



# Suspect Relations

*Sex, Race, and Resistance  
in Colonial North Carolina*

KIRSTEN FISCHER

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*For Nancy and Jürgen Fischer, ever my “proud parentals”*



## Introduction: Changing Conceptions of Race

Sexual relationships and their social repercussions in colonial North Carolina can tell us much about eighteenth-century constructions of race. In the intimate interactions of ordinary people, we can see ideas about race and a social hierarchy based on racial distinctions taking shape. Scholars have analyzed how well-educated men in the eighteenth century conceptualized race, gender, and class in their letters, essays, and scientific tracts. We know much less, however, about the way non-elite people—Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans—contributed to the construction of these social categories. How did they reinscribe or contest developing meanings of race? By what means did racial prejudice become attached to ideas of permanent bodily difference, and what role did sexual relations play in this development? How did specific relations of gender and class aid or disrupt the imposition of a racial hierarchy? Building on scholarship about the racial aspects of colonial legislation, prescriptive literature, and the writings of an educated elite, this book draws on court records and travel literature to show how a wide range of people shaped race relations and racial thinking in their personal (and yet often very public) sexual lives. In their illicit sexual behavior and in their responses to the unlawful conduct of others, ordinary people participated in the development of a new racial order. As they did so, they reenacted and reshaped relations of gender and class as well.<sup>1</sup>

The eighteenth century marks a watershed in racial thinking. By the close of that century, European Americans generally believed that race was

inherent to the body and visible in physical traits that in turn revealed the moral and intellectual capacities of an individual. This conception of race as biological would eventually become so entrenched as to seem timeless, but in fact the idea represents a significant shift from previous notions of difference. Formerly, racial difference appeared external and mutable, a matter of culture and geography as much as anything else, and susceptible to changes in either. Climate, for example, served to explain European perceptions of Africans' appearance and temperament: proximity to the sun in tropical zones scorched Africans' skin, while the region's heat led to their dissolute behavior. Enough time spent in northern climes, however, would turn lazy, passionate, dark-skinned people into industrious, self-controlled, and light-skinned ones. Similarly, many Europeans believed that Native Americans were born white, and that outdoor living and the application of oil and paint gradually stained their bodies. In this view, racial affiliation resulted from geographical circumstances and culturally determined choices. The same was true for Europeans: just as Africans and American Indians could blanch over time and assimilate European culture, so too could northern Europeans become dark-skinned and uncivilized if left among African or American "savages."<sup>2</sup>

The shift toward a biological view of race began in the late seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> Elaborating on Sir William Petty's *The Scale of Creatures* (1676) and François Bernier's division of humankind into at least four categories in 1684, philosophers in England and northwestern Europe divided the world's people into groups and debated the possibility that distinct human species, each with their own physical, moral, and mental abilities, had evolved from separate origins. In the 1730s, the Swedish botanist Linnaeus devised *A General System of Nature* that classified all living beings, whereupon Enlightenment thinkers wondered whether the human category itself encompassed a hierarchy of types. In 1754 the Scottish philosopher David Hume supposed "the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites." Most eighteenth-century writers who speculated about distinct human species eventually rejected the idea of multiple human origins in favor of the biblical recounting of a single pair of ancestors for all people. Still, what stands out in the array of competing explanations for human differences is the growing emphasis on anatomy rather than on culture or environment as the underlying cause. The term *biology* would not be used among scientists until 1802, but during the eighteenth century the idea of physically distinct groups of people—what the next century's scientists would call "races"—gained wider currency than ever before. By the nineteenth century, the origins of this idea had disappeared behind the presumption

of naturalness, and it was commonly understood in Europe and the United States that race was (and always had been) a biological given, incontestably real and physically obvious.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars disagree over how to describe and evaluate eighteenth-century ideas about race.<sup>5</sup> Some argue that the widespread belief in one shared origin for all of humanity and the touting of universal laws that applied (at least in theory) to all members of the human family represent a form of racial thinking that was not as racist as the next century's "scientific racism" with its theories of measurably distinct and unequal human species. While the specific underpinnings of racial theories are important, racism does not, to my mind, hinge on any one particular explanation of human origins. Enlightenment thinkers, positing a single human origin only to claim that groups of people had either evolved or degenerated to different and unequal rungs on the evolutionary ladder, created a racial hierarchy that proved just as expedient in justifying "race"-based enslavement as did accounts of polygenism. The conception of human characteristics as physical, inheritable, and permanent enough (how long does it take to move from one evolutionary stage to the next?), together with the idea that physical traits reliably portend intellectual and moral qualities, helped justify the enslavement and exploitation of Africans for the benefit of Europeans. Despite a rhetoric of "one human family," then, Enlightenment accounts of racial difference proved no less harmful than later versions, and eighteenth-century formulations often appear as racist as the next century's more thoroughly biological definitions of race. Theories of race defined and explained difference in various ways, but all could justify oppression. The following discussion of "race" and "race relations" excavates the eighteenth-century manifestations of these concepts without losing sight of either their historical specificity or their uses in the justification of slavery. Informed by the extensive scholarship on race as a social construct, "races" appear here as socially defined categories that can have severe social and economic effects. Although the terms *black* and *white* are problematic because they reinscribe the very categories whose construction I examine in this book, I nonetheless use these as convenient synonyms for *African American* and *European American*. The term *interracial sex* is similarly misleading, because it presupposes two fixed and distinct races that then mix, but I have used the term when its paraphrasing would be too unwieldy, hoping the reader will add imaginary quotation marks.

Like ideas about race, assumptions about sexual difference also changed dramatically in the eighteenth century. Early modern Europeans believed that physical differences between men and women resided less in their reproductive organs than in humoral physiology. Based on the teachings of

Galen of Pergamum (ca. A.D. 130–200), the early modern idea of physiology explained the health and personality of an individual in terms of the balance of four “humors” in the body: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. The predominance of hot and dry humors in men made them more rational than women, who were characterized by cold and moist qualities. The mixture of humors in the body created a gradient of sexual difference to which anatomy was relatively unimportant, as women and men were essentially the same. Women, for instance, represented inverted versions of men with similar if not identical sexual organs placed inside their bodies rather than on the outside. Under certain circumstances, in fact, abrupt and unexpected sex changes were thought to happen to women (although not to men). In sum, the sex of an individual existed on a continuum of unstable possibilities rather than in one of two fixed poles.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, there was little doubt that both men and women were sexual beings. Female orgasm was long considered a prerequisite for conception, and sensuality and sexuality were thought to constitute a woman’s very being. Biblical accounts of womankind as the “weaker vessel” buttressed the notion that women lacked the moral compass and the capacity for rationality and self-control that defined honorable manhood. The assumption of female immorality provided the imperative for men to rule over women, but it also led husbands to fear being cuckolded by an adulterous wife. Dire images of sexually aggressive women fill the pages of scriptural warnings, and advice books on proper behavior continually enjoined women to chastity. Nowhere, however, did the prescriptive literature assume that women’s sexuality was inherently different from men’s.<sup>7</sup>

In the two centuries after 1600, ideas about the physical and behavioral differences between men and women changed. Among scientists, the “one sex” model gave way to the idea that men and women were so anatomically different as to constitute two distinct entities rather than two versions of the same thing. The new “two-sex” model depicted women not as inverted men, but as the complementary, inherently different, and even “opposite” sex. Concurrently, this model ascribed to women a nature distinctly different from that of men, depicting women as naturally (and hence ideally and appropriately) modest and reserved. Virtuous women were submissive and chaste, and those who did not fit this image now appeared deviant. These new notions of womanhood (embedded especially in prescriptions for genteel behavior), produced some favorable images of women as more moral and sensitive than men, but they still employed a reductionist definition of femininity that grounded women’s nature in their bodies.<sup>8</sup>

Ideas about race, sex, and gender changed significantly in the eighteenth century, but how did these ideological shifts inform each other, if at all? In

particular, how did they interact and shape the developing racial hierarchy in American colonies increasingly dependent on slave labor? Scholars have produced an impressive body of work on race and sex, respectively, and I rely heavily on both in my efforts to see the connections in North Carolina.<sup>9</sup> A third investigative thread involves gender more generally. From the first extensive family and community studies written by social historians in the 1970s, to more recent work on the profound (but often less visible) impact of gender on political ideologies and socioeconomic structures, the scholarship on gender covers a vast terrain and continues to reshape our understanding of the colonial era.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, historians have begun to explore the links between gender systems and the racial order. Kathleen Brown’s work on the role of gender in structuring the social relations of racial slavery in colonial Virginia through 1750 is especially path-breaking in this regard. It is now clear, for example, that colonial marriage laws defined racial boundaries with increasing specificity, and that legislation regulating the interactions of servants and slaves proved crucial to the way racial hierarchies were made and upheld. But we still know much less about how individuals, in their everyday interactions, shaped racial ideology and race relations in eighteenth-century slave societies. This book examines illicit sexual practices to gain insight into the way ordinary people participated in the making of a racial hierarchy.<sup>11</sup>

Historians interested in the causal relations of social change are tempted to prioritize one form of oppression over another, often with insightful results.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, rather than argue for a shift in the priority of one category over another, this book examines the continual contestation, reassertion, and reconfiguration of racial categories within the context of sexual relations. It seeks especially to show how assumptions of gender, race, and class difference propped each other up in the developing social hierarchy. That does not mean that these constructs of difference were all equally powerful or equally up for grabs; they were not. Ideas about hierarchical relations of gender and class preceded chronologically those about race and may have seemed more obvious and natural to eighteenth-century colonists. But as racial prejudice was reformulated into biological racism (that is, into the idea that one’s “race” consisted of an inherited and immutable set of moral, intellectual, and physical qualities), ideas about class and gender were also always in play. Sometimes certain aspects of social organization appeared more fluid and contestable than others, but in fact ideas about proper relations of gender, class, and race were always informing each other in ways that remained remarkably flexible. When I describe how race became more “fixed” or a racial hierarchy “hardened,” I mean to say that racial and social boundaries came to *seem* permanent and

natural, but not that racial ideas (or relations, for that matter) became rigid. Like perceptions of gender and class, racial concepts continued to adapt to circumstance, engaging in all kinds of acrobatics so that race as a construct would seem natural, permanent, and timeless.<sup>13</sup>

Sexual relations provide a useful analytical window onto the past because bodies in the eighteenth century were public and private at the same time. On the one hand, of course, bodily experience remained intensely personal. As the most immediate means by which people experienced themselves as individuals, one person's physical sensations could, in the last instance, never be felt by another. Yet, at the same time, bodies had a strikingly public dimension. For example, slaves disfigured with branding and whiplashes embodied the power of their owners. Bodies could also signal resistance to coercion; they were, after all, the very vehicles by which people ran away or engaged in prohibited sexual behavior. One's physical self became both a site and a means for the expression of power relations, and sex was an important part of such experiences. Sexual relations, in turn, had social meanings and economic repercussions that shaped the developing racial order. Sexual relations were racialized, for example, when courts punished some forms of interracial sex and not others, thereby linking a person's sexual prerogatives or sexual vulnerability to their race (in addition to their gender and status). At the same time, race relations were sexualized when, for example, masters sexually exploited their slaves, castrated them, or broke up slave families. When sexual coercion was linked to a racial hierarchy, each made the other seem more "natural," that is, the result of innate, biological facts. This book shows how people defined, conducted, punished, resisted, and understood sexual relations in ways that made race seem physically real, even as some also struggled against racialized forms of oppression.<sup>14</sup>

Foucault used the term *bio-power* to describe the regulation and discipline that the state began to impose on individual bodies and on entire populations in the eighteenth century. A new "technology of sex" drew on medicine, education, and demography to promote norms by which the state would subjugate individuals and control populations. These techniques of power, Foucault said, served to reproduce a large labor force for the growing capitalist economy, and they "also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization." This book focuses on the latter effects of bio-power and explains how efforts to regulate women's sexual behavior also underscored racial boundaries. But in its investigation of the regulatory power of legal and social rules about sex, this study keeps its sight on the experience and agency of the women targeted by such measures. Far from being passive recipients of a new social order, their resistance and accommoda-

tions to the exigencies of bio-power fundamentally influenced race relations in the colonial setting. Lower-class women, in particular, found themselves the focus of legislative efforts to outlaw certain kinds of unions, with the result that when they struggled to determine their own intimate relationships, they necessarily shaped relations of race and class as well.<sup>15</sup>

The assertion of difference, then, met with contestation, and there was no simple linear development in the eighteenth century from a racist or protoracist mentality to a racist one. Women and men made personal choices based on many contingencies, of which racial or ethnic identity was only one. Some sexual relations were based on inclination, mutual attraction, shared interest, and love. Ideas about racial difference may have played only a small role in shaping these liaisons, and some of them, by demonstrating more egalitarian forms of intimacy, could inadvertently or self-consciously challenge the supposed naturalness of the racial order. Other sexual encounters, however, were purposefully abusive. In other words, there was no single or overdetermined relationship between illicit sex and other relations of power. Unlawful sex occurred in circumstances that were oppressive, liberating, violent, collaborative, loving, and compromising. As race became an important, even defining, element in eighteenth-century sexual relations, illegal liaisons—some voluntary, others coerced—variously disrupted and reinforced the idea of race as an inherited and immutable fact, and not always in predictable ways.

