Executing Race
Harris, Sharon M.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Harris, Sharon M.
The Ohio State University Press, 2005.
Project MUSE.  muse.jhu.edu/book/28298.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/28298

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1177524
Lucy Terry:
A Life of Radical Resistance

Within the war . . . I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior.
—Audre Lorde

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child . . .
—African American spiritual

Like Belinda, Lucy Terry (ca. 1724–1821) lived the realities of colonialist practices in the United States, and yet she stands at the forefront of African American literature. While her status as the first African American poet should afford her a place of considerable distinction in the annals of U.S. literary studies, in reality it has become a critical tag that dismisses Terry’s remarkable life and poetic achievements. While a few scholars, such as Sidney Kaplan and Frances Smith Foster, have recognized Terry as “one of the most remarkable women of her time,” that critical perspective has not prevailed. Perhaps because “Bars Fight” is Terry’s only extant poem, it has typically been studied merely as an anachronism. Carolivia Herron reminds us, however, that “studies of relationships between black writings and prior works in western tradition have been used almost exclusively to affirm that Afro-American literature lacks creativity,” and similar assertions have dogged Terry’s poem. In a recent essay, Toni Morrison defines her interest in writing as a solution to her search “for a sovereignty, an authority”; in the creative act alone, Morrison asserts, “did I feel coherent, unfettered.” This assertion is
not a utopian allusion to the power of the imagination, for Morrison recognizes only too well that language “both liberate(s) and imprison(s)” the writer. Morrison’s use of the term “unfettered” surely alludes to Phillis Wheatley’s poem “On Imagination,” in which she asserts that her “fetters” were temporarily abandoned through the powers of imagination. It is ironic, then, that critical commentary has, in a sense, held Lucy Terry fettered to a narrow reading of possibility in her poetry.

One potential means of breaking this pattern is to understand the theory of bicultural play, that is, to recognize that such interactions are intercultural exchanges in which the observers view the observed, but the observed are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate their observers’ actions. It has been argued that when it comes to texts from European explorers, scientists, and settlers, we are fascinated with any kind of text: “Oral texts, written texts, lost texts, secret texts, texts appropriated, abridged, translated, anthologized, and plagiarized.” Indeed, we should be interested in all such texts, but “Bars Fight” should also be read as a cultural text in which both African cultural influences and American traditions shaped its creation. Just as overt references to the African deity Orissa in Belinda’s petition force us to recognize the bicultural perspective of her petition, the more covert influences in Terry’s poem should have an equal effect, especially when we recall the necessity of covertness when one is still enslaved.

Reading Terry’s poem as a cultural text lets us discover that it is a satirization of one of the Euro-American culture’s most popular genres, the Indian captivity narrative, and as such it stands at the forefront of a significant tradition in African American literary history. To understand “Bars Fight” in this context, and equally so to examine the life that gave rise to the power to be one who critiques—to be one who, through bicultural play, turns the observers’ gaze back on themselves; to be, perhaps, the subaltern who speaks—demands a radical rethinking on the part of twenty-first-century critics. Black feminist scholars have, over the last twenty-five years, been the vanguard in this process of rethinking the past, and the discussion that follows is indebted to that quarter-century of scholarship.

As bell hooks has observed, the prevailing image of African American female bodies is one of bondage and a lack of agency:

Rarely [in the fight against white supremacy] does anyone call attention to the complex and diverse ways the [black female] body has been foregrounded as a site of conquest in all efforts of colonization. . . . Rarely do we articulate a vision of resistance, of decolonizing that provides strategies for the construction of a liberatory black female body politics. . . .
Who among us when remembering 18th and 19th century representations of African American females can call to mind any visual representation of the body of a free black woman.9

While Lucy Terry's physical likeness per se is unknown to us, her lifelong resistance to oppression may be a significant step toward reconfiguring our vision of black women who resisted colonization.

In addition to hooks's attention to the black female body, Frances Smith Foster has exposed the ways in which twentieth-century critical studies have impacted representations of African American women's writings:

Greater respect for the genius, strength, and resiliency of African American culture would allow different readings. . . . For example, if we were to take seriously the idea that Christianity was not manufactured in Europe and did in fact contain beliefs and practices common to many African religions and the idea that in many African cultures, poetry was used to instruct, correct, and commemorate, then Phillis Wheatley might be read as an audacious, even a subversive, poet.10

The same could be argued for the far more radical Lucy Terry.

Further, if we conjoin these pertinent calls by black feminists for critical reassessments with what at first may seem like an unlikely theoretical sister—Donna Haraway and her seminal essay of the late twentieth century, “A Cyborg Manifesto”—a sense of the radical nature of Terry's poem emerges. Haraway posits the image of the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.”11 Further, she focuses on women's situations in relation to such means of analyzing objects of knowledge and the dualisms that have ordered Western discourse in the last half-century. While we are at a point of extreme today, as Haraway asserts, extremes themselves should not be posited linearly or binarily. That is, we should resist oppositions that posit “now” as worse/more opportune than “then” to act upon existing systems of domination. Haraway presents her “cyborg myth” as being “about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.”12 If we translate Haraway’s analysis of women's fictive/reality through the lens of the eighteenth-century Middle Passage’s “disassembly and reassembly” of human beings within its prevalent systems of slavery (where certainly the slave is figured as “a hybrid of machine and organism”), interesting correlations and potentialities for transgressing boundaries and recognizing new fusions emerge:
The actual situation of women is their integration/exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination. The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself—all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others—consequences that themselves are very different for different people and which make potent oppositional international movements difficult to imagine and essential for survival.  

As Haraway carefully notes, “[W]e are not dealing with a technological determinism, but with a historical system depending upon structured relations among people.” While we cannot make a one-on-one “translation” from a twenty-first-century culture of cybernetics to a mid-eighteenth-century slave culture, we can understand correlations between systemic cultural productions. If the “informatics” of slavery, of its “scientific” and cultural objects of knowledge and its pervasive discourses, were not electronically/cybernetically situated, they were nonetheless the all-pervasive, productive/reproductive, polymorphous means by which domination functioned and by which it was made invisible.

Reinscribing Lucy Terry’s Resistance

Lucy Terry, like Margaretta Bleecker Faugeres, used a resisting voice to execute a new vision of American culture. Knowledge of Terry’s radical challenges to the dominant culture’s devaluing of herself and her race exposes and transgresses eighteenth-century boundaries of domination and discourse. What becomes most evident is that Lucy Terry valued the power of voicing her opinions—of making her presence visible in a society that proscribed cultural invisibility for its enslaved members. Once freed, Terry repeatedly positioned herself—physically as well as intellectually—in opposition to racist and sexist colonizing practices. An understanding of Terry’s text will, therefore, be enhanced by first examining the contexts—personal and cultural—that figure her developing activism against contemporary racist practices.

Born in West Africa around 1724, Lucy Terry was kidnapped at a very young age, possibly in infancy, and brought to Bristol, Rhode Island. David Proper has uncovered several new details about Lucy Terry’s early life in New England. Notably, Proper has ascertained that Terry was first taken to Enfield, Connecticut, from Rhode Island and that her first master was apparently Samuel Terry (1632–1730) of Enfield. With Samuel Terry’s death in
1730, Lucy was likely sold as part of the estate. At the age of five or six years, she became the property of a Deerfield, Massachusetts, slave master, Ensign Ebenezer Wells (1691–1758). His father, Ebenezer Wells (1669–?), was one of the original grantees of Deerfield, having been allotted twenty of the original eight thousand acres that constituted the establishment of Deerfield in the Pocumtuck Indians’ native region. Terry’s master held several civic positions in the town and participated in the local militia. In a Puritan community such as Deerfield, however, his standing in the church was perhaps of greatest import. Here, too, Wells seems to have garnered special recognition. For instance, in 1746 when the issue arose of “seating the meetinghouse” for a newly constructed church, Wells was among the members to be allotted “first Choice” in selecting pews. Being a slave owner increased rather than diminished Wells’s standing in Deerfield, which, like all of Massachusetts Bay’s Puritan communities, relied largely upon property ownership for social and church status.

During Lucy Terry’s first years in Deerfield, the townspeople were actively involved in the Great Awakening revivals, and church records indicate that on June 15, 1735, “Lucy Servant to Ebenezer Wells was baptised upon his account.” This act was undoubtedly part of the missionary impetus to Christianize Africans that marked the Great Awakening fervor. If the baptism was, as it appears, not a matter of choice, church membership may well have been Terry’s choice: Church records note that on August 19, 1744, “Lusey Servant to Ebenezer Wells was admitted to the fellowship of the chh.” Her indoctrination into the Calvinist tradition has played a large role in critics’ assessment of her life and poetry. Yet later events, detailed below, suggest that one of Terry’s greatest skills was in using her religious training as a tool against the social and legal oppressions of the dominant culture.

