

Evangelical Networks in the Greater Caribbean and the Origins of the Black Church

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HENRY Beverhout looked out over the West African village of Freetown in 1792 with misgivings. From his own experience and from the complaints he received from other townspeople, he now recognized that the black men and women of Sierra Leone were not being afforded the equal treatment they had been promised. Exploited and discriminated against for most of their lives by white masters in America, these expatriates had arrived in West Africa determined to chart a new course for themselves. But the path to economic, civil, and religious freedom was littered with obstacles. They soon encountered problems with white Sierra Leone Company officials over low pay, high prices, and the slow pace at which land was apportioned to the new settlers. Just as important, the black émigrés were dismayed by the company's system of justice, whose juries Beverhout said did not “haven aney of our own Culler in” them. Having absorbed the British and American legal traditions of trial by a jury of one's peers, he demanded that in any “trial thear should be a jurey of both white and black and all should be equal.” Going even further, he then made the explosive claim that “we have a wright to Chuse men that we think proper to act for us in a reasenble manner.”¹

For Beverhout to assert that blacks be put on the same legal footing as whites was a risky maneuver in 1792 in a colony controlled by Europeans, but his iconoclast ideas and demands for equality sprang naturally out of his Atlantic world upbringing. Born a free man of color in St. Croix, he was the mulatto son of one of the leading white families in the Danish West Indies. Beverhout's position among both the whites and people of color in St. Croix was bolstered by his connection with evangelical religion. Firmly entrenched in the planting class, whites of the Beverhout family were early supporters of Moravian Church missionaries in their work to convert the archipelago's

¹Christopher Fyfe, ed., *'Our Children Free and Happy': Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s*, with a contribution by Charles Jones (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 25–26; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon, 2006).

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Afro-Danish slaves to Christianity as early as the 1730s, providing Henry Beverhout with access to a worldwide network of Protestant evangelicals. His global perspective and sense of personal worth were enhanced by the Moravian practice of giving people of African descent positions of authority within the church hierarchy. The Moravians also encouraged international consciousness among its black members, sponsoring the travel of select people of color from around the Atlantic basin. One of Beverhout's cousins, Wilhelm Beverhaut, for example, was moved from the Danish Caribbean island of St. Thomas to attend the Moravians' boarding school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1756 so that he could be trained as a mission worker. Henry Beverhout may have been inspired by his cousin, because in the early 1770s he left St. Croix for Charleston, South Carolina. His reasons for moving to the mainland are unclear, though given his later career it is possible that he went to the low-country capital to spread the gospel. Unfortunately for Beverhout, the American Revolution shortened his stay in South Carolina when in 1783 he and other Loyalists were evacuated to Canada by the British army. Undeterred by the change of scene and denominational boundaries, he organized a Methodist congregation in New Brunswick, which in 1792 migrated en masse to Sierra Leone. Henry Beverhout's religious convictions, forged in the Atlantic world, gave him the energy and resolve to demand greater freedom for his people wherever they settled. Shortly after he arrived in Sierra Leone, the colony's white governor complained about "the Wildest extravagances" being committed by local black Methodists at their church services. He singled out Beverhout as a chief fomentor of the "evil that many follow in this violent enthusiastic spirit."²

Beverhout's experiences and exposure to exciting new political and religious ideas made him somewhat exceptional. Though his life may have been atypical compared to the vast majority of enslaved African Americans, his actions do represent in broad outline the strategies used by many eighteenth-century black Christians to forge new lives for themselves in the British Atlantic world. Educated, mobile, though not always free, and not content to live in static social environments that oppressed their brothers and sisters, Afro-Christians like Beverhout moved multiple times throughout their lives in their search for identity and autonomy. By

²Fyfe, 'Our Children Free and Happy', 70; C. G. A. Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John*, ed. Johann Jakob Bