Collar and a Dime*

The dissolute Papa Pascal sells Equiano to Captain Doran, who rightfully views Equiano’s literacy as a threat to his own stability, telling Equiano that he “talked too much English”, and Equiano is “too well convinced of his power (Vassa 94). The power possessed by Captain Doran comes from his willingness to embrace the cruel attitude of the colonies. It is with Captain Doran that Equiano’s “former suffering in the slave-ship” rages back into mind with multiplied intensity (Vassa 94). It is with Captain Doran that he is forced into this “land of bondage” which causes “a fresh horror, and a “chilled” heart (Vassa 98). Equiano wisely hides his skill from Captain Doran (Vassa 94), and has to labor on the transatlantic with unfamiliar intensity, 31 expressing to the reader that “I now knew what it was to work hard; I was made to help unload and load the ship” (Vassa 99). In suppressing Equiano, Captain Dorian fails to make use of an economic powerhouse in his possession.

This new kind of intense physical exertion that found him “day by day mangled and torn” curtails or stalls Equiano’s studies32 (Vassa 99). He simply ceases to mention any positive relationships or gains in literacy. Equiano only recalls pain, fear, and his thoughts being directed toward escaping this servitude through “the stroke of death”, or escaping back to London with the help of his former crew or paid men (Vassa 98). This, though, is an exception to the rule concerning his terms in
bondage or employment. Captain Doran, in his own avarice, does not recognize the valued treasure maker at hand, and so he sells Equiano.

A Recognized Asset

Sold again, this time to a Quaker, Mr. King, for whom Equiano’s literacy proved beneficial. First inquiries for Equiano represent how his literacy interacts with King’s labor choices. Mr. King selected Equiano for purchase because of his “good behavior”, and because Equiano “understood something of the rules of arithmetic” (Vassa 99-100). Historically different from other colonies, King’s residence, Pennsylvania, would be a northern state, espousing an apparently more liberal approach to slavery. Mr. King quickly puts Equiano in school to be a clerk (Vassa 100). Equiano is skilled in seamanship, a potentially broad set of skills, and that he “could shave and dress hair,” do arithmetic, and “refine wines” a skill he “learned on shipboard” (Vassa 100). Mr. King applies one of his clerks to teaching Equiano how to gauge (Vassa 100). According to University of Pennsylvania archives gauging, essentially the measurements of dimensions or volumes, was one of the first courses offered at the opening of The Academy of Philadelphia. Equiano is privately educated.
Get a Promotion and a Raise

Equiano begins managing deliveries for Mr. King’s “rum, sugar and other goods” (Vassa 101); he is the only African clerk to be “employed” under Mr. King, and one of few Africans with any significant degree of such liberty in The Interesting Narrative. The education that Equiano developed on the transatlantic and in London place him in a better position than the slaves he observed in the colony.\(^3\) Equiano, as a promising investment, represents a relationship in which literacy is encouraged, the terms are liberal, and so naturally a mutually beneficial social and commercial relationship, a partnership, is allowed to develop.

A Nearly Ideal Partnership

Equiano eventually “managed an estate” for Mr. King (Vassa 103), purchasing, transporting, and managing essentials for King’s estate, and “often supplied the place of a clerk”\(^4\) working on various ships for King (Vassa 103). Equiano’s desire to please his master, King, gave him ever-increasing power, and “there was scarcely any part of his business or household affairs” in which Equiano did not have his hands and mind involved (103).

Despite his value, the colonies remain a dangerous place for him. Equiano is discriminated against at many turns, and Mr. King hires a white man to accompany Equiano as he goes about business on Mr. King’s behalf (Vassa102). Equiano continues frequent short voyages that tested and increased his literacy and commerciality. Equiano’s business aptitude “was of more advantage than any of his
clerks,” (Vassa103) which is proven in Mr. King’s willingness to hire a bodyguard for Equiano.

Enterprising

Because Equiano is experienced\textsuperscript{35} in a “variety of departments” he is in demand (Vassa 113). A competent Captain Thomas Farmer, after some persistence, is able to borrow Equiano from Mr. King. Equiano, motivated with the prospect that he might “get a little money, or possibly make [his] escape if [he] should be used ill”, eagerly takes on this venture (Vassa 115). Equiano proves his value in a mutual relationships because, in regards to Farmer, he is “better to him on board than any three white men he had” (Vassa 115). Equiano’s literacy and industry caused Equiano to be a “right-hand man” during their ventures (Vassa 115), suggesting he participated in decision making. This is opposed to Equiano’s time with Captain Doran, who used Equiano poorly and does not express any financial or personal gain for working with Equiano.

Equiano decides to try his hand at commerce for his personal gain. He began purchasing and selling between islands, “[laying] this money out in various things occasionally, and it used to turn out to very good account” and because he already had considerable experience with buying and selling, his choices were consistently gainful (Vassa 116).

Even in his success, Equiano is victim to extortion at several turns. After having witnessed the abduction and enslavement of a mulatto man who was born and
lived free until abduction, Equiano decides to work toward his freedom and to return permanently home to England (Vassa 121-122).

*Buying His Way Home*

Distrusting King’s integrity, Equiano secretly arranges to learn navigation. King proves himself by offering to pay for lessons to maintain Equiano, who is still legally his slave\(^36\). Despite Farmer’s recognition of Equiano’s value, “passengers, and others” interfered with Equiano’s liberty (Vassa123). Representing colonials\(^37\) who did not understand the importance of retaining knowledgeable labor, they curtail Equiano’s advancement, but they do not stop him.

*Freedom Dawns*

When Equiano prepares to buy his freedom, Mr. King demonstrates momentary weakening in moral by threatening to sell Equiano. Revealing, as Carretta writes it, “the perverse effect the institution of slavery” King’s full commitment to Equiano is eroded, making difficult “the transition from considering Equiano as a piece of property to treating him as a man” (Carretta 111). The perversity does not, in the moment, prevail, however.

Captain Farmer, having worked with Equiano for some time and having firsthand experience of Equiano’s abilities, attested to Equiano’s worth and loyalty. Mr. King then in the same conversation, as a bid to confirm his own loyalty\(^38\), and for financial security, offers Equiano the terms of buying his freedom at “forty pounds
sterling money, which is only the same price” paid for Equiano (Vassa 125-126). In Carretta’s words, Equiano “became a venture capitalist” (Carretta 102). Equiano redoubles his efforts at selling goods, and uses the freedom he has to extend his commerce.

Equiano sails and sells with great prudence. He traverses the colonies trying his hand at “various things occasionally” for four years (Vassa 116). Equiano tenaciously works, doing “double the work” to expedite voyages, working himself into illness (Vassa 127). Equiano’s literacy and commercial power continued to grow his coffers.

Having just completed a voyage in which he is cheated out of time and sentiment by being convinced of a nonexistent treasure, Equiano successfully “unladen the vessel” and found himself “master of forty-seven pounds,”(Vassa 135), the price of freedom. King almost reneges. Had not his “good friend” Captain Farmer interceded, Equiano would have had to break the law, tarnishing his image, by taking his freedom. Rather than risking Equiano’s escape, Captain Farmer sees the value of a partnership with Equiano. 39 Farmer solicits Equiano to stay and outlines Equiano’s known economic value in his discussion with Mr. King, Captain. Farmer says that Equiano has “earned [King] more than a hundred a year” and that this has been “good interest” on the price paid for the slave (Vassa 135). Farmer’s hope is that Equiano would “‘be with the vessels’” (Vassa 138). Equiano’s decision to do further works with the men, tied to his relationship with Farmer and King, 40 is “entirely to please these my honoured patrons” (Vassa 138).
Like a desecrated inversion of the prodigal son,41 Equiano wishes to see Papa Pascal, who seemed to have sold him capriciously. A good son, Equiano “still loved him Papa Pascal, notwithstanding his usage” (Vassa 138). He proudly wants his Papa Pascal to “see what the lord had done,” by his freedom and command of wages (Vassa 138). Equiano’s interest bears an equivocal resemblance to Luke 15: 11-24, in which the prodigal son hopes to be treated like one of his father’s servants. The prodigal son’s absence from home and Equiano’s absence are markedly different, yet share a son’s desire to return home. Equiano’s now English heart continually wishes to be back in the approving embrace of his Papa, because Equiano “loved him” still (Vassa 138). At his last contentious meeting with Papa Pascal, greed and pride abound (Vassa 165). Interestingly, it appears that it is Pascal that leaves. He leaves the scene and the home of the Guerin family, while it is Equiano who “remained still” and converses with the family about his future. Here we can read the implication that this is Equiano’s family, while the intemperate Pascal disappears angrily from the text.

Now home, Equiano’s relations, the Guerin family, place him with masters of the trade. Equiano knows the way of it. He furthers his literacy and advances his trade in hairdressing. Eventually Equiano returns to the transatlantic to support his dwindled savings, and reveals another layer of agency.

After some time on the seas, Equiano visits friends and connection for months before Dr. Irving solicits him to work, in “preference to anyone,” because Dr. Irving “had a mind for adventure in cultivating a plantation” in the colonies Vassa (202). Equiano is
again selected for special labors based on his literacy and labor history. His ability to do clerical work, deal with numbers, review and produce written documents, as well as a labor history firmly rooted in the goods and production methods in the colonial labor (slaving included) system, makes him a prime candidate for a surely well compensated position. Equiano not only returns to work, he returns to the colonies with Dr. Irving, now reflecting the full investment of his surrogate family, who were so interested in his literacy and morality.42 Before returning permanently home and finding a wife, on the transatlantic he is able to express the fullness of literacy by representing the learned Christian who ministers to the savage.
Chapter 2: Galatians 5:1- Christ Frees

Chapter one of this thesis focused on how surrogate familial bonds galvanize and support Equiano’s social advancement through stimulating and protecting his intellectual and professional potential and development. The first chapter analyzed how biological and surrogate familial bonds provide opportunities unique to Equiano’s labor in the eighteenth century’s transatlantic sphere, even as the historical and cultural setting of the narrative exposes a violent and intensely prejudiced Atlantic world. This second chapter focuses on how Christian conventionality sanctions family ties to further Equiano’s literacy and labor skills. Chapter two also explorers how Equiano’s Christianity supports his representation of his own survival and ability to thrive, thus leading to this textual representation as an anglicized African.

Vassa’s text represents how a commoditized African can form a Christian identity, developed and expressed through familial ties and commercial successes, gains legal humanity and agency. These bonds and subsequent successes are implicitly due to the unique commercial and social environment of the transatlantic world. The Interesting Narrative represents how a reception into even a broader Anglo familial structure is only possible in interstices provided by the ships among the volatile colonies, the more need-based mariner societies, and England. For Equiano to form, or reform (a nod to Equiano’s resistance to Catholicism and his transformation from a member of a proto-Christian group to realized Anglican); he needs to be literate, to be prosperous, and to qualify as fully human through Christian
relational bonds. These are important to validate Equiano, allowing him to judiciously assess the behaviors and morality of Englishmen.

While integral to the slaving-colonial system, ships that pass through the colonies are floating institutions of labor, residency, and, at times, warmth that are comparably unfettered by the colonies’ influences. In *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano’s labors, literacies, surrogate familial bonds as well as his commercial and social alliances are rooted in these floating institutions. As mentioned before, while attention has been given to the how of Equiano’s masculinity, exploring how the historical “England was increasingly constructing a manly national identity” (Nussbaum 58), Equiano’s English masculinity is less grounded in his intrepid and venturesome successes, but in a distinct combination that also undermined the necessity for an overt conversion of savage Africans.

Christian rhetoric underpins what we might now attempt to consider as purely secular institutions; race, economy, and literacy. Equiano must convert, and Equiano’s *conversion* is strategic, but is constructed as little more than a *natural* progression toward Christianity. To affect this strategy, Equiano’s Christianity is constructed on a matrix of ancestral ascension in which his people are destined only for an Englishness a refashioning of persistently racist English narrative conventions, and adoption into and establishment of an English familial structures.
Cradle of Humanity

Vassa constructs Equiano to have a degree of natural fitness or adaptability for English culture because Equiano’s African heritage is proto-Christian. From birth, Equiano is prepared to enter Christianity. Equiano signals his inborn (zonal) fitness as he is transported from his native home to the coast of Africa. He recounts his journey to the reader that as “all the nations and people I had hitherto passed through, resembled our own in their manners, customs and language” (Vassa 53). Equiano’s people “practiced...like the Jews” (Vassa 41). From circumcision (Vassa 41) to governmental practices (Vassa 44), Equiano is first implying then offering Igbo as Jews in stasis.43

Equiano might have compromised the connection between his nativity and Christianity by elaborating that the Creator they believed in is a belt-wearing pipe smoker (Vassa 40), and that his people had “priest and magicians”(Vassa 41). Yet this could have been a concession. As his people still primitive offered sacrifices (Vassa 40), they had some catching up to do from their isolated location days from the African coast. Christian rhetoric from his time suggests that Jews needed to discover Christ, so too do Equiano and his people need to right theirs. But from no other stock does Christianity ascend than from a Judaic stock.44 Firmly established with these ancient Christian-primed roots that are based in imagining Igbo as Afra, Equiano moves toward English Christianity by reorienting toward his English home, London.
*It’s a Goddamned Arms Race*

I agree that Equiano and his author, Vassa, are transgressive. Carretta writes that they “crossed economic, geographical, legal, political, religious, and social boundaries since childhood” (138). A crucial boundary that Equiano crosses, or rather a crucial threshold he passes through, is to enter into the rhetorical armory that is Christianity. Christianity functions as a rhetorical sword and shield, complete with ensign signaling Equiano as a “reality” of providential influence and as a necessary reminder of those Christian axioms that are found lacking in the world he inhabits. The providence that moves Equiano through despair would eventually cause him to repudiate the slave trade, the foundation of colonial life. Equiano’s self-fashioned identity of a Christianized African allied with God-fearing Englishmen functions in the text not only as a critical position, but validates Equiano as a voice meriting interest.

*Freaky Friday*

Vassa’s *Interesting Narrative* is rife with easily identifiable Western European colonial narrative conventions that help him forward his rhetorical goal of communicating to a white Christian readership the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade. Vassa’s use of established colonial tropes provided both social capital and economic capital for the author. The English conventions that Vassa appropriated were in some ways re-inscriptions or coding of racist, nationalist, and more importantly, religious and economic values held by the dominant English colonial culture. While these values were aligned toward the enslavement of Africans and subjugation of other
non-English groups, Vassa’s deployment of such values authenticates Equiano’s alignment with English values while simultaneously allowing him to deconstruct and reveal fatal flaws inherent in the colonial system.