On May 17, 1756, Lucy Terry married an older, property-owning, freed African American, Abijah Prince (1706–94). Abijah had been born in Wallingford, Connecticut, a slave to the Reverend Benjamin Doolittle; he resettled in Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1717 when Doolittle became the town’s first minister. When he died in 1749, Doolittle apparently manumitted Abijah and willed to him some of his real estate rights. Two years later, Abijah Prince was the owner of shares in three land divisions in the town. Although he apparently left Northfield around 1752, he retained his land there for the next thirty years.

For the first few years of their married life, the couple resided in Deerfield on land owned by Terry’s master. Early histories of the community note that the Princes’ house bordered a stream that became known as Bijah’s Brook and that “Luce Bijah,” as Terry was known, was “one of the most noteworthy
characters in the early history of Deerfield.” 25 In 1764, the Princes moved to Guilford, Vermont, where Abijah had inherited one hundred acres from Deacon Samuel Field. Vermont was a notable choice of residence. The colony had long been recognized for its opposition to slavery. In the Revolutionary years, it would be the first state to proclaim that all men were “entitled to life, liberty and happiness and that no person should serve another after he reaches maturity.” 26 Abijah understood that in the colonies property ownership was the primary means of maintaining his and his family’s free status as well as the means of gaining recognition within the community. 27 Therefore, in addition to owning the Northfield and Guildford properties, he petitioned King George III and the governor of New Hampshire to become one of the original grantees of Sunderland, Vermont. The request was granted, and he held equal shares with the other grantees in the divided lands, 28 with a total of three hundred acres in his name. Abijah thereby became one of the leading African American landowners in the colonies. Whereas extending property rights for African Americans was represented in Abijah’s choices, Lucy chose the legal system as the landscape upon which she would manipulate the colonialist system on behalf of her family and her race.

Lucy Terry Prince had remarkable courage, and her oratorical talents served her particularly well in social and legal disputes that subsequently arose. Three notable cases engaged her attention and demonstrate the means by which she sought to push the boundaries of rights for African Americans in New England during the early Federal period. First, in 1785, Terry Prince spoke in a public forum, exposing white neighbors, Ormas and John Noyes, who had threatened her family with violence. In resistance to the Princes’ land ownership, the Noyeses had destroyed the Princes’ fences and set haystacks on fire in an attempt to remove Lucy and Abijah from their land. This was really Lucy’s battle. Abijah was almost eighty years old and physically unable to take on the rigors of travel and court appearances. Lucy was readily able. She traveled by horse across the state of Vermont to present her defense. Appearing before Governor Thomas Chittenden and his council, Lucy Terry Prince asked for protection against racist persecution. On June 7, 1785—in spite of the Noyes family’s wealth, leadership in the community, and racial advantage—the council ruled in Terry Prince’s favor, ordering Guilford’s selectmen to protect the Prince family and their property:

On the Representation of Lucy Prince, wife of Abijah Prince, and others shewing that, the said Abijah, Lucy and Family, are greatly oppressed & injured by John and Ormas Noyce, in the possession and enjoyment of a certain farm or Piece of Land, on which the said Abijah and Lucy now
Lives, the Council having Taken the same into consideration and made
due enquiry, are of Opinion that the said Abijah and Lucy are much
injured, and that unless the Town Take some due Methods to protect said
Abijah, Lucy & family in the enjoyment of their possession, they must
soon unavoidably fall upon the Charity of the Town.²⁹

In this instance, it is clear that the concern about having to support the fam-
ily if their land was usurped influenced the council’s consideration, perhaps
as much as Terry Prince’s argument of injury by the Noyeses. In her subse-
quent legal case, Terry Prince’s persuasive advocacy of her rights would be the
deciding factor.

In 1793, Lucy Terry Prince again sought to push legal boundaries for
African Americans. The Princes had six children, all of whom had been edu-
cated in Guilford’s schools.³⁰ Terry Prince wanted her sons to have the same
higher-education opportunities as the other young men in the community.
Thus she applied for admission of her youngest son, Abijah, Jr., to Williams
College in Williamstown, Massachusetts.³¹ It was not coincidence, surely,
that Lucy Terry Prince chose Williams College for her son’s application of
admittance. The college was named in honor of Ephraim Williams, who had
designated his estate for the founding of a liberal arts college. Williams was
captain of a company that had been raised in 1746 to invade Canada.
Whether or not Abijah, Sr., was part of that specific company is unknown,
but Ephraim Williams’s and Abijah Prince’s names appear in the same mili-
tary records during King George’s War. Lucy Terry Prince might also have
assumed that, because her two eldest sons had served in the military during
the American Revolution, there was cause for consideration of her case since
many Euro-Americans used military service as a basis for a variety of privi-
leges after the war. When her son’s application was rejected, Terry Prince went
before the college trustees, who had by grant of the General Court the
authority “to determine and prescribe the mode of ascertaining the qualifica-
tions of the Students,”³² and demanded the right to speak. One of the trustees
was Elijah Williams, who had presided over the Princes’ marriage in 1756;
Terry Prince may well have expected support from her longtime acquain-
tance. In an eloquent, three-hour speech, drawing on her knowledge of law
and scripture, Lucy Terry Prince argued on her son’s behalf. She did not suc-
cceed in gaining admittance to Williams College for Abijah, Jr., but she did
expose the legal and religious hypocrisies of the community to a lengthy and
articulate public examination.

In her third public battle, in May 1796,³³ Lucy Terry Prince was success-
ful. The Princes’ homestead was in the Batten Kill area of Sunderland, across

156 Chapter 6
a small creek from the home of Colonel Ethan Allen. One of their nearer neighbors, however, was Colonel Eli Bronson, whose property abutted the Princes’ land. Bronson had attempted to steal a lot owned by the Princes, going so far as to extend his fences around the disputed area. Over seventy years of age and widowed, Terry Prince fought to retain the property, this time taking her case all the way to the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Vermont. The Honorable Samuel Chase of Maryland presided over the hearing at Bennington. Two leading Vermont attorneys, Stephen R. Bradley and Royall Tyler (the playwright, who would become Vermont’s Chief Justice in 1807), defended Colonel Bronson. Although Terry Prince was advised by Isaac Tichenor, a well-known lawyer and later a governor of Vermont, she chose to argue the case on her own behalf.34 Deciding in Terry Prince’s favor, Judge Chase observed of her defense that she had “made a better argument than he had heard from any lawyer at the Vermont bar.”35

While Terry’s legal actions always reflected her commitment to property rights for African Americans, the latter case also reflects the complex situation of being a widow if one’s property was seized and taken from her. Without property, women—and especially women of color—were left in a precarious legal vacuum. Towns were often unwilling to allow women to live in the community unless they owned property or had financial support from male relatives. The act of “warning out” transients (warning them that they must leave a community or be removed by local authorities) was well established by the time of Terry’s court case. But “transient” had a specific legal meaning in the eighteenth century: rather than today’s definition of homeless vagrants, transient in Lucy Terry’s time meant “a person who had been living in a town but had not become a legal inhabitant of that town. Inhabitants had rights and privileges; transients, however, remained in residence only by the permission of town leaders.”36 Terry had already seen in her first legal battle the concerns of town leaders about having to support a black family. In 1796, as a widow, her position was even more uncertain unless she retained rights to her property, since “transient” did not allude only to people new to a town. Examples abound in town records of the consequences for widows without clear legal rights to property. For example, the sixty-nine-year-old widow Abigail Carr, a thirty-year resident of Providence, Rhode Island, was forced to return to Newport where she had married her husband forty years earlier, even though she no longer had family in Newport. Regardless of how long one lived in a community, the only means by which legal status as an inhabitant was achieved was through birth, servitude, or the purchase of property; poverty in old age could shatter one’s lifelong status as a resident. As Ruth Wallis Herndon has noted, however, “transient” also took on the
connotation of “undesirable,” and racial identity became a notable determin-
er in who was warned out in an era that saw a significant increase in the
number of free African Americans, due to processes of personal or state
emancipations.37 Whereas unmarried white women were those most often
warned out, a woman of color often faced more harsh interpretations of her
acceptability. For example, the free-born mulatta Nancy Brown left her home
state of Connecticut at age fifteen and settled in Boston; however, in 1800
when, at age eighteen, she came to Providence, she was not simply warned
out but imprisoned at Bridewell correctional institution because she was
described by some in the town as a person who “conducts herself in a very
disorderly manner and is an unfit person to be at large.” After two days of
imprisonment, the constable escorted her outside the town limits because she
had “no particular home.”38 Nancy Brown may well have demonstrated dis-
orderly conduct, but what constituted such conduct is open to inquiry.
Certainly many white citizens found Lucy Terry’s continual outspokenness
and legal challenges “disorderly” and “improper” for a black woman; thus
maintaining her property rights was a necessity of survival.

