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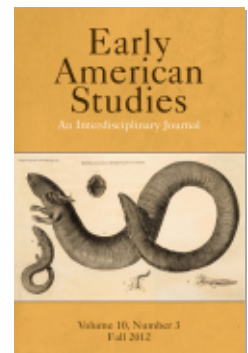
Bible, King, and Common Law: Genealogical Literacies and  
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# Bible, King, and Common Law

## Genealogical Literacies and Family History Practices in British America

KARIN WULF

*College of William and Mary*

**ABSTRACT** For centuries, genealogical fads with historically distinctive qualities have appeared in disparate societies around the globe; from totalitarian to authoritarian to merely traditional societies, genealogy has served the interest of states that promote the significance of ancestry. We are unused to thinking about genealogy in America and an implicated American state in this context. But in British America an ideological coalition of religion, government, and law—constituent parts of the early modern state—was heavily invested in the authority of lineage and promoted both genealogical literacy and genealogical production. Protestantism, Anglo-American political cultural tradition, and the law all encouraged an understanding of the deep significance of lineal ancestry; each asked for the creation and maintenance of family history. This essay, then, both reveals the extent of intimate expressions of family connection in British America and queries the logic of their production. It centers the state in stories of the family and puts family stories at the center of state interests from the colonial period and into the foundational era of the United States.

It might be a list of births and deaths adrift in a manuscript collection, a diary preface or a letter recounting family history, or a page in an account book or Bible given over to genealogical particulars. Among a profusion of

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For helpful readings of this essay in its many guises, I am very grateful to audiences and participants at a Brigham Young University seminar on the history of the family and the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture fourteenth annual conference, to Scott Casper, Deborah Cohen, David Hall, Julie Hardwick, Margaretta Lovell, and especially to Alison Games and Christopher Grasso.

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like examples, we find that in 1757 near Boston, Timothy Tileston's birth was recorded along with the births, marriages, and deaths of several generations in the flyleaf of a Bible that had been a gift to his father, also Timothy Tileston. The senior Timothy's "Honored Grandmother Elizabeth Rand . . . Daughter of Mr. Timothy Foster who was formerly the owner of this Book" particularly "Desire[d] this Book is to Descend from One Timothy Tileston to Another so long as their shall be any of that Name."<sup>1</sup> Historians usually brush past this stuff in the archives, noting its ubiquity and seemingly generic quality—if we notice it at all. Merely antiquarian detail?

Exemplified by such homely acts of family history as the Tileston Bible, the pervasive evidence of Americans' interest in genealogy across the centuries ought to give us pause. Far from reflecting a timeless, undifferentiated interest in one's family, genealogical production reflected a keen—and historically specific—appreciation that birth and connection could confer a range of both practical and affective privileges and inequities.

Questions about the nature and extent of genealogical practices are particularly trenchant in the early American case. We may be unsurprised that attention to family lineages has been intense in "traditional" or even totalitarian societies, but a sturdy scholarly tradition proposes a very different picture in America.<sup>2</sup> This tradition suggests that prevailing winds blew new,

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1. Tileston-Foster Bible (London, 1616), Massachusetts Historical Society. Elizabeth Foster Rand's desire to see both her maternal and paternal families honored with this name, the first of which had been her own uncle, was amply rewarded by at least six successive generations of Timothy Tilestons. An account of the Timothy Tilestons, eldest sons of eldest sons, is in *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (July 1866): 278.

2. For social and political uses of genealogy in three very different sociopolitical contexts, see María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Gabrielle Spiegel, "Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative," *History and Theory* 22, no. 1 (February 1983): 43–53. A recent example that situates genealogy within modern imperial emphases on race and subordination is Damon Salesa, "Samoas Half-Castes and Some Frontiers of Comparison," in Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), esp. 82–87. Work on genealogy in America is very limited, focused on the nineteenth century and on genealogical organizations. See Katherina Hering, "We Are All Makers of History: People and Publics in the Practice of Pennsylvania German Family History" (Ph.D. diss., George Mason University, 2009); Francesca Morgan, "Lineage as Capital: Genealogy in Antebellum New England," *New England Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *NEQ*) 83, no. 2 (June 2010): 250–82; François

loosely Lockean forms of self and society into the eighteenth century to match the emergence of new political and legal regimes. American families were increasingly domestic families, according to this view, attentive not to the past and their progenitors, but to the present, intimate circle of a marriage and its children. Lineage may have concerned some elites, but those concerns fully flowered only in the nineteenth century with the establishment of genealogical societies and their close cousins, historical societies.<sup>3</sup> That narrative suggests a chronology that fits the American Revolutionary emphasis on individualism and independence and locates genealogy as a function of later, private interests.<sup>4</sup>

That narrative does not, however, account for the extensive evidence of genealogical work by early Americans. Nor can it address the many ways in which state and allied institutions in British America promoted—even required—genealogical work. Here a word on terminology is probably in order. Eighteenth-century family history fragments may not register as works of “genealogy” if we restrict our understanding of that term to the elaborate lineages produced for nobility, or to the formal published materials produced by nineteenth-century societies (extended now to the beehive of online hobbyist activity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries). But a humble family record such as the Tilestons’ Bible, European noble lin-

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Weil, “John Farmer and the Making of American Genealogy,” *NEQ* 80, no. 3 (September 2007): 408–34.

3. Exemplifying a tradition of scholarship on the eighteenth-century emergence of affect and domesticity is Jan Lewis’s *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The domesticity literature, much of which was published in the 1980s and is indebted to scholarship on the early modern English family, is sometimes confused with or braided with debates about family structure and household size; for a challenging overview, see Daniel Scott Smith, “The Curious History of Theorizing about the History of the Nuclear Family,” *Social Science History* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 325–53. For an account of the literature on family and American exceptionalist arguments, see Toby L. Ditz, *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut, 1750–1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3–23.

4. Debates on the nature of political, social, and cultural change in the eighteenth century defy brief summary. An example linking a wholesale transition in political forms to individual and family structure and culture is Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). For a brisk analysis of the attachment of family history to whiggish narratives of political change, and the current state of scholarship on the transitions in the Western family more broadly, see the introduction to David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Jon Mathieu, eds., *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-Term Developments (1300–1900)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

eages, and later published genealogies are comparable genealogical products—fruits of the same tree. A close analysis of genealogy, properly understood as an account of ancestry in any form, as practiced in British America lets us see as importantly allied phenomena such materials as family-generated and state-generated information about familial relationships.

Examining the wide variety of ways early Americans represented family connections, we see a pervasive attention to genealogy, and we can uncover some of the surprising connections between institutions of power and people's most deeply felt attachments. In colonial British America a triune ideological coalition of religion, government, and law—constituent parts of the early modern state—was heavily invested in the authority of lineage and promoted genealogical literacy and production. Protestantism and monarchical governance relied on the logic of genealogy to explain relations of power. The law organized and secured property for lineal inheritance. And, as in other colonial places, authorities in British America regulated families, policing sexuality and marriage to order racial and status hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> Genealogy played an important role in all this business, conferring and confirming legitimacy through church and court records of family relationships. Comprehending the role of such institutions in the way that genealogy was valued and rewarded—and thus recorded so diligently—is critical. The sinuous connection of authority and lineage was the platform for hierarchies of status and for access to power.

As important as it is to query the role of the state and its institutional players in encouraging the production of family history, both elite and non-elite families made their own histories in light of, but also despite or in complete disregard of, such inducements. They expressed the nature and tenor of their commitments in an astonishing number and variety of textual, oral, and performative genealogies. They wore the clothing of their dead ancestors. They asserted familial connections to achieve credit, inherit property, or argue for their freedom from slavery. More conventionally, they recounted family history in textual forms, Bible records being the least of

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5. On the infiltration and regulation of domestic life by imperial regimes, see especially the essays in Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). A useful comparison of French and Spanish uses of lineage to enforce race is Thomas C. Holt, Guillaume Aubert, and María Elena Martínez, "Forum: Purity of Blood and the Social Order," *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *WMQ*) 61, no. 3 (July 2004): 435–520. See also Jennifer Spear, "Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana," *WMQ* 60, no. 1 (January 2003): 75–98.

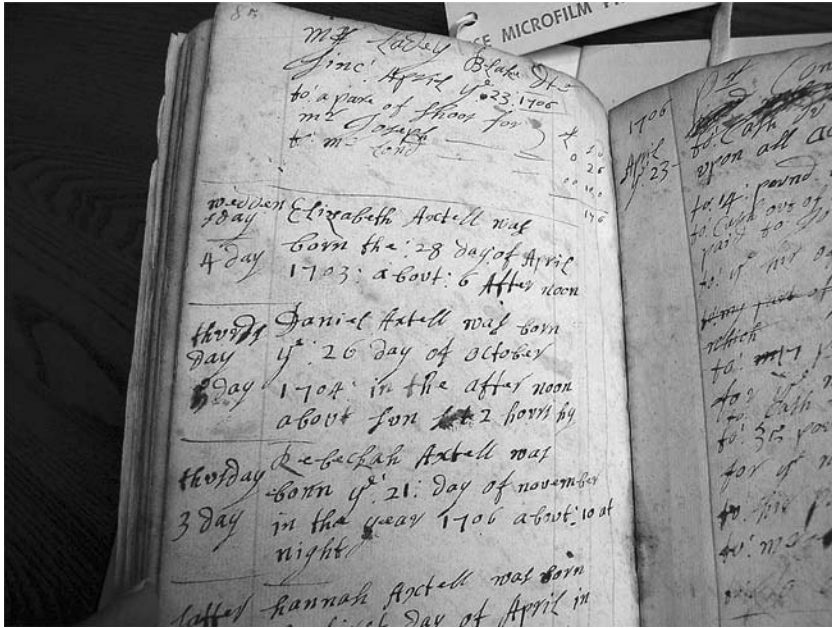


Figure 1. Daniel Axtell account book. In this large, leather-bound ledger, fourteen by six inches, approximately 300 pages, Daniel Axtell (1673–1736) kept accounts of his businesses in South Carolina, where he had a sawmill, tannery, and plantation, and in Dighton, Massachusetts, where he had a general store, among other business concerns. In this central section of the volume Axtell recorded such family information as the precise time of his children’s births. Massachusetts Historical Society.

them. (See figure 1.) Genealogy could be an expression of family at the most elemental level: whether in the course of legal action in which property or a slave’s freedom was at stake, or in the exchange of treasured objects out of sight of the state altogether, people interpreted “family” and announced its inclusions and exclusions. Sometimes those statements of membership corroborated state interests, particularly in accounting for race, but sometimes they furthered other interests and agendas—economic, legal, and emotional.