Colonial North Carolina is ideal for this study for the very reasons historians have largely overlooked it. The colonial population grew only slowly in the first half century of settlement because the shallow and shifting Outer Banks hindered the establishment of permanent harbors, and the rivers that fed into the Albemarle Sound hampered travel by land. Scholars have generally preferred to study the wealthier and more populous colonies to the north and south, and those historians who do study North Carolina have often described the settlement as woefully primitive and even of criminal bent. The weak control exerted by the elite, the argument goes, allowed the rest of the population to behave in unruly fashion, making North Carolina an embarrassingly unsophisticated link in the chain of otherwise thriving and orderly British colonies along the Atlantic coast. Certainly the Anglican Church and a moneyed elite established themselves only gradually in the colony, but what at first glance may seem an unfortunate circumstance in fact conceals a treasure trove. The prolonged political instability in North Carolina resulted in extensive eighteenth-century court records that chart the transition from a relatively fluid social structure to a firmly stratified slave system. North Carolina differed from neighboring colonies in its relatively slow settlement before about 1730, but many of

the processes that shaped the colony were not unique. As in other colonies, laws that regulated the interactions of servants and slaves concurrently drew boundaries of race. The social hierarchy emerged not only from racial legislation, however, but also from the everyday behavior of ordinary women and men who often, but not always, complied with the law. Such unlawful conduct, so visible in North Carolina's extensive court records, also shaped ideas about racial difference.<sup>16</sup>

My focus remains largely on northeastern North Carolina because records for the oldest counties along the Albemarle Sound allow a reconstruction of the hardening racial hierarchy from as early as the 1680s through the eve of the American Revolution. This study draws heavily on unpublished lower court records to understand how people negotiated sexual relations. It has been worth the effort to sift through hundreds, if not thousands, of original, unindexed lower courts records looking for cases involving women, because many such cases were heard and dismissed at this level and never appeared in the higher court records. The lower court records are challenging sources. Many names appear only once, making it hard to pinpoint a person's social and economic standing in the community or to excavate their kinship ties. Court records are also skewed toward illegal behavior and say less about those who complied with the laws. Furthermore, people on trial spoke defensively, not freely, about their transgressive behavior. Nonetheless, the records discussed here are invaluable for the way they show how ordinary people engaged with each other in private and in public spaces, in households, taverns, and Quaker meetings, on the street and on the run, in the birthing chair and on the courtroom bench. Depositions often include ordinary language (the repetition of slander, for example), and they provide unique glimpses of otherwise undocumented social relationships. Despite their lacunae, colonial court records provide evocative source material for the reconstruction of the racial politics of illicit sex.

The chapters in this book are thematic and loosely chronological. Chapter 1 explores female behavior that thwarted Anglican gender norms and explains why it mattered to authorities in early North Carolina. The focus here is not on illicit sex so much as on an Anglican gender order and its discontents in the decades of settlement to 1710. The private and public realms were inseparable in the colonial era, and clergymen, government officials, court magistrates, and male heads of households all represented a larger patriarchal authority. In the context of North Carolina's political instability, the presence of alternative gender norms—those of Native Americans and of Quakers—accentuated the already precarious position of North Carolina's Anglican elite. Frustrated government officials found that to es-

tablish a "proper" social order, they had to enforce as normative their notions of female propriety and patriarchal gender relations.

Colonial observers displayed an avid interest in Native American sexual behavior, and chapter 2 explores the rhetoric and the reality of Euro-Indian relations. Some colonial writers employed a gendered accounting of racial difference, one that discerned between Indian men and women and focused on their sexual behavior, to promote the colonial appropriation of Indian land. Sexual representations of Indian women thus became part of an ideology of conquest. In real life, Native Americans experienced colonialism in distinctly gendered ways. Over time, native women who had liaisons with English traders went from being cultural brokers, whose sexual relations with outsiders served a traditional role in diplomacy and trade, to being more liminal figures whose alliances with English husbands accommodated some degree of private property and patriarchal gender relations. This chapter shows how intimate Anglo-Indian relations became a forum, both representational and real, in which people on both sides negotiated shifting power relations and ideas of racial difference.

The third chapter argues that the establishment of a racial hierarchy relied on the sexual regulation of single women, especially lower-class white and free black servants. Increasingly detailed colonial legislation regarding sex and marriage defined racial boundaries and adjudicated the status of illegitimate children. By 1715, the North Carolina legislature had prohibited servants from marrying, outlawed interracial sex, and burdened the mixed-race children of white mothers and the offspring of free black women with long terms of service. But the hardening of racial categories in colonial statutes did not necessarily translate into a fixed ideology of race. Women resisted the restraints on their personal lives: some ran away to get married, and others struggled to hold together families that did not receive legal sanction. Sexual misconduct often occurred together with theft, illegal trade, irreverent speech, and aid to runaway servants and slaves. The combination of social and sexual transgressions could undermine conventional relations of gender, race, and class and marked the limits of elite control. Placing ordinary women at the center of historical analysis enables us to understand, as the colonial elite also did, that the sexual behavior of women was not peripheral to the project of colonization but rather a crucial part of the struggle for control in an expanding slave society.<sup>17</sup>

Despite continuing challenges to the emerging hierarchy, racism among whites deepened as slavery became more widespread in the colony after about 1730. Ideas about race found expression in the sexual slander European Americans spread about one another, and chapter 4 uses defamation cases as a measure of whites' growing concern about racial distinctions.

Slandorous allegations of interracial sex depicted the act as a transgression against a natural boundary as well as a legal one, making the liaison seem more unnatural and more abhorrent than fornication between white partners. The graphic nature of the insults strengthened the idea that interracial sex represented a degradation of the most serious kind, especially for white women. These charges prompted vehement courtroom denials in which plaintiffs defended their reputations by underscoring racial boundaries. Sexual slander cases mark the limits placed on acceptable sex within the context of rising racial divisions, highlighting how the white community understood and regulated its own behavior while reinforcing hierarchies of gender, race, and class.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the concept of race as physical and hereditary had become much more firmly entrenched. The final chapter argues that this was partly the result of the diverging treatment of black and white bodies. As eighteenth-century statutes first regulated and then prohibited branding, whipping, and amputations for white servants but not for slaves, the divergence in legally condoned acts of violence reinforced the idea that the bodies of African Americans were inherently different. The brutality that could be legally inflicted on slaves signaled to white viewers the innate difference of the victims. In particular, punishments that targeted the sexual agency of the victim (such as the castration of male slaves) served as sexualized markers of race. In the context of slavery, sexualized violence became an especially vivid means of marking a body as "black" or "white."

Illicit sexual relations in the eighteenth century constituted dangerous liaisons on a number of counts. They were dangerous for people without much social power, because harsh punishments could be the result. Fines, public whippings, and even banishment from the colony were court-ordered penalties for unlawful sex. But illicit liaisons also seemed dangerous to government officials who saw in them a challenge to their own authority. Interracial liaisons among the lower classes were particularly threatening because they portended other kinds of illegal cooperation and because children from such unions blurred racial boundaries. The adjudication of illicit sex did more than attempt to control certain groups of people: it also bolstered the notion that race was a physical fact, one that justified enslavement and exploitation. Over the course of the eighteenth century, indeterminate ideas about racial distinctions melded with notions of gender and class differences to form a new amalgam, a fully biological notion of race, one that seemed as natural as sexual difference already did and as divinely ordained as the social order. How these concepts of difference related to one another, how racial ideas gained substance in

the social relations of individuals, and how some people resisted its implications is explored in the chapters that follow. In illicit affairs and unlawful transactions, people tested and contested ideas about gender, class, and race. Whether these suspect relations were discussed in travel literature, Quaker meetings, tavern slander, or courtroom testimony, their public explication, denial, confession, and punishment further enhanced the status of race as a biological given. In a broad array of personal interactions and courtroom exchanges, unlawful sex was symbolically linked to ideas of racial difference in ways that made race seem as corporeal as sex. In the context of colonization and slavery, contests over illicit sex went a long way toward making race seem real.



## Disorderly Women and the Struggle for Authority

To men in positions of authority in early North Carolina, the adultery of one wife or the escape of one servant woman meant more than an individual flouting the law; to colonial leaders, defiant women personified the social disorder they deplored in a colony they were still trying to control. In August 1697, for example, magistrates heard the case against Dorothy Steel, a white woman who in early June had run away from her husband William in Albemarle County in northeastern North Carolina. Seeking refuge further south, Steel hired William Lee and John Spellman "to goe with her to Ashley River." Three other men—James Seserson, John Hardy, and Henry Hayes—also joined the expedition, and together the renegades stole what they could from William Steel, including one bed, one rug, a pot, a trunk in which to carry their loot, three firelock guns, and their mode of transport: "a Canoe and Sailes." Forty miles from Cape Fear, Dorothy and her companions encountered "sum Indians" and gladly "bought sum venson of them." The next day, however, Indians "Came Creping up in the bushes" and shot at them, wounding Henry Hayes in the shoulder. The travelers returned fire and reversed their tracks, planning now to go north to Virginia. Halting in their old neighborhood, Dorothy persuaded thirty-year-old Elizabeth Vina to join them. A neighbor spied the fugitives and asked "whi thay stayed and lurked about thare," advising them to "begon spedly or he would go and fetch the Constable and sese [seize] them." Vowing "thay would dey before they would be taken," the runaways set off again. For two

days they rowed along the shore until they saw three head of cattle. John Spellman shot the smallest one, which the hungry crew gutted, quartered, and roasted. Disembarking at Thomas Pollock's plantation on Salmon Creek, the runaways enjoyed "sum tobacco and Rosting yeares of Corn of Colonel Pollickes negro Manuell," a slave who, with his wife, managed the plantation without supervision. The fugitives then traded one of William Steel's guns to Tom Andover, a free black man who agreed to "pilaite [pilot] them to south Key." Relying on theft and trade, the runaways survived on the loose for two months. In August, however, their luck ran out. They were apprehended, brought to court, and deposed by Thomas Harvey, deputy governor of North Carolina and chief justice of the General Court. Lee, Spellman, and Steel kept their accounts brief, but Elizabeth Vina and James Seserson added that Lee and Steel "did Ly together upon one bed all the voige." William Lee eventually admitted as much in court, and the grand jury indicted him and John Spellman (who did not make a confession) for "ravishing" Dorothy Steel. When the court reconvened in October, Lee and Spellman were convicted and sentenced to thirty-nine lashes for the "Ravishment of the wife and goods of Wm. Steel." Dorothy herself suffered thirty stripes for "Unlawfull Departing from her husband and going away with an adulteror." In addition, John Spellman was banished from the colony for four years for "feloniously killing a Beast."<sup>1</sup>

Dorothy Steel's transgressions had a political dimension because patriarchal household government, political rule, and property rights were tightly intertwined in early modern Europe and its American colonies. The patriarchal household was crucial to the social order; it served as metaphor and microcosmic example of the divinely ordained social hierarchy. As the monarch expected obedient subjects, so did the patriarch demand submissive household dependents (namely his wife, children, and servants). Households also controlled property and regulated its transfer from one male owner to his heirs. As a married woman, Dorothy Steel had no legal identity apart from that of her husband and could claim no property of her own. She violated William's property rights by stealing valuable objects, but also by running away and depriving him of his right to sole access to her body and her labor. Steel's adventure disrupted prescribed relations between husband and wife at the same time that it showed disregard for property rights and for the deference required of subordinates in general. Given the links between individual households and the social order, women's misconduct took on a political cast that the perpetrators themselves did not always intend.<sup>2</sup>

Illicit behavior like Steel's (which was certainly not unique to North Carolina) acquired special meaning in the context of the Albemarle Sound, a

fledgling colony marked in its early decades by considerable social fluidity, political instability, and religious dissent. Government officials, themselves often recent arrivals without the impressive plantations and houses of wealthy men elsewhere, struggled to establish their authority in the new settlement. Generally modest living conditions in the young colony blurred distinctions of status, and members of the budding elite—the governor's council, court magistrates, and prominent assemblymen—were hard pressed to distinguish themselves socially from most other colonists. They could do little to quell complaints from wealthy colonists elsewhere that North Carolina settlers routinely refused to curtail smuggling, pay quitrents, or show respect to appointed officials. Dorothy Steel's trial substantiated the suspicion that stolen goods circulated among white, free black, and enslaved traders: Tom Andover, the free black ferrier, accepted William Steel's purloined gun in exchange for transportation, and Manuel and his wife shared Colonel Pollock's corn and tobacco with the fugitives. To court magistrates and other critics, Steel's flight and adultery, combined with the apparent ease with which she and others engaged in theft and unlawful trade, exemplified the general unruliness that marked the settlement on the Albemarle Sound. Disorderly women confirmed the perception of well-to-do onlookers that North Carolina harbored dissenters and delinquents alike.

The misconduct of colonial women in North Carolina gained further resonance from the fact that alternative gender roles existed among Native Americans and Quakers, respectively. These culturally distinct gender norms contrasted with mainstream English ideas about the place of women in patriarchal households, and they contributed to the perception of social disorder in the colony. This was especially true in the case of Native Americans in the region, whose customs of matrilineage, land use, property holding, and gender relations represented a visible and viable alternative to colonial norms. Although Indian men held official positions of power in their society, native women controlled significant aspects of community life and influenced political decisions. Native American gender roles and arrangements of property holding in North Carolina presented a strong challenge to the interlaced English norms of patriarchy and private property. Another alternative to English gender roles appeared in the Society of Friends (called Quakers), a politically influential minority in the early colony. Quakers lived in patrilineal households, and they held private property and owned slaves as did members of the Church of England. Yet Quakers allowed women to travel in pairs and preach to meetings throughout the colonies. Women Friends also met monthly to discuss, vote on, and record community matters. Among both Indians and Quakers, then, albeit in very distinctive ways,

women gathered together, talked, and acted in consultation and often in concert with one another *as women*. They had socially sanctioned channels of influence that appeared aberrant to people accustomed to English familial norms of subordinate wives and daughters without access to an institutionalized and influential forum for the public expression of their opinions.<sup>3</sup>

To colonial critics (who often exaggerated the degree of self-determination and political power that Indian and Quaker women enjoyed), such alternative gender relations appeared threatening because they seemed to give women inordinate power and implicitly challenged the presumed naturalness of the patriarchal order. Dorothy Steel may not have been thinking about Indians or Quakers when she fled her husband, but to colonial magistrates her behavior illustrated more than the homegrown disorder that characterized England and colonial settlements alike: her actions reminded such men of the alternative relations of gender, property, and authority in and near colonial settlements that might spread and more radically undermine their own versions of law and order. Part of the quest for authority among colonial lawmakers and magistrates thus involved the establishment of their own gender ideals as normative. Seeking legitimacy as an elite when they did not yet have the accoutrements of that class, these men in positions of authority tried to assert their place at the top of the social hierarchy in part by enforcing one set of gender relations over other available options. Dorothy Steel's public whipping, which included nine lashes more than usual for adultery, served to demonstrate the enormity of her crimes against her husband as well as the power of local authorities to punish transgressions of prescribed relations of property and respect. But such punishments could not halt the misconduct of colonial women, nor could they erase the presence of gender relations among Indians and Quakers that contrasted starkly with English ideals.