Little is known about the remainder of Lucy Terry Prince’s life. Between
1757 and 1769, she had given birth to six children.39 Her two oldest sons,
Cesar (1756–1836) and Festus (1758–1819), enlisted in the Massachusetts
army and fought in the American Revolutionary War. Though they retained
their Sunderland property, in later years Lucy and Abijah had returned to
Guilford, where Abijah died in 1794. Lucy remained in Guilford until 1803,
thereafter returning to Sunderland. Painful ironies reflect the increased oppo-
sition to racial equality in the early nineteenth century. When she was in her
late seventies, after almost a decade of struggling on her own to retain the
family property and the rights she felt were inherent to all citizens of the new
nation, Lucy Terry Prince lost the farm that she and Abijah had established
in 176440—the purchasers were the Noyeses, whom she had defeated in their
erlier legal battle over the land. Further, as William Loren Katz has observed,
“It is one more of history’s ironies that in 1821, the year of her death, the leg-
sislature of the state of Massachusetts established a committee to determine
whether it ought to pass a law expelling black emigrants.”41

Local history asserts that even in her old age, Lucy Terry Prince was known
for making the eighteen-mile trek to neighboring Bennington on horseback,
and once a year until her death she traveled over the Green Mountains in order
to visit her husband’s grave. Lucy Terry Prince died in 1821 at the approxi-
mate age of ninety-seven years. An obituary for Lucy Terry Prince appeared in
The Vermont Gazette on August 1, 1821. The obituary noted, “In this remark-
able woman there was an assemblage of qualities rarely to be found among her
sex. Her volubility was exceeded by none, and in general the fluency of her speech captivated all around her. . . . All considered her a prodigy in conversation. . . . Her knowledge of the scriptures was uncommonly great.” The African American Congregationalist minister, the Reverend Lemuel Haynes, delivered “a discourse adapted to the occasion” at her interment. The obituary ended, appropriately, with a poem. Though still privileging women’s status as mothers, the poem honoring Lucy Terry Prince challenges the scientific racialism of the era via the figure of the “sable mother”:

... And shall proud tyrants boast with brazen face,  
Of birth—of genius, over Afric’s race:  
Go to the tomb where lies their matron’s dust,  
And read the marble, faithful to its trust.  
...

How long must Etheaopia’s murder’d race  
Be doom’d by men to bondage & disgrace?  
And hear such taunting insolence from those  
“We have a fairer skin and sharper nose?”  
Their sable mother took her rapt’rous flight,  
High orb’d amidst the realms of endless flight:  
The haughty boaster sinks beneath her feet,  
Where vaunting tyrants & oppressors meet.

Three major cultural contexts necessarily come together to explain how Lucy Terry came to produce her satirical poem about Euro-Americans being taken captive in a raid on Deerfield: first, the complicated history of colonialist and Native American relations in the Deerfield region; second, the popularity of “Indian captivity narratives” at the time of King George’s War and especially in Deerfield, where one of the bestselling narratives had been written; and third, the system of slavery that supported the colonialists’ plantations in Deerfield.

Colonialist and Native American Relations in Deerfield

The region of the Connecticut Valley in which Deerfield was founded had long been inhabited by several native clans that came to be known as the Pocumtuck Confederacy. In the precolonial period, the Pocumtucks dominated the region; their settlement encompassed the conjunction of the Connecticut and Deerfield rivers and thus was highly arable land on which
they produced corn and other staples. In addition to the Pocumtucks, the Confederacy consisted of such clans as the Naunawtuks, Warranokes, Podunks, Tunxis, and Squakheags, whose settlements extended throughout the region. For several decades after the arrival of European colonialists, relations between the various Native American and European groups in the area were relatively peaceful and productive.

In Euro-American histories of the region, most notable of which is George Sheldon’s *A History of Deerfield* (1895), the myth is perpetuated that the Pocumtucks became hostile, even though the settlers had paid them for their land. The colonialist government did, indeed, purchase the tribal title to eight thousand acres in exchange for “good and valuable Considerations.” On February 24, 1667, Chauk, a Pocumtuck sachem, and John Pynchon, Jr., the colonialist government’s representative, negotiated the deed of sale that provided the land for the settlement of Deerfield (originally named Pocumtuck). In the deed, Chauk was careful to retain certain rights that he hoped would preserve his people’s fishing and hunting ways of life: “the sd Chauk alias Chaque doth reserve Liberty of fishing for ye Indians in ye Rivers or waters & free Liberty to hunt Deere or other Wild creatures & to gather Walnuts chestnuts and other nuts things &c on ye commons.” Although Sheldon remains the most thorough historian of Deerfield, it is notable that he presents this deed, with its recognition of tribal hunting and fishing rights, as proof of the colonialists’ fair treatment of the Pocumtucks. This story of the sale of land to the settlers has been perpetuated by subsequent scholars; while it is true that the land was paid for, the situation was far more complex than such an assertion suggests.

In recounting the breaking of the ground for the plantation in 1671, Sheldon suggests that the real cause of the Pocumtucks’ removal from the area was that they “had been swept off by the Mohawks a few years before.” Tribal wars certainly had occurred in the region, but Sheldon’s subtitle “Indian Wars” bears witness to the erasure of the colonialists’ responsibilities by his primary focus on native peoples’ warring activities. That emphasis elides the European forces that were instrumental in effecting many of the wars. The Pocumtucks began trading corn with the colonialists as early as the mid-1630s, and even then restrictions were made on trading which were intended to ensure that the settlers could best benefit from raising and selling corn.

Relations became further strained as wars broke out—both among tribal societies and among colonizing societies; their actions necessarily affected one another. The Narragansetts and the Mohawks became increasingly involved in conflicts with the Pocumtucks—the “Indian Wars” to which Sheldon
refers—but colonialist conflicts were often at the heart of seeming native disputes. Colonialists in the Deerfield region reneged on their friendly terms with the Pocumtucks as early as the 1660s. When the Dutch and English were in dispute for the regions around Albany, Dutch soldiers joined a party of Mohawks in their battles with the Pocumtucks. The Pocumtucks refused to enact a peace treaty and reportedly killed one of the Mohawk leaders. When the English gained the Dutch province in 1664, part of their negotiations with the Mohawks was an agreement that the English would not assist the Abenakis or the Pocumtucks in any wars against the Mohawks. Thus Deerfield settlers who had once been the Pocumtucks’ business patrons and generally companionable neighbors refused to intervene when the Mohawks advanced upon the Deerfield clans in 1665. As Sheldon records, “After burning the fort and wigwams, and laying waste the cornfields of the Pocumtucks, the victors swept northward” to where the other clans of the Confederacy resided and enacted similar devastation there:

So thoroughly was the work of the Mohawks done, that when, in 1665, the English from Dedham laid out the “8000 acre grant” at Pocumtuck [which became the community of Deerfield], there was not a syllable in their report, in the debates thereon in town meeting at Dedham, to indicate that a single wigwam or a single human being was found on this scene of desolation. Their forts and dwellings had become ashes fertilizing the rank weeds over their sites, and sad silence brooded over their bleaching bones, or grass grown graves.48

As Thomas Jefferson observed about colonial practices in a draft of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “It is true that these purchases were sometimes made with the price in one hand and the sword in the other.”49 The colonialist settlement of Deerfield would itself be destroyed in 1675 during King Philip’s War. It was rebuilt only to endure the devastating military engagement of Queen Anne’s War in which the Reverend John Williams was taken captive.