Untangling the precise relationship between state interests and the other agendas that encouraged people to generate family accounts may not be possible. In the case of British America, however, we can assess how and why the state and related institutions were so broadly invested in lineage and in the production of genealogies. And we can apprehend that a wide

range of people, from the enslaved to the most privileged, responded both to a British genealogical regime and to the dynamic attachments of their particular families. Their genealogical work reiterated the consistently deep importance of affinity and connection both for government and for the people it aimed to govern in an era and a place more often associated with the rise of individualism and the breakdown of traditional forms of religion, politics, and family. As historians seek to understand historical currents moving across the eighteenth century, some see swift-moving rapids transforming government, society, and economy; the persistence of genealogy and family history practices at the institutional level and in the most intimate contexts suggests that the compelling appeal of identifying, imagining, and articulating familial connections contributes to the important history of continuities and the steady, conservative undertow of culture and power.<sup>6</sup>

This essay considers British Americans' fluency with three interlaced genres of genealogy.<sup>7</sup> First, it describes the three overlapping institutional arenas where the authority of genealogy was expressed: religion, government, and law.<sup>8</sup> Second, this essay examines closely three forms of genealogical articulation that reflected those overlapping arenas of Bible, king, and the common law: a single family history, a collection of heraldic imagery, and an extensive manumission case—each of which exemplifies the employment of genealogical literacy. By looking to an intimate family con-

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6. The case for the critical importance of continuity has been made by, among others, Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). On the particular challenge for cultural histories of dissecting meaning while attuning to power, see Michael Meranze, "Culture and Governance: Reflections on the Cultural History of British America," *WMQ* 65, no. 4 (October 2008): 713–44.

7. To be literate is to be learned in letters, but more broadly to be educated to read and to write—or simply to discern and to communicate. I treat literacy here as a functional knowledge, that is, knowledge that is accrued and can be mobilized. I also recognize varieties of genealogical literacy, with some common features across British America. For work that deals with diverse forms of literacy see, for example, Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: the Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

8. On the mutuality of government, law, and religion in early modern England, and a discussion of the state as a "claim to authority" and an accumulation of power through local practices as well as central institutions, see Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c. 1550–1640* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), esp. 32–34.

text, to visual and material culture, and to the law of slavery, we find that these forms of evidence demonstrate how broadly and deeply genealogy pervaded British America. Through these three examples, chosen from among the rich and deep archive of extant genealogical materials from early America, we can see how, and begin to discern why, the cultural logic of genealogy was so deeply rooted in British America.



British American genealogical literacies began with their most important genealogical text: the Protestant Bible, a book nearly ubiquitous in the lives of people living in North America.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the Bible is recognizably and fundamentally genealogical; its texts emphasize the holy significance of lineage. The Old Testament's family histories teach about patrilineal descent from Adam to Noah, Abraham to Joseph, and Moses to the Israelites: "So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies."<sup>10</sup> The New Testament is anchored in the twin lineages of Jesus of Nazareth: of the House of David and of his holy father, beginning in the Gospel of Matthew with "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" and tracing the generations down to "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born."<sup>11</sup> These biblical genealogies, showing how the very legitimacy of the characters rests on lineage connections, were taught from the

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9. For an analysis of Bibles in estate inventories as perhaps the best evidence that the Bible was the most commonly owned book in the colonies, see David Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 119–20. Their relative scarcity in rare book rooms and archives belies the sheer volume of Bibles printed, sold, traded, willed, and resold and is not a measure of the book's influence on the lives of people of other faiths who were, through conversion efforts or by virtue of the imposition of values through law and other means, also profoundly influenced by it.

10. 1 Chronicles 9:1 (King James Version). From Genesis 26–36 come two among the many examples of the significance of genealogy in the Old Testament: the relationships among the wives of Jacob and their offspring were dependent on genealogical accounts; similarly, the conflicts between Jacob and Esau, and their root in their different relations to their father, Isaac, were based on birth order preferences.

11. Matthew 1:1–16. "So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations"; Matthew 1:17. A study of patrilineality as a key trope in the Pauline epistles is Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of the Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).



text of the Bible itself and in catechisms and prayer books, but also in sermons and lessons delivered orally in church and at home.<sup>12</sup>

For British Americans, both biblical text and material practices reaffirmed the importance of genealogy. A closer look at how particular Bible editions available in British America packaged and marketed genealogy reveals the pervasiveness of genealogy to biblical instruction as well as its emphasis in didactic text features and illustrations. Until the late eighteenth century Bibles in America were English bibles—most commonly the Geneva and King James translations, both of which included elaborate genealogical illustrations.<sup>13</sup> The Geneva, published in 1560 as the work of Calvinists in that city, was first printed in England in 1575 and then continuously through the mid-seventeenth century. In part because the Geneva was intended to advance the abilities of lay people to read and to interpret the Bible—in line with Protestant theological aims—it was chock-full of marginal reference material, including a guide to the genealogies of the Bible. Fairly schematic, this genealogical illustration began with Adam and “so passing by the Patriarches, Judges, Kings, Prophets, and Priestes, and the fathers of their time, continuing in lineal dissent to Christ our Saviour.” The imagery (see figure 2) is geometric, rather than organic: lines, ovals, and the occasionally more elaborate shape, the entirety designed to clearly “Setteth out to the eye the genealogie.”<sup>14</sup> “Christes rising” concludes ten pages of genealogical charts.

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12. An example of early modern biblical scholarship on the significance of genealogy is Hugh Broughton’s “A defence of the holy Genealogies: whose ignorance hath greatly hurt the Jewes, and hindered Christianitie” (London, 1595?). Broughton saw the discrepancies in biblical genealogy as a potent source of infidel attacks, noting, “Clearness and Safety of Religion cannot stand without knowledge in Genealogies.” Broughton, “Defence,” 1. For a summary of previous efforts to chronologize and harmonize the biblical histories, see Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 134–38.

13. Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). On early modern textual aids to biblical comprehension, see Lori Anne Ferrell, *The Bible and the People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 127–57.

14. The central “line” of descent is represented by a linear twisted link (and what to a modern eye looks astonishingly like a DNA double helix). Adjacent sibling and maternal connections are illustrated alongside, in connected ovals. *The Bible. Translated According to the Hebrew and Greeke, and conferred with the best translations in divers languages. With most profitable Annotations upon all the hard places, and other things of great importance, as may appear in the Epistle to the Reader* (London: Christopher Barker, 1583), images 5 and 10 (of 709). From a reproduction of the

In 1604 James I commissioned the translation that became known as the King James, or the “Authorized,” Bible. The language of the King James is grand and majestic, reverberating with the kind of monarchy its namesake aspired to fulfill. Designed for reading aloud at services for worship, the King James was meant to explain the world of the ancients as well as the unified system of sacred authority exercised by God and kings in the contemporary early modern world.<sup>15</sup>

Because the King James (KJV) advanced a vision of social hierarchy and the glories of the Crown, it was even more explicit in linking conceptually the genealogies of the Bible and the genealogies of the English monarchy and nobility.<sup>16</sup> Printed in more than thirty-three editions of the KJV between 1611 and 1640, *Genealogies of the Sacred Scriptures*, created by John Speed, antiquarian, mapmaker, and historian of the British “nation,” showed in thirty-four pages of elaborate, illustrated detail the descent from Adam to Jesus of Nazareth. Speed illustrated these genealogies with symbolic imagery associated with heraldry; in figure 3 Jesus’s name is in a form of cartouche, for example. Other heraldic devices throughout the Speed genealogies made explicit for an early modern reader the notion that authority, divinity, and lineage were conjoined.<sup>17</sup>

We might imagine that early New Englanders embraced the Geneva Bible, with its impeccable Puritan pedigree, rather than the King James, with its lofty language and imposition of hierarchical social and political

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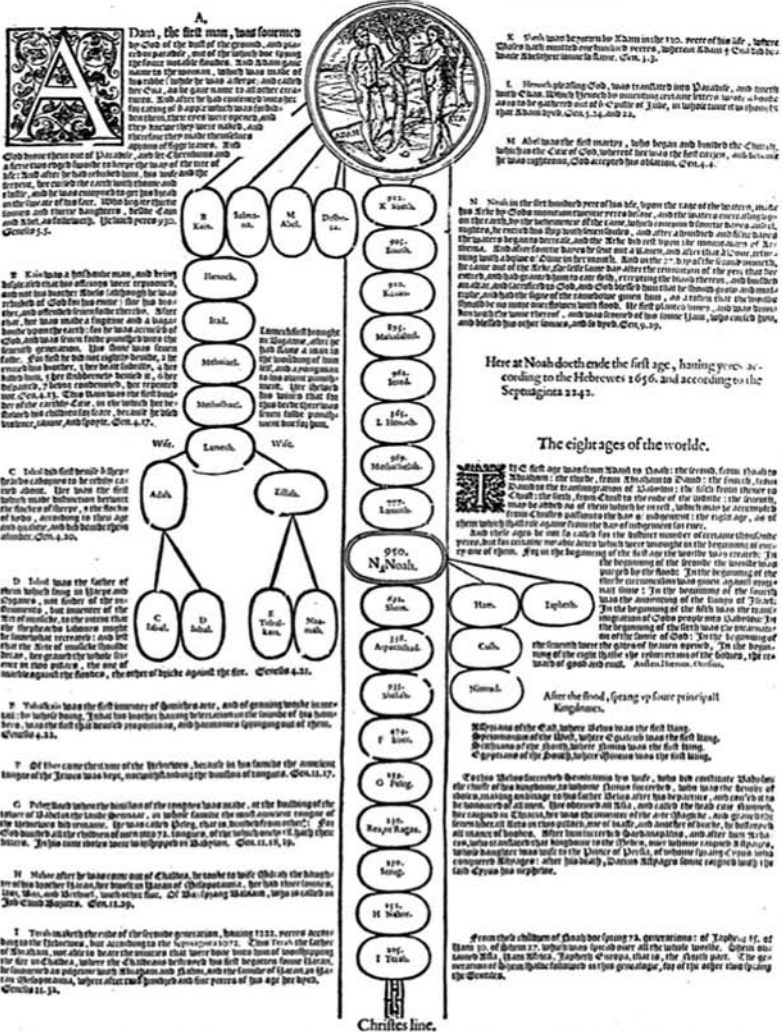
original in the British Library, accessed on EEBO October 15, 2008 (no stable URL).