Unlike the Indigenous and African men, such as in cornerstone novelist Defoe’s popular text *Robinson Crusoe*, Equiano controls the rhetorical arch of Christianity, literacy, and economic freedom in a way that subverts the generic Anglo-supremacist orientations of the time-space and readership that characterized much of eighteenth century London. According to Philip Gould *The Interesting Narrative* possesses a “submerged theme of economic autonomy” that opposes our protagonist’s commercial self against “the barbarity of the African slave trade” (133). Equiano, as an actor in commercial ventures, is for a time enslaved and later faces re-enslavement, making a tenuous conflation of identities in a dangerous dichotomy. Especially true because that submerged theme of economic autonomy was integral to the rhetoric that drove the Old World’s support for the colonization of the New World. Economic autonomy (tied to new forms of economic exploitation) frequently occurred under the myopic charade of savaging the beautiful, gentle, and pure religion of Christianity onto the uncouth legions of Africa and the Americas. Like his white contemporaries, Vassa was dependent on this veil of Christianity to validate economic and social success. Because Equiano, like his author, is an African and spends much of his early life as a slave engulfed in a garroting slaving system, he needs to authorize his freedom.
The rhetoric that constructs Equiano insulates him against slavery advocates who viewed the slaving system as natural and desirable for certain groups from certain climates, generative or not. Jim Egan writes “whereas in earlier centuries climate had been coupled with religion…many who wrote on natural history in the eighteenth century held climate entirely responsible for difference” (189). Advocates who would view Equiano’s technically non-Christian origins naturally or intrinsically makes him fit for slavery.

In the transatlantic 1700s freedom was a Christian right, and, for many thinkers, Christianity was tied to visible biology. Because Equiano does not have the same inborn credentials of being born English,47 Equiano needs to and does repeatedly and comprehensively qualify himself as English enough or as English. As part of his qualification Equiano succeeds through malefic episodes, marking himself with providence.

The colonies seek to negate humanity through alternately audacious irreverence and apparently banal cruelties. Vassa represents the transatlantic as hellish in its systematic abuses of Africans and ultimately destructive in its inuring effects on Englishmen, even to the murdering of other Englishmen (57).48 To legitimize the freedom and agency acquired by Equiano by the end of The Interesting Narrative,49 Equiano fashions an identity that aligns him with the England he loves, simultaneously contrasting him against the English colonies. Vassa-Equiano, as an African, humanizes his suspect dark body by reproducing and turning alienating rhetoric to designate himself as Anglican.
Pretty as a Picture, and Dropping Names

The first pages of *The Interesting Narrative* thoroughly sanction the text by presenting a list of socially significant subscribers, some of them abolitionists, some reverends. As leaders they are religious and political figures that were centrally important to English culture. According to Carretta “[Vassa’s] subscription list demonstrate how skilled he was at what we now call networking, developing a constellation of influential and powerful contacts through often overlapping categories of individuals connected to one another in smaller groupings” (298). Vassa’s broadcasted connections were with those who were in the finer echelons of English society. As organic textual work from cover to cover, Vassa is declaring virtue by appealing to social sensibilities. Yet, even before the subscribers list, readers encountered Equiano through conspicuously Christian visuals (Vassa 2). Professor of African American Studies Marlon B. Ross writes that Vassa evidently “wants to assert his verifiable character by Englishing it, donning it in the familiar attire” (28). The illustration inserted by the will of the author is important because the image, being what greets the reader first, sends a powerful message: I have a Bible, therefore I can read; I have a Bible, therefore I am Christian; and I am well dressed, therefore I am successful and well socialized. Equiano is constructed to play through the boundaries of identities, self-fashioning a whole identity that is simultaneously rooted in Christianity and Africanness, to “appose these internal schisms of meaning…disruption of conventional thought” (Fisher 99). The value of expressing pictorially as a supplement to what is expressed textually has subjectively
invaluable implications for any given text. Throughout the text, Equiano represents African (Igbo at more precise moments) piety and English Christianity as two toward the same end, and this representation starts with a picture.52

From denouement, Equiano describes the qualities of his home as being “uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables…plenty of Indian corn…different kinds of pepper, and a variety of delicious fruits which I have never seen in Europe; together with gums of various kinds, and honey in abundance”(Vassa 37). This description presents an extensive bounty, characteristic of biblical Eden, obviously waning, as though to suggest that the Diaspora derived Igbo are situated in a sort of secondary or reconstructed Eden, or possibly Israel.53

_Tawny Skin, Heart of Gold_

Equiano shares that “the pedigree of the Africans from Afer and Afra” is that of the “descendants of Abraham by Keturah his wife and concubine”54 (Vassa 44). Through this Biblical basis Equiano compares Africans to Spaniards who are living in an American “torrid zone” and have become “dark colored” advancing that, simply enough, colors “vary in different climates”(Vassa 44-45). Equiano ties African complexion to England’s Portuguese allies who have mixed with different indigenous communities, considering these mixed progeny as “the same persons” as the Portuguese in heart and intellect, even if retaining only a “smattering of the Portuguese language” (Vassa 45). Equiano suggests the changes in the Spaniards and Portuguese are climate based, yet he is careful to acknowledge their essence as one
belonging to their European origins “surely the minds…did not change with their
complexions” (Vassa 45). Through advancing an argument that weakens the tie
between physical appears and morality, Equiano makes room for himself.

Before The Interesting Narrative really begins, the protagonist is inculcated in
social and religious Englishness, Equiano challenges race. In developing the African
image of Equiano, Vassa retains in the image the tenets of English culture. Because
the world represented in the text is so gallingy racist, Equiano’s personal agency can
seem incredible or fantastical. This may have been the point. As an African figure
that skillfully navigates the social and economic milieu of the eighteenth century
transatlantic world, Equiano represents a foreigner negotiating in Englishhood. As
Charles C. Mann points out in his book 1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus
Created, the Americas of eighteenth century were no exception to the understanding
that “human beliefs and actions about ethnic and racial differences rarely withstand
logical scrutiny”(409). To an exclusive degree, Mann is discussing race
classifications created by Europeans living in the historical transatlantic world. The
Europeans of the New World, the subject of Mann’s discussion, shaped and reshaped
race as well as systematic responses to race in confounding and unprecedented ways.
As such, we can understand that this historical Eurocentric worldview saw race (and
sub-categorically, religion) as climatologically influenced. These are beliefs that
Equiano engages with and argues against (Vassa 44). Equiano, as an African, from
that European perspective, would have biologically inherited vices, temperament, and
religious disposition befitting an African atmosphere; while these assertions currently
are in the realm of the pseudo-sciences, they held great cultural sway in the colonial world. Equiano’s analysis of region and integrity, especially concerning those born in England and living in the colonies, argues against geo-humoral prejudices about race, while at the same time adroitly supporting climatological views by describing his native home with Edenic attributes, subtly ascribing himself with innate piety, as his exit was an abduction and not a casting out (Vassa 37).