By the 1740s, during which Lucy Terry was enslaved in Deerfield, numerous battles had been fought between Native Americans and settlers in the region, not only during King Philip’s War but also during the numerous “French and Indian” wars: King William’s War (1688–97, with attacks on Deerfield every year from 1693 through 1696), Queen Anne’s War (1702–13), and Father Rasle’s or Grey Lock’s War in the 1720s. Although the 1746 attack during King George’s War (1744–48) that Terry recounts in “Bars Fight” was the last of its kind, Deerfield had been the site of thirty battles between Native Americans and colonialists by that date.
Like so many other conflicts in the colonies, King George's War was actually between European powers but was played out on New England soil as well. While European wars had the greatest impact, the longstanding fur trade was also an important backdrop that reflected a vast history of manipulation, profit, and abuse from colonialist and native participants alike. With the questions of the Austrian Succession the focal point of English and Spanish hostilities, France sought to engage her old nemesis England in war once again. The impact reverberated across the “New World” landscape from Nova Scotia and throughout the New England region. In preparation for war, mounts (tower lookouts) were built at several sites in Deerfield to defend against attacks from the French and their Native American allies. At a town meeting on May 21, 1744, the positioning of mounts was determined and included one at the home of Lucy Terry's master. Scouting parties were under the charge of Captain Elijah Williams, son of the Reverend John Williams. As a member of the militia, Abijah either was part of the scouting parties or was with the army when it attempted to invade Canada.

The first years of King George's War left Deerfield relatively free of conflict. No raids upon the area were enacted in 1745, and the early months of 1746 were disastrous in neighboring areas but not in Deerfield. In that year, an army from the region, led by Captain Ephraim Williams (who would become founder of Williams College), failed at an attempt to invade French Canada. Perhaps in retaliation or as already planned, a group of several hundred French, Mohawks, and Abenakis descended into the Connecticut Valley. Fort Massachusetts fell on August 19. The community of Deerfield seems not to have heard of the fall of the fort, and that lack of information left them ill-prepared for the party of Native Americans that attacked Deerfield on August 25, 1746. It was this raid that Lucy Terry depicted in “Bars Fight.”

The Captivity Narrative in Deerfield Local Mythology

To assert that Lucy Terry's “Bars Fight” is a satire of Euro-American captivity experiences requires evidence that Terry had access to the narratives of captivity that flourished in her era. There has been some debate about whether Terry was literate. No laws in Massachusetts forbade teaching slaves to read and write, and in an agrarian community, it is likely that slaves received at least the rudiments of a practical education. Even if Terry were nonliterate, however, she could easily have had access to the captivity narrative tradition in her community. The long history of confrontations between Native
Americans and the colonialists in Massachusetts from the 1690s through the mid-eighteenth century made captivity both a fact and a prominent fear among the early settlers, especially those on the frontier, as Deerfield was considered. In their extensive study of the captivity narrative, Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier assert that captivity experiences and narratives about captivity were “interwoven into the fabric of early American culture.”

Equally significant in relation to Lucy Terry is the fact that one of the most popular captivity narratives of the eighteenth century was written and published by a minister from Deerfield. John Williams’s *The Redeemed Captive, Returning to Zion* was first published in 1707; it sold an estimated one thousand copies during its first week of publication and went through at least eleven editions. Williams, most of his family, and several other residents of Deerfield had been taken captive in 1704, during Queen Anne’s War. With the requisite graphic denouncement of surprise attacks, deaths, and kidnappings, Williams recounts the morning of the raid on Deerfield:

> On Tuesday, the 29th of February, 1703–4, not long before the break of day, the enemy came in like a flood upon us; our watch being unfaithful, an evil, whose awful effects, in a surprisal of our fort, should bespeak all watchmen to avoid, as they would not bring charge of blood upon themselves. They came to my house in the beginning of the onset, and by their violent endeavors to break open doors and windows, with axes and hatchets, awakened me out of sleep.

The admonishment to the watchmen and the horrifying sense of invasion, coupled with graphic accounts of the murder of several residents (including Williams’s spouse, Eunice Mather Williams, and two of their children) were also the bywords of numerous sermons delivered in the churches of Deerfield over several decades. As a member of the Puritan church, Lucy Terry would have been exposed to many such sermons during her dozen or more years of attendance before the 1746 raid.

John Williams died in 1729, before Lucy was brought to Deerfield, but his legacy remained an integral element in the community’s history and sense of itself and its mission. Williams’s successor, the Reverend Jonathan Ashley, came to Deerfield in 1732 and remained the minister there for over forty years. His sermons suggest that his attitudes toward Native Americans were compatible with Williams’s recorded attitudes. In Ashley’s jeremiads, Native Americans were savages who would force white men from their homes, take their lands, and “ravish” their wives. What Lucy Terry heard in the sermons
and captivity narratives was the colonialists’ mythologizing of the Native American as savage and as inhabitants of the devil’s domain. The subject position taken by these Anglo-Americans must have struck Terry as particularly ironic, considering her own history of being kidnapped and brought into slavery in a strange land. Like most Anglo-Americans’ accounts of being held captive by Native Americans, John Williams lamented being kidnapped and taken to an unfamiliar region: “Who can tell what sorrows pierced our souls when we saw ourselves carried away from God’s sanctuary to go into a strange land exposed to so many trials, the journey being at least three hundred miles we were to travel, the snow up to the knees, and we never inured to such hardships and fatigues, the place we were to be carried to a popish country?”

While *The Redeemed Captive* focuses on the horrors of being kidnapped and held captive by people from an alien culture, it was equally so an anti-Catholic text that signified Williams’s and the Puritan community’s fear that captives taken to French Canada would be converted to another religion. The Puritans never acknowledged as comparable their own extremely rigid insistence upon religious conformity, their owning of slaves, or their forced baptisms of slaves. But Lucy Terry’s experience as a member of the slave community in Deerfield undoubtedly made the comparison clear to her.

**Slavery in Deerfield**

Slavery in Deerfield, and in the Connecticut Valley region in general, was longstanding and involved the domination of Native Americans as well as African Americans. The earliest recorded account of Native Americans held as slaves appears in a 1679 diary entry from the Reverend Peter Thatcher of Milton. On August 18, he recorded that he had beaten his “Indian girl” with “a good walnut stick” because she had let his daughter Theodora fall and hurt her head. The tradition of owning Native American slaves in Massachusetts Bay Colony was longstanding. John Winthrop and family were among the earliest colonialists to engage in the practice. In terms of Africans’ enslavement, the first record in Deerfield takes us again directly to the Reverend John Williams. In a family register, Williams noted the death of one of his slaves, Robert Tigo, on May 11, 1695.

There were some notable distinctions between opportunities for African American slaves in Deerfield and what we know about the slave system in the southern colonies at the time. Deerfield was also an agrarian plantation society (referred to generally in the Bay as the Frontier Plantation), but on a much smaller scale. At the time of the 1746 attack, for instance, the popula-
tion of the town was only about three hundred, a number that probably reflects only the white residents. Records suggest that the leading slave owners held in the range of four to six slaves. Church records and account books include forty-seven African Americans who lived in Deerfield in the eighteenth century. As in the south, field work was the primary labor of male slaves in Deerfield and, to large extent, of the white settlers as well since the community depended upon the productivity of the common fields for their survival. The women slaves worked in the fields, but town records indicate that they were also taught to spin and weave. Both Lucy Terry's and Abijah Prince's labor was used on occasion after their marriage to pay off accounts with the merchant Dr. Thomas Williams, and Abijah occasionally hired slaves to work his farm.

The conditions and opportunities inherent within a slave's life in Deerfield fluctuated with the whims of whoever held ministerial and civic offices in the community. While slaves were baptized and admitted to fellowship in the church, they were listed with children's records, regardless of their age. Both John Williams, the minister, and Elijah Williams, the justice of the peace, were willing to perform some form of marriage ceremonies for slaves, but John Williams distinguished his record keeping for slave and nonslave marriages. For instance, he recorded the marriage of two slaves whom he owned around 1703: “Frank and Parthena, Mr Jn' Williams his negroes were joyned in Marriage by ye Reverend Mr Jn' Williams, June 4: 170—.” However, this notation was not included in the town records' usual pages for marriages; rather, he relegated the entry to a flyleaf of the volume.

Perhaps nothing so clearly reveals the racial distinctions that Williams drew as his own insistence upon God as the only master—for white people. While Williams was held captive in Quebec, the priests used many means to attempt to convert him to Catholicism. Ironically, one attempt included bringing in a Native American woman convert, Ruth, who used Williams's own scriptural preachings to argue in favor of Catholicism. As he recounts:

One day a certain savagess taken prisoner in King Philip's War, who had lived at Mr. Buckley's at Wethersfield, called Ruth, who could speak English very well, who had been often at my house but was now proselyted to the Romish faith, came into the wigwam. And with her an English maid who was taken the last war, who was dressed up in Indian apparel, could not speak one word of English. . . . my master bade me to cross myself. I told him I would not; he commanded me several times, and I as often refused.

Ruth said, "Mr. Williams, you know the Scripture and therefore act
against your own light, for you know the Scripture says, ‘Servants, obey your masters.’ He is your master and you his servant.”