15. This was a book written to conflate “the kingliness of God with the godliness of kings, to make royal power and divine glory into one indivisible garment which could be wrapped around the nation as a whole.” Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003). See also Alistair McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), esp. 311–13; and on the KJV translation as a work of English political and cultural idiom, see Naomi Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society, and Culture in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

16. On the relation of Speed’s other work to his *Genealogies* and the coherence of his worldview, which placed lineage at the center of imperial design, see Martha W. Driver, “Mapping Chaucer: John Speed and the Later Portraits,” *Chaucer Review* 36, no. 3 (2002): 228–49.

17. John Speed, *The Genealogies recorded in the Sacred Scriptures according to every family and tribe. With the Line of our savior Jesus Christ observed from Adam to the Blessed Virgin Mary*. (London, 1611).

# This Table setteth out to the eye the genealogie of Adam, so passing by the Patriarches, Iudges, Kings, Prophets, and Priestes, and the fathers of their time, continuing in lineall descent to Christ our Saviour.



Note, that where in any circle ye finde two numbers, the vpper sheweth how many yerres he liued, or reigned, and the vnder number sheweth how many yerres hee liued, or reigned. Note also, that where thowthe their tables any person or deced is mentioned not in the very words of the Scripture, they may be adouched out of Histories Eccliesiasticall, and other good and ancient authorities.

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Figure 2. This detail of the Geneva Bible edition's guide to the scriptural genealogies is geometrical: lines and ovals lead through pages from Adam eventually to the birth of Jesus.

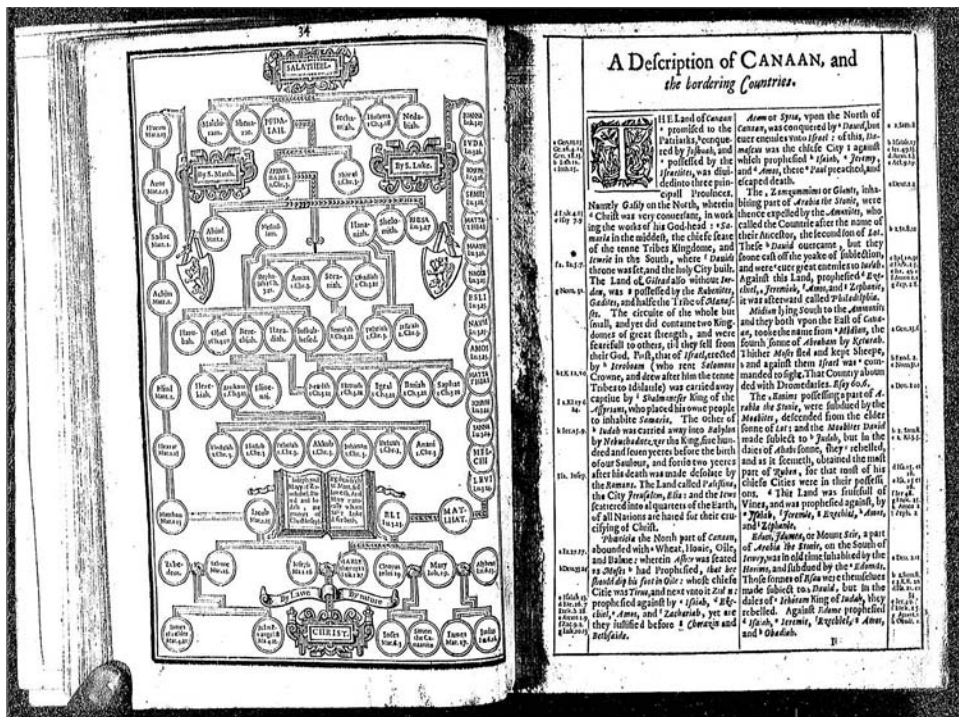


Figure 3. In John Speed’s “Genealogies of the Sacred Scriptures,” created for inclusion in the King James Bible, the KJV’s emphasis on the authority of lineage in religious and in monarchical contexts was underscored by the use of such touches as a heraldic cartouche.

authority. In fact, Puritan clergy began to prefer the King James as early as its completion.<sup>18</sup> And the generation that migrated to New England used both but preferred the King James for sermonizing. John Winthrop’s “Modell of Christian Charity,” famously preached aboard the *Arbella* as the

18. Harry Stout argues that the transition to the KJV among Puritan clergy in New England can be directly attributed to its social and political uses. “Where the Geneva Bible and its marginalia served well the purpose of an embattled religious minority with thoughts fixed firmly on martyrdom and the world to come, it was less useful in fashioning binding principles of social organization and order in this world.” And he describes the KJV as having “impeccable social and intellectual credentials.” Stout, “Word and Order in Colonial New England,” in Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, eds., *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 25–26.

Massachusetts Bay Puritans prepared to disembark for their new life, carefully quoted passages from both the Geneva and the KJV. Though Winthrop owned and used several Bibles in his life, he carried with him to New England his father's King James version, printed in London in 1615 and bound with related texts: concordances, a book of Psalms, and an edition of Speed's *Genealogies*.<sup>19</sup>

The pervasive religious teaching of genealogy is plain in not only the textual and visual culture of Bibles circulated in British America, but also in family and church practices that reinforced the biblical emphasis on genealogy. Family Bible records were one example of how the Bible's genealogies could be made commensurate with a family's sense of itself, as the details of family events narrated an ambitious lineage progression.<sup>20</sup> The Timothy Tileston Bible contained the mid-eighteenth-century passage describing it as a bequest to future Timothys, but it also contained earlier and later family records. Preserved in the flyleaf, for example, are Timothy Foster's late seventeenth-century notes of his children's births.<sup>21</sup> Other family Bibles contained more elliptical fragments. The Ainslies of South Carolina left a Bible that recorded only the (brief) marriage of John and Mary Ainslie in 1762, as well as a couple of family births from the 1750s.<sup>22</sup> The

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19. Adam Winthrop's Bible is at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Though the Geneva and the King James Bibles were the most prevalent Bible editions available and circulating in the English colonies of North America, and though all the Genevas carried the same genealogical illustrations, there is of course no way to know just how many of the King James editions also included the Speed genealogies. For another example of a colonial founder with a KJV bound with the Speed genealogies, see Sir Edwin Sandys of Virginia's Bible, containing Sir Edwin's bookplate and some later family history records, at the Virginia Historical Society.

20. Kathleen Ashley, "Creating Family Identity in Books of Hours," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 145–65. Some of the reasons Ashley suggests for the development of inscriptions—bourgeois book ownership, new lay and clerical relations, the devotional book as a liminal place between the sacred text and daily life—accord with family Bible record keeping. For the material life of the Bible in colonial Virginia, see Lauren Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

21. Tileston Bible, MHS.

22. Ainslie Family Bible (Oxford, 1745) record (disbound), University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, S.C. For the Ainslie marriage, see also *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 20 (1919): 29. Despite the problems of archival survival endemic to the early South, a good number of Bible records from Virginia and South Carolina show patterns of record keeping similar

Virginian Ann Hill Tunstall began a more elaborate, multigenerational family Bible record in the 1740s when she inscribed the births (and some deaths) of her ten children.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps embedding one's own family history in the most important book of Christian family history created an authoritative echo.

Parish record keeping, established with renewed vigor in the Anglican church in England, pervaded the colonies with an even more vigorous forum of familial accounting.<sup>24</sup> Compelled by legal requirements and by their parishioners' desires, clergy of all denominations worked to generate and maintain records of the lives and family histories of their flocks. Ministers struggled to find the right system of documenting families, some more conscientiously and successfully than others. Consider the case of Daniel Foster, pastor of the New Braintree, Massachusetts, Church of Christ, tasked by his congregation in 1779 with keeping good records of church business, including vital information. Foster kept these records in fits and starts, mixed with the ongoing work of sermon making and church meetings. He wrote movingly of his wife's first childbirth: "Feby 28 1780 Mrs. Foster was delivered of a man child: to our great joy . . . our son was baptized Fordyce." The Reverend Foster went on recording his children's births and his family's events in a special location within the church book. But by the time his service had come to a close, his recording of all the other births in the community seemed insufficient; his congregation considered the "unhappy situation in regard to the very imperfect condition of their Chh. Records" and directed the next minister to do better. The New Braintree community expressed an anxiety about the need for full and complete family

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to those in other regions. A greater challenge for searching and evaluating Bible records is the nineteenth-century library practice of separating the family record from the book.

23. Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, 173–74.

24. In an early compilation of Virginia's laws, the responsibilities of each Anglican parish were stated first: "That the Minister or Reader of every Parish, shall well, truly, and plainly, Record all Births, Burials, or Marriages, that shall happen within the Precincts of that Parish, in a Book to be provided by the Vestry for that purpose. And, if any Master of a Family, or other person concerned, shall omit giving notice to the said Minister or Reader, of the day of the Birth, Death, or Marriage, of any to him or them related, [in] the space of a Moneth, such person for such his neglect, be fined One hundred pounds of Tobacco." *The Lawes of Virginia Now in Force: Collected out of the Assembly Records, and Digested into One Volume* (London, 1661), 6–7.

records and the “disadvantages to which they must necessarily be subjected for want thereof.”<sup>25</sup> What kinds of disadvantages did they imagine? Making and keeping family records surely fitted neatly with the biblical emphasis on genealogy, but it also fitted tightly to other institutional imperatives, most especially governmental and legal ones. Who was related to whom, and how, mattered. It needed to be documented, and it should be available for verification.

Though biblical genealogies compelled attention to lineage and encouraged both intimate and communal recording practices, it was the British monarchy that animated the importance of family history and genealogy for an eager and attentive colonial audience. If New Braintree’s residents considered their birth, marriage, and death records important enough to chastise a minister who failed to keep close account of them, no one’s vital data were attended more closely than a king’s. Royal watchers were assigned to observe a future monarch’s birth, even detailing the bloody state of the queen’s childbirth linens, the afterbirth, and the baby’s coloring (could it have died and been replaced?). Marriages, hailed and described in detail in the press, foreshadowed royal births (as well as political alliances). A monarch’s death was attended by ritual ceremony and public grieving, but also by pronouncements on the status of the succession. All this attention to the royal family served a near celebrity culture that colonists participated in as keenly as Britons at home. Almanacs, the most popular and widely owned texts in British America, recounted royal birthdays and anniversaries of marriages and deaths; playing cards, illustrated prints, children’s books, coins, mirrors, firebacks, china, crockery, and consumer goods of all kinds made the images of the monarchs, and of the monarchy, an everyday experience.<sup>26</sup> Embracing the monarchy through commemorating a major life event among the royals or purchasing memorabilia was not only about venerating (or celebrating) an individual or a family but also about reinforcing the concept of lineal succession. As a colonial toast to the monarchs proclaimed, “May the numerous offspring of royal love inherit the numerous

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25. Records of the New Braintree Church of Christ, vols. 1 and 2, American Antiquarian Society (AAS), Worcester, Mass.