### English Gender Relations—Real and Ideal

Dorothy Steel's adventure rankled the General Court precisely because patriarchal gender relations, like divisions of class, were the bedrock of English society. The family served explicitly as a training ground for lessons in hierarchy. As one seventeenth-century English tract explained, "A family is . . . a little Commonwealth . . . a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned." In the model English household, virtuous women were quiet, obedient, and chaste; along with the children and servants, they deferred to the family patriarch. Legally,

English wives' identities were subsumed by their husbands'. A woman who married became a *feme covert*, which meant "under the protection and influence of her husband, her *baron* or lord." A married woman could not legally own property or claim her own earnings (all of which belonged to her husband), nor could she sue or be sued, have legal say over her children, or object to her husband's right to the "moderate correction" of his wife, children, and servants (which included the use of a whipping switch no bigger than the size of his thumb). Patrilineal families conveyed property from one generation of male owners to the next, and the legal apparatus of the state protected marital boundaries and punished sexual transgressions that could result in illegitimate offspring and tangled lines of inheritance. Estranged spouses could sometimes gain a legal separation without the ability to remarry, but marriages were usually unseverable, with divorce granted only in extraordinary circumstances such as bigamy, consanguinity, or a husband's impotence. Since legal divorce was difficult for husbands to obtain and nearly impossible for wives, unhappy men could and did desert their spouses, leaving women unable to remarry, claim or sell property, or gain custody of their children.<sup>4</sup>

As authority was divided in the English household, so were responsibilities. Husbands and sons engaged in agricultural work and the public business of the household. Although wives and daughters helped in the fields at harvest time and sometimes worked at weeding and hoeing, their primary responsibilities remained within the sphere of the house, garden, dairy, and poultry yard. They churned butter, brewed ale, spun thread, sewed, washed and mended clothes, and tended the garden. Wives also cooked, cared for the children, and—as an extension of their husband's authority—oversaw any servants. Although women made crucial contributions to the domestic economy, they were mostly excluded from those tasks that, when hired out, received more pay (plowing, for example) or that garnered more public respect (such as artisanry of the kind dominated by men). Women's work was presumed secondary and supplemental in relation to men's labors.<sup>5</sup>

Chastity (virginity for unmarried women, monogamy for wives, and abstinence for widows) comprised the crucial female virtue, especially for middle- and upper-class women. Where property was at stake, husbands wanted to ensure that only their biological offspring became heirs. But even where lack of property made the issue of inheritance less pressing, a "cuckolded" husband unable to control his wife's sexual behavior forfeited respect as the head of his household. Since both women's virtue and men's honor were at stake in cases of female misconduct, sermons and advice manuals insisted on the vigilant surveillance of women and control of their sexual behavior. In carefully supervised courtships, couples were to become

acquainted but abstain from sexual relations. Only after the public announcements of plans to wed (called marriage banns) did prospective partners receive sanction to proceed with the ceremony and conjugal intimacy.<sup>6</sup>

In real life, however, people's behavior did not conform to the prescriptive literature. Women and men in early modern England who engaged in premarital sex encountered wide tolerance, especially among the lower and middling classes. An exchange of gifts could signal "betrothal" and with it the informal license to have sex based on the prospect of future marriage. Once married, women's work took them outside the household. They carried their wares to market, for example, where they made deals, joked, flirted, and fought. In the give-and-take of everyday life, conjugal couples worked out their own particular relationships. While companionate marriages marked some households, shouting matches and marital violence testified to a "struggle for the breeches" in others. Given the symbolic importance of patriarchal domesticity (and the general lack of privacy), gender role transgressions often became a matter of public concern. When wives "hen-pecked" their husbands or husbands did not discipline wayward members of their household, the community might sanction one or both spouses. Women accused of promiscuity were carted through town on an open wagon and assailed with insults, while parades (called the skimmington or charivari) served to humiliate the husband with taunting songs about his wife's profligacy. Female subservience remained an elusive ideal and people knew it, but in the pageantry of public humiliation and the dramatic reassertion of prescriptive roles, men and women alike reaffirmed the salience of gender norms. Although women might thwart prescribed behavior, hierarchical gender relations remained an organizing principle of both real and symbolic power.<sup>7</sup>

As in England, families in the colonies provided a critical means of social organization. In an upstart society without entrenched institutions, family order was all the more important. Where colonies were sparsely settled and less effectively supervised by the authorities, some feared that "masterless" people might more likely engage in aberrant behavior. In response to the "grave Inconvenience" that followed from single people "being for themselves" and not living in "well Governed families," New England legislators, for example, required in 1636 and 1669 that no single person shall "be suffered to live of himself." Such injunctions in the colonies were limited to the seventeenth century and did not appear in North Carolina, but the importance of the family as a means of ordering social relations persisted there as well. Colonial women received admonishments to defer to their husbands, and settlers in North Carolina would have been familiar with the kind of advice provided by the *Virginia Gazette* in 1737: a wife should "Never dispute with him [her husband] whatever be the Occasion . . . And

if any Altercations or Jars happen, don't separate the bed, whereby the Animosity will cease . . . by no Means disclose his imperfections, or let the most intimate Friend know your Grievances . . . Read often the Matrimonial Service, and overlook not the important word OBEY." Perhaps especially in outlying settlements marked by political instability, orderly households became the symbol of, and prerequisite for, a functioning government.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, this ideal was neither universally held nor an everyday reality. Some colonial couples created their own (officially unrecognized) wedding ceremonies or dispensed with wedding vows altogether, which in turn led to large numbers of illegitimate children. Migration between colonies and the delay in communication by mail made it difficult to hinder bigamy or to know if an absented husband had died and his wife was free to remarry. Even lawfully married couples did not necessarily contribute to social stability, since households remained a contested space in which men and women continually renegotiated their relations of power. In frontier conditions, furthermore, gender roles blurred, as women engaged in work traditionally thought to be men's. One colonial woman in the North Carolina backcountry, for example, had to "carry a gunn in the woods and kill deer, turkeys, &c., shoot down wild cattle, catch and tye hoggs, knock down beeves with an ax and perform the most manfull Exercises as well as most men in those parts." Rigid gender distinctions were a luxury that few could afford, and shared responsibilities led, if not to more equal relations of authority, then at least to the perception among some observers that the patriarchal mainstays of frontier families were in danger of unraveling.<sup>9</sup>

Because the symbolic importance of patriarchal families persisted even in (perhaps especially in) the face of divergent practice, a wife's disobedience to her husband could represent a larger gesture of dissent. When Dorothy Steel fled her husband and took on other lovers, she not only wounded William's status as the head of his household, she also broke the domestic rules that lay at the heart of the social order. Her defiant declaration that she would rather "dey" than return to her husband demonstrated a deliberate rejection of the social and sexual behavior expected of her by the colonial government and the Anglican Church. To disapproving members of North Carolina's General Court, Dorothy Steel's attitude epitomized the irreverence that plagued colonial authorities.<sup>10</sup>

### "The Refuge of our Renegadoes"

North Carolina had not always been so troublesome. The colony appeared promising in 1629 when Charles I named it "Carolana" after himself and

granted all the land between thirty-six and thirty-one degrees latitude to his attorney general Sir Robert Heath. This vast tract of land between Virginia and the Spanish colony of Florida stretched theoretically from the Atlantic to the western sea. Heath did not actively promote colonization, however, and when Charles II was restored to the throne after the English Revolution, he revoked his father's grant to Heath and transferred the land to eight loyal supporters, making them in 1663 the "Lords Proprietors" of "Carolina." This generous grant of unknown proportions—the distance to the Pacific Ocean was still a matter of conjecture—had as its aim the enrichment of the royal favorites. In contrast to the religious settlements in New England, colonies in the South were mercantilist ventures, and the Proprietors looked forward to the annual quitrents that planters would pay for their plots of land, together with the taxes levied on corn, wheat, tobacco, and lumber exports. To entice planters, the Proprietors established a "headright" system in which they granted a certain amount of acreage per person or "head" brought into the colony: "eighty acres English measure to every freeman and as much to his wife if he have one," and eighty acres to a master or mistress "for every able man Sarvant he or shee hath brought or sent" and forty acres for every "weaker Sarvant [such] as woeman children and slaves above the age of fowerteene yeares." Indentured servants would receive forty acres after the expiration of their terms of service.<sup>11</sup>

Investors had good reason for optimism. Surveyors returned from expeditions with enthusiastic reports of fertile soil and dense pine forests that reached from the Outer Banks on the Atlantic Ocean through the hilly Piedmont to the Appalachian Mountains in the west. As early as 1622 the secretary for Virginia, John Pory, visited the Albemarle region and found "great forests of Pynes 15 or 16 myle broad and above 60 mile long, which will serve well for Masts and for Shipping, and for pitch and tarre . . . On the other side of the River there is fruitfull Countrie blessed with abundance of Corne, reaped twice a yeere." For men on the make who could not travel to the "southern plantation," promotional literature tempted with such titles as *Virginia: More Especially the South Part thereof, Richly and Truly Valued: Viz. The Fertile Carolana, And No Lesse Excellent Isle of Roanoke, of Latitude from 31. to 37. Degr. Relating the Meanes of Raysing Infinite Profits to the Adventures and Planters*. The prospective settlement in Albemarle appeared to have all the makings of a windfall.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the promise of natural bounty, the region's geography impeded travel and trade, isolating the new colony. The shifting sands of the Outer Banks defeated attempts to establish permanent harbors, and the swamps and rivers around the Albemarle Sound made travel by land arduous. The Albemarle settlement was so far away from its political hub in Charlestown

(later Charleston), that after 1664 the "Countie of Albemarle" received its own county governor and assembly. Governor William Drummond, his chosen Council, and twelve elected assemblymen made laws, levied taxes, and established courts in Albemarle. Around 1668 Albemarle County was divided into precincts—Currituck, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Chowan—each with its own court. Beginning in 1689 the governor of Albemarle County was replaced by a deputy governor for "that part of our province of Carolina that lyes north and east of Cape feare." This deputy governor reported to the governor of Carolina in Charlestown until 1712, when the Proprietors began to address their instructions directly to the "Governor of North Carolina." What once had been Albemarle County had become a separate colony (see figures 1 and 2 for maps of the region).<sup>13</sup>

Along with its government institutions, the colonial population of Albemarle grew only slowly. To entice wealthier investors, surveyor Thomas Woodward pressed the Proprietors in 1665 to allow larger land grants for those who could afford them, "It being only land that they come for." Woodward explained that "Rich men (which Albemarle stands much in need of) may perhaps take up great Tracts; but then they will endeavor to procure Tenants to helpe towards the payment of their Rent, and will at their own charge build howseing (which poor men cannot compasse) to invite them." To have "some men of greater possessions in Land then others" better served "the well being and good Government of the Place than any Levelling Paritie." But not all immigrants shared Woodward's dislike for a flattened social hierarchy. From the start, the Albemarle settlement encompassed a sizable presence of non-elite whites, many of whom had been shut out of the Virginia real estate market by large-scale land speculators. (In 1658, thirty people alone held title to over 100,000 acres of land in Virginia, and by 1666 all desirable land between the York and James Rivers had been patented.) Virginians who could not afford to buy land at high prices, and who were reluctant to test the Piedmont Indians to the west, turned their attentions southward. Beginning in the 1650s, small farmers and fur traders sought their livelihood south of the Virginia border, and in the next decades, a steady stream of migrants followed. Most early settlers in the Albemarle Sound region were English men and women from the Chesapeake, especially from the southern counties of Virginia. Decades later, in the mid eighteenth century, large numbers of African, German, Scots-Irish, Welsh, and French immigrants changed the ethnic makeup of the colony. They either traveled south from Pennsylvania and Virginia down the Great Wagon Road and spread throughout the Piedmont, or they arrived in Cape Fear by boat or by land from South Carolina (as was especially the case with enslaved Africans after about 1730). But in the first decades of colonial settlement, Europeans

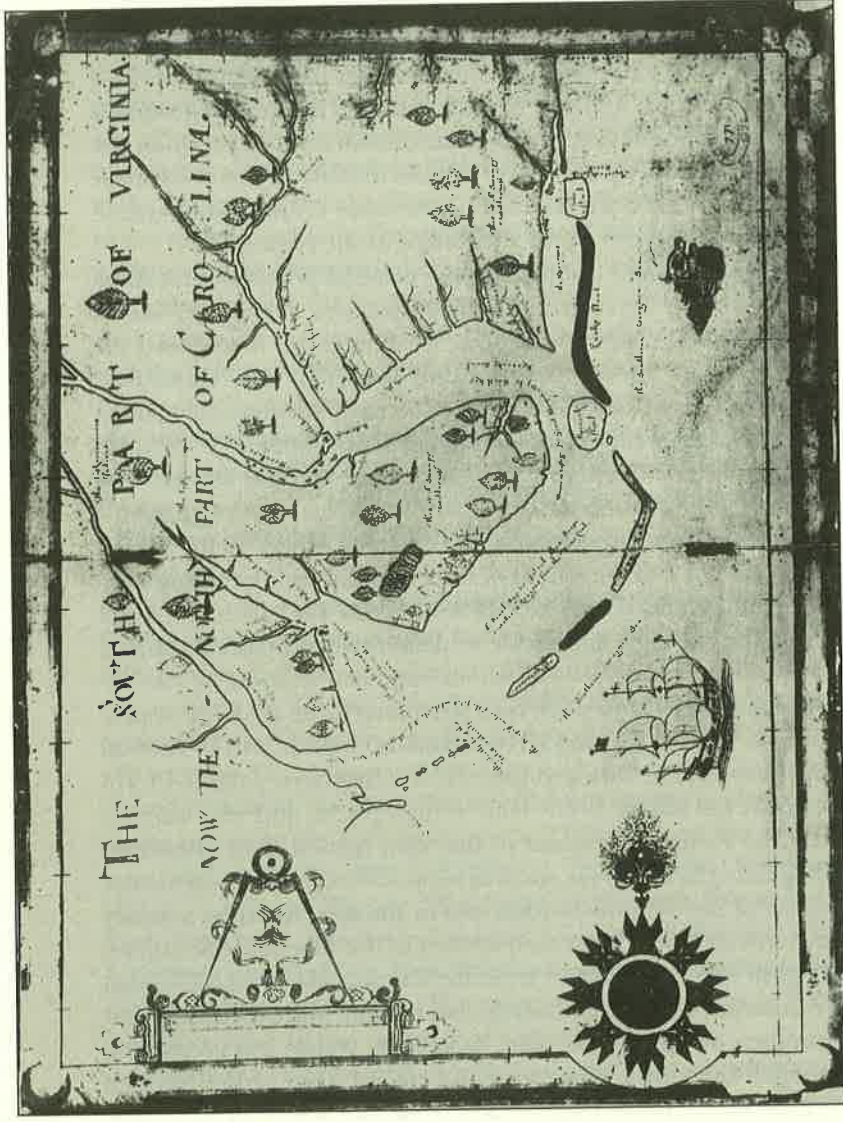


Figure 1. The map of "The South Part of Virginia Now the North Part of Carolina," made in 1657 by London chart-maker Nicholas Comberford, shows the Chowan, Roanoke, Pamlico, and Neuse rivers as well as the outer banks that made maritime travel hazardous. The second line of writing was added to the original title in a different hand in the seventeenth century. Courtesy of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