I told her she was ignorant and knew not the meaning of the Scripture, telling her I was not to disobey the great God to obey any master.63

It was an argument Williams would never have heeded, nor indeed probably have comprehended, from one of his own slaves.

When Thomas French became Deerfield’s town clerk, a different attitude toward slave relations was evident. No records were kept for marriages or deaths of slaves—only for their sale as property. Female slaves, if they were children or still within child-bearing age, seem to have drawn higher prices at their sale. The 1730s, during which Lucy Terry was brought to Deerfield, was a particularly active period in the purchase of slaves. This flurry of increased slave trading was probably due to expansionist activities but equally so to the revival activism of Jonathan Edwards in nearby Northampton and elsewhere in the region. Baptisms and church membership of African Americans flourished at this time in Deerfield, when the Christianizing of slaves in Puritan communities was considered an expedient measure in the larger process of missionary work.64

Yet there was no assertion that even converted African Americans were equal, politically or spiritually. The most notable account of Puritans’ attitudes toward slaves is recorded by Terry’s minister, Jonathan Ashley, in a manuscript he titled “lecture to the Negros,” delivered on the evening of January 23, 1749. While asserting that there were no human beings “too low and Dispicable for God to bestow salvation upon,” Ashley made it clear that, for slaves, freedom was strictly a proposition of the next world. Basing his text on “1 Cor 7.22 For he that is called in the Lord being a Servant is the Lords freeman Likewise also he that is called being free is the Servant,” he outlined his argument as follows:

1st I will Show that Christianity allows of the relation of master & servants

2dly I will Show that Such as are by Divine providence placed in the state of Servants are not excluded from salvation but may become the Lord’s freemen

3rdly I will Show what a privilege and advantage it is to be a free man in the Lord.

4thly will give some directions to such as want to become the Lords freemen.

5thly will Show what motives there are for Such to Seek to be the Lords free men.65
Ashley may have chosen to give this sermon only days after preaching the funeral sermon for the Reverend Benjamin Doolittle because of Doolittle's manumission of Abijah Prince upon his death. Clearly, Ashley sought to quell any thoughts of freedom in this life for the enslaved “servants” of Deerfield.

This is the community that Lucy Terry entered as a young child. With the relatively small number of slaves in the community, it is likely that Terry would have learned about the earlier fate of John Williams’s slaves, Parthena and Frank. It was within months of their marriage that the infamous 1704 French and Native American attack on Deerfield occurred during which Williams and his family were killed or taken captive. In passing, Williams mentions Parthena’s fate: “The enemies who entered the house were all of them Indians and Macquas . . . [They] carr[ied] to the door two of my children and murder[ed] them, as also a Negro woman.” Frank died shortly thereafter, on the journey to Canada. There is no reason to assume that the events of 1704, made a part of local history by Williams’s captivity narrative, would have had any less place of significance in the African American community, which also suffered losses due to the raids.

Conjuring Subjectivity

The three cultural contexts detailed above, all of which are implicated in the colonizing practices of New England Puritans, are necessarily shaped by the patriarchal and androcentric nature of Puritanism itself. There were, however, two other major figures—each, if diversely, matriarchal and gynocentric—that offered themselves to Lucy Terry as models of resistance to the dominant culture. One such model was Eunice Williams, a Euro-American woman born into one of the most privileged families of colonialist Deerfield. The other model was Jinny Cole, an African American enslaved woman whose position was culturally deprivileged. Each woman established a location of identity that allowed her to resist the oppressive nature of Puritanism. The Euro-American woman’s resistance was, ironically, borne of the same acculturation process that the African American woman resisted, but Williams’s acculturation was into a cultural site that the Puritans desperately sought to eradicate. It was in that uncommon alliance that Eunice Williams and Jinny Cole each became touchstones for Lucy Terry’s own evolving resistance.

Eunice Williams was only seven years old when she was taken captive. Since she was the Reverend John Williams’s daughter, her acceptance of Jesuit and Native American cultures presented a particularly threatening
example to the Puritans of the possible corruption of their “errand in the wilderness.” As her father recounted in *The Redeemed Captive*, Eunice was separated from him and, with several other captives, taken to the Mission de St. François Xavier du Sault St. Louis, a Kahnawake Mohawk fort located across the St. Lawrence River from Montreal, where he was held. John Demos has observed that within two years, the child had become immersed in Kahnawake culture, and she had forgotten the English language (which she never attempted to recover, even when she occasionally returned to Deerfield as an adult). After being taken captive, Eunice was renamed A’ongote (“she has been planted as a person”), and by 1713 she had also been rebaptized and had become a member of the Catholic Church, with the baptismal name of Marguerite. Eunice’s conversion to Roman Catholicism would have been as disturbing to her Puritan family as her adherence to tribal customs. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has observed, marriage, religion, and “the supportive power of female networks” among the French Catholics were major factors in several young Euro-American women’s choice to remain with their French captors.

The Kahnawake culture was an equally conducive environment for females, and its impact on Eunice was probably greater than the Catholic influence, since the Kahnawake synthesized Catholicism with their own beliefs. While captives were sometimes put through initial rites of public humiliation, another alternative was adopting the captive into a Kahnawake family. This latter process was apparently what Eunice experienced; shortly after her capture, she was reported to be living with a Native woman. The Kahnawake culture was matrilocal, matrilineal, and matrifocal. Married daughters and their families lived with their mothers, kinship passed through women’s family lines, and women met in councils before the men so that the chiefs would have benefit of their advice. Women had an integral role also in the selection of clan chiefs, which meant that they could ensure the perpetuation of their sex’s status in the clan. In religious contexts, women gained notable status. In Eunice’s time, a Mohawk woman, Kateri Tekakwitha, was a prophet of great fame throughout the region. Furthermore, it was a culture renowned for its indulgence of children. Nothing could have been more different than Eunice’s first seven years in a Puritan community, where the raising of children was extremely strict and females were regarded as inferior to males. Within three years of her captivity, Eunice asserted that she did not want to return to her birth community. Certainly religious and civic acculturation played a powerful role in her decision, and as Derounian-Stodola and Levernier observe, Eunice is best understood as a transculturated woman:
We cannot underestimate the extent to which transculturation originated in habituation or coercion rather than in conscious choice, that is, in the replacement of old authority figures by new ones, especially for young girls. Transculturated women eventually lost their native language and established their own family ties by marrying Indians or Frenchmen, or remaining within the closed environment of a Catholic convent, so we must be especially wary of believing that their texts come to us undisturbed.

Yet processes of acculturation speak powerfully about a community. For Eunice and dozens of other captives who followed similar patterns of remaining with their native captors and marrying into the community, it was a process of acceptance by the dominant culture. It was a strikingly different process than the Puritans’ acculturation practices which demanded Native Americans, African Americans, and all “others” accept positions of inferiority.

In 1713, at the age of sixteen, Eunice married François Xavier Arosen, a Kahnawake Mohawk. Shocked and in despair about the marriage, members of the Williams family journeyed several times to Canada and sought to encourage Eunice to return to Deerfield; in each instance, she refused. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier astutely argue that Eunice’s decision may reflect not her desire to remain with the Kahnawake but rather her understanding of the change in her status that would make her assimilation back into the Puritan community impossible. When her father died in 1729, Eunice’s refusal to return would have been particularly significant in terms of Deerfield’s sense of its mission in the “wilderness.” That same year two other renowned Puritan leaders died—Solomon Stoddard and Edward Taylor. As Thomas Foxcroft soon thereafter lamented, “[H]ow great is the scarcity of real Saints in our Day!” That the daughter of one of the “real Saints” had determined to reject her Puritan community in favor of a Native American community deeply influenced by Catholicism only served to signify how tenuous that mission had become.

Had Eunice simply refused to return to Deerfield, we could read her response solely as a decision to stay within her new community. But Eunice and Arosen visited the region three times in the 1740s, prior to Lucy Terry’s composing of “Bars Fight,” and the decision to make such visits suggests a more complicated response to her birth community. When Eunice visited the region, she set the strict condition that no one would detain her. In 1741, the couple made their second visit, which included Deerfield for the first time; they brought their two children and stayed for several months. Each visit was a time of great excitement in Deerfield, with people traveling to see her and
hear sermons preached in her honor (though, more accurately, to convince her to return). The continual reappearance of Eunice Williams in the Deerfield community—while at the same time refusing to be reassimilated—made her a particularly visible reminder of failure. Of notable significance to Lucy Terry’s perspective would have been Eunice’s visit in 1743–44, two years before Terry produced “Bars Fight.” Eunice was in the vicinity from September 1743 through March 1744. Sermons preached during this visit explicitly linked slavery and captivity. One sermon, dedicated to Eunice who was in the audience, asserted: “When you think with Pity on the Slavery, Captivity, and mean State of this Person, whom you see here . . . remember that if you are without Christ you are in a State of Slavery to sin.” If the mainstream community’s sense of Eunice Williams was, as a memorial plaque asserts, that she “married a Savage and became one,” Lucy Terry may well have recognized her actions as resistance to the oppressive colonialist culture, and she certainly read the “text” of the community’s conflation of slavery and captivity as ironic in its limited focus.