26. For accounts of the profusion of English goods in the colonies, see T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); on the material culture of monarchy, see Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

virtues of their magnanimous parents.”<sup>27</sup> Births, marriages, and deaths were the essential links in the chain of royal succession.

An obsession with securing English royal lineages was perhaps understandable given the regularity with which succession had been interrupted by death, war, coup, and, in the case of Henry VIII’s children, divorce—all of which made the supposedly straightforward nature of succession in fact quite political and quite complex. Colonial British Americans would have been deeply familiar with—some of them deeply and inescapably involved with—the upheavals of the seventeenth century, which had resulted in the expulsion of the Stuarts and, ultimately, the ascent of the Hanovers of Germany. Print culture references to the monarchical lineages abounded, including pamphlets that closely followed controversies such as those swirling around the claimant to the throne Prince James, the Old Pretender (whose father was the deposed James II), and the Young Pretender (his son).<sup>28</sup> The prominent Bostonian and Puritan divine Cotton Mather, with a lineage of his own he liked to tout, took up the theme of succession at perhaps the thorniest moment in the transition from Stuarts to Hanovers—after the Glorious Revolution, that is: the death of Queen Anne and the ascension of George I. Mather’s sermon, published quickly following the queen’s demise in August 1714, was titled to give prominence to “the Legal Succession of the British Crown to the Illustrious House of Hanover.”<sup>29</sup> By the eighteenth century the Hanovers had secured their claims to the throne, though the repeated counterclaims by descendants of the Stuarts were just

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27. *Loyal and Humorous Songs, on recent occasions: Birth and coronation odes, poems . . .* (New York, 1779), 53. For other examples of interest in the romantic life and the resulting offspring of the king and queen, see “Anecdotes of the Private Lives of His Majesty and His Amiable Queen,” *Virginia Gazette*, June 4, 1772.

28. Examples of the pamphlet literature generated by the Old Pretender and the Young Pretender include George Hickes, *Queries Relating to the Birth and Birthright of a Certain Person* (London, 1714); *Registrum Regale; or, The Genealogy of Sovereign Princes* (London, 1728); *An Essay upon Lineage and Succession* (Edinburgh, 1746). These works, and more like them, circulated in the colonies. American literary magazines regularly republished this material as well. See, for example, coverage of the Pretender controversy in prose, verse, and song in “A Song upon the Times,” *American Magazine*, February 1746, 86; “The True Mother . . .,” *American Magazine*, March 1746, facing title page; as well as items in the *American Magazine* in April and May 1746.

29. Cotton Mather, *The Glorious Throne . . .* (Boston, 1714). Mather also published, upon the death of George I, *Christian Loyalty; or, Some Suitable Sentiments on the Withdraw of King George the First* (Boston, 1727).



one impetus for paying close attention to the genealogies of the Hanovers themselves. Parading the genealogies of the nobility and the monarchy refreshed their claim to legitimate rule and reinforced the significant connection between lineage and authority.

For colonials, genealogy's use as both symbolic of and an instrument for state authority was not only about the current occupants of the throne. Of course, their attention to the monarchs reflected the commercialized interest spurred by consumer goods and print culture engendered by what we might today call a cult of celebrity. More profoundly, they shared their countrymen's deep commitment to the idea of authority vested in the constitutional monarchy established by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. But their attachment to the importance of genealogy as an explanation for and evidence of the legitimacy of that authority was also connected to the Protestant character of the British succession after the Glorious Revolution. Pulpits rang with the words of ministers committed to seeing Protestantism firmly and forever fixed to England's monarchy. After having weathered the Cromwellian regime and then the resurgence of a Catholic threat in the form of James II, New Englanders felt, in the words of Benjamin Colman, that "the Name of the great *King William* was ever dear to these his loyal *New-England Colonies* and that beyond expression; but there is no *one* thing by which his Immortal Memory is more endear'd to us, that the wise and just *provision* by Him made for the *Succession of the Crown in the Protestant Line*."<sup>30</sup> By this logic, the monarchical succession was absolutely critical—but could, and should, be interrupted if it interfered with a greater purpose.

The British were hardly singular in their attachment to patriarchal forms, or to monarchical succession, or to the ways that the latter was always, even in the case of a female ruler, bent to the former.<sup>31</sup> But what the British system did, and what then became elaborated in the colonies, was to attach a legal system that privileged patrilineal inheritance.<sup>32</sup> And it was the potent

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30. Benjamin Colman, *Fidelity to Christ and to the Protestant Succession in the Illustrious House of Hanover* . . . (Boston, 1727); emphases in original.

31. In *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680–1714* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). Rachel Weil emphasizes the importance of determining legitimacy through policing and regulating female sexuality, as does Patricia Crawford in *Blood, Bodies, and Families in Early Modern England* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004), esp. chap. 4, "Blood and Paternity."

32. This was not so in other European legal traditions, including the French, Spanish, and Dutch.

patrilineality of Bible, king, and law wedded to colonial conditions that made for the kinds of genealogies we see in British America.

Though the symbolism of the monarchy's power leaned heavily both on allusions to divinely endowed legitimacy through succession and on notions of patriarchy and lineage shared by the Bible, the law gave substance to each. English common law, the system by which courts and judges made law by decisions in reference to precedent rather than by which legislatures enacted statutes, was deeply about the law of property. The laws of property also invaded criminal law, civil law, election law, and family law alike. The law structured how property could be held or taken, by whom, and under what circumstances. And it regulated the transmission of property through inheritance.<sup>33</sup>

Inheritance laws and practices differed only slightly between England and the colonies, and indeed among the colonies and then the United States: all Anglo-American inheritance law was premised on the notion that property would be passed lineally, from men to their children, principally their sons. Thus, a key expectation of Anglo-American inheritance was the ability to trace heirs—a genealogical literacy.<sup>34</sup> Legal publications stressed the importance of the laws of descent; nearly a third of the text of Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, the most prominent legal treatise of the time,

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33. The significance of the Anglo-American legal commitment to property is sometimes overlooked. An extensive sociological and economic literature documents the importance of institutions that regulate the security of property and its intergenerational transference, as well as the ways in which those very institutions thus encourage intergenerational kin relations. For a recent cross-cultural summary of the implications for wealth inequality, see Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, "Foundations of Societal Inequality," and Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, Samuel Bowles, et al., "Intergenerational Wealth Transmission and the Dynamics of Inequality in Small-Scale Societies," *Science* 326 (October 30, 2009): 678–79 and 682–88, respectively.

34. Carole Shammas, "English Inheritance Law and Its Transfer to the Colonies," *American Journal of Legal History* 31, no. 2 (April 1987): 145–63, notes that a chief characteristic of the English system of inheritance was its "narrow unilateral system for the descent of property" (150). Claire Priest has suggested the importance of the enhanced status of creditors in the colonies, which arose chiefly because creditors were allowed to claim real estate from their debtors, along with other forms of property. Certainly this practice diverged substantially from English law, though the wider availability of land and the preservation of lineal inheritance may have made the inheritance of unencumbered real estate more, rather than less, common in America. Priest, "Creating an American Property Law: Alienability and Its Limits in American History," *Harvard Law Review* 120, no. 2 (December 2006): 385–459.

focuses on the potential complexity of inheritance.<sup>35</sup> Accompanying illustrations such as the “Table of Consanguinity” and “Table of Descents” (figure 4) explained the extended family relationships that governed inheritance.<sup>36</sup>

Some changes in the laws of inheritance followed in the aftermath of the American Revolution, most notably the abolition of primogeniture and entail. Both of these practices had allowed for the strictest application of lineal property, famously in the case of William Byrd II of Virginia and other Virginia grantees. Byrd’s 1743 will “recommend[ed his] widow and fatherless children to the mercifull Providence of God,” and granted some money to each of his daughters, but the “rest of my estate in land, slaves, stock, plate, books, pictures, mony, and other personal estate whatever” he gave to “my son William Byrd and his heirs for-ever.” Abolishing this sort of primogeniture and the entailing of estates meant two things: eldest sons would not automatically be preferred at the expense of their siblings (although the option to avoid that scenario had always existed in colonial law), and the perpetuity of estates was now in the hands of the living rather than the dead.<sup>37</sup> But it did not change the core system of lineal inheritance,

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35. Blackstone stands in here, as he hoped to in his own time, for a wider and much more varied body of legal work. Variation among local legal cultures, however, should not obscure the basic principles, particularly regarding inheritance, common across them. On the English legal treatises that circulated in the colonies, and the republication of material emphasizing inheritance of property, see Holly Brewer, “Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: ‘Ancient Feudal Restraints’ and Revolutionary Reform,” *WMQ* 54 (April 1997): 312nn22–23.

36. Other significant legal texts similarly stressed the importance of lineage. See, for example, the jurist Matthew Hale’s *History and Analysis of the Common Law of England* (London, 1713), printed posthumously and many times reprinted, in which of only two topical chapters on law, the first, “Touching the Course of Descents in England,” focused on “the hereditary Transmission of Lands from Ancestor to Heir, and the Certainty thereof.” (Hale, *History and Analysis*, 207). See also Giles Jacob, *A Treatise of Laws; or, A General Introduction to the Common, Civil, and Canon Law* (London, 1721), which (esp. 222–24) details the organization of descent of property. For American reproductions of the “Table of Consanguinity” and the “Table of Descents,” see editions of Blackstone from Philadelphia, 1771; Worcester, 1790; Portland, Maine, 1807. Excerpts from Blackstone meant to instruct administrators and executors of estates, as well as the local officials dealing with wills and estates, appeared widely. See *The Deputy Commissary’s Guide within the Province of Maryland* (Annapolis, 1774); John Grimké, *The Duty of Executors and Administrators* (New York, 1797); and a Philadelphia edition of Blackstone from 1803, which included the variations reflected in Virginia’s laws of 1785.