In that a person’s race translates to qualities of moral and social fitness, Equiano’s position against climate-based race is complex because he must work against the logic of climate-based “race” to make of himself a viable image and speaker, while he also benefits from designating his natal region as proto-Christian to further an inherent climatological race linked Christianity. As Equiano recalls his past, it suggests that Africa may indeed be a proto-Christian space, thus aligning more with England’s future than what might have been assumed by readers contemporary to the author. From this Judeo-diasporic and quasi-Edenic beginning, our protagonist insists from the earliest scenes of the narrative that his life in Africa was at little odds with the Christian English-self he eventually becomes.

Ben Solomon and William Ansah Sessarakoo, who were contemporaries to Vassa, were African nobility, while Equiano leaves little possibility to be considered with such distinction. Carretta writes “when [Vassa] published his Interesting Narrative in 1789, he was closer in social status to Solomon and Sessarakoo than to the black figures of eighteenth-century visual satires” (286). While not constructed as a truly noble image, Equiano can erroneously be grouped with these noble figures.
Vassa likely understood that these African caricatures solicited more humor or impertinence than an interested gaze; Equiano avoids impertinence by implying a right to interest through his early identification as a “stranger” (Vassa 31)

In the formal opening page of the narrative, Equiano is presented as a “private and obscure individual, and a stranger too…neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant” (Vassa 31). As a private and obscure person he directs the readers’ understanding that his aim is not to gain public sympathy or to sensationalize. His goal is not to be seen as flawless or conquering. In identifying himself as a stranger, Equiano presents himself as a person who is not only unknown and alone, but also in need and right of Christian fellowship.58 While initially the Christian interest owed to Equiano might be negotiable, as his Christianity develops, he cannot, on pain of indictment against Christians, remain a stranger. This might be possible for “nominal Christians” to ignore, but as a person reflecting Christian principals, he is deserving of Christian interest. As a true Christian who is looking for a Parish, true Christians should embrace him.59

As Equiano is advancing as a Christian, any exclusion from Christian fellowship should incite a sense of duty or guilt in the reader, and a Christian should feel some sense of zeal for conversion. Equiano, through increasing in social, commercial competence and Christian faith, as a stranger, establishes a need for and right to Christian fellowship and hospitality, which are too seldom shared with him.60 When Equiano recalls the laments of African brothers who are sold apart “Oh ye nominal Christians….learned you this from your God?… Do unto all men as you
would men do unto you?”, it is an indictment on the anti-Christian nature of English colonials as they ignore the Gospel of Luke, 6:31(Vassa 61). This moment acts as a wailing portent, a foreshadowing, for the later separation of Equiano Brother Baker.

*Equiano’s Christianity is Narrative, After All*

Coming from an unassuming, simple, and, most importantly, implicit Judaic background accords Equiano some inborn piety. Through most of his life, from pre-slavery through years of bondage and his later freedom, elements of the captivity narrative genre reinforce Equiano’s Christian image. Richard Slotkin, in his text *Regeneration Through Violence*, describes key aspects of captivity narratives by stating that the captive “stands passively under the strokes of evil, awaiting rescue by the grace of God,” and that the captive “meets and reject the temptation of Indian marriage and/or the Indian” religious food rites, and “represents the whole, chastened body of Puritan society; and the temporary bondage of the captive”, despite the time being “threatful of pain and evil,” (94). Slotkin’s definition includes that salvation “is likened to the regeneration of the soul in conversion” (94). Slotkin is writing from a cannon of captivity narratives that are exclusively white, and that as a general rule has females as protagonists. On the surface these conventions present little or no connections to Vassa’s jeremiad. Although, below the surface is an arrangement of other features particular to captivity narratives. Equiano, initially an innocent (virginal) body, defined in relationship to the feminine, is first, through abduction, separated from his proto-Christian native family then, through compulsion, separated
from his Christian surrogate family. Throughout these separations he is subject to threats of violence and to actual violence.

What strengthens the relationship between our protagonist and the protagonists of the canonical captivity narratives are not only the abductions, but despite oppressive and violent subjugation, he rejects offers for full inclusion in so-called savage societies (Indian, Spanish, Turkish and, eventually, even colonial\textsuperscript{63}).

\textit{Soiled Land}

Equiano encounters several men of sound morals on both the transatlantic and the colonies, but only the narrator returns to England whole or un tarnished. His surrogate brother, Richard Baker, dies in the colonies. Doctor Irving loses part of his fortune and exits the narrative in confinement. Father Queen disappears into the colonies to some unknown end. Lt. Pascal refuses to acknowledge that he abandoned Equiano, a good investment and familial connection.\textsuperscript{64} Good men die in the colonies, are obscurely removed from the narrative, or are corrupted by colonial influence.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{English Disappointment and the Indian Issue}

In this environment, Equiano advances in teaching and pastoral work. Equiano teaches the Indian Prince “all the letters” and to “put two and three of them together and spell them,” and both his spiritual and literacy contributions are thwarted, and a new Christian is ruined (Vassa 203). Equiano is in “full of hope seeing daily every appearance of that [spiritual] change”(Vassa 203). Equiano is making headway with the prince, when “ungodly actors,” English traders who are traveling with the prince, “for some selfish end” (Vassa 202) undermine Christian progress in the Indian
prince’s conversion. These evil emissaries, being with the prince for some time, have seemingly prevented the prince from going to church (Vassa 203). Hasty in returning, they probably did not risk allowing the Miskito prince, “baptized by the name of George,” to attend church in England (Vassa 203). Here we have a prince named George who is undermined by Englishmen who ignore English conventions (respect for his personage and burgeoning Christianity, the spread of which was an English objective), in the years subsequent the Boston Tea Party. Equiano refers to these Englishmen as “some” men of their type, suggesting that irreverent Englishmen are common enough in the colonies. Apparently and appallingly they guard against the spread of Christianity, therefore when they interfere with Equiano it bears second thought.

The Miskito prince’s conversion under Equiano was going well, as Equiano states the “poor heathen much advanced in piety” (Vassa 203). Cue the persistent actions of Satanic “emissaries”\(^66\) common in the colonies (Vassa 205). Equiano’s particular failure to succeed in conversion reveals a pattern of “true sons of Bilial” (Vassa 204). Bilial is a name that designates a non-believer or anti-Christian life.\(^67\) As such these Englishmen lambast Equiano’s spiritual efforts. Though he “rebuked them as much [he] could,” it obvious that fear constrained his efforts (Vassa 203). This glaring opposition translates to an understanding of not only Equiano’s spiritual, commercial, and legal plight, but the overall degenerate state of the colonies.

These English men not only request visits from a devil they believe does not exist, they purposefully weaken the Indian prince’s growing faith because the prince
views the Englishmen as representatives of English culture and faith (Vassa 204). The Indian prince can neither understand the degraded nature of the Englishmen who are able to “read and write, observe the sun and know all things”, nor how Equiano would behave so differently while also possessing the same level of education (Vassa 204). These Englishmen “teased the poor innocent youth, so that he would not learn his book any more!” (Vassa 209). These men were dangerous.

This episode with the Indian prince can be seen as an inversion of captivity narrative because in the traditional captivity narratives that form the cannon white men are the locus of salvation. It is where white men are gathered in great number that civilization (read Christian society) prevails. Yet Englishmen in this narrative are both the means to perdition (colonial Englishmen) and salvation (England).