There was, however, an even greater influence on Lucy Terry than the actions of the masters. Within slave communities the sense of African pride and the valuing of African traditions endured through song, crafts, and terminologies that were assimilated into the customs of colonial America. In the instance of Lucy Terry, however, she had the first-hand knowledge of an African woman, the enslaved Jinny Cole, as an example of the pride and customs that could be retained against the onslaught of oppression in the Puritan community.

Jinny Cole (ca.1723–1808) was born in Guinea and remained in her homeland until she was nearly twelve years old, when she and several other children were kidnapped, bound aboard a slave ship, and brought to Boston to be auctioned into slavery. Her first owner is unknown, but in 1738 or 1739 she and her infant son, Cato, were purchased by the Reverend Jonathan Ashley and brought to Deerfield. Jinny was purchased as a household slave for Ashley’s wife, who was mourning the loss of their nine-month-old baby. Jinny remained a slave for the Ashley family for over seventy years. She died on September 1, 1808, having broken her neck when she fell down the cellar stairs at a neighbor’s house. Jinny Cole’s and Lucy Terry’s lives in this small community overlapped for a twenty-year period.

Within the slave community, Jinny Cole was known as a powerful storyteller. Her narratives must have been of particular importance in the development of a sense of pride and subjectivity in a young girl like Lucy, who was similar in age but who had been kidnapped in infancy. Cole’s stories told of her early years in Guinea, of her position as the daughter of a king, and of
the richness of the culture in her homeland. Throughout her lifetime, Cole recounted the terrible wrongs that had been done to her and her people by being kidnapped and brought into slavery. She insisted that one day (through her own actions or through death), she would be returned to Guinea. In such an assertion, Cole reveals her familiarity with African folk traditions that figure freedom from slavery as a return “home,” whether that locale be Africa or heaven.82

Cole also amassed a collection of artifacts that seemed peculiar to her white neighbors. The historian George Sheldon, who knew Cole’s son as a child, recounted that Jinny collected “all kinds of odds and ends, colored rags, bits of finery, peculiar shaped stones, shells, buttons, beads, anything she could string.”83 Though Sheldon views such collecting as odd, Cole’s actions are informed by African cultural practices, especially those that were enacted by the griot, or dyeli. The dyeli were a social group of particular West African peoples recognized as professionals who specialized in music and oral traditions and who were part of the larger nyamakala, professionals specializing in jewelry making, blacksmithing, music, and other arttries.84 As a means of replicating former communal practices, Cole’s gathering and stringing of colorful scraps conjures a site for memorializing her heritage as well as for mourning her cultural loss—the same results that are achieved in Lucy Terry’s “piecing together” of the events of August 25 in order to dislocate the privileged status of white captivity. Jinny Cole represents a recognized component of the captive-exchange system that marks the economic basis of slavery and other forms of captivity. That is, she transcends her designated subordinate status by demonstrating unusual skills developed during the cross-cultural experience.85 While exceptional carpentry, cooking, and other trade skills have long been understood as means by which slaves might transcend the usual brutalities of slave existence, sometimes even the means of attaining their freedom, Cole’s (and later Terry’s) storytelling skills were the means of exploiting the system to her own advantage, much as oratorical skills were, decades later, for Frederick Douglass.

Perhaps most important to Lucy Terry’s own artistic development, Jinny Cole’s stories repeatedly conveyed her horror and anger at having been kidnapped and brought to a strange country.86 She detailed the comfort and safety of her African home, until the fateful day when she and several other children were playing near a well. Without warning, they were seized by white slave traders and immediately taken aboard the slave ship. Significantly, Jinny always concluded her story of being taken captive with the lament that the children never again saw their mothers. It is as much this image as that of “Young Samuel Allen” that impacts the conclusion of Lucy Terry’s poem. Part
of the discourse of imperialism is the assertion that colonization leads to assimilation and thus the perpetuation and expansion of the dominant culture. Certainly the experience of colonization necessarily alters the colonized (and the colonizers), but alteration is not always fully enacted as assimilation, and fractures of resistance are evident in any systemic representation of the imperialist/colonialist project. Jinny Cole represents one such fracture in the U.S. colonization of Africans. Her stories may well have acted as Lucy Terry's own restoration—if not to her home, certainly to knowledge about her West African traditions.87

“Bars Fight”

As noted earlier, once she was freed, Lucy Terry repeatedly and publicly positioned herself in opposition to racist, colonizing practices. “Bars Fight” suggests that even while enslaved, Terry had begun her acts of resistance. The twenty-eight-line poem is best understood in the folk ballad tradition. As Eugene Redmond has astutely noted, the poem's strengths are more easily recognized when considered against other popular poetic ballads, including Longfellow's “Paul Revere's Ride” (“Listen my children and you shall hear / of the midnight ride of Paul Revere”).88 As a folk ballad, “Bars Fight” acts as a satire of Euro-American colonialists' lamentations about Indian captivity. Terry's insistence upon concluding rather than beginning the poem with young Samuel Allen being carried away to Canada subverts the captivity narrative tradition. This technique and the satirical nature of the poem (which has heads rolling away from bodies and petticoats tripping up fleeing females), in fact, expose, as all good satire does, a very serious theme: for African Americans, who had endured more than a century of enslavement by the time of the 1746 raid, there could be no overt narrative lamenting their captivity.

Folk ballads had a long history in African cultures, and the genre had appeared in Western literatures for several centuries before Lucy Terry produced her poem. In the eighteenth century, folk ballads were becoming increasingly popular in England and the North American colonies. These ballads—what Joseph Addison referred to in a 1711 issue of The Spectator as “the darling Songs of the common People”89—arose first from the people and then, as with Terry's poem, were published in a formal manner. As David Zesmer observes, folk ballads “are narrative poems that tell their stories in a unique way—concisely, dramatically, and impersonally. The narrative . . . is usually focused upon one striking episode; earlier and later events, if men-
tioned at all, are not treated in detail, but are briefly alluded to and, in many cases, deliberately left unexplained.90

In his early, influential study, Richard VanDerBeets termed the captivity narrative America’s “first literature of catharsis,”91 and as Sacvan Bercovitch, Myra Jehlen, and Tara Fitzpatrick, among others, have argued, the paradigm of the Puritan captivity narrative “helped to shape and promote a particularly American discourse regarding our historical identity.”92 But the “our” designation of this “historical identity” is deceptive, because, with few exceptions, studies of the captivity narrative have excluded slave narratives. Each genre has emerged in recent scholarship as a highly codified, immensely popular, culturally powerful genre; but to separate these genres risks the danger of erasing African Americans both from the discourse of captivity and from conceptions of historical identity. Whereas the captivity narrative is recognized as a community-binding and colonist-aggrandizing document, the slave narrative has often been represented as the achievements of an individual. In a discussion about neoslave narratives that holds significance for earlier narratives as well, John Edgar Wideman has argued that

neoslave narratives thus serve the ambivalent function of their ancestors. The fate of one black individual is foregrounded, removed from the network of systemic relationships connecting, defining, determining, undermining all American lives. This manner of viewing black lives at best ignores, at worst reinforces, an apartheid status quo. Divisive categories that structure the world of the narratives—slave/free, black/white, underclass/middle class, female/male—are not interrogated. The idea of a collective, intertwined fate recedes. The mechanisms of class, race, and gender we have inherited are perpetuated ironically by a genre purporting to illustrate the possibility of breaking barriers and transcending the conditions into which one is born.93