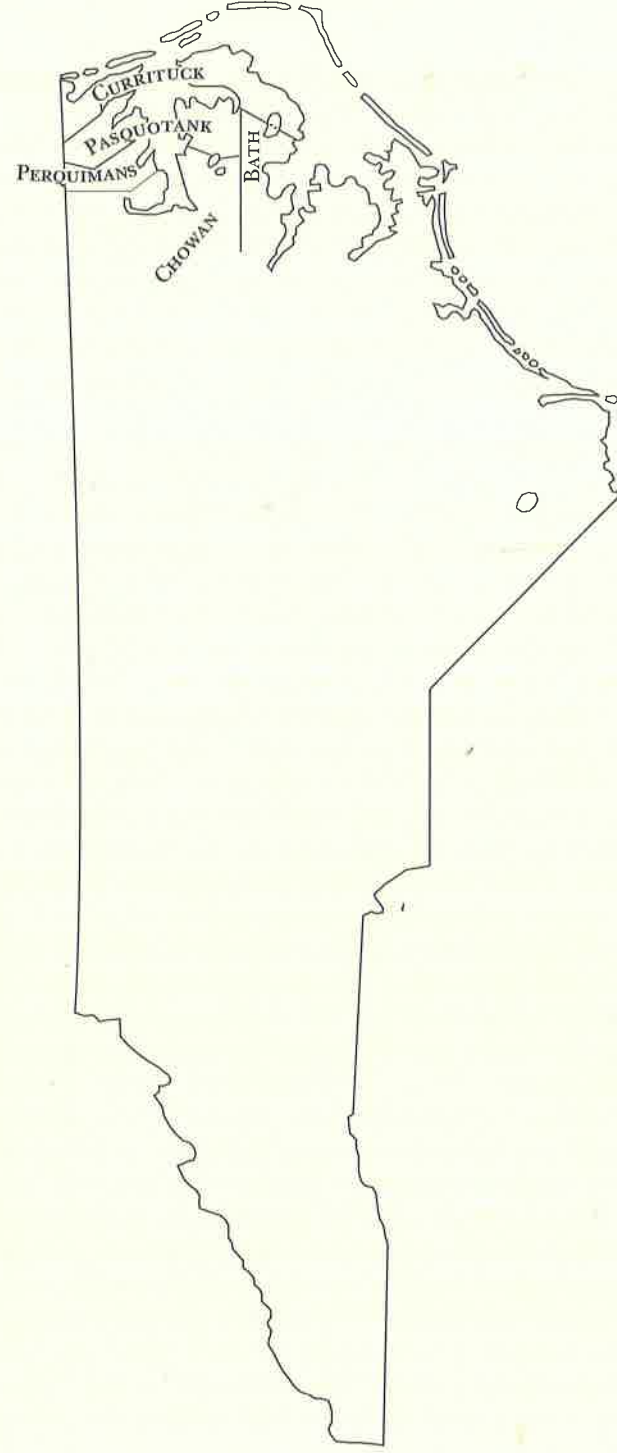


Figure 2. North Carolina colony in 1700.

in North Carolina hailed mostly from England (often via Virginia), and they frequently traveled in small groups, sometimes as families.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the newcomers were former servants who sought independence and a plot of their own when their indentures expired. The president of the Virginia Council reported in 1708 that "many of our poorer sort of Inhabitants daily remove into our neighboring Colonies, especially to North Carolina." The Virginia Council noted the departure of a "great number of young people & servants just free to seek for settlements in the province of North Carolina where land is to be had on much easier Termes than here." Land was available at low prices, and young men could realistically hope to own small tracts within a few years. Others traveled south to escape debt collectors. As Colonel Joseph Seymour of Maryland complained in 1707, North Carolina's five-year postponement of debt repayment "has occasioned great numbers to flye from this Province thither to the great detriment of Merchants in England and cheating the honest well meaning people of this Country." The Virginia Council agreed. The exemption in North Carolina "for being sued for debts contracted in other places" only "encourages a great many people of uneasy circumstances or dishonest inclinations to run thither to avoid their creditors & secure themselves a safe retreat . . . [in] that Country which has no settled Government." Elites in Virginia and Maryland worried that disaffected servants, runaway slaves, debtors, and thieves congregated south of the Virginia border to pursue their criminal ways outside the purview of the law. For decades, wealthy observers echoed the 1681 warning of Virginia's governor Thomas Culpeper that "Carolina (I meane the North part of it) alwayes was and is the Sinke of America, the Refuge of our Renegadoes, and Till in better order, Dangerous To us." As late as 1732, Governor Burrington still lamented that "there are not a sufficient number of Gentlemen in it [North Carolina] fitt to be Councillors, . . . Justices of the Peace, . . . [or] officers in the Militia." He deplored that "there is no difference to be perceived in Dress and Carriage" between the common people on the one hand and court justices and government officials on the other, "which Parity," Burrington complained, "is in no other Country but this."<sup>15</sup>

From the start, political upheavals underscored the bad reputation of Albemarle settlers. In 1677, an antiproprietary faction protested the enforcement of the Plantation Duty Act of 1673, a duty of one penny per pound of exported tobacco. The protesters, themselves among the most prominent settlers, imprisoned the substitute governor and customs collector, Thomas Miller. The conflict, known as Culpeper's Rebellion, began as a quarrel among North Carolinians engaged in intercolonial and transatlantic trade, but it spread to those with other grievances. Miller later testified that "by beat of Drum and a shout of one and all of [the] rabble" he had been "accused of

blasphemy, treason and other crimes, and so upon a shout of one and all of [the] rabble" he was "clapt in Irons" and then the "stocks and pillory [were] overturned and throwne into the river by this rabble." Some observers feared the uprising would spread among laboring people and entice them to flee or rebel. "If they not be suddenly subdued," one report warned, "hundreds of idle debtors, theeves, Negros, Indians and English servants will fly into . . . the vast coast and wild woods of the backside of Virginia." The rebellion subsided, but political strife did not. Between 1670 and 1712 the Albemarle settlers sent six of their first fourteen governors back to England, some of them in chains. Governor Seth Sothell, for example, himself a Proprietor, was ousted in 1689 for multiple acts of corruption. In 1729, seven of the eight exasperated Proprietors gave up the enterprise (the earl of Granville retained his portion), and North Carolina became a royal colony. Looking back on the proprietary period in 1732, George Burrington, the first crown-appointed governor, described the inhabitants of North Carolina as "not Industrious but subtle and crafty." They "always behaved insolently to their Governours," Burrington reported, and "some they have Imprisoned, drove others out of the Country, at times sett up two or three supported by Men under Arms," so that "all the Governors that ever were in this Province lived in fear of the People (except myself) and Dreaded their Assemblies."<sup>16</sup>

Such obstreperous behavior may have been encouraged by the rough and relatively equal living conditions of white settlers in early North Carolina. Landholding was more evenly distributed in North Carolina than in Virginia or South Carolina: quitrent lists compiled in 1735 for the northeastern counties of Currituck, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Chowan, Bertie, Tyrrell, and Edgecombe show that while nearly three quarters of the heads of households owned land, the majority of planters owned less than 250 acres, and few owned more than 1,000. The houses on these tracts were built to serve in the short term, not to last or to create an imposing specter of wealth (see figure 3, Boyette House). Most initially had one or two rooms, often with dirt floors, and they were made of hewn logs, the cracks filled in with clay, moss, sticks, and straw, although some houses had clapboard siding and a few were made of brick and had more than one story. North Carolina had no towns at all in the seventeenth century. Bath, the oldest, was incorporated on the Pamlico Sound in 1706, but three years later it still consisted of only twelve houses. In Chowan County, Edenton (called Queen Anne's Creek until 1722) became the colony's largest town (and remained so until mid-century), but as late as 1728, William Byrd of Virginia found that it boasted only "forty or fifty houses, most of them small, and built without expense. A Citizen here is counted extravagant, if he has Ambition enough to aspire to a Brick-chimney. Justice herself is but indifferently Lodged, the



Figure 3. The Boyette House in Johnston County from the early nineteenth century consists of horizontal sawn planks dovetailed together at the corners and a wooden chimney daubed with clay. This kind of one-room dwelling was typical in eastern colonial North Carolina. Courtesy of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

Court-House having much the Air of a Common Tobacco-House." The men who made up the governor's council and the justice system did not yet have the available income or the access to imported goods that would have allowed the ostentatious display of wealth with which Virginians were familiar. In Williamsburg, organized horse races, carriage rides through town, the seating of well-dressed families in the front pews of the Anglican Church, and courtroom rituals in impressive brick buildings routinely reinscribed class difference and commanded gestures of respect from the lower orders. North Carolina's leading men could not yet engage in such public exhibitions of privilege (the first Anglican church was a wooden structure built in 1701), nor could they claim to be from a long line of prominent families in the colony. From the point of view of wealthy men elsewhere, and probably also from that of resident settlers, the elite in North Carolina was still trying very hard to become an "upper" class.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of the slower accumulation of wealth in North Carolina, large-scale slaveholding grew only slowly. Nonetheless, African Americans came

with at least four of the ten English settlers who obtained land prior to 1663, and many more migrated in the following decades. In 1705, about 1,000 slaves lived in the colony. The most populous county (Pasquotank) had 1,121 white and 211 black inhabitants by 1709. Thirty years later, when 103 of Pasquotank County's 283 households paid taxes for slaves, thirteen slaveholders owned between six and ten slaves; the remaining owned five slaves or fewer. North Carolinians began to catch up with slaveholders elsewhere when Albemarle planters such as Edward Moseley, Alexander Lillington, and the Swann family moved to the Cape Fear region where they and investors from South Carolina began to amass huge tracts of land and import slaves in large numbers. In the early 1730s, Governor George Burrington estimated North Carolina's population at about 6,000 blacks and 30,000 whites. (At that time nearly 50,000 blacks and over 100,000 whites lived in Virginia, and more than 21,000 slaves constituted a two-to-one black majority in South Carolina.) By 1748, slaves outnumbered servants in North Carolina, and by 1763 slaves outnumbered indentured servants in the Albemarle region by three to one.<sup>18</sup>

Although the slave labor system did not boom until well after the colony was established, laboring people of different backgrounds lived and worked together from the earliest days of settlement. English, African, and Indian servants worked together planting tobacco, corn, and other vegetables, raising many pigs and some cattle, and processing pines for the naval stores industry: they boiled sap for pitch, tar, and turpentine, and cut logs into boards, shingles, and barrel staves. The inventory for Captain Valentine Bird in 1680, for example, listed eleven Negro slaves, one Indian woman slave, and one indentured white woman. In 1693, two whites, four Indians, and eleven blacks worked for Quaker Esau Albertson in Albemarle County. In January 1694 Quaker Francis Tomes claimed headrights for ten people, including "Two Indians, three Negrose," and two white servant women. When John Bentley filed for headrights the following month, he listed "a negroe Boy a Negroe Woman an Indian Boy." Similarly, Isaac Wilson claimed land in January 1706 for "Negroe Phebe Indian Mall Negroe Patt Negro Maria." These close living and working conditions lent themselves to interracial cooperation. In July 1698, for example, "two negroes & one Indian" belonging to James Cole ran away together, but only after they "rob[b]ed the house and Caryed away Severall Goods and a trunk with wearing Cloaths." A white woman named Rebekah Baily was arrested in 1706 for "unlegally receiving Six pair of Buttons" belonging to Mr. Thomas Peterson and delivered to her by a "Negroe Woman belonging to William Glover Esquire." Whites and blacks on the Glover and Peterson estates had moved the buttons (and perhaps other goods) smoothly from one place to the other. Close working

arrangements enabled a swift trade in stolen articles, and networks of communication aided runaways seeking temporary shelter. As Dorothy Steel's case illustrates, such illicit activity was hard to repress, and it added to the frustration of government officials who yearned for tighter social controls.<sup>19</sup>

Servants and slaves sometimes cooperated with each other, but they likely held prejudices as well. Although an ideology of racial difference as something innate and hereditary was still under construction, cultural chauvinism had a long history. English people, for example, no matter how lowly, could readily avail themselves of the widespread belief that protestant English culture was far superior to that of Catholic Spain, France, and Gaelic Ireland. English commoners heard much about a "barbaric" Ireland, where the importance of clans (rather than individual households), the nomadic and wide-ranging grazing of animals, the common arrangement for partible inheritance rather than primogeniture, a syncretic religion of Catholicism and non-Christian beliefs, the possibility of divorce and remarriage, and apparent tolerance of loose sexual morals all seemed evidence of a primitive, uncivil people. Irish beliefs and relations of property and gender served, in the minds of ambitious Englishmen, as evidence of an uncivilized country that was available for the taking, even at the cost of violent expropriation and brutal repression. When the Irish fought back, stereotypes of Irish savagery gained further credence. Even lower-class English servants, who were themselves often accused of the same kind of vagrancy and degeneracy that caricatured Irish people, may have felt pride and relief at being English at least, heirs to presumed cultural superiority despite their poverty.<sup>20</sup>