Soon after failing against these Englishmen, Equiano would flex his Christianity again. Equiano and several men were under threat of burgeoning violence from Indians, and our hero, in his virtue “thought of a strategem….recollecting a passage...read in the life Columbus,” uses the Bible to tell the Indians about “certain events in heaven,” then “menaced them” into silence and capitulation (Vassa 208). Having early in the narrative deployed the Talking Book motif, 68 Equiano was once a boy who thought a book could speak; ironically, he now convinces others of that very thing. He controls this factor, for survival and for the conversion of savages to the Christian God. This reveals Equiano to the reader as a master of the Bible. This is another inversion that imbues Equiano with piety or appropriateness, while working
as subverting invectives for the failures of Englishmen in the colonies, and by subtle extension, a lax metropole.

For many of Vassa’s contemporary readers, the images Vassa created likely affirmed some perceptions of Indians as quasi or un-Christian, shallow thinking, and uncouth. As a writer, Vassa reinscribed some of the racist imaging common to captivity narratives. Problematic, yet clever. An ultimate goal, though, might have been reached. The representations in the text are of Africans who were moral and industrious, Indians who are responsive to the word of God, and English colonists “did not believe that there was any hereafter” and did not “fear the devil” (Equiano 204). The latter of the three being anathemas to correct English culture.

While the transatlantic was a place where English cultural and moral norms were at times barely more than nominal, it was important for England to believe that the English who lived in the colonies and those who operated among the colonies and the metropole were aligned with Englishness. By constructing these men outside of English expectations and having constructed Equiano as a learned Christian benefitting from providential intervention and bravery, Vassa made room for Equiano and himself.

The Contradiction in Terms

Continuing to utilize captivity narrative convention, Equiano again finds his personal safety, or salvation, compromised. Equiano spends fair time working in partnership with Dr. Irving, who researches and practices desalinization, and owns a
plantation in the colonies. Equiano personally assists Dr. Irving during his transatlantic travels, works at procuring slave labor for Dr. Irving’s plantation, and manages the plantation.\footnote{71} Equiano is skilled, and his first thoughts are to commerce, at least until it conflicts with his solidifying moral code. Our protagonist’s qualms are not initially centered on the institution of slavery, but on the amoral conduct of the Englishmen who operate with unfettered cruelty within the institution. Equiano, in fact, views selecting his “own countrymen”(Vassa 205) as a good thing because his people are industrious. In choosing his own countrymen, he presents a fair deal to his employer. Confusingly, at times Equiano seems to refer to any African as one of his people and so it can be thought that Equiano means that the Africans he selects can be from anywhere in Africa. However, Equiano also remarks that there are observable difference between his people and other African peoples, as he nears coastal West Africa. Other people “fought among themselves…and ornamented themselves with scars” (Vassa 54). Equiano has well prefaced for readers the industriousness of his people. It is his people whose particular “manners, customs and language” and patterns of “joint labour” of men, women, and children are recognizable to him (Vassa 206), presenting yet another nod to the quasi-Edenic nature of his natal home.

Equiano uses the opportunity of hosting a prince to draw comparisons between his people and the Miskito Indians, a nation group that was historically allied with England. He then draws comparison between the English government and the Miskito government, triangulating a relationship with his own proto-Christian and proto-English people (Vassa 207). In this relationship his native people represent
something comparatively closer to Englishness than those who were, however temporarily, allied with England. Contrasted against the evils of English colonials, the moral image of both certain Indians and certain Africans can be all the more acceptable, while he alone is exceptional.

*Home Sweet Home*

Again Vassa’s nod to the captivity narrative genre deems Equiano as worthy of salvation and immersion within English society. Part of Equiano’s full realization that his Christian self could no longer remain in the colonies includes his denial of fragrant offerings from the Indians, who were “more pious” than “European brethren or neighbors” anywhere in the colonies (Vassa 206). He rejects the offering of meat because “thought it looked like salmon, and it had the most fragrant smell,” he simply “could not eat any of it” (Vassa 210). Equiano offers no other explanation for why he cannot eat the meat that is offered him, other than suggesting its unverified nature. The suggestion is clearly that the meat is not suitable for him to consume. As an element of captivity narrative, avoiding the “food rites” of the yet to be Christianized Indians and the debauched Englishmen so as not to “unenglish the very soul” (Slotkin 94), is Equiano’s deciding moment. The oppressively godless nature and people of the colonies have wearied Equiano. To save his English soul, he makes ready to leave, so to, as Slotkin might put it, return to his “English Israel.”
Enlivening Equiano’s anti-slavery sentiments and final capitulation out of the slave trade is his own abduction. His exceptional worth precedes him, and the owner of a sloop, Hughes, tries to claim Equiano as his own property after Hughes says “he would give [Equiano] wages” (Vassa 211). At Equiano’s refusal Hughes “swore exceedingly” and “cursed the master for a fool who sold [Equiano his] freedom” (Vassa 211). Equiano responds that after being “twice amongst the Turks” he had not been treated so poorly, and that he would never have “expected any thing of this kind among the Christians” (Vassa 211). In wrath Hughes replies with “‘Christians! Damn you!’,” proceeding to abduct the free Equiano75 (Vassa 211). The avarice that typifies the colonial atmosphere drives an Englishman to spite critical elements that define him, his nation and religion. Continuing his flippant disregard to Christianity, Hughes accosts Equiano with “except you have St. Paul’s or St. Peter’s faith, and walk upon water” you will never be free (Vassa 211). It appears that rather than risk Equiano rising to the challenge, Hughes binds and lifts Equiano so he is not “letting [Equiano’s] feet touch or rest upon anything” (Vassa 212). Hughes actions imply that he fears Equiano might in fact be able to walk on water. Furthering Hughes disregard for home, he shows a determination to flout England by going to trade with the Spanish (Vassa 211). As they are Catholics and competitors, this decision tainted with suggestions or treason and irreverence for Protestant or Anglican concern. This action places greater distance between Hughes and Englishness, physically and metaphorically.76 As though to further admonish the corruption of the colonial actors,
and to reiterate the sanctity of the transatlantic, the men who help Equiano are the
captain, the carpenter, and a young man on the ship (Vassa 212). These men are men
who live on the transatlantic, while Hughes is a resident of the colonies who owns
ships. Before Hughes can bring them among the Spanish, due to the influence of
Equiano’s relationships, Equiano manages to escape across water, on faith, “neck or
nothing” (Vassa 213). The level of danger and cumbersomeness of the Equiano’s
escape under gunfire, aimed at both he and a white man, presents a high level of risk
Equiano takes to gain freedom. His success is a testament to his merit.

This escape also reveals the pernicious nature of colonial greed when looking
at the actions that Hughes takes in threatening a ship captain, and Englishman of rank,
and his willingness to murder another Englishmen. Each violent and anti-Christian
measure is in order to maintain what he viewed as property, despite Equiano’s firmly
established legal right to freedom. Hughes is willing to circumvent freedom and
destroy Christian and English bodies because he has succumbed to colonial avarice.