37. The democratic implications of abolishing “feudal” forms of inheritance are not clear. Certainly the central principle of inheritance continued to be lineal descent. In fact, abolishing both entail and primogeniture provided more sons with

Table of DESCENTS in Parcenary in VIRGINIA

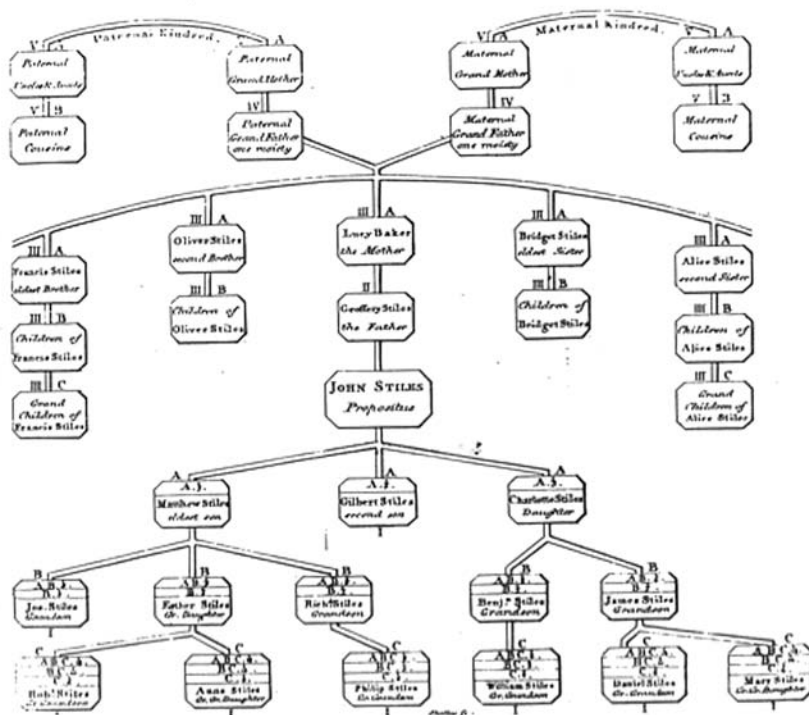


Figure 4. William Blackstone, *An Analysis of the Laws of England*, Appendix, “Table of Descents in Parcenary in Virginia.” As Blackstone wrote in his introduction to the table, it was “intended to exhibit, to the Eye of the student, the successive Order, in which he must search for the Heir of a Person.” The table does much more, explaining the intricacies of lineal inheritance.

in some ways only broadening the lineage—something that modest previous changes to inheritance law had achieved as well.<sup>38</sup>

Deviations from the succession of property from father to son occurred naturally and regularly, however. Without the drama with which the mon-

access to the fruits of lineage. The adaptation of Blackstone’s “Table of Descent,” which illustrates the descent of property in post-1785 Virginia, still emphasizes the importance of lineage and still highlights how crucial a particularized knowledge of genealogy was to the maintenance or acquisition of inheritance.

38. The provision for intestate property, freedom for testators to divide their property more uniformly among their children, and the emphasis on full blood

archy's succession was interrupted, in ordinary families the lack of a male heir, the absence or premature death of legitimate children, or the remarriage of a widow more simply interrupted the natural flow of inherited wealth. In these circumstances, as Blackstone and others so vividly illustrated, knowing your genealogy was crucial to securing your inheritance. Generations could be caught up in the tangle of relationships as they sorted out just who was entitled to what. In late seventeenth-century Boston even passing sailors were deposed in the contested case of Henry Chickering's estate. Chickering's son John died, and his widow remarried. But what of John's oldest son and heir, little John? In some accounts he had died an infant, but other testimony revealed him to be alive and well in the home of his stepfather and mother—who would then possibly hold his property as guardians until he came of age. Was this child really John, the heir?<sup>39</sup> Cases like these were a reason for such close attention to the records of vital data kept by clergy. The local minister ought to be able to attest to the facts of a child's birth and his death, if indeed he had died.<sup>40</sup>



Bible, king, common law—these were the essentially British foundations on which British American genealogical literacies rested. As we have seen, religion, government, and law were not only didactic about genealogy: in each case these institutions reflected in their own practices a reverence of genealogy, and they also required individuals and families to know and to *produce* genealogical information. Genealogical didacticism and the imperative for genealogical production created a highly genealogically literate culture—and a colonial populace attuned to the British-style authority of lineage useful in the contexts most pressing in their own environment.

The evidence of enthusiasm for genealogy across British America is abundant.<sup>41</sup> Men and women kept track of their family connections in special family record books, in family Bibles, or in memos tucked into the

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inheritors all contributed to a distribution of property more broadly among descendants. Shammass, "English Inheritance Law," 149, 151, 160.

39. Testimony of Thomas Falls and Timothy Prout, Chickering estate case, Boston Public Library (Ms. Eng 560).

40. For another example of the intense focus on church records, see Ralph Bigland's *Observations on Marriages, Baptisms, and Burials as Preserved in Parochial Registers* (London, 1764).

41. For examples of genealogically themed material and visual culture, see D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes, eds., *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002).

pages of account books. They spoke of their family's past, noted important family dates in diaries or in the pages of an almanac, stitched, painted, penned, and displayed family history illustrations, gave evidence in legal proceedings about who was descended from and related to whom, recounted their vital statistics for recordation in their local churches' books, and buried their loved ones as near to family as possible. The diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of people who lived in British America were often reflected in their specific genealogical practices. For example, German Americans decorated elaborate and colorful *fraktur* family records.<sup>42</sup> Native Americans and African Americans collected and created meaningful oral family histories that reflected both their own cultural values and the kinds of genealogical imperatives inherent in British American religious, legal, and governmental structures.<sup>43</sup>

Close attention here to three examples from the font of extant genealogical materials—a 1771 printed family genealogy, a plethora of heraldic imagery, and a manumission lawsuit—shows how the authority of lineage vested in the Bible, the monarchy, and the law resonated in genealogical practices. In each case we can see how the British emphasis on lineage and genealogy was present, how that was fitted to colonial conditions, and also how families' efforts at self-representation were often most attentive to very local circumstances, including the relationships among family members. A different selection of examples from the deep well of genealogical artifacts might better and in more detail show such variations in genealogical productions as regional particularities—in the South, for example, a greater emphasis on racial distinctions is obvious; in New England the intense interest in rooting family histories within particular town histories is evident. Yet these three examples help illustrate the broad cultural underpinnings of genealogical work common across British America: religion, governance, and law.

Our first example is a twenty-three-page genealogy, dated 1771, that in the manner of the Old Testament recounts the children and grandchildren of Samuel Stebbins and Hannah Hitchcock Stebbins of Springfield, Massa-

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42. Corinne Earnest and Russell Earnest, *To the Latest Posterity: Pennsylvania-German Family Registers in the Fraktur Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

43. For an example of Native American genealogies produced coercively, see Ann Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). For African American genealogies produced in the course of litigation, see Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 212–44.

chusetts.<sup>44</sup> The self-described compiler was Luke Stebbins, forty-nine, the eighth of nine children of Samuel and Hannah who lived to adulthood; Hannah started bearing children in 1708, and her last—two of the last three died very young—was born in 1730. Luke was a careful historian, and New England town histories as well as later genealogies published in the nineteenth century cannot improve much on his work. He anchored the family in the 1634 arrival from England of Rowland Stebbins, and then Rowland's two sons' settlement in very new towns. Luke's ancestor Thomas Stebbins was one of the original settlers of Springfield. Thomas's firstborn of five sons was the grandfather, Samuel, about whom Luke would write extensively.

The Stebbins genealogy, like other genealogies, can be read in any number of ways: as a complex performance or a textual production reflecting its debt to a number of different genres, for example. For our purposes, it looks like other colonial efforts to narrate a lineage, situating a family in its immigrant origins and highlighting one line of descent. Luke Stebbins, like many colonial family historians, seems to have been relatively unconcerned with any English progenitors: "It is not to be expected," he wrote, "that a particular and minute Account should be given, of the family . . . before their first coming . . . to Settle in this Land." His family account's appearance in print self-consciously pushed both the Stebbins genealogy's usual and its particular features to the attention of its audience.<sup>45</sup> Stebbins offered a seven-page introduction to the genealogy that in its first passages reiterated some of the basic principles of Anglo-American genealogical literacies, pointing out that "Genealogies . . . are of as antient a Date as the Formation of Man" and that though "preference being given most especially to those contained in the Holy Scriptures," genealogies more generally had been "of

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44. [Luke Stebbins], *A Genealogy of the Family of Mr. Samuel Stebbins and Mrs. Hannah Stebbins, His Wife, from the Year 1707, to the Year 1771. With their Names, Time of Their Births, Marriages and Deaths of Those That Are Deceased* (Hartford, Conn.: Ebenezer Watson, 1771).

45. For comparable (temporally and geographically) manuscript lineages, see the Parsons genealogy (1743), at the New England Historic and Genealogical Society (NEHGS), Boston, and the Baker family history, in the Charles Baker Papers, AAS. Very few genealogies were printed before 1800; other print examples include the Bollinger family records, printed (probably part of a wider phenomenon of genealogies printed in fraktur at Ephrata, Pennsylvania) in 1763 and 1794, copies held at the NEHGS and the Library Company of Philadelphia; a broadside of the James and Prudence Davis family (New Bern, N.C., 1766) in *Early American Imprints*; and the "Register of the Family of Mr. Josiah Peirce" at the AAS.

use among all civilized Nations, time immemorial, to the great Advantage and Benefit of Mankind.” The “many good Reasons” for families to maintain genealogies, he averred, included the demonstration of God’s goodness toward their ancestors, which would itself “excite in their Children, and Children’s Children, Thankfulness, Hope and Dependence on the GOD of their Fore-Fathers.” And finally, the example of pious, worthy ancestors would encourage among descendants “a laudable Ambition to imitate” those qualities. These remarks smoothed the way for a longer (four-page) encomium of Samuel Stebbins and then, more briefly (more than two pages) of Hannah Stebbins. The former was praised as a model husband (“affectionate”), father (“bountiful”), neighbor (“Charitable”), and Christian (“steady”), the latter as a mother and Christian woman (“tender and pious”). Luke Stebbins had appointed himself interpreter of his family, and of his parents’ character; in so doing he emphasized their strong interest in the education of their grandchildren and the importance they placed in seeing “good Government . . . maintained in families.”<sup>46</sup> These long plaudits allowed Stebbins to situate the importance of his own family’s genealogy both within a longer history of like efforts, including the biblical genealogies, and within the contemporary generation of Stebbinses.