By positioning the two genres in relation to one another, we can begin to examine precisely those binary structures that support the status quo—and our own critical practices. This latter point is worth pursuing. Why, for instance, was there such a resurgence of interest in Euro-American captivity narratives in the 1990s? Certainly the best scholars of the genre are examining the displacement of the Native American through these narratives,94 but the emphasis upon a genre that is largely produced by one race to oppress and justify the destruction of another deserves further interrogation. So, too, have scholars of slave narratives highlighted the necessity of Christian conversion and white authorization of these texts. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has asked,
“[H]ow can the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language in which blackness is a sign of absence?” Frances Smith Foster has recognized that one means of beginning to counter this absence is to make the absence itself a marker. She notes that “it is clear that by assuming the role of historiographer without acknowledging this as an unusual position for one of her sex, race, and class, Terry is using silence to amplify her message” in “Bars Fight.” I would add that by recognizing the silenced story as part of the satirization of the dominant culture’s popular genre, we can better understand the significance of Terry’s poem. In part, the separation of the captivity narrative and the slave narrative genres also reflects the shift that Foucault highlighted in his study of the political anatomy’s move in the eighteenth century from an exercising of power through overt torture to the “discipline” of suppression. The effectiveness of this panoptic system relies on its diffusion, in a “multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body.” The very “invisibility” of the slave system was rooted in its acceptance in early Euro-American culture, to the extent that slaveholders could lament the captivity of a white citizen without seeing a correlation between that event and their own political and social systems of slave captivity. It is this point that Terry satirizes at the end of “Bars Fight.” As Mary Louise Pratt reminds us, the critique of empire is not simply a late-twentieth-century phenomenon; rather, “the critique . . . [was] coded ongoingly on the spot, in ceremony, dance, parody, philosophy, counterknowledge and counterhistory, in texts unwitnessed, [or] suppressed.” The satire of Lucy Terry’s poem deserves witnessing.

Terry’s intellect and courage served her well throughout her legal battles in the early Federal period, but as Josiah Holland recorded in his nineteenth-century History of Western Massachusetts, Terry was recognized especially “for her wit and shrewdness.” As one nineteenth-century source, whose mother knew Lucy Terry, recalled, “Lucy was a noted character and her house was a great resort for the young people, attracted thither by her wit and wisdom, often shown in her rhyme and stories.” Eileen Southern has discerned that “[a]fter gaining her own freedom, [Terry] made her home a gathering place for slaves and freedmen of the community; a place where they could listen to tales and songs of old Africa.” Satire by African Americans is often misread by the white community as complacency or acceptance of dominant-culture values. Captivity narratives were cultural scripts that reinforced white supremacy, patriarchal values, and cultural hegemony. Terry’s poem, like her life, disrupts that script.

Even the title of the poem reflects contested cultural space. The usual gloss of “bars” is simply “meadows,” but in Deerfield its meaning was much more
specific. One of the most frequent issues of legislation created by the early settlers of Deerfield was the fencing of the meadow lands on which their crops were produced and which constituted the livelihood of the community. (Terry's subsequent legal battles, as detailed above, were both centered on issues of illegal fencing of property.) Each family's section was fenced separately, and in the 1660s, gates were built at all roads leading into the meadows, except in the South Meadows where a set of bars was placed. The bars soon became the local name for that particular section of the meadows. The term was still in use in 1746, but by Terry's time the southern part of the bars had also come to be associated with colonialists' attitudes toward Native Americans reflected through subsection names such as "Indian Hole" and "Squaw Hill." Thus the title of Terry's poem not only relates to the events of 1746 but should also recall the long history of battles over contested cultural space in Deerfield specifically and in the colonies in general.

Like many folk ballads, "Bars Fight" is rooted in factual events. The raid on Deerfield occurred within days after the fall of Fort Massachusetts, but the Deerfield community was unaware of that event—surely the landowners, the Allens and the Amsdens, would not have ventured out onto the bars had they known. On the morning of August 25, a party of haymakers set out for a day's work. Among the group were Samuel Allen, forty-four years old, and his children Eunice (age thirteen), Caleb (nine), and Samuel (eight). Also included in the party were Oliver (eighteen) and Simeon (nine) Amsden; their father, John Amsden, had died, and they were now responsible for maintaining the family's portion of the meadows. Three other men were with the party—John Saddler and Adonijah Gillett, soldiers whose job it was to guard the workers during wartime, and Eleazar Hawks who was Samuel Allen's brother-in-law. Hawks made the fatal mistake of heading off for partridge hunting in a thicket that bordered the bars, for it was there that the war party was hiding. Hawks was killed outright, and Allen killed one Native American before he and Adonijah Gillett were slain. Oliver Amsden was killed, scalped, and decapitated; and Samuel Allen was captured and taken to St. François, Quebec—notably the same site where Eunice Allen was taken in 1704. Only Caleb Amsden and John Saddler, one of the supposed protectors, escaped without injury; Caleb hid in a cornfield, and Saddler escaped across the river to a nearby island. Eunice Allen's fate is graphically rendered—in true captivity narrative tradition—by Sheldon: "Eunice was the last to be overtaken, but finally an Indian split her skull with his hatchet and left her for dead, not stopping, however, in his haste, to secure her scalp. Eunice survived the blow for seventy-two years, but she never fully recovered."
For all of its attention to the “factual” details of the raid, the construction of Terry’s poem relies less on the facts than on their impact. The first fourteen lines follow the traditional captivity narrative’s lamentations over the violence of “Indian raids” and the heroic endeavors of the white citizenry under attack:

August ’twas the twenty-fifth,
Seventeen hundred forty-six;
The Indians did in ambush lay,
Some very valient men to slay,
The names of whom I’ll not leave out.
Samuel Allen like a hero fout.
And though he was so brave and bold,
His face no more shall we behold.
Eleazar Hawks was killed outright,
Before he had time to fight,—
Before he did the Indians see,
Was shot and killed immediately.
Oliver Amsden he was slain,
Which caused his friends much grief and pain.

Undoubtedly, the seeming honoring of heroic colonists was what endeared this poem to the Anglo-American residents of Deerfield over the next several generations. Yet, while the collective nature of community—so important in traditional captivity narratives to reestablishing the dominant power relations—is suggested in “His face no more shall we behold,” the narrative “I” locates the unspoken third race in the poem—that is, the African American speaker—and the noncollective sense of community responses is figured in line 14 when it is Oliver Amsden’s friends (not the narrative “I” nor the collective “we”) who lament his loss.

In the subsequent fourteen lines, Terry’s double-voiced discourse, rendered through her wit, further jars the critical reader’s participation in these lamentations with scenes that are grotesquely and uncomfortably comic, and the satire may explain why the poem was equally popular with generations of African Americans:

Simeon Amsden they found dead,
Not many rods distant from his head.
Adonijah Gillett we do hear
Did lose his life which was so dear.
The reader or listener is apt to feel an impulse to laugh, however uncomfortably, at the grisly image of Simeon Amsden’s head rolling away from his body; the rhythmic cadence and the poem’s sudden shift to shock value invites such a response and immediately raises questions about the seriousness of the lamentation. This is true if one reads the poem with a satiric tone; if one then reads the poem as a monody, its dual possibilities of interpretation become more evident. In other words, audience and choice of tone create the ambiguity necessary to any slave’s use of satire. In 1746, all residents of Deerfield would also have recognized the satiric jab taken at the soldier John Saddler who, under attack, saved himself.

It is Terry’s rendering of the tragic fate of young Eunice Allen, emphasizing female clothing as what quite literally trips her up, that marks one of the sites in the poem where bicultural subterfuge is most brilliantly played out. Women’s fashions have been a topic of cultural satire since the beginnings of early U.S. literature. Though fashion was of less significance on the frontier, sewing and the preparation of clothing was a major part of women’s work, and especially slave women’s work, in Deerfield. One of the last images Sheldon recalls of Jinny Cole is seeing her and her white mistress sewing together, and Lucy Terry’s store account records demonstrate her many purchases of sewing materials such as cambric and ribbons. One of the reasons fashion and clothing cannot be understood in a simple context of national identity, however, is that the very representations (cultural and critical) often exclude as much as they include. It is doubtful that Deerfield slaves were as scantily clothed as were many of their counterparts on Southern plantations, but it is also unlikely they were afforded the same amount or quality of attire as their masters. Eunice Williams had also made clothing an issue during her 1743 visit when she outraged the community by refusing to change from Kahnewake to Anglo clothing, even when attending church services. It has been asserted that clothing constitutes “the
quintessential colonizing commodity, and, significantly, the reference to tripping on petticoats is the one nonfactual addition to the historical details that Terry makes in the poem. When subversive allusions are the only discursive option for the oppressed, what better means than to use the petticoats, which may well have been produced by slave labor, as a point of satire. Through her first name and through emphasis on clothing, Eunice Allen conjures Eunice Williams and the concluding sense of community failure rather than heroics.