Escaping captivity within the colonies yet again does not free our protagonist
from danger. The last time that Equiano experiences when someone “more like
Christians” in the colonies was not with white men “though they had been baptized,”
but with Indians (Vassa 213-214). Equiano is in duress once more when Captain John
Baker tricks him into boarding Baker’s ship (Vassa 215). The name Baker itself had
become a signifier for brotherly affection. As though the colonies have regenerated
Baker to suit its needs, Baker, “who was very avaricious,” is the meanest shipmaster
encountered (Vassa 216). This Baker is so deeply afflicted by greed and so easily
incensed that “beat often as severely as he did some negroes” the Englishman pilot, Stoker, leading to protracted illness and death (Vassa 216). This is destruction of an English and presumably Christian body. Africans, non-Christian slaves, attempt to help preserve the Englishman by taking him “a blanket at the risque of their lives” (Vassa 215). The deranging effects of colonial attitudes are tied to irreligious cruelties that spread against all humanity. Baker is redesignated as a hellion; wanton and irascible. This suggests that even life aboard ships was losing the possibilities for Christian brotherhood for our Equiano, or even an Englishman. The frenzied cruelty displayed by this New Baker is part and parcel to the colonies, and is now fully transatlantic.

Escaping Baker with the help of Dr. Irving, Equiano knows better than to seek the wages he earned while under coercion by Baker, undermining the fabric of expectation around hard work and just dues. Equiano points out that “such oppression as [beatings and theft of wages]” were common enough to the colonies for him to end as expeditiously as possible any further contact with the colonies (Vassa 218).

Being even a free African in the colonies of Vassa’s narrative meant that life would continually be threatened with torture and re-enslavement. Abducted, nearly murdered a few times, and certainly swindled under threat of violence throughout, Equiano expresses that events such as these are “too much the practice there to pay free Negro men for their labor in this manner” (Vassa 219). And despite Equiano’s observations, Equiano was fit to succeed in the colonies. Though having reasonable fears of unjust treatment, with the guidance of God’s steadfast interventions, Equiano
did accrue enough social power and enough control of capital, that had he chosen to stay in the colonies, he could have garnered something close to immunity.78

*The Interesting Narrative* does not fit neatly as a captivity narrative. It manipulates captivity narrative motifs along with Talking Book Motifs, humanizing Equiano. This is necessary in part because of the alienness of the author and the protagonist. This alienness necessitates combining with familiar narrative convention shifts the in the critical gaze of the heavily Christian audience. A more crucial appropriation might be that this captivity narrative does not end as one might expect, with a general sense of returning to “home” absolute, as in place of origin or nativity. Equiano does not return to his native Africa. Instead, roughly a third-way through the text, Equiano’s home reorients. Equiano’s home becomes not the Africa he was born, but the London that sanctions his commercial identity and is his salvation. The text suggests that as an African’s Christianity grows so too does his fitness for English life, also suggesting that colonial life is not English life. Equiano’s goal is to be “neither saint, nor hero,” but to master commerce, so he fits the image of intellectual and intrepid voyager mastering the New World. Because that image is rooted in Christian relationships, he cannot stay in the New World. He must cleave to the oldest of traditions, at least on the surface. Only possible through mastering them, Equiano’s manipulation of these English qualifiers is disruptive. Methodologies still in practice today reflect Equiano’s process. Yet, one could wonder how they endure and if they are useful.
Conclusion: Breaking Bondage and Making Success

Reinvesting

Equiano proclaims “‘What does it avail a man if he gained the whole world and lose his own soul,’”(Vassa 201) and this proclamation of scripture guards his exit from the perniciously commercial colonies. Though he excels at slaving commercially, he finds himself frequently at odds with the human denigration he observes and to which he contributes. Philip Gould writes that the rhetorical arch of this text “turns on the crucial ambiguity of the very meaning of free trade itself…. exchanging the moral categories of trade in antislavery discourses,” meaning that the narrative image of Equiano is transformed from actor to victim, morally, if not technically (134). Yet it is through his participations in slaving commerce that he is actually able to enumerate and analyze the effects of the system, from a perspective necessarily shared with Englishmen and slavers. Initially, his concerns are not toward the human right of “freedom” but on the eventual moral negligence and barbarism seen in cruel beatings of white and black alike. Yet, commercial success authorizes his sentiments, allowing him to speak to the internal erosion that is represented as omnipresent in the colonies.

Vassa’s enthralling narrative represents both horrifying and beneficial inconsistencies in transatlantic English cultural structures during the long eighteenth century that point to rampant immoralities, remarkable possibilities, and a sense of pending calamity for all. The heart rending imagery of “tortures, murder, and every other imaginable barbarity”(Vassa 234) brought to readers by a skillfully crafted
protagonist, reveals the destructiveness of the slaving system, eventually highlighting valuable probabilities in embracing a childlike Africa. An Africa with an English subconscious so ripe for engagement that it would “insensibly adopt the British fashions, manners and customs,” advancing in just the same manner as the English have from their forefathers (Vassa 233). The self-effacing jeremiad presents first a stolen and subjugated child, then an intrepid and venturesome Equiano gladly acting as slaver, and closes with Equiano visiting New York and Philadelphia, firmly to return to England, marry an English woman, and argue for the inclusion of Africa as an economic venture and protégé.

Equiano argues that “when civilized” Africa can produce riches “beyond reach of imagination,” and he figures “5£ a head” to be exact (Vassa 235). Equiano’s economic figuring is important because the transatlantic slaving system, for all of its racist, nationalist, and religious ideologies, is rooted in capitalist economic principles. Thus much of the power of Equiano’s image comes from his commercial success. His commercial success comes from his surrogate family’s support in educational ventures, and both of these are stitched together by Christianity. The interactions between Equiano’s surrogate family and success are not only relevant to discussing Equiano as a literary figure and Vassa as a historical figure, it is relevant to how we can discuss labor and social mobility today.

The myth of upward mobility remains a strong popular narrative in the U.S. today. Upward Mobility, according to economics writer and Mellon Scholar James
Surowiecki, has been “a cornerstone of American thinking” and this is, summarily, a myth (Mobility).

As the drive toward “education” continues to gain steam, we should be asking ourselves “What is it?” “What is it worth?” and the attendant “Is it possible to live better than one’s birth class?” Deeply rooted in our cultural psyche is the college fund that is grown for children by a responsible parent. Deeply rooted in the cultural psyche are suggestions of upward mobility that come with a college education. Deeply rooted in our cultural psyche is the sense of class that comes with classes.

While The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself seems to be an affirmative or evidentiary text for higher education meaning a good life, dig a little deeper and we can find a different affirmation. Without proper social relationships and cultural sanctions, education can be a matter of little to no practical importance.

Equiano exemplifies that era’s Englishness in his speech and action. I feel it imperative to point out that his “speech” is action, as it symbolizes, reflects, and affirms culture. Though his actions exemplify Englishness, his body does not. In order to negotiate this, he must explain away his birth family, consecrate himself English with a new (surrogate) family, and simultaneously consecrate this family with appropriate (appropriating) speech. In assimilating into this family, Equiano complicates his upward mobility. He is not, theoretically, moving up. He is assuming an expected social position. The text affirms that it is in fact social connections, specifically those that can be defined as familial, that define the path.
We should wonder greatly as educational options and opportunities evolve presently, and discussions of exceptionalism are convoluted by technical access. We should wonder at our being in love with exceptionalism. With myth. We should wonder at the persistence of these economic and social structures, even structures advocated by Equiano; structures that absorb disparate areas of the globe into our economic structures.
Notes

1. See pages thirty-four, thirty-five and footnote six for further information on slave codes that typified American colonies.