By emphasizing the lineage of his father, Samuel, the firstborn of his grandfather Samuel, Luke Stebbins reinforced the strict patrilineal story foreshadowed in the introduction, but he elided a fuller and more complicated rendering of his family’s history. The predilection in the American colonies for what scholars have called “preference-plus” inheritance strategies reflected the English practice of bestowing larger inheritance shares on oldest male children.<sup>47</sup> And, in many instances, multiple marriages owing to one partner’s early death made for families of half-siblings and step-siblings. In the Stebbinses these patterns came together—not that Luke Stebbins gave up this information easily. His father, Samuel, was the only surviving child of a second marriage that was brief. Samuel Stebbins the elder then married a third time, within two years, Abigail Brooks, and they began their own family, which produced eight surviving children—and presumably Abigail raised baby Samuel. After eleven and a half pages detailing the births, marriages, and deaths of 138 Stebbins descendants of Samuel, first son of Samuel, and a “supplement” catching up with or correcting a few stray dates, Luke Stebbins allowed only a three-paragraph “Appendage” to explain his grandfather’s other children—his own father’s eight half-

46. Stebbins, *Genealogy*, v–ix.

47. On these practices, see especially Ditz, *Property and Kinship*.



siblings: “Out of proper respect to my uncles and aunts . . . as well as to inform our children somewhat of their near relation, I insert the following” brief information.

Other families found ways to more faithfully (and more artfully) represent multiple marriages within single generations.<sup>48</sup> Why this grudging and awkward acknowledgment in the Stebbins case? And why the failure to acknowledge or include these people in the first place? Strict patrilineality is clearly part of the answer. Luke Stebbins was a younger son, but his father was the oldest son of an oldest son. That birth order counted for something, and not just in terms of status. Despite having had eight half-siblings, Samuel Stebbins the younger was the eldest son. As such he inherited a double portion of his father’s estate. Yet he was not one of the estate’s administrators. That job fell to his stepmother, Abigail Brooks Stebbins, and her eldest son, John.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps Luke Stebbins was eliding not only his grandfather’s subsequent marriage and children, but also the relationship and status that marriage had cost his own father. Other details suggest that Samuel Stebbins, as celebrated as he was by his son Luke, was overshadowed in his own natal family by his half-siblings. It was those children who went on to be celebrated founders of more New England towns.<sup>50</sup> And Luke had already signaled a sensitivity to the acclaim other branches on his family tree might have accrued: earlier in the genealogy he noted that his great-grandfather’s brother’s family had been founders of Northampton—then he supplied a marginal note that “from him . . . derived the Families of Stebbins’s that

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48. A striking example is the Craft family record, ca. 1804, describing “The Family of Joseph, Elizabeth, and Sarah Craft.” The record, bordered with columns, lists the marriage dates of Joseph and Elizabeth (1763) and Joseph and Sarah (1777) and the children in order of their birth; a note on the side corresponds to a bracket labeled “first woman’s” and “second woman’s.” See also Laurel Ulrich’s essay “Creating Lineages” in Simons and Benes, *The Art of Family*, 5–11, on the selective emphasis in lineal accounts.

49. Ralph Stebbins Greenlee and Robert Lemuel Greenlee, *The Stebbins Genealogy in Two Volumes* (Chicago, privately printed, 1904), 85–87.

50. See *Historical Celebration of the Town of Brimfield, Hampden County, Mass.* (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan Co., 1879), 456–57, on the original founders, “Liet. Thomas Stebbins with his brother and nephew, Deacon John Stebbins and John Jr.” It goes on to relate their descent from Rowland through Thomas, then Thomas to Samuel, all of whose children by Abigail Brooks are mentioned—but not his eldest son, Samuel, by Joanna Lamb. Another detail Luke Stebbins omitted: after his mother died, his own father remarried; there were no children, but the second wife did inherit some property.

went to Deerfield before that town was destroy'd in 1704, and those that now are there are their Descendants." The destruction of Deerfield by Indian raid, the subsequent captivity of a number of Deerfieldians, and the printed accounts generated thereby made Deerfield a cultural touchstone for Massachusetts—an indicator of commitment both to the cause of colonial expansion and to the faith of their (Puritan) fathers. For Luke Stebbins, asserting this key reference as a marginal note could further emphasize the importance of the story of his own family line.

The Stebbins genealogy, then, was wrapped in layers of context. Its author referred to what was assumed to be a universal (in his universe, anyway) understanding of genealogy's relevance by invoking the Bible and the significance of ancestral example. It recounted a family story according to the patrilineal standards of English law and colonial practice. It rooted the family in its New England origins, making clear its members' stake in this New World identity. And it was invested in contesting some very local familial tensions. The Stebbins production illustrates how the representation of one set of intimate family connections could reflect the biblical lineage model of genealogy, the civil and church imperative to document relationships, and a family's own most intimate concerns.

Rather than a singular family artifact, a second example of British American expressions of genealogical literacy is the use of heraldry, a genre of visual and material culture experienced very widely. The British American interest in, appropriation of, and profusion of heraldry reflected both a reverence of the way that lineage and authority were united in the monarchy and an awareness of how its most powerful symbols could be used to great effect in other contexts. In the colonial context Europeans regularly used a coat of arms to signal their authority and Europe's imperial claims to America and its peoples. Heraldry marked possession: arms appeared on maps, on currency, and on treaties, and imperial authorities gave Native Americans presents marked with armorial devices in hopes of inspiring allegiance, awe, or both.<sup>51</sup> The silver gorget in figure 5 was made in New York

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51. The Duke of York's arms were given to Indians in New York in 1683. Daniel K. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *WMQ* 40, no. 4 (October 1983): 545. Rochambeau gave medallions with the French arms on them to Rhode Island Indians in 1780. Robert A. Selig, "A German Soldier in America, 1780–1783: The Journal of Georg Daniel Flohr," *WMQ* 50, no. 3 (July 1993): 585. For a Spanish colonial example, see Patricia Seed, "Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires," *WMQ* 49, no. 2 (1992): 194.

in 1755. This item, and others like it, such as armbands and wristbands, was presented to Native Americans as a gift of diplomacy and alliance.<sup>52</sup> Like many of these pieces, the gorget, technically a piece of throat armor, bore the king's arms—instantly recognizable from the slightly outsize supporters, the lion and unicorn, in this depiction.<sup>53</sup> The grammar of official heraldry is complex, rife with symbolic representations of geometry (the quartering of the shield and so forth), mottos, mantles, and crests, but the basic message conveyed by a coat of arms was straightforward. Royal arms were an emblem of ownership, legitimacy, authority, and rule.

But a coat of arms could signal all of these without the royal mantle; heraldry signified nobility as well as royalty. It was through the nobility, with its power and land tenure, that the authority of lineage reached further into the English population. And even untitled but landed families could sport an authentic coat of arms. The catch was authenticity, for a coat of arms was of little use to the system of lineage rule if it was not authentic. A medieval institution, the College of Arms gained new life and new importance in the early modern royal transitions; royally appointed heralds conducted thorough and regular genealogical research throughout the realm for the purpose of authenticating arms—essentially, they authenticated noble blood kin and the political (and economic) privileges that attended nobility. England's ruling elite had long used genealogy in precisely this instrumental way. Securing power through adjustments to lineal successions was a tactic supplemented and complemented by adaptations and explanations of lineage that served political ambitions. The heralds also created new arms and new genealogies when noble status was conferred, an honored and effective way for a king or queen to create and keep allies.

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52. Martha Grandy Fales, *Early American Silver*, rev. ed. (New York: Dutton, 1973), 183. Fales discusses other items of "Indian silver," including wristbands with the U.S. seal commissioned in 1795. One of these is worn in the 1795 portrait of an Osage by Charles Fevret de Saint-Mémin. Fales, *Early American Silver*, 182–86.

53. The use of supporters, those animals that appear on either side of the shield and usually on the crest and motto, was reserved, from the sixteenth through the late nineteenth century, for royalty. Thus, the king's arms need not have been carefully read for the quartering on the shield that denoted his kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland, and a complicated design denoting his authorities in Germany. In fact, the shield is small enough that this detail is omitted. But the lion and the unicorn, the crown that crests the shield (the lion himself crowned!) and the motto "Dieu et Mon Droit" (God and my right) were all enhanced so as to make the whole legible. On these technical aspects of the royal arms in this period, see Thomas Woodcock and John Martin Robinson, *The Oxford Guide to Heraldry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 95, 112.

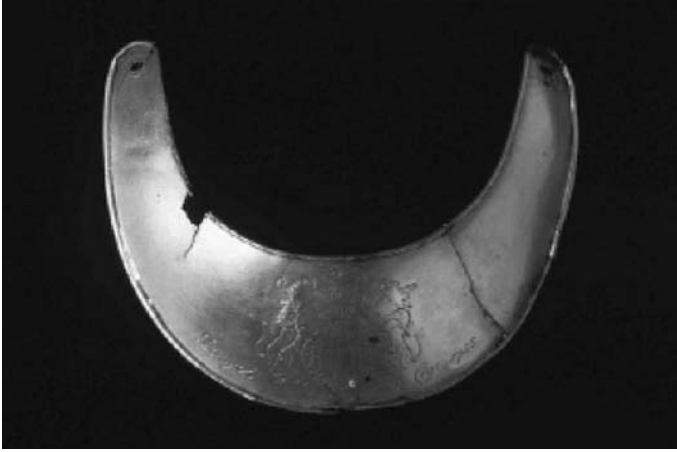


Figure 5. Barent Ten Eyck gorget, ca. 1755. This gorget, made in New York and discovered in North Carolina, was created to be part of the ceremony of imperial gift giving common to colonial-Native diplomacy. The central symbol of the king's authority, his coat of arms, was elaborated by Ten Eyck, the silversmith, by increasing the proportional size of the animals supports. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.

The pursuit and use of heraldry among Americans would seem fruitless given the attachment of titles and arms to specific English land-based lineages.<sup>54</sup> But colonial innovation interceded in several ways to create an enthusiasm for and reflect the interest in the authority of arms. The organization of the Carolina colony, the *Fundamental Constitutions* drafted by John Locke, actually provided for a colonial, hereditary nobility. The York herald of the College of Arms, Lawrence Cromp, was appointed in 1705 as the Carolina herald to oversee grants of titles and arms, to invest the Carolina nobles with robes and pendants, and “under your hand & Seal to devyse, Give, grant and assign upon the Face of the Sun in its’ Glory Such

54. Some colonists did petition the College of Arms for genealogical research that would have documented their entitlement to a coat of arms; for the case of William Alexander, see Paul David Nelson, *The Life of William Alexander Lord Stirling: George Washington’s Noble General* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), and for a contemporary example of Alexander’s continuing efforts to claim the title of Lord Stirling, see “The Pedigree of Lord Stirling,” *Gentleman’s Magazine*, October 1, 1776; for disputes to his claim to the lineage title, see “Further Account of Lord Stirling,” *Gentleman’s Magazine*, November 1, 1776 (calling him the “Lord of Long Island”).