English chauvinism extended beyond the bounds of Europe to include Africans as well, whose rendition in early modern English art and literature was marked by a fascination for the "exotic," mingled with a fearful disdain of "blacknesse." Writers of travel accounts (many of whom never left England) represented black women and men as strangely different in manners and appearance. African women, for example, materialized in these narratives as both mothers and monsters. Descriptions of breasts so long that women could nurse over their shoulders evoked images of animal teats, while the portrayal of painless childbirth (a common theme in accounts of Irish and American Indian women as well) made African women's reproduction, like their nursing, seem mechanical and effortless. Depicted as both sexual and savage, African women appeared perfectly suited for the productive and reproductive labor of slavery. Such images had permeated English culture by the late seventeenth century, and they informed English responses to people of different cultures they encountered in the New World.<sup>21</sup>

In the North American colonies, however, everyday interaction soon dispelled fantasies of monstrous humans. To the Indians, Africans, and Europeans working in North Carolina's corn and tobacco fields, cultural ways that were initially strange soon became less fearsome. In the first few decades of settlement, shared housing, joint labor in the fields and forests, and community efforts to establish a settlement under frontier conditions hindered rigid distinctions of living conditions or work responsibilities along racial lines. Servants of different backgrounds who shared houses, food, and tools discovered mutual interests that could lead to joint enterprises such as theft, running away, and sexual liaisons. Many servants, white and black, had come from Virginia, where the condition of African Americans was not necessarily that of enslavement: until the late seventeenth century, some free black families in Virginia managed to own property, win lawsuits against whites, and acquire slaves themselves. Interracial marriage was not explicitly prohibited in Virginia until 1691. The humanity of people from different backgrounds and of distinctive appearance was not in doubt, and living conditions in the less developed North Carolina colony fostered acts of cooperation. Not that perfect understanding or full acceptance of others' ways prevailed. Prejudice against people who dressed, ate, looked, celebrated, and mourned differently combined with the belief in one's own cultural superiority most certainly persevered. But adaptation to new living and working conditions sparked curiosity about cultural differences and customs that might prove useful in new surroundings. One such set of customs involved gender roles. Recent arrivals to North Carolina looked with great interest—some with fear, others with admiration—at the way Native American arrangements of gender seemed to make a world of difference.<sup>22</sup>

### **"Plantinge Corne without Fence":**

#### **Native American Land Use and Gender Roles**

By the time Dorothy Steel and her compatriots exchanged goods and gunfire with "sum Indians," the latter had been greatly affected by well over a century of European contact. The Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto traveled through the region in 1540, Giovanni da Verrazano sailed up the coast for the French in 1542, and Juan Pardo explored in 1566–68. The English founded their first colony on the island of Roanoke in 1585 (although it soon disintegrated). Diseases imported during these sixteenth-century European expeditions spread rapidly among Indians who had no immunity to Old World microbes, and recurring epidemics continued to

devastate native populations. The Cherokee in the mountains, for instance, numbered approximately 30,000 in 1660, but an outbreak of smallpox in 1697 cut the population in half. The Tuscarora and Algonquian tribes in the coastal region also numbered about 30,000 in 1660, but by 1685 the coastal plains Indians were reduced to about 10,000, and at the turn of the century their number was half that. In 1700 only about 4,000 Tuscarora Indians and fewer than 1,000 members of smaller tribes—some of whom had been reduced to a single village—occupied the region between Virginia and the Neuse River. Although Native Americans had vastly outnumbered the newcomers throughout the early decades of colonial settlement, by 1700 the newcomers were in the majority: roughly 9,400 Europeans, 7,200 Indians, and 400 African Americans lived east of the mountains.<sup>23</sup>

The Indians in the region that became North Carolina belonged to three linguistic groups (see figure 4). The largest of these was Iroquoian and included the Cherokee in the mountains and the Tuscarora in the coastal plain. In between, in the Piedmont, lived Siouan-speaking people, while smaller groups of Algonquian Indians, the Machapunga, Chowan, Pamlico, Meherrin, and Bear River Indians, for example, populated the coast and the regions around the Albemarle and Pamlico Sound. Even within a single linguistic family, people spoke mutually unintelligible languages. Surveyor John Lawson, who in 1701 traveled five hundred miles through South and North Carolina, found that “Altho’ their Tribes or Nations border one upon another, yet you may discern as great an Alteration in their Features and Dispositions, as you can in their Speech, which generally proves quite different from each other, though their Nations be not above 10 or 20 Miles in Distance.” While distinctive traits marked the region’s native cultures, there were also widely shared customs of lineage, land use, property, and relations of authority that contrasted notably with English customs.<sup>24</sup>

Europeans understood Indian customs from within their own cultural framework, and their observations often reveal their own assumptions about appropriate gender relations. John Lawson, for example, described the reasons for Native American matrilineage in terms that would make sense to (and possibly amuse) his English readers, saying that “the Female Issue [carried] the Heritage, for fear of Imposters; the Savages well knowing, how much Frailty possesses the *Indian* Women, betwixt the Garters and the Girdle.” Concerns about female infidelity and assumptions of women’s weak moral fiber pervaded English culture; it is hard to know whether this was a concern as well among Indian groups or simply Lawson’s gloss on the situation. Historians must treat these narratives with care, reading for the author’s audience and motives as well as for content. Nonetheless, these

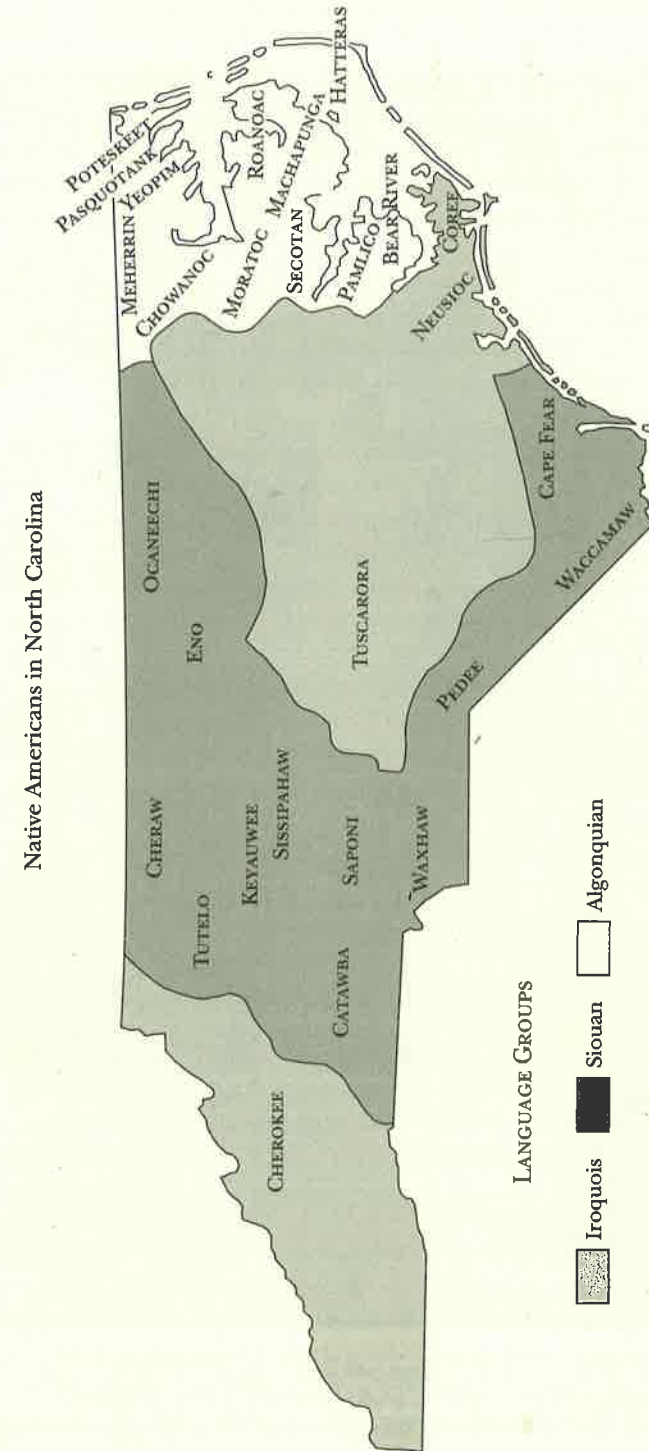


Figure 4. Indians in early North Carolina belonged to three linguistic groups: the Iroquois-speaking Cherokee and Tuscarora, the Siouan speakers in the Piedmont, and Algonquian speakers in the coastal plain.



kinship based on "blood" (and not adoption), as well as his sympathy for husbands he describes as hen-pecked, but he also shows a community of "female Relations" responsible for raising children.<sup>26</sup>

Matrilineality was not the same as matriarchy (women were generally not chiefs, for example), yet the custom of tracing families through the female line gave women important responsibilities. The clan, and the women at its core, decided how to respond to the death of a relative. The tradition of blood vengeance required that the murder of kin be avenged—and a kind of cosmic balance reestablished—by killing the perpetrator or a close relative of the perpetrator. That is why "*Indians* ground their Wars on Enmity, not on Interest, as the *Europeans* generally do." Lawson explained that "for the loss of the meanest Person in the Nation, they will go to War and lay all at Stake, . . . till the Nation they were injur'd by, be wholly destroy'd, or make them that Satisfaction which they demand." Indian women decided, too, whether war captives should be adopted to replace lost family members or tortured and killed in retribution for the loss. When women chose torture they enacted it themselves, beating the victim with canes and burning torches, occasionally reviving the victim with a douse of cold water, all the while singing and laughing, especially if the captive showed fear of death. Women were central figures in war-related rituals, and as a group they made important decisions over life, death, and membership in the clan.<sup>27</sup>

Indian women also acquired status from indigenous customs of property holding and land use. Many Indian groups such as the Cherokee, for example, discerned between different kinds of property that could be claimed by the entire tribe, a family, or an individual, respectively. While whole tribes laid claim to certain hunting grounds, women in matrilineal families controlled the fields they tended, the corn and other crops they produced, and the houses in which family members lived. Individuals owned personal possessions such as tools, jewelry, and weapons, but such goods were generally not passed on to heirs. Native Americans in North Carolina recognized claims to territory based on usufruct rights—the specific uses people made of the land—rather than exclusive ownership of land within permanently fixed boundaries. The allocation of hunting, fishing, and planting to different villages within the same territory allowed different groups to benefit from the same area without infringing on one another's activities. Claims to land remained contingent upon active use, and people who did not return annually to their fields lost their right to them, making the land available to anyone else who planted it. North Carolina Indians usually divided work responsibilities by gender, although entire Indian villages prepared and planted the fields. Men removed trees by setting fires to the trunks or stripping the bark so the trees would die, then

men and women planted the fields together. James Adair, an Irishman who spent over thirty years among the Cherokee and Chickasaw Indians, remembered that "Indian law obliged every town to work together in one body, in sowing or planting their crops; though their fields are divided by proper marks, and their harvest is gathered separately." The work did not seem disagreeable as they "fall to work with great cheerfulness" while an orator "cheers them with jests and humorous old tales, and sings several of their most agreeable wild tunes" while beating on a drum as "they proceed from field to field, till their seed is sown."<sup>28</sup>

Though men and women shared some tasks, most responsibilities divided along gender lines. Men fished with spears and elaborate fishing weirs and hunted game in the winter, leaving the women, children, and older men in the villages. In warmer months, groups of women tended the fields of corn, beans, squash, and peas, while older women, perched on scaffolds, kept vigilant watch for crows and other scavengers. Women also planted smaller vegetable gardens near their houses, gathered nuts, berries, honey, and edible roots, baked bread, cooked soups, and pressed oil from nuts. Adair admired the "great variety of dishes they make out of wild flesh, corn, beans, peas, potatoes, pompions [pumpkins], dried fruits, herbs and roots," and claimed that "They can diversify their courses, as much as the English, or perhaps the French cooks." Women also made their own household utensils: baskets from woven cane, an array of glazed pottery, bottles from hollowed gourds, and deerskin flasks. They used bone needles and sinew to fashion clothing from dressed animal hides and from fabric made with fibrous hemp stalks.<sup>29</sup>

The segregation of responsibilities dove-tailed with the belief that men and women had distinct powers that existed in a delicate balance with each other. This balance required careful tending lest a transgression of gender roles cause terrible disruptions. Blood, for example, was thought to have great powers that accrued differently to men than to women, requiring gender-specific cleansing rituals. Women, for example, were thought to have special powers related to menstruation and their ability to give birth. Their menstrual blood was considered a powerful substance that required abstinence, isolation in separate huts, and ritual purification. In turn, male warriors returning from battle were thought to ruin the cornfields if they entered them before completing rituals of seclusion and purification, and wounded men lived in isolation for four months to avoid spreading pollution. Both men and women had powers related to blood, but the effects of that power were markedly distinct. Native American men and women operated from within separate realms of responsibility, and Indian women generally had less public authority than men, but their well-defined gender roles neither demanded nor justified

a gender hierarchy of the kind Europeans believed God had imposed on the descendents of Adam and Eve.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, some Europeans viewed the multiple responsibilities of Indian women as oppressive. Commentators described the "squaw drudge" as a primitive and pathetic woman who worked in the fields while her lazy husband enjoyed hunting and fishing. The image of Indian women as quasi-slaves appeared early in colonial accounts and had a tenacious history. In 1607, the English aristocrat George Percy said that Powhatan women in Jamestown, Virginia, "doe all their drugerie. The men takes their pleasure in hunting and their warres." In 1728, William Byrd of Virginia employed a well-worn trope when he wrote that "The little Work that is done among the Indians is done by the poor Women, while the men are quite idle, or at most employ'd only in the Gentlemanly Diversions of Hunting and Fishing." In England, hunting was a leisure activity reserved for the wealthy, so English observers often misunderstood both the social value of hunting game and the respected role of women's agricultural work. Honest misunderstanding or not, the image of the "squaw drudge" served other purposes as well. Depictions of lazy Indian men exploiting female relatives emphasized Englishmen's roles as providers for European women (whose daily "drugerie" went unremarked). Englishmen could also fancy themselves welcome civilizers: European gender roles would relieve grateful Indian women of their agricultural servitude and draw them into the appropriately domestic work done by English women.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, however, native women gained power from their agricultural work. Aside from the common crib into which women annually put as much corn as they saw fit, individual households stored their own harvest. The supervision of food stores gave women influence in decisions of diplomacy—when to go to war, for example. The fact that women controlled the fruits of their labor and shared in the resources and responsibilities of the village may explain why they did not seem to feel unduly burdened by their work. One long-time visitor among the Cherokee noted that "Though custom attached the heaviest part of the labour to the women, yet they were cheerful and voluntary in performing it." In his nineteen years among the Cherokee, missionary Butrick continued, "I have seen nothing of that slavish, servile fear, on the part of women, so often spoke of."<sup>32</sup>