2. For further background on the period, see Jack P Greene’s “The Cultural Dimensions of Political Transfers” nods to 1700s America’s generally Eurocentric “religion, political institutions, legal traditions, and patterns of cultural reformulation” (6), while Diana Paton’s “Punishment, Crime, and the Bodies of Slaves in the Eighteenth-Century Jamaica” comparatively examines “statute law” and “slave codes” in American colonies (926).

3. In The Transatlantic Indian 1776-1930, Kate Flint write’s that “[s]uch adventure narratives” represent distant and strange lands and people of the Amazon which “grounded British resourcefulness and bravery” being a true through-line of Englishmen surviving violent attacks from hell bent natives while borrowing from the amenable exceptions (18).

4. In The Imaginary Puritan Nancy Armstrong describes England’s “attempt to maintain the ‘original’ English,” indicating a configuration around belief in an idyllic England (21) creating exploitable tensions between English ruling classes and their subject.

5. According to Rugemer’s “The Development of Mastery and Race,” the colonies had been developing slave codes since the mid 1600s that steeply punished slaves and
“did not recognize the killing of a slave as murder,” but rather more like property
damage (47).

6. Through examining a series of exchanges between Granville Sharpe and Thomas
Clarkson, Englishmen contemporary to Equiano, Amanda Perry’s “A Traffic in
Numbers” provides insight into the contribution that The Interesting Narrative made
to the abolitionist movement.

7. In the colonies a slave’s language capacity was, at best, of little interest to the
general population, and Equiano had learned just enough English to understand the
purpose of a sextant, to serve his master, and to know when he was sold.

8. Nussbaum compares Equiano to Othello, a “murderous dramatic” Shakespearian
icon (64), and physically “black” literary image whose sexuality could be
problematic, finding plays on gender and homosexuality or homoeroticism in both
texts.

9. Carretta cites discrepancies in “real” or historical records that are represented in the
text, and, if taken as accurate, undermine Equiano’s history as an African, important
to support his conversion and imagery.

10. Read “navy” as the transatlantic, and while there are other seas on which Equiano
could have and labored in, it is principally on the transatlantic that his naval activities
took place.

11. Found in the appendix of Louis Crompton’s “Homosexuals and the Death Penalty
in Colonial America” a letter was written in the 1700s by a crewmember of a William
Cornish’s ship stating that the writer was invited into a sexual liaison with Cornish in Cornish’s cabin, and observed evidence that Cornish forcefully “bugard” (buggered or sodomized) a younger crewmember.

12. Baker’s response to Equiano’s class and race is markedly warmer than what Equiano experiences anywhere in the colonies, with overt expression of fraternal affections, yet undertones of homoeroticism.

13. Baker might have embraced a real Equiano because in the real transatlantic ever developing national statuses, ship-life was precarious and wanting untested crewmembers of unknown dispositions in lengthy, isolated and interdependent labors is difficult to imagine.

14. According to Eileen Razzarri Elrod’s *Piety and Dissent: Race, Gender and Rhetoric* “the Talking Book Motif features an encounter between a nonliterate observer [an African] and a text” (79).

15. This friend of Papa Pascal is referred to as “the mother,” designating her more as an archetype than an individual. The nameless members of this family are archetypes, distinguished by their roles.

16. While these relations had expectations to possess Equiano, their behaviors do not match Equiano’s experiences in the colonies. The family’s behaviors mimic that of uncles and aunts, reinforced through formal bonding and baptism.

17. In reference to Stoker an abused pilot who Equiano observes being frequently beaten by a white Captain, John Baker (Vassa 215).
18. Though “Oh, ye nominal Christians….must every tender feeling be sacrificed to your avarice?…Adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery” (Vassa 61), cried by Africans brothers being separated, is particularly salient when considering Equiano’s subsequent separation from Brother Baker.

19. Here Equiano is led to an unrelated, entirely foreign woman, ending any hope for sibling reunification.

20. Because England or London is yet his own home, he is a visitor to another country and as his time seems largely dedicated to study, it is reasonable to see this as a functional, though informal, study abroad.

21. This induction takes place in church with the Guerin family driving and attesting to the baptism, lending formality, religious if not legal.

22. According to Karin Wulf’s “Bible, King, and Common Law” the English world used Bible records for credit, asserting familial ties, at times “corroborat[ing] state interests” and at other times contradicting “economic, legal, and emotional” agendas (471).

23. Slaves in the historical world and as represented in the world of Vassa’s text, were often worked to death (101).

24. From the Guerins Equiano receives a Bible in addition to advice in appropriate behavior.

25. The physical nature of the transatlantic is confined, close and the social environment can be seen as un-conventional.
26. Queen also teaches Equiano how to see connections between the laws and the faith. Equiano is surprised, and commits the laws to memory, and dutifully deploys them throughout the narrative (Vassa 92).

27. Because of the filial nature of Equiano’s relationship with Papa Queen, with Queen wanting to ensure a “good livelihood” by instructing Equiano in commerce, the crewmembers called Equiano by Queen’s name (Vassa 92).

28. Equiano cites that overseers, who hold one of the most purely colonial jobs imaginable, are “persons of the worst character of any denomination of men in the West Indies….who cut and mangle slaves in the most shocking manner on the most trifling occasions” (Vassa 104-105).

29. Historically, a slave master might part with a slave due to economic hardship or if a slave no longer fulfilled functions. It would be folly to underestimate the value of separating literate and traveled slaves from the others as well.

30. The white pilot, Stoker, a Christian by default, suffers that same fate as the Africans in the colonies, including Equiano who fears the Georgia colonies because of how he is “beat and mangled” and “cut” (Vassa 129).

31. Now knowing what it means to work hard affirms that under Papa Pascal, Equiano had relatively light labors.

32. Being in the business of trade meant that production volume was a high priority, and working as chattel under a colony minded master, his education had to take a back seat to his survival.
33. In addition to the imagery mentioned earlier in this text, in the colonies of the narrative slaves were raped and savaged in multiple ways, living in “open sheds, built in damp places; so...they contract many disorders” (Vassa 105).

34. Equiano is continually laboring on sea vessels because, rather than for colonial physical labor, Mr. King prefers Equiano to pursue white-collar work per agreement, conditions favorable to common white men.

35. Equiano had a wonderful effect on Mr. King’s profits, bringing a sizable sum at “above a hundred pounds a year” (Vassa 103).

36. Affirming his value, his decision to return to “Old England” leads to him buying secret lessons in navigation (Vassa 122-123), and receiving sworn protective passage, at the risk of the crew offering (Vassa 123).

37. Described as passengers and other, not seamen or captains, places these people outside of truly transatlantic labor, thereby only making use of the transatlantic passage but not living on the transatlantic.

38. Mr. King likely made this offer out of fear because he is aware that Equiano has developed relationships and skills strong enough to effectively, if not legally, free himself, meaning, according to Carretta, that Equiano chose not to and did not rely on the “kindness” of others (Carretta 104).

39. Farmer and King understand the value that Equiano possess on the transatlantic, which is why both men prefer to keep Equiano as friend and partner.
40. Equiano’s relationship with two men might be symbolic because, much like Equiano’s origins, a father of “high distinction…grandeur” (32) while also being masters of agriculture (37), Equiano negotiates a relationship between Farmer and King.