Arms & Crests as you Shall think most ffit & proper to all such Inhabitants of our said Province, that to you shall appear deserving the Same as an Everlasting Monumt. to them and their Posterity of their Rise & Descent from our sd. Province of Carolina.” Though there is no evidence that any of this was carried out, the scheme for the Carolina herald and his work on behalf of a hereditary nobility was a singular effort to implant in the colonies a mechanism for awarding and perpetuating land-based titles that paralleled the English system at home. Locke’s involvement is but one suggestion of similar political interests in enhancing Parliament’s powers while retaining a commitment to lineage—backed by inherited property—as a crucial source for Anglo-American forms of authority.<sup>55</sup>

It turned out that, the official sanction of a herald notwithstanding, colonials made quite free use of coats of arms to style themselves with the status—and the authority—conferred by genealogies. From Georgia to Maine, in Boston and in tiny Frederick, Maryland, artisans advertised their ability to decorate objects with a coat of arms.<sup>56</sup> Elite Virginians became

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55. Appointment of Lawrence Crompton as Carolina herald, June 1, 1705, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. The *Fundamental Constitutions* was unique in British colonial designs in its heavy emphasis on the control and perpetuation of a nobility. Locke drafted the original Carolina *Fundamental Constitutions* in 1669 and, as David Armitage and others have argued, was key to their revision in 1682. Armitage also takes up the connection between Locke’s work on the Carolina project and his *Second Treatise*, crucial links in the critique of liberalism’s complicity in empire and slavery, in Armitage, “John Locke, Carolina, and the *Two Treatises of Government*,” *Political Theory* 32, no. 5 (October 2004): 602–27.

56. Artisans were sensitive to their clients’ ignorance of any actual claims to arms: in 1774 William Bateman of New York advertised that he had a book of thousands of arms, and that “gentlemen who want their coat of arms engraved by him, and do not know them, may search the book gratis.” Fales, *Early American Silver*, 240. John Singleton Copley’s painting of the Boston silversmith Nathaniel Hurd (1765, and with an original frame by Paul Revere) shows Hurd’s arm resting on two books, one of which is plainly the 1724 edition of John Guillim’s *Display of Heraldry*, an indispensable guide to English arms and titles. Dressed casually and presenting himself as an artisan, Hurd also signaled his knowledge of and service to the aspirations of gentility that came with engraved silver. Thomas Reynolds, a stonecutter in Philadelphia, assured potential customers “As many gentlemen are unacquainted with the Coats of Arms pertaining to their families . . . Edmondson’s Heraldry . . . now in the City Library, contains all the coats of arms ever used in Great Britain or Ireland.” *Columbian Magazine*, January and February 1788, back wrapper, and *American Museum*, October and November 1787 and January 1788, wrapper, both in Zinman Collection, Library Company of Philadelphia. I am grateful to Carl Keyes for these references.

known for grand gravestones adorned with family crests, and in cities such as Boston and Philadelphia silversmiths turned out lovely work similarly decorated. Heraldic devices ornamented silver cans, casters, cups, bowls, salvers, tankards, beakers, coffeepots, teapots, and chocolate pots. Coats of arms were painted on coaches, chaises, signboards, and ships, and it became fashionable for elite young women in late eighteenth-century Boston to embroider their families' arms.<sup>57</sup> Items emblazoned with a coat of arms could be a special bequest to a namesake, as in the case of the Virginians Samuel Peachy and Moore Fauntleroy, each of whom willed a "great silver tankard" that "has my coat of arms on it," the former to a grandson, the latter to his son.<sup>58</sup> Yes, elites seem to have prized objects emblazoned with "their" arms, though the regularity with which artisans turned to manuals that listed coats of arms by last name—a shortcut that the College of Arms would surely condemn, and which led to plenty of errors and appropriations of coats of arms—suggests that many if not most were unconcerned with the strict legitimacy of their use.<sup>59</sup> And the profusion of goods available with armorial devices demonstrates that the style was available down through the ranks, certainly to middling people as well as elites. Lastly, the ways that arms were displayed on public buildings, signs, trade cards, and other advertisements show that people of every rank were exposed to these devices. Heraldry certainly signaled a claim to high status, but it was no guarantee of anything but the wearer, bearer, or observer's intent. The extensive use of

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57. Examples abound. Caudle cup by John Coney with Addington arms (Boston, 1679), and Jacob Hurd coffeepot with Clarke arms (Boston, 1750), both in Fales, *Early American Silver*, 21, 42; Wyllys painted arms from Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework. 1650–1850*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 60; Foxcroft/Coney arms in silk and Greene arms in silk, wool, and beads, both in Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 64, 67. No doubt some of the profusion of armorially styled objects were borne by the individuals attached to them; but as the current College of Heralds notes so succinctly, a coat of arms belongs to an individual, not a family. Thus, the common uses in the colonies of a family coats of arms were probably a sort of improvisation.

58. "Abstracts from Records of Richmond County, Virginia," *WMQ* 17, no. 3 (January 1909): 177, 187. Peachy's will was proved in June 1714, Fauntleroy's in April 1739.

59. In New York the Sill family commissioned a piece with the family arms from the silversmith Cornelius Kierstede. After reference to Guillim's book of arms, Kierstede engraved a tankard with the family arms of *Still*: close enough. But these were the particular arms of a dowager of the Still family. Fales, *Early American Silver*, 238–39. Women could inherit arms only if there was no male heir, and they used these arms in a diamond or lozenge shape.

heraldry throughout British America as a symbol of heredity and authority suggests not only how monarchy could serve to reinforce genealogical thinking, but how powerfully the concept of genealogical connection could suffuse material and visual culture.

The third example of genealogical work shifts our attention to the role of property law in the creation of race and the institution of slavery. Whereas Anglo-American law, including inheritance law, protected the interests of white families and their lineal inheritance, it thwarted the interests of black families entirely. The law was premised on the ideological, economic, and sexual cornerstone of racialized slavery in British America: hereditary slave status. Perverting the ideals and practices that so entwined authority and lineage for whites in Anglo-America, this form of inheritance from mother to child simultaneously enhanced slaveholders' property and secured white men's access to the bodies of enslaved women.<sup>60</sup> Reflecting the careful crafting of law that twinned racial and gender privileges and disabilities, slavery was a status with which a white man could not, by himself, endow his children.<sup>61</sup>

Because slavery was so crucially connected to issues of descent, genealogical information was important. Genealogical data about enslaved people, particularly their dates of birth and information about their mothers, were

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60. Determining the legal inheritability of slavery in the American context was based on a combination of Roman precedent, biblical interpretation, racial ideology, and expediency. As Orlando Patterson notes, "In all societies where the institution [of slavery] acquired more than marginal significance . . . birth became the most important source of slaves." Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 132. Patterson goes on to categorize differences in determining inheritable status (by mother, father, both, neither, high or low status), 133–47. On Virginia's self-conscious move to create slavery as a condition of racial heredity, and for some examples of early freedom suits that followed the critical 1662 statute, see Brown, *Good Wives*, 212–44, and 441n52 on the greater proportion of freedom suits invoking free white mothers, especially early in the eighteenth century.

61. The law reflected the imperatives of racial hierarchy, but not always the interest and desires of specific people, even white men enmeshed in the privileges of that hierarchy. For a careful account of the subtle ways that courts negotiated lineal inheritance, see Adrienne Davis, "The Private Law of Race and Sex: An Antebellum Perspective," *Stanford Law Review* 51, no. 2 (January 1999): 221–88. Davis points out the balance judges sought to strike, particularly in cases where black women stood to inherit from either black or white lovers or common-law husbands, between respect for the lineal succession and the requisites of racial hierarchy.

carefully collected, preserved, and deployed when necessary. Slavery itself was on the line; or, more accurately, freedom hung in the balance. Just as slavery depended on birth and descent from an enslaved woman, freedom could be dependent on demonstrating a free lineage. Thus, freedom suits and manumissions often turned to the recitation of a maternal genealogy.<sup>62</sup>

One well-documented example shows how slavery, freedom, and genealogical work entwined in the political and legal realms. Shortly before he died in 1771, the Virginian John Pleasants drafted a will that would eventually free hundreds of people from slavery. Pleasants was a major landholder, an eminent Quaker, and an early southern advocate of abolition. To his children and some grandchildren he bequeathed enslaved people and their families until the time when emancipation was legalized.<sup>63</sup> When the Virginia legislature passed a law in 1782 allowing for private manumissions, most of his heirs acted quickly to fulfill the terms of Pleasants's will.<sup>64</sup> But not all. The failure of some heirs to emancipate people whose fate had been entrusted to them produced a dramatic legal showdown. In 1798 John's son Robert Pleasants, first president of the short-lived Virginia Abolition Soci-

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62. To take one brief example from earlier in the eighteenth century, all six people who filed freedom suits in Prince George's County, Maryland, in the 1730s cited descent from a free woman as the basis of their claim (three of those people appeared in court multiple times). In 1739, for example, "Molatto Newmal" argued that his "mother being born of a white woman yr. Petr. Conceives that he is intitled to his Liberty." Transcriptions of the Prince George's County cases as well as those for other Virginia and Maryland counties can be found at [freeafricanamericans.com](http://freeafricanamericans.com); wills and deeds of manumissions can be found at the website of Professor Michael Nicholls of Utah State University: [www.usu.edu/history/faculty/nicholls/manumissions/index.htm](http://www.usu.edu/history/faculty/nicholls/manumissions/index.htm). Discussions of the instrumental use of law to create maternal descent of slave status in the English North American colonies, and the implications thereof, are in Warren Billings, "The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *WMQ* 30, no. 3 (July 1973): 467–74; and Brown, *Good Wives*, 212–44.

63. A copy of pages 3–11 of John Pleasants's will is in the Pleasants Family Papers, box 12, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. An important summary of the Pleasants case, in which Robert Pleasants first petitioned the Virginia legislature, then moved to have his case heard at Virginia's High Court of Chancery, and finally was taken to the Court of Appeals, is in *The Papers of John Marshall*, ed. Charles Hobson, 12 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974–2006), 5:541–55. I thank Fredrika Teute for this reference.