Even though women gained status through the production of food, the accumulation of personal wealth did not figure prominently in the indigenous social order. Indians owned personal possessions, but these were not amassed to show economic or social power, nor were they passed on to heirs. Pottery, jewelry, and weapons were buried with the owners when they died (to be used in the afterlife). At harvest time, individuals made a

contribution to the public granary "according to his ability or inclination, or none at all if he so chooses," to which "every citizen has the right of free and equal access, when his own private stores are consumed." When the next harvest began to ripen, the stores of corn were destroyed at the annual Green Corn Ceremony. Adair believed this ceremony contributed to the "spirit of hospitality" he saw among the Indians, and he admired their "community of goods": "An open generous temper is a standing virtue among them; to be narrow-hearted, especially to those in want, or to any of their own family, is accounted a great crime." Lawson believed that because Indians garnered respect based on their "natural Vertues and Gifts, and not Riches," they did not "contemplate on the Affairs of Loss and Gain; the things which daily perplex us." They "never work as the *English* do, taking care for no farther than what is absolutely necessary to support Life." Though Lawson, Bartram, and Adair may have used idealized images of community-oriented goodwill as an oblique attack on social conditions in Britain, they had aptly recognized that honor and rank among the Indians they visited did not stem from the accumulation of property. Positions of leadership were inherited, but respect had to be earned and maintained through demonstrations of skill, not a show of wealth.<sup>33</sup>

Property arrangements and sexual customs were linked in native cultures, albeit differently than in European ones. Indians in North Carolina did not transfer personal property from one generation to the next, making superfluous any effort to control a wife's sexuality for the purpose of passing wealth onto her husband's biological sons. Nor did unhappily married spouses feel compelled to remain together. One Indian explained to Adair that "marriage should beget joy and happiness, instead of pain and misery," and for a couple that "could not love each other afterwards, it was a crime to continue together, and a virtue to part, and make a happier choice." Lawson found that in Carolina, Indian women could dissolve unhappy marriages easily, since their unions "are no farther binding, than the Man and Woman agree together. Either of them has Liberty to leave the other," Lawson explained, in which case the woman remained in her house and kept the fields she cultivated, and "all the Children go along with the Mother, and none with the Father." If the wife had an extramarital affair, she "was not punish'd for Adultery, but 'tis the Man that makes the injur'd Person Satisfaction." The "Rival becomes Debtor" to the husband, paying certain goods agreed upon between the two men, after which "all Animosity is laid aside betwixt the Husband, and his Wife's Gallant." Amazed at what seemed an unnatural breach of patriarchal authority, Englishmen marveled that Indian husbands submitted to a "petticoat-government" and let themselves be cuckolded by promiscuous wives.<sup>34</sup>

But these outsiders may also have exaggerated the extramarital activity of Indian spouses, either for their sensationalist value, or because they did not recognize Indians' marriages as such. Long-term conjugal relations were celebrated with a bridewealth (a dowry) and a ritualized feast. John Lawson said he knew "several Couples" who remained "faithful to each other, admitting none to their Beds but such as they own'd for their Wife or Husband: So continuing to their Life's end." Other unions incurred fewer reciprocal obligations between partners and may have begun and ended with less formality. Because many English observers did not discern between different kinds of conjugal relations, they often described Indian nuptial rites as spurious and "marriages" as fickle. Despite such misunderstandings, intrigued Europeans rightly noted that Indian wives generally enjoyed more social and sexual leverage than did European women. To a greater extent, native women retained control over their agricultural produce, their children, and their sexuality. Men held most positions of power, but women's responsibilities gave them publicly acknowledged influence over community decisions.<sup>35</sup>

Though colonists' ideas about property differed from those of the Indians they encountered, the English themselves had no consensus regarding appropriate land use. Precisely because property rights were contested in England, Native American arrangements appealed to some migrants and seemed foolish to others. Since the sixteenth century, the landed elite had been reasserting their rights to property for which they held titles but which generations of tenant families had farmed or used as commons for grazing animals. Eager to evict tenants and enclose the land with fences to graze wool-bearing sheep for the expanding textile industry, titleholders insisted that property ownership was a private, permanent affair, that ownership of land was absolute and remained unaffected by its uses, and that property could be legally transferred to another owner only through inheritance or sale. The enclosure movement fueled bitter contention. A steep rise in the population exacerbated problems of homelessness and unemployment, and beggars roamed the countryside in search of subsistence. Harvest failures compounded the crisis, leading to a rise in food prices while high unemployment held wages low. During the English Revolution, radical thinkers like the Diggers argued that private property was unethical and based on violence, and they promoted a communal tilling of the land. This tradition of radicalism persisted into the eighteenth century, and even less radical villagers tenaciously defended the custom of commonly held grazing lands and communal rights to forest timber. Upon arriving in America, some settlers may well have appreciated Native American customs of shared land use. Others, however, believing it immoral to hold land and

not till it, would have found spurious the Indians' claims to hunting territory. They may have seen "lazy" Indian men as comparable to aristocratic English landowners who retained uncultivated fields and forests for their own pleasure.<sup>36</sup>

Whether sympathetic to Indian uses of land or not, most English immigrants craved an independence they understood to be literally grounded in freeholdings. Land-hungry and enticed by reports that acreage could be had on "easy terms" from the Indians, English migrants to North Carolina acquired land and began the process of fencing and planting. As early as 1648, aspiring landowners from Virginia bought land from North Carolina Indians, and by the 1660s such transactions had become general practice. The Lords Proprietors deplored that settlers in the Albemarle region independently "bought great tracts of land from the Indians, which if they shall injoye will weaken the plantation." Accordingly, the "Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina," penned in 1669 by John Locke, stipulated that "no person whatever, shall hold or claim any land in Carolina, by purchase or gift, or otherwise, from the natives or any other whatsoever; but merely from and under the Lords Proprietors, upon pain of forfeiture of all his estate, moveable or immoveable, and perpetual banishment." Despite these proprietary efforts to control land deals in the colony, settlers continued to make their own arrangements with Indian neighbors.<sup>37</sup>

Culturally distinct notions of property soon clashed. Native Americans willing to share territory or barter with Europeans for certain uses of the land could not readily comprehend the idea of selling land outright. The idea of "trespassing" on the newcomers' now "privately" owned property remained alien. Tensions rose as English settlement patterns impinged on ancient hunting grounds and when settlers' livestock trampled unfenced Indian gardens and cornfields. In the colony's first decades, conflict mingled with gestures of reconciliation. Skirmishes broke out repeatedly (Indians attacked the Albemarle settlement in late September 1666, for example), while at other times Anglo-Indian relations took a friendly turn, as in 1670, when the English found that "all our provisions was gone soe wee were fiorst to live upon the indeans who are very kinde to us." Overall, however, Indians found themselves increasingly hemmed in by settlers whose land claims were defended by the courts.<sup>38</sup>

The fate of one Algonquian town shows the radical changes that occurred in a short amount of time. Chowanoc, located on the west side of the Chowan River, had been inhabited for more than a thousand years, and in the 1580s was home to seven hundred warriors and their kin, some 2,500 in all. In November 1694, the Chowan Indians complained to the General Court that "they are much Injured by the English seating soe near them."

The magistrates initially ordered that "noe more [land] Entryrs or settlement of land be made higher than the plantations which are already seated above the Old towne Creeke," but they could hardly prevent settlers' continuing encroachments on Indian territory. A year later, an Indian named John King reported in court that Englishmen John Parish and William Godfrey "offered some abuse to him and other Indians" and "denyed their liberty of Hunting." This time the court's response was stingy: the Indians had "liberty to hunt on all wasteland that is not taken up and liberty to pass through the lands that are seated in their goeing to and from the said Wast land," but only under the stipulation that they conduct themselves "sivilly and doeing noe Injury." Native Americans soon found that when they continued to hunt or plant in familiar terrain they stood accused of breaking treaties and ignoring land sales. By 1709, Chowanoc had been reduced to fifteen fighting men and their families. After the Tuscarora War ended in 1713, the Chowan were confined to a reservation of six square miles in Bertie County called Indian Woods. Many Chowan Indians may have entered the colonial settlements as laborers, joined larger tribes, or fled their homes altogether, but by 1752, the ancient town consisted of only a few families with hardly any land at all.<sup>39</sup>

The very seasonal mobility of Indians added to the colonial perception that Indian communities were unstable and without legitimate claim to the land. There were Indian villages, of course, but during winter hunts men left them for months at a time, adding to the perception of Indians as roaming and unsettled people. When the Meherrin Indians complained to the Virginia Council in 1707 about the "encroachments" made on them by North Carolina colonists, North Carolina assemblymen Edward Moseley, William Glover, Francis Foster, and Samuel Swann composed their own counter-charge: "the stragling and vagrant Indians of that Nation" had been "plantinge Corne without fence so that no English can seate near them without danger of trespassing [with] their Cattle and Horses," which the Meherrin Indians "Revenge without measure." The real question at hand, the writers continued, was "whether near a hundred familys of her Majesty's subjects of Carolina should be diseased [deceased] of their freehold to lett a few vagrant and Insolent Indians rove where they please." The depiction of Indians as vagrants ignored the obvious presence of Indian fields and gardens and overlooked the agricultural labor done by women (perhaps precisely because as "women's work" it seemed less legitimate to colonial observers). From this perspective, Indians had no claim to the land because they did not properly use it, whereas Englishmen who provided for their families had a right to farm the land. Having rhetorically erased Native American agriculture from the landscape (with language that recalled the

unemployed gangs of England), these assemblymen proposed a solution in the form of surveillance: "we have always thought it necessary that the Indians should live together in towns where all their young men may be under the immediate inspection of their own Governors to prevent their private mischiefs that may be more easily done and concealed in single and separate familys."<sup>40</sup>

English objections to indigenous patterns of land use thus merged with their reservations about Native American family structures. Colonial leaders found Indian families insufficient as a means of controlling the behavior of young men because families played a very different role in Native American society than they did among the English. In English society, male heads of household were charged with maintaining order, preferably leading by their own example, but failing that, by inflicting corporal punishment on wayward family members and servants. In Native American society, by contrast, the entire village policed social boundaries by ridiculing or shunning those who behaved in unacceptable ways. Indians shamed transgressors with a "keen irony and satyr, that kills whom it praises," and they deployed "an ironic way of jesting. . . with severe sarcasms which wound deeply." Relatives and neighbors, not household patriarchs, used verbal pressure to enforce good behavior within the villages. Because the larger community exerted social control, individual marriages could form and dissolve without disrupting the social order.<sup>41</sup>

In both colonial and native societies in North Carolina, albeit in very different ways, property arrangements and familial relations provided interconnected structures of social organization. Native women's social authority resided substantially in their responsibility for agricultural work and in their control over its produce. Matrilineal social organization and the absence of property inheritance allowed Indian women considerable sexual self-determination. Among the English, by contrast, married women could not own property themselves, and rules about female chastity sought to ensure the transference of real property to their husband's male heirs. English men tilled the land and controlled its resources, and although women's work was crucial to the domestic economy, a wife's productivity did not lead to an expansion of her authority vis-à-vis her spouse. Cultural differences regarding gender roles mattered to colonial authorities precisely because of the links between property-holding, inheritance, lineage, marriage, sexual behavior, and relations of authority. Some feared an alternative culture might attract too many disaffected colonists. A few traders in the backcountry did no harm, even when they remained there for decades and lived in Indian villages with native spouses and children. Too many such cultural converts, however, undermined claims about the cultural superiority of the English. Uncertain

about their own status, furthermore, would-be leaders had an exaggerated sense of the impact of alternative systems of property, gender, and power on colonial society. After all, some, but certainly not the majority of colonists, viewed social relations in Tuscarora, Waxhaw, or Cherokee villages as admirable and worthy of emulation. Still, the paranoia was real enough, and it put misconduct like Dorothy Steel's in a new light. Her willingness to take property from her husband, engage in sex with other men, and trade freely with Indians and Africans gained new meaning in the light of Indian ways. To government officials and court magistrates, her behavior seemed more than simply the acts of a delinquent English housewife; it portended just the kind of cultural conversion they feared. Whose relations of gender and property would ultimately prevail seemed an open question in the late seventeenth century. In the meantime, colonial presumptions about the natural order of patriarchal households faced another challenge. This one came from the radical Protestantism of the Society of Friends.<sup>42</sup>

### Inner Light and Sexless Souls: The Society of Friends

Women in the Society of Friends had roles and responsibilities greatly at odds with English gender norms. Quakers' belief that women and men could in equal measure be infused with divine "Inner Light" meant that women who experienced godly inspiration spoke with as much religious authority as their male peers. Women Quakers, like men, could become "Public Friends," respected public speakers on religious matters who received certificates to travel and preach to mixed groups of men and women. In a radical departure from the teachings of Apostle Paul that women must remain silent in church and submissive to their husbands, women preachers left their husbands and domestic duties behind to serve the larger cause of bringing unconverted women and men "into the Light." In an effort to encourage Friends and convert non-Quakers, women preachers bore public testimony to the workings of God, gave sermons explicating the Scriptures, and published their writings. Furthermore, Quaker women, like men, met in gender-segregated meetings where they discussed community affairs and sent groups to investigate Friends accused of misconduct and couples planning to marry. Quaker women thus had a formalized and regular means of making decisions that shaped their community. They also had an identity apart from their familial responsibilities. In the first decades of settlement on the Albemarle Sound, the gender norms of the growing minority of Quakers in the colony represented to Anglican men a world turned upside down and a hindrance to the establishment of proper social relations and respect for their authority.<sup>43</sup>