Other elements of the poem are more subtle in their interpretive possibilities, but if we grant Terry the same consciousness of artistry that is typically afforded her Euro-American contemporaries and that is noted in every account of her by the people who knew her, there is much more bicultural play at work in the poem than has been acknowledged. For instance, the poem contains several references to water and passages across water. John Williams had used water similes to recount his captivity (e.g., “the enemy came in like a flood upon us”). “Bars,” in one sense of the word, is specific to the Deerfield common-field system, but in a Puritan community, it may also have carried other implications. Many Deerfield residents had originally come from the seafaring coastal towns of the northeast; the word may also refer to the colloquial term for a submerged sand bank along a shoreline that often obstructs navigation, and phrases such as “crossing the bar” have long been a part of maritime songs. This dual reading of “bars” is supported by the later reference to John Sadler’s escape “across the water.” While he escaped, unheroically, the others were barred from doing so by the attacking enemy. Several scholars have studied the impact on the early Puritans’ collective consciousness of their treacherous passage across the Atlantic. For people like Terry and Cole who had escaped “the dreadful slaughter” of so many acquaintances brought to America via the Middle Passage slave trade, these images carried equally complex and enduring meanings.

So, too, is the act of an ambush emphasized by the reference to Eunice Allen’s being “tommy hawked” by those lying in wait. But “tommy hawked” also implicates Eleazar Hawks, who wandered off into the thicket; he is left in poetic ambiguity as both the victim of his mistake and, ironically, the instigator of the attack. The “master” of events, the colonialist invader, is thereby implicated in the actions of his own making. Equally ambiguous is the narrator’s reaction to the invaders of August 25. As “awful creatures,” they are both terrible in their horrific actions but, in good Puritan linguistic doubleness, “awe-ful” or creating a moment full of awe. What results in all of these moments of poetic ambiguity is an inability to identify who is guilty and who is victim. As William Andrews has noted, “In Afro-American writing, sub-
terfuge and diversion have traditionally played a deconstructive role vis-à-vis conventional white literary modes and messages. [A narrative’s] ‘simplicity’ suggests a rhetorical technique open to black narrators of white-controlled texts—narrative diversion as a way of making an injustice tellable even when it is not correctable.” As with many slave songs that could be “read” by a white audience as harmless, the underlying meanings in “Bars Fight” dislocate significations and allow for multiple interpretations.

The most damning element of “Bars Fight,” however, is the last couplet: “Young Samuel Allen, Oh lack-a-day! / Was taken and carried to Canada.” Euro-American women’s narratives dominate the documented captivity experiences. Their narratives have one strikingly common element: they “stress that captivity’s main metonymy was the dramatic and decisive fracturing of the original family unit.” Terry’s emphasis upon the disintegration of the Allen family follows this pattern—with one significant difference. In Euro-American women’s narratives the figure of the mother predominates. Mary White Rowlandson emphasized her role as mother, carrying her wounded child, in the opening pages of her classic narrative. Even when the captive was male, he was often described in relation to his mother; for example, an account of the Deerfield captive John Catlin, age seventeen when he was captured, begins by describing him as “born in the 50th year of his mother’s age.” Eunice Williams also made the issue of her mother one of the points of resistance to communicating with her father. After her marriage, while the surviving family members were still attempting to induce her to return, her spouse told their emissary that “had her father not Married again, She would have gone and Seen him long Ere this time.” Lucy Terry exploits this convention by focusing on the consequences of fractured families at the conclusion of her poem, but significantly, she leaves the situation unresolved. The image of the child kidnapped and taken to a strange land not only recalls Samuel Allen’s and Eunice Williams’s fate but also replicates the conclusions of Jinny Cole’s stories, which always ended with the lamentation that she and the other kidnapped African children never again saw their mothers.

Let me conclude with a few remarks that build upon this assessment of “Bars Fight” as a satire of the captivity narrative tradition. Both Annette Kolodny and John Sekora have remarked on the fact that the first published African American slave narrative, Briton Hammon’s 1760 text, was in fact an Indian captivity narrative. Not only would the first published slave narrative “necessarily be shaped into a popular form,” Sekora argued, but it “dared not
protest that most pernicious of captivities, chattel slavery.”112 Hammon’s text, Kolodny asserts, “cries out against ‘horrid cruelty and inhuman Barbarity,’ even if its apparent target is a native tribe.”113 Produced fourteen years earlier, Terry’s poem engages the same context. Again, John Saillant has astutely argued that Lemuel Haynes (who preached at Terry’s funeral) also used the discursive elements of the Puritan captivity narrative in his text about two imprisoned men, *Mystery Developed* (1820). Haynes “merged the language of the captivity narrative with the language of slavery and emancipation” by inverting the “nature of the captors. . . . [I]n Haynes’s captivity narrative the captors are representations of white society and executors of its laws.”114 Thus reading Lucy Terry’s poem not as an anachronism but as an appropriation of the Puritan captivity narrative form in order to critique American slavery places her at the forefront of a significant tradition of resistance in African American literature.

These texts are best understood as autoethnographic expressions. In such expressions, the “colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms”; the autoethnographic text “involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror.”115 Unlike her legal actions once freed, Lucy Terry had no opportunity as a slave to remark overtly upon her own condition; but as the “unspoken” third race in her text, African Americans and their enslavement are clearly marked within the cultural context of the poem.

The third and perhaps most requisite stage of the traditional Anglo-American captivity narrative was restoration: after the brutal moment of captivity and having endured much hardship, religious captives inevitably asserted the necessity of faith and of adherence to a particular religion’s tenets in their comments on restoration to their own communities. Equally important is the effect of the restoration scene to eclipse the sense of loss of power that captivity has enacted on the community as a whole. John Williams’s *Redeemed Captive* was intended as much as a community restorative as an individual return. After Deerfield had “gained notoriety throughout New England”116 for its destruction in the Bloody Brook massacre of 1675 and again in the 1704 raid in which nearly three-fifths of the locals had been killed or captured, Williams’s narrative was a necessary antidote to communal defamation. Through the process of “describing and interpreting the experience of captivity, the [returned] captive reverses—after the fact—the ‘national’ power relations between ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’ that imprisonment has temporarily reversed.”117 The standard closure process of captivity narratives restores the power relations of white dominance. In “Bars Fight,” however, the Native American is not “captured” in the narrative and thus tamed by the dominant
culture; nor is the white captive restored to his position of racial and cultural dominance. By denying this traditional act of closure in her poetic account, Terry leaves the community as a whole in material and discursive disruption.

What Terry’s satire of colonialists’ lamentations of captivity erases is any assertion that providential design can be read through the events of August 25. Only the colonialists’ own actions and reactions lead to rolling heads and disastrous entanglements with petticoats. The ending couplet of “Bars Fight” emphasizes the experience of being brutally abducted from one’s homeland and taken to a strange environment. The “unspoken” subject position echoes throughout this abrupt conclusion: for the African American captive, there could be no requisite, climactic rendering of restoration. For well over a century, Africans had been enslaved in an alien environment with no hope of restoration and no praise for endurance. The bitingly understated “Oh lack-a-day!” culminates Terry’s satirization of the white culture’s genre of self-absorption, a self-absorption that allowed them to ignore the parallels between the fate of young Samuel Allen and the hundreds of thousands of Africans enslaved in early America.

Lucy Terry’s bicultural play with genre and diction is revolutionary in the sense in which Eric Cheyfitz uses the term. That is, a colonized person can “master” the dominate language in order to explode or expose the colonizer’s position of power. “In the revolutionary situation,” Cheyfitz argues, the colonized individual “does not so much master the master’s language as take possession of it.”

Terry’s use of satire pushes the revolutionary gesture even further: she exposes not only the colonialists’ power but the limitations of that power as well. She may be said to engage in what Carla Kaplan terms “the erotics of talk,” that is, the desire to locate an ideal audience that will recognize her poetics, like her life, as a cultural mirroring. “Such mirroring says, of both the private and public sphere that ‘it does not have to be this way, it could be otherwise.’ . . . [It] is a kind of poetic justice, a ‘political language’ for personal and social equality.” Against the discourse of scientific racialism, then, Terry posits the ability of African Americans to grasp the dominant culture’s language and to use it to expose the masters’ shortsightedness and, ironically, lack of reasoning. In the context of women’s political, social, and racial oppression, only the rare voice of a Margareta Faugeres or a Lucy Terry emerges. Lucy Terry’s life of radical resistance needs to be acknowledged in our constructions of the struggle for cultural identities and resistance to the Enlightenment’s denigration of her race and the female sex in the post-Revolutionary years. After all, if the colonized person has greater knowledge than the colonizer—in this instance, a more complex understanding and literary execution of captivity—who is captive and of what system?