41. The image of Equiano’s feelings for Lt. Pascal interact strangely with the prodigal son image presented earlier in the narrative in Equiano’s longing for his father’s house as Equiano once expresses longing even for the conditions in which his father’s slaves lived (Vassa 35-36).

42. A nod to Proverbs 22:6, “Train a child up in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (KJV), Equiano has been successfully reared from youth to English manhood, and is prepared to step out as a man to deploy the full majesty of God’s written word on the “noble savages” of the Americas.

43. Other attributes suggest static-Judaism; Equiano implies fitness in a religious “habit of decency” that includes “many purifications and washings,” belief in “one Creator of all things”, and speaking morally (Vassa 40-41).

44. Jesus was born a Jew and was raised observing and practicing the Jewish faith before spreading what comes to be known as The Gospel, which would be appropriated at turns and shaped into what has consistently been referred to as Christianity.

45. Ephesians 6:17 offer Christian Salvation as arms and protections against the perils of the world.
46. Hugh distresses Equiano who "began to blaspheme, and wished often to be anything but a human being." and realizing his error, Equiano "invoked Heaven from my inmost soul, and fervently begged that God never again permit me to blaspheme his most holy name" (Vassa 190).

47. Being born in England might also have given Equiano some social cache, but this would have been easier to dismiss.

48. Humanity in the fuller sense as defined by Anglo-supremacist standards because Equiano shows the reader the case of Stoker the abused pilot, and the white man who is “flogged so unmercifully” to death and tossed to sea.


50. Equiano presents his African body in English dress, offering his English audience a Bible turned to Acts, a book that chronicles some of the movement from Judaism to Christianity.

51. In Chapter 1, “The Race of/in Romanticism: Notes Toward a Critical Race Theory,” Ross contextualizes Equiano’s writing within “subliminally exposed substructures of everyday experiences” for those “ambiguously incorporated in the undertow of powerful national naming” (35)
52. Because Equiano’s physical image and foreignness still mark him as different, Vassa again shows how his English public viewed these differences, reconciling his African body to English society.

53. Without ignoring the ubiquity of edible plant and abundance of honey pointing to Exodus 3:8 and aligning the Jewish Promise land with Eden and Igbo zone Africa, Igbo zone is inferior to original Eden because both men and women toil on the land and abductors and slavers are able to enter and steal.

54. Theologian Dr. Gill and professor Dr. Clark, contemporaries to Vassa, who were defining the historical and theoretical framework for Anglo-Christian life, offer that Africa is largely a continent that descends from the wife of Abraham, defining them as Jews.

55. Though marking Baker as Creole complicates this; Baker’s full involvement in transatlantic life affects him positively, and he is also subject to geo-humoral theory.

56. Proto-Christian in the sense that it is established before the advent of Christianity yet possesses elements that can be read as precursors to developed Christianity.

57. While Equiano can be viewed alongside figures of African nobility, Vassa does not construct Equiano as nobility as Equiano is born to an industrious people who “are all habituated to labour from our earliest years” (Vassa 37).

58. Considering that Equiano is sure to indict the unchristian behavior of the many European men, it is even more reasonable to imagine that he use this "In parochial
registers: A person not belonging to a parish” and a Christian’s failure to address Equiano as a stranger is to call a doom upon their souls (OED Online).

59. According to Holly Joan Toensing’s Women of Sodom and Gamorrah “the wickedness of these cities is in the inhospitable treatment of the resident aliens and sojourners…linked with the wickedness of idolatry” (62-63), so it is reasonable to wonder at the nuances of hospitality and Equiano’s flagrantly Christian “indulgent…public” (Vassa 31).

60. The “Dissenting Minister” Equiano finds connection with is a unique individual in London’s Soho, approaching a more authentic Christianity Equiano “had never seen nor thought of seeing on earth” bringing to mind “Holy scriptures of the primitive Christians, who loved each other” (Vassa 184), condemning the men of the colonies while pointing to Afra.

61. As much a cultural proverb as gospel, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto” is a common adage that is secularized by its frequent usage, though its relationship to the Gospel of Luke is clear in this passage.

62. Equiano is conspicuously close to his mother, “could not keep from her or avoid touching her” and “being very fond…and almost constantly with her” (Vassa 40).

63. The societies parenthetically listed are not English, nor the correct form of Christian, nor Christian at all, raising suspicion about the colonial English by demonstrating more hospitable behavior toward the increasingly Christian Equiano.
64. Lt. Pascal, while alive, is ruined because of his volatile response to Equiano’s request to honor commercial engagements, his willingness to embarrass his family regarding this, and his disregard for the Biblical grounds through which he is tied to Equiano.

65. “Some respectable families”, who perhaps later relocated to London for survival, informed Equiano of the suffering of an African whom Equiano tries to help through failed legal recourse and action causing Equiano to feel like the “meanest of worms” (Vassa 181-182).

66. Due to the actions of Englishmen the prince “would not learn from” the Christian text *Fox’s Martyrology* (Vassa 204) an examination of Protestant and proto-Protestant martyrs, especially those who were English.

67. Bilial is name of a person with whom Christ has little business, according to Corinthians 6:14-7:0.

68. Eileen Razzarri Elrod’s Talking Book motif moves Equiano from thirsting for literacy to controlling literature.

69. Britain tried to ensure that British subjects at home and abroad saw the crown’s control and would have been sensitive to colonial activities due to the nascent United States of America and the general political and social unrest of throughout England’s other American colonies.
70. It can be imagined that the Englishmen who “had been before blasphemers” are led by Equiano in prayer as he prayed for his own life during their northerly voyage, going farther “than any navigator had ever ventured before” (Vassa 176-177).

71. This seeming paradox can be explain by noting Equiano’s apparent issue is not with slavery, but is with anti-Christian sentiments and dishonesty that are inherent to the colonies. Equiano brings aboard the same ship as the Miskito prince slaves whom he “chose of his own countrymen” for plantation labor (205).

72. In their cruelty and lasciviousness, the Englishmen add a layer of being unclean by consuming meat that Equiano could not (210).

73. Slotkin’s “partake of the Indian’s love of or equivalent of bread and wine” was disparagingly damaging for the captive, as is bound them to the life of the Indians (94).

74. In Slotkin’s exploration of captivity narratives, he seems to coin “English Israel” as a way to explain the role that England plays in representing a site of salvation.

75. Even as he returns to England, Hughes, of the ship that is to transport Equiano attempts to force him into labor on one of his other ships (Vassa 211), presenting a veiled damnation, avarice would find the protagonist in bondage again.

76. Corroborated by Silver, Trade, and War by Stanley J Stein, Barbara H Stein (191), the metaphorical distance can be seen in trading with a group that is both Catholic and Spanish indicating both religious conflict and politico-economic competition.
77. Equiano’s fears are grounded in experiences he recounts through the chapters, such as the re-enslaving and torture John Annis, a “free Negro,” who is captured back into slavery and staked to the ground (Vassa 179-181).

78. Representing the ideal, as white, Christian, entrepreneurial, and convivial, Equiano’s Montserrat friend give him the praise and acceptance his ethics and Christian mettle and trepidation merited, and wish to engage him with further commerce (Vassa 163-165).

79. Comparing the population of Africa as a continent (doubling “every fifteen years”), to the population of England (“one hundred and twenty millions”), produces big numbers, economically (Vassa 234-235).
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