The Society of Friends, founded by George Fox in England in 1648, proclaimed a theology of universal love that was available to all human beings, regardless of skin color, sex, or status. Anyone willing to strip away the superficial layers of egotism could be flooded by the "inner light" that was the godliness in every human being. Imbued with a feeling of divine love, Friends called out their inspirations, speaking as vessels of the Lord; for the way they shook with the power of their visions, critics derisively labeled them "Quakers." The Society of Friends dismissed the notion of a covenant of works—the idea that one could influence one's salvation with good behavior. They also discarded outward signs of deference and social conventions of authority. In the 1650s Fox rejected all formal structures of organized religion, including baptism and marriage ceremonies performed by a minister, as well as the paying of tithes. He replaced the pagan language of the calendar with numerical indications for days and months. Quakers refused to swear oaths of any kind, including oaths of allegiance to the crown. They ceased doffing their hats or bowing to social superiors and began addressing everyone with the informal "thee" and "thou" rather than the more formal "you." In their desire to shed vanity and pride, Quakers dressed in simple, modest clothing. As an antiformalist sect that believed that "once in the light, men and women were out of the law," Quakers soon became subject to severe persecution in England.<sup>44</sup>

This persecution followed Quakers to America. It gained a legislative toe-hold in the southern colonies when the Governor's Council in Maryland, briefly under Puritan control, arrested itinerant preachers and in 1658 ordered that all Quakers cease their religious practices or "depart the Province on paine due to rebels and traitors." In 1660, lawmakers in Virginia passed "An Act for Supressing the Quakers," those "unreasonable and Turbulent sort of people" who teach "lies, miracles, false visions, prophecies and doctrines" in an effort to "destroy religion, lawes, communities and all bonds of civil societie." The act ordered the arrest and deportation of any Quaker to arrive in the colony and imposed a fine of a hundred pounds of tobacco on anyone who owned Quaker literature or allowed meetings in or near their home. Two laws passed in 1662 ordered a fine of two hundred pounds of tobacco for anyone caught attending a Quaker meeting, a penalty of twenty pounds in cash for every month of missed attendance at an Anglican church service, and a fine of two hundred pounds of tobacco for every child not baptized (with no limit placed on the number of times a parent could be fined). The next year the Virginia government stipulated that when five or more non-Anglican adults—Quakers or "any other separatists whatsoever"—gathered together for a religious meeting, each had to pay two hundred pounds of tobacco for the first offense, five hundred pounds for the second,

and suffer deportation for the third. Shipmasters who transported Quakers to the colony had to pay five thousand pounds of tobacco and ship them out again on the same vessel; anyone who offered shelter to Quakers would be fined the same amount, and local officials who failed to enforce the law could forfeit two thousand pounds in the loose-leaf currency. Although these laws were enforced only intermittently, the threat of such penalties hung over the heads of all dissenters, and occasional punishments served as dire warnings. When Quakers Mary Tomkins and Alice Ambrose entered Virginia a second time in 1663, they each suffered thirty-two lashes at the pillory and were expelled without their personal belongings. Virginia lawmakers did their utmost to prevent the spread of "this Pestilent sect."<sup>45</sup>

North Carolina differed from Virginia and Maryland in that it offered liberal provisions for religious dissenters. Seeking to encourage settlement, the Proprietors expressly granted "freedom and liberty of conscience in all religious or spiritual things." Certain restrictions remained, however. The "Fundamental Constitutions" of the colony, written by John Locke, pronounced atheists officially unacceptable. No one was allowed to live in or own land in Carolina "who doth not acknowledge a God, and that God is publicly and solemnly to be worshipped." Religious diversity was permitted only as long as it did not lead to political dissent: no one was to "speak any thing in their religious assembly irreverently or seditiously of the government or governors, or of state matters." Moreover, the Church of England, "which being the only true and orthodox, and the national religion of all the king's dominions, and so also of Carolina," was the only church that received public maintenance. Nonetheless, the constitutions were generous in their allowance that "any seven or more persons agreeing in any religion, shall constitute a church or profession, to which they shall give some name, to distinguish it from others." Despite its restrictions, therefore, North Carolina (like Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) was much more tolerant than other colonies in which Quakers suffered imprisonment, fines, banishment, or even hanging for their beliefs.<sup>46</sup>

Hannah Phelps appreciated the relative religious freedom available in Albemarle County. She had migrated first from England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony where she and her husband hosted the first recorded Quaker meeting in Salem in June 1658. That year, Quakers were banned from the colony on pain of death. Despite the danger, Hannah continued to hold meetings at her house and was fined every year from 1658 to 1663 for not attending the Salem church. When she traveled to Boston in autumn 1659 to visit two Quakers from England who had been sentenced to death, she and five other Friends were summarily arrested and imprisoned. Two weeks after the execution of the condemned Friends, Hannah

and her cohorts were admonished, whipped, and sent home, and the Salem Court seized her house and lands in payment of the fines levied against her and her husband. In July 1664, Hannah and Henry Phelps sought refuge along the Albemarle Sound. As early as May 1672, the Quaker minister William Edmundson visited these Carolina Friends. The renowned Irish missionary found the watery landscape south of the Virginia border "all wilderness" with "no English inhabitants or pathways, but some marked trees to guide people." When he finally arrived at the Phelps's house on Perquimans River, Edmundson dried his sopping clothes and held the first meeting of the Society of Friends (and the first recorded religious service) in the Albemarle settlement, gratified that despite his weariness several people "were tendered and received the testimony." Spurred by a visit from George Fox later that year, the fledgling Society continued to grow. When Edmundson returned to the colony in 1676, he found the people generally "tender and loving" with "no room" for "priests" (paid ministers) since "Friends were finely settled."<sup>47</sup>

By 1700 there were three thriving monthly meetings in the Albemarle area, two in Perquimans (held at the houses of Francis Tomes and Jonathan Phelps) and one in Pasquotank. Monthly meetings also convened at the Nicholson, Bundy, Scott, and White households until, by the first decade of the eighteenth century, Friends had built separate meetinghouses (see figure 6). Prominent Albemarle Quakers gradually acquired considerable political influence. Francis Tomes, for example, was a member of the Albemarle Council, deputy collector of customs, and a justice of the peace. The North Carolina Yearly Meeting first met in his home in 1698, and he provided land for three of the meetinghouses. Joseph Scott was a member of the General Assembly, and Gabriel Newby served in the House of Commons. The political influence of Albemarle's most established group of religious dissenters peaked when Proprietor John Archdale, himself a convert of Fox's, became the governor of Carolina in 1694. The following year, for example, the North Carolina assembly passed an act exempting Quakers, who were avowed pacifists, from military service.<sup>48</sup>

Archdale's Anglican successor, Governor Henderson Walker, sought to turn the tide, requesting in 1703 that the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) send a minister, since "we have been settled near this fifty years in this place, and I may justly say most part of twenty-one years, on my own knowledge, without priest or altar." Reverend John Blair arrived the following year but lasted only six months before he returned to England, impoverished and discouraged. By his account, "the Quakers . . . are the greatest number in the Assembly, and are unanimous, and stand truly to one another in whatsoever be their interests." The next

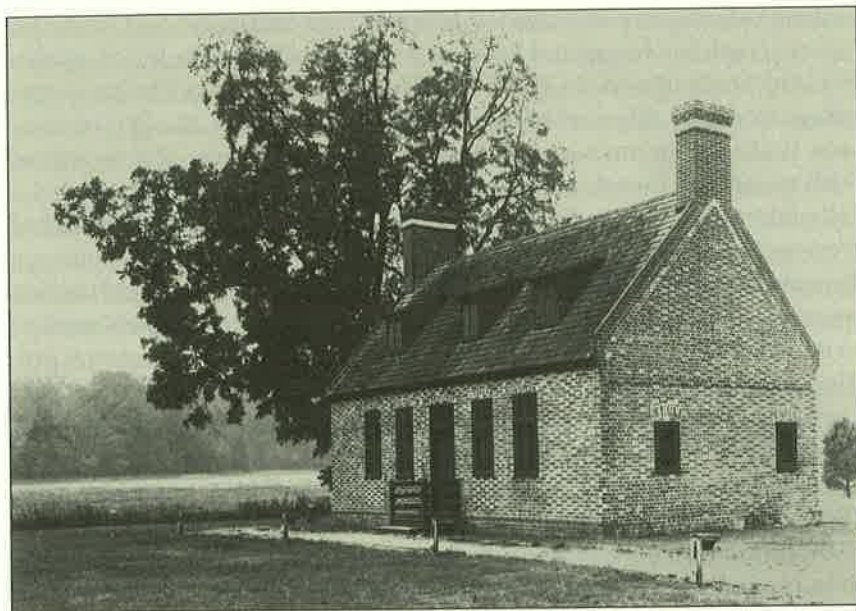


Figure 6. *The Newbold-White House in Perquimans County, built around 1730, was home to many prominent Quakers and may have been used as a meetinghouse. Courtesy of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.*

two SPG missionaries, James Adams and William Gordon, arrived in 1708 and found the Quakers numerous and troublesome. Reverend Adams estimated that Pasquotank, the most densely settled county, had a colonial population of 1,332 that included 900 Anglicans (and a few Presbyterians), 210 Quakers, 11 settlers who professed no religion, and 211 “negroes, some few of which are instructed in the principles of the Christian religion.” Reverend Gordon reported that “There are few or no dissenters in this government but Quakers,” and these he found “very numerous, extremely ignorant, insufferably proud and ambitious, and consequently ungovernable.” Quakers “were made councillors and grew powerful,” for the governor’s council appointed magistrates to the courts. Furthermore, Friends “were very diligent at the election of members of Assembly.” James Adams related that “though not yet the seventh part of the inhabitants, . . . [Quakers] have in a manner the sole management of the country in their hands.” Venerable statesmen, Adams charged, had been turned out of the assembly “for no other reason but because they are members of the Church of England.” Even worse, “shoemakers and other mechanics” had replaced

them in the assembly, “merely because they are Quaker preachers and notorious blasphemers of the Church.”<sup>49</sup>

Friends irritated their non-Quaker neighbors in a number of ways. One significant conflict centered on Quakers’ pacifist refusal to take part in wars against Native Americans (or to let their servants join the militia), despite the decree that “all inhabitants and freemen of Carolina” between the ages of seventeen and sixty “shall be bound to bear arms, and serve as soldiers whenever the grand council shall find it necessary.” Alexander Spotswood, lieutenant governor of Virginia, complained to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina that the “Masque of Quakerism” enabled the “lazy or Cowardly” to use “the pretence of Conscience” to avoid military duty. Nor would Quakers contribute their labor or that of their servants or slaves to the construction of forts, and tensions rose further when Friends refused to pay the five pound fine for lack of compliance with the law. Their decision may have been principled, but Quakers who attended muster faced reprimand and possible disownment from the monthly meeting. Defiance of “worldly” authority came from compliance with the Society’s rules. Yet the penalties for being a pacifist could be stiff: in 1680, nine Quakers from Perquimans County (including Hannah Phelps’s son, Jonathan) spent six months in jail for their refusal to attend military exercises, and their property was confiscated in lieu of fines. For settlers afraid of Indian attacks, Quakers’ refusal to fight represented a profoundly disturbing breach of loyalty to the colonial enterprise.<sup>50</sup>

Quakers not only practiced pacifism in ways that infuriated their white neighbors, they also actively cultivated positive relations with those whom others feared and despised. Henry White, one of the earliest English settlers to Pasquotank, was a Quaker whose “Christian conduct and loving behavior towards the Indians” earned him “great esteem and respect from them.” Nathan Newby, a Quaker blacksmith, mended Indians’ guns while discussing with them the “Sentiments they have about Heaven and heavenly Things.” White, Newby, and others held fast to the idea that all people could experience divine inner light. That Quakers would rather converse with Indians than fight them had already raised the ire of some. That Newby willingly mended Indian guns when he would not take up arms against their owners only added to the existing resentment against Friends. Male Quakers seemed to abrogate their responsibilities as colonial men when they refused to defend their families as non-Quakers believed effective heads of households must.<sup>51</sup>

In other ways, however, Quakers upheld familiar English norms. In contrast to the Diggers and other radicals of the English Revolution, Quakers did not advocate a redistribution of property, and many acquired consider-

able holdings in the colonies. Nor did they shy away from acquiring human chattel. By the end of the eighteenth century there was a booming commerce in Indian captives sold as slaves to colonial buyers, and North Carolina Quakers took advantage of the trade to acquire cheap labor. In April 1690, for example, the Perquimans County court forced Alexander, an Indian of unnoted origin, to sign an indenture to wealthy Quaker widow Mary Scott for the unusually long term of eighty years. Alexander had been "imported" into the colony and then sold to Mary's husband, Joseph Scott, who had since died. Aware that justices sometimes freed servants whose masters could not produce the indenture in court, Alexander had "secretly stole away & burnt" the document before running away. Unfortunately for him, however, the court ordered that the recaptured Indian sign a newly drawn indenture that specified he would serve Scott "faithfully and truly in all manner [of] employment, & labour" and "demeane [him] self [earnestly] and civilly." Obviously astute about using the legal system to his advantage, Alexander finally won his freedom in October 1705 when he sued Mary Scott's daughter, Juliana Laker, for detaining him after the expiration of his twelve-year indenture from 1692 (which had apparently replaced the 1690 indenture that called for eighty years of service).<sup>52</sup>

Quakers held African slaves as well. In 1671, George Fox urged Friends to educate their unfree laborers and limit their terms of service, and five years later William Edmundson published a condemnation of the flourishing slave trade in Newport, Rhode Island. Nonetheless, many prominent Quakers continued to hold human chattel, including some of the oldest and most prestigious Quaker families in North Carolina. Henry White owned two men when he died in 1706, and his son Robert divided two women, three boys, and a girl among his children in 1732. Jeremiah Symons owned eight slaves in 1713, while Francis Tones in 1729 bequeathed to his heirs four male and three female slaves, including a "Negro wench" named Jenney "and all her futer Incees." Hannah Phelps's son Jonathan divided eight Negroes among his wife and children in 1732, Gabriel and Mary Newby owned two slaves in 1733, and Solomon Pool divided up five slaves in 1739.<sup>53</sup>