64. Full texts of the Virginia laws concerning manumission can be found at the Virginia Center for Digital History: [www.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/laws1751-1800.html](http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/laws1751-1800.html).



ety, sued thirteen of his relatives for the release of the enslaved men and women they had inherited and had been meant to manumit.<sup>65</sup> In some cases the defendants were not the direct beneficiaries of John Pleasants's will but had inherited the enslaved from an intermediate party. Questions then turned on whether manumission could be directed by a will to a future legality, and whether subsequent inheritors were beholden to the original will.

The case was heard in Virginia's highest court; Robert Pleasants—and the men, women, and children whose freedom he argued for—carried the day. One of the men who had been freed under the terms of John Pleasants's will, but was still wrongly retained in bondage, successfully sued his mistress directly.

The Pleasants case was extraordinary in some respects—namely, the number of people involved and the disposition of Virginia's court. But it was ordinary in the way that it provoked an exploration of genealogical information in the service of the law. In a series of findings and directives it issued beginning in March 1798 and concluding in March 1800, Virginia's High Court of Chancery required that family and personal information about hundreds of people held in bondage in Virginia be collected and then submitted for the court's inspection.<sup>66</sup> Because of a gradual emancipation clause (enslaved men and women were free at age thirty), a key question concerned the age, and thus the enslaved status, of an individual's mother. Court-appointed commissioners reported, for example, that twenty-nine persons enslaved by Samuel Pleasants were born to mothers after they were thirty and thus should be freed immediately. One hundred and fifteen people were born to mothers younger than thirty, and their birthdates and the dates, thirty years on, when they should be freed were noted.

These investigations into the genealogy of slave families became very particular, as in the case of the those people held in bondage by Daniel Teasdale in September 1799: "the issue of Suky, now deceased," the children of Sally,

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65. On Virginia abolition, and for a close analysis of the progress of British Parliamentary debates on the abolition of the slave trade, see the correspondence between Robert Pleasants and James Pemberton of Philadelphia, Pleasants Family Papers, box 12, folder 3, Huntington Library.

66. Some of the manuscript reports can be found *ibid.* The results were reported in the publication of the Virginia High Court of Chancery, "Between Robert Pleasants . . . and Mary Logan" (Richmond, 1800). These investigations continued more than a decade after the court's finding. William Pope to Micajah Crew (the Pleasantses' attorney), Montpelier, Va., July 30, 1809, Micajah Crew Papers I, Brock Collection, box 43, folder 25, Huntington Library.

“now 42 years of age,” and Jenny, “aged 35.” Suky’s children Isabel, who was twenty-one, Hampton, who was twenty, and two teenagers, Molly, fourteen, and Frank, thirteen, all would be enslaved until their thirtieth birthdays. Suky’s younger children, Jack, eleven, Suky, eight, and Peter, four, were all “born free as their mother was then 30 years of age.”<sup>67</sup> Although we cannot be sure from whom this information was derived, the court’s commissioners implied that they interviewed the people most directly concerned, and other manumission cases and freedom suits cited oral genealogical testimony from enslaved people.

Oral family histories were important sources of information in freedom suits, but so too were the account books in which slaveholders kept records of slave families’ genealogies. Plantation account books detailed slaves’ births and deaths along with other information about the management of agricultural production.<sup>68</sup> Accounting for the number and ages of slaves was perceived as important both for the maintenance of this form of property and for the most efficient use of labor. But there was more to the keeping of the family histories of enslaved people than pure economic rationality. The very variety of means by which these histories were kept embedded them in the same processes of memory’s production, and of valuing lineal connection, as other family records.

Just as whites were preserving their own family histories within books that mingled genres of information, so too do the records of slave families appear within volumes whose uses ranged widely—and included the genealogies of both slaves and slaveholders. In the early eighteenth century Samuel Godwin combined tobacco accounts and records of the shipment of other goods with his family’s—and his slaves’—genealogies. On two pages the story of Godwin’s family unfolded: his own birth, his wife’s, their marriage, their children’s births. And on another, “Jim the sun of Aim was born the 26 day of December 1770.” In this tiny, three- by five-inch volume, now with no cover, these details are nestled together, their close communion betraying the complex tensions and exercise of power that mediated the relations among the people themselves.<sup>69</sup>

67. “Between Robert Pleasants . . . and Mary Logan,” 15–16.

68. A canonical plantation account is Jefferson’s “Farm Book,” which details from 1776 to 1826 his agricultural interests and production and the supplies he distributed to his enslaved.

69. Samuel Godwin Memorandum Book, 1705–1804, Brock Collection, Huntington Library. Among other examples is the journal of the Behn family of South Carolina, which integrates information about the white and black families in its pages. For example, “Elizabeth Sarah Behn Departed this Life the 25th Day of May



This essay suggests more than a history of genealogical practice in early America: it argues that genealogical consciousness was a bedrock of British American culture. Taking genealogy seriously as a subject of study has been made more difficult by its current status as a popular American hobby, but also by scholarly emphases on the domestic family and the political rejection of aristocracy.<sup>70</sup> Obscuring the significance of genealogy in early America, too, is the nineteenth-century appearance of elite societies and publications formalizing its practice, which historians have interpreted as reflecting a new and distinctive interest.<sup>71</sup> The notion that the creation of family histories was a private interest only of elite families suggests that, in America, only status was at stake in genealogical work, and that only elaborate family histories of the sort published in the nineteenth century could be classified as “genealogies.”

But neither is true—and for reasons that matter. People across many cultures may be attentive to their families’ past, but the form and content of their genealogical productions reflect the traditions and expectations of the societies in which they live. Indeed, their genealogical interest may itself be constituted by those traditions and expectations, *particularly* when the latter are mediated by the state (and allied institutions). Phenomena particular to the British system, such as the security of property and its lineal passage to heirs, and the patriarchal logic of the Protestantism so deeply ingrained in British American culture may have become naturalized or seen

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1804 at six o’clock in the afternoon—Aged 2 years 25 Days,” and, on the following page, “Prince son to Binah Born 15th Octr. 1805.” Behn family journal, South Caroliniana Library.

70. For a modern-day example of the persistent naturalizing of genealogical interests, see William Ferris’s remarks introducing the NEH project “My History is America’s History”: [www.neh.gov/news/press-release/1999-11-24](http://www.neh.gov/news/press-release/1999-11-24). And for a challenge to the notion of genealogy as a politically neutral practice, see the introduction to Henry Louis Gates’s 2006 program on PBS, “African American Lives 2”: [www.pbs.org/wnet/aalives/about.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aalives/about.html).

71. There are numerous examples of interpretation along these lines, but for one that focuses on John Farmer, founder in spirit of the New England Historic Genealogical Society and author of the first extensive works of New England local history cum genealogy, see Weil, “John Farmer and the Making of American Genealogy.” A more nuanced account that also focuses on published local histories and genealogies is David D. Hall and Alan Taylor, “Reassessing the Local History of New England,” in Roger Parks, ed., *New England: A Bibliography of Its History* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989).

as neutral when in fact they played a crucial role in organizing social, economic, and political relationships. Not coincidentally, but elementally, they encouraged genealogical literacy. The emphatic importance of lineage to religious teaching and practice, the culture of monarchy, which prized biological descent as the most important source of authority, and, crucially, a system of law that secured lineal inheritance all undergirded the British American genealogical regime.

If historians can agree that genealogy is not a timeless, universal phenomenon, but rather a historically specific cultural production, we must also account for its dual character as a concern of the state and of families. The British system in America encouraged genealogical literacy and even coerced genealogical production from a diverse group of Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans with varied cultural backgrounds, including very different ideas and lived experiences of family.<sup>72</sup> Some families, subordinated to the power of the colonial state, could be nonetheless “drawn into maintaining and reproducing colonial regimes,” while other families more consciously facilitated such a regime because of the power afforded them within it.<sup>73</sup>

But individuals and families, of course, also created genealogies out of sight of the state. The meanings of such intimate histories are complex and may yield only to the closest readings. When the Reverend Nehemiah Hobart of Hingham, Massachusetts, recorded the death of his aunt Lydia Lincoln in 1732, he added sorrowfully, “now my Grandfathers children are all Removed By Death. I hope we are to meet in Heaven.”<sup>74</sup> When William Calhoun of the South Carolina backcountry accounted for the marriages of his neighbors in a small pocketbook, he also saved a page to record the births of his nine children, from Joseph, born in 1750, to Ezekiel, born in 1773.<sup>75</sup> When Jabez Warner, a shoemaker in Woodbury, Connecticut,

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72. When the English took New York in the later seventeenth century, they replaced the Dutch system of marital communal property with their own, more strictly patriarchal inheritance law. See Deborah Rosen, “Women and Property across Colonial America: A Comparison of Legal Systems in New Mexico and New York,” *WMQ* 60, no. 2 (April 2003): 355–81. The English insisted that Native American families mimic features of their system, too, for purposes of inheritance. For a colonial example, see Plane, *Colonial Intimacies*.

73. This is Durba Ghosh’s formulation in her consideration of native women’s agency in the colonial state in India. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.

74. Peter Hobart record book, 1635–1780, MHS.

75. Calhoun family papers, South Caroliniana Library.

paused in the middle of his oversize and lengthy account book and set aside a page for his family history, he made sure to include his parents' marriage and children, and then his own marriage and children, deaths of infants (often quickly following their births), each event painstakingly narrated: "Anne Warner daughter to Jabez and hannah Warner was born Jan.-the 24th 1757. Anne Daughter of Jabez Warner and hannah his wife Departed this Life Novbr-24th 1760 four years old wanting 2 months."<sup>76</sup> And when Ann Fisher of Maryland's Anne Arundel County petitioned the county court in 1734, and again in 1743, to gain her freedom, it was her mother's and grandmother's histories she recounted from the oral tradition she must have known so well: she was the daughter "of a Certain Mary Fisher of Ann Arundel County a free woman and . . . the daughter of a certain Mary Molloyd Born in Ireland who came into this Province a servant for a term of years."<sup>77</sup>

In each of these cases an emotional texture is plain, even as family history merged with other necessities: of law, of politics, of money. Genealogy was perhaps most effective when it worked both sides of the street, when it acted as both familial expression and an object of state utility. It is the case not only that the state insinuated genealogical literacies into the life of the family for its own ends, or even that families could find legitimacy for their interest in the concomitant interest of the state, but also that in British America the state's genealogical predilections closely mirrored many people's understandings of the cultural traditions of religion, governance, and law that bound them to family.

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76. Warner account book, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.

77. Anne Arundel County Court Judgment Records, 1703–1765, August 13, 1734, and June 14, 1743, [www.freeafricanamericans.com/AnneArundel.htm](http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/AnneArundel.htm).