Antislavery sentiment spread only slowly among southern Friends. English Quaker abolitionists Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay vehemently denounced slavery in the first decades of the eighteenth century, and American-born John Woolman took up the torch after 1754, but the antislavery movement took only gradual hold in the southern colonies. In 1722, the Virginia Yearly Meeting expressed concern about "the importation of slaves or the purchasing them for sale," but it did not prohibit the ownership of slaves. The North Carolina Yearly Meeting recommended in 1740 that

slaveholders use their chattel "as fellow-creatures" and not "make too rigorous an exaction of labor from them," and in 1758 asked its members: "Are all that have Negroes careful to use them well and encourage them to come to meetings as much as they possibly can?" But only in 1776 did the Society of Friends officially prohibit slaveholding among their members and threaten to disown Quakers who continued to keep slaves. In terms of human and landed property, then, most Quakers were not radical. Indeed, from the point of view of the Indian Alexander and other servants and slaves, Quakers may have been much like other masters.<sup>54</sup>

Quakers departed most radically from inherited English norms with their perception of gender as irrelevant to spiritual authority. Quakers were the first religious sect in seventeenth-century England to believe that speaking as a messenger for God was not a male privilege. In a break from Pauline tradition, George Fox denounced the presumed spiritual prerogatives of the male sex by asking rhetorically: "may not the spirit of Christ speak in the Female as well as in the Male?" Quakers believed they preached as disembodied spirits. As William Penn put it in 1693, "Sexes made no Difference; since in Souls there is none." The theological tenet of spiritual equality did not have women's liberation as its goal, but in its effects it translated into an expansion of opportunities for women Friends. Quaker women could preach in public, travel as missionaries alone or with female or male companions, publish religious treatises, and organize and run women's meetings. When critics objected to independently traveling women preachers, Fox countered in 1676 with the reminder that "Moses and Aaron, and the seventy elders, did not say to those assemblies of the women, we can do our work ourselves, and you are more fit to be at home to wash the dishes." Rather, "they did encourage them in the work and servicé of the Lord."<sup>55</sup>

In the last decades of the seventeenth century, the Society of Friends evolved into a highly structured institution with clear disciplinary guidelines and a rigid system of local, monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings. Quaker women on both sides of the Atlantic conducted monthly meetings (parallel to the monthly men's meeting usually held in the same house) and kept their own records. The women's meetings heard women's requests to travel to other meeting houses, they wrote certificates of permission and recommendation, they organized committees to investigate whether couples were "clear" to marry, and they decided on punishments in disciplinary cases involving women. The women's meeting presented their findings to the men's meeting, which usually endorsed the women's decision. Sometimes a smaller committee of men and women investigated cases of untoward behavior such as bad language, excessive drinking, or "superfluity

of aperiell," namely "foulds in their coats or any other unnecessary fashions . . . in their dreses." Women's haughty speech or flirtatious demeanor could catch the eye of wary matrons, who subjected the suspect to detailed interrogations. In Pasquotank County, for example, Mary Overman stood accused of "behaving her Self Vane & Loos in her Conversation." Worse, Ann Bundy was engaged to a non-Quaker and "keeps him in her house Contrary to the advise of friends." If the accused confessed and publicly apologized, all was well. If an apology was not forthcoming, the women's and men's meeting conferred over whether the wayward Friend should be disowned. Disowned Quakers could still attend worship, but they could no longer participate in the monthly business meetings where Friends made decisions that affected the whole community. Disowned Quakers achieved readmission only by reading aloud a paper of self-condemnation that persuasively denounced and lamented their trespass against the Friends' moral code. In this tightly structured group, discipline of members was communally enforced. Women's meetings offered both censorship of nonconforming women and a great deal of power to those who complied with the community's moral standards. Within the bounds of conservative sexual mores, women enjoyed authority and influence among Friends. The organization of women as active participants in the community's self-governance marked a departure from other Christian denominations. The Society of Friends was the only Protestant sect in which women met *as women* with a formal collective authority.<sup>56</sup>

Women, like men, played an important role in regulating Quaker marriages. Friends carefully monitored the pacing of courtship and marriage, and they especially tried to prevent marriage "out of Society," which meant either marriage to a non-Quaker or marriage to a Friend in a civil or church ceremony (by which means Quakers ducked court-ordered fines for fornication). Friends believed that marriages to non-Quakers were based on worldly interests and weakened the religious commitment within the community. Pairs of influential (or "weighty") Friends visited those steering toward such a union and tried to persuade them otherwise. When Quaker women insisted on marrying outside of society, the women's meeting often recommended that they be disowned and then sought the men's endorsement of their decision as a final step.<sup>57</sup>

Quaker marriage ideals and practices differed markedly from English norms. Because Quaker spouses were equally subordinate to God, the bride and groom spoke identical nuptial vows that omitted any reference to wives obeying their husbands. Complete submission to God's will modified patriarchal assumptions of a husband's control over his wife, and women ministers were encouraged to pursue their godly calling even at the expense

of their domestic duties and their husband's needs. The ideal of spouses as loving and spiritual equals translated into real advantages for women Friends. Despite their strict discipline, Friends remained aware of changes of affection and the need to be flexible in matters of the heart. When Esther Belman and John Turner failed to announce their wedding banns a second time, committees from the men's and women's meetings conducted investigations into the pair and found that they had changed their minds and "Desired that they might be Clear from each other." The meeting allowed the break-up, but "Desired them to be Carefull not to do the Like any more." Friends aspired to loving unions, and if a marriage caused discord, the unhappy spouses could separate (although they could not remarry as long as the spouse still lived). The estranged husband provided an allowance for the woman and, should she move away, a reasonable dowry. Such arrangements differed starkly from the scenarios faced by other unhappy English wives. While both spouses could sue for separation (which was easier to obtain than divorce), men often simply deserted their families. Women who sued for separation usually won their cases only on the grounds of cruelty, and even then they received no financial support. Among Quakers, by contrast, if the relationship soured, disaffection constituted cause enough for untying marriage bonds.<sup>58</sup>

The acceptance of women as authoritative public speakers on matters of religion shaped the Quaker response to outspoken women in general. When Quaker women argued with men, they were chastised for being "unloving" Friends, but not for being unruly women. In 1710, Ann Symons admitted that she "Did Enter into my Cousins Peter Symons house & did Strike him & when I was asked about it by my friends in the Meeting I made Slight of them and gave them Ill Language Not becomeing that holy profession: As Askeing them what Satisfaction they wanted for Strikeing my Lord Mayr." Ann apologized for behavior that was unbecoming of one who should be an example of love and peace. She did not, however, indicate that her behavior was especially unseemly because of her sex. That same year, Mary Tomes hurled "rash words and unseaviery Expressions" at Gabriel Newby. When she apologized later for her "Proud and unstable minde which I doe Condemn as being the fruits of unrighteousness," the women's meeting agreed that she "hath binn to forward in Charging Gabriel with things," but they also advised Newby to be more "Carefull and to not give Agrevation . . . but to Live in younity." The women's meeting reprimanded Tomes for being unloving, but no one described her "rash words" as especially inappropriate because she was a woman. Mary Tomes was the topic of discussion again in 1714 when a Mr. Bundy complained that she was not fit "to preach the gossell" and had given him "bad languig." Tomes told the

meeting that Bundy "caled her an oald wicked woman" and said "shee need not be in haist to go to meeting." The meeting sided with Tomes but took the opportunity to admonish her gently to "not take much time on preaching when their is prity large meetings" because people were "not efected theirwith but Rather burthened." The women's meeting thereby reaffirmed Tomes's status as a legitimate (if gregarious) preacher.<sup>59</sup>

To disapproving observers, querulous Quaker women epitomized the dangers of giving women formalized authority. The "uncivil Carriage toward the tithe gatherer" that Elisabeth Tomes flaunted in 1725 exemplified to critics how women's authority within a religious setting could devolve into unruly social behavior. Not that Quaker women were more outspoken than their Anglican counterparts. The level of audacity among different groups of women is impossible to measure, and self-confident women of different backgrounds and persuasions had their day in court. But to Anglican men concerned with their own authority, an opinionated female Friend proved what they feared, namely that religious dissenters promoted social disorder, and that this might first become visible in unorthodox gender relations. Quaker women could be *expected* to insult government officials; that was the logical outcome, critics thought, of letting women preach. And while scolds were offensive, women ministers were blasphemous. Quaker women who abandoned their wifely duties to travel about and speak at different Quaker meetings represented a most appalling inversion of the biblical injunction that women remain submissive to their husbands and silent in matters of scriptural exegesis. From the Anglican perspective, Quaker meetings, female preachers, and marriages that seemed dangerously loose undermined the divinely ordained and socially required patriarchal family. Although Quakers were part of the colonial Christian culture, they overtly defied the government's mandate for militia duty and they opposed the state-supported Anglican Church. In their dress, behavior, language, ideology, and social organization, Quakers stood out as non-conformists. To non-Quakers concerned with the social disorder and lack of deference that marked North Carolina, the Society of Friends was suspect: it seemed to promote behavior that deviated from patriarchal norms and endangered the colony's welfare.<sup>60</sup>

Decades of political tension between Anglicans and Quakers came to a head over the contested deputy governorship of Thomas Cary. Nominated in 1705, Cary began his term in office by strictly enforcing anti-Quaker laws that required an oath of allegiance to serve in the Albemarle assembly. He thereby eliminated Quaker assemblymen (who predictably refused to swear oaths) and replaced them with Anglicans. The dissenters complained to the Proprietors and effected Cary's removal from office, but when Edward

Hyde arrived from England in August 1710 to serve as deputy governor in Cary's place, he also set out to exclude dissenters from the assembly. The Quakers, believing that Cary had been won over to their side, rallied behind him and proclaimed Hyde's commission invalid. Tensions escalated into a rebellion, and supporters on both sides (including some Quakers) took up arms. Only when the Virginia militia arrived to quell the uprising in Hyde's favor did the battles end. In the aftermath of what became known as Cary's Rebellion, the Quaker faction lost power in the assembly. A statute in 1715 allowed "no Quaker or reputed Quaker" to "give evidence in any criminal causes, or to serve on any Jury, or bear any office or place of profit or trust in the government." The Society of Friends had been politically disenfranchised. In the decades after Cary's Rebellion, some Quaker families from Albemarle joined the growing migration of Friends from other colonies into the North Carolina Piedmont and the coastal counties south of Albemarle Sound. Friends also persevered in the older northeastern counties, where Anglican ministers continued to complain about the lack of local support for their endeavors. Nonetheless, the political heyday of Quakers in colonial North Carolina had ended.<sup>61</sup>

Not over, however, were the concerns of Anglican councilmen, magistrates, and ministers that the colony was still a "troublesome and unsettled country," a "barbarous and disorderly place." Half a century after English settlers began to settle in North Carolina, the social order was still in disarray, and disregard for prescribed gender roles contributed to the impression of disorder. In 1711, Reverend Urmston bitterly described the settlement as "a nest of the most notorious profligates upon earth . . . Women forsake their husbands come in here and live with other men." Should the husband follow his wayward spouse to North Carolina, "then a price is given to the husband and madam stays with her Gallant," the lovers spread a rumor that the husband is dead, "become Man and Wife make a figure and pass for people of worth and reputation [and] arrive to be of the first Rank and Dignity." In Urmston's bilious recrimination, gender relations in North Carolina were an inversion of their proper form. The sexually profligate women in his description (real or imagined) embodied the general disorder the discouraged minister saw all around him: settlers did not give enough respect to men of the cloth, they were delinquent in paying his salary, and pridefully contentious in everything else. North Carolina countenanced immorality to the highest degree, Urmston maintained, and one could see it in the fact that adulterous women attained social respectability. For Urmston, the prevalence and acceptance of illicit sex served as a measure of the colony's low moral standing and lack of civility. Unruly and licentious women personified the colony's general social disorder.<sup>62</sup>

Precisely because the image of docile women held such a prominent place in English theories of orderly rule, irreverent women posed a problem for men hoping to establish their authority in an unsettled government. In that context, female defiance, be it adultery and theft, as in Dorothy Steel's case, or public preaching and arrogance toward the tax collector on the part of Quaker women, became part of the struggle for authority. North Carolina's leading men found that to establish a social order, they had to enforce patriarchal gender roles as well. In later years, women's misconduct would seem less threatening to the maturing colony. In the early decades, however, as the colonial outpost grew only slowly amidst tempestuous contests for political control, the social and political conditions in the settlement gave outspoken women particular political resonance. The presence of competing gender norms among Indians and Quakers made the imposition of patriarchal English norms seem all the more imperative. For that reason, the sexual activity of Native American women became a particular focal point for Englishmen concerned with unruly women. Interestingly, not all colonial observers objected to what they saw.



## Cross-Cultural Sex in Native North Carolina

On December 28, 1700, surveyor John Lawson departed Charlestown with a small group of men and began a reconnaissance trip that would take him some five hundred miles through the interior of South and North Carolina. Three weeks later, the six Englishmen and their Native American guide stopped at a "pretty big" Waxhaw town in the Carolina Piedmont. The men were "all out, hunting in the Woods, and none but the Women at home." One of Lawson's party, desiring "an Indian Lass, for his Bed-Fellow that Night, spoke to our Guide, who soon got a Couple, reserving one for himself." Though the "pretty young girl" and the eager Englishman "could not understand one Word of what each other spoke," the woman, "being no Novice at her Game," demanded trade goods in exchange for sex. The man "shew'd her all the Treasure he was possess'd of, as Beads, Red Cadis [woven cloth], &c. which she lik'd very well." The "Match was confirm'd by both Parties, with the Approbation of as many *Indian Women*, as came to the House," and the couple "went to Bed together before us all, and with as little Blushing, as if they had been Man and Wife for 7 Years." In the morning, however, Lawson awoke to find the man pacing the floor in a "deep Melancholy." The woman had "pick'd his Pocket of the Beads, Cadis, and whatever else should have gratified the Indians for the Victuals we receiv'd of them," and she also took the shoes he had made the Night before "of a drest Buck-Skin." With "much ado," Lawson's men "muster'd up another Pair of Shooes, or *Moggisons*" while the women "laugh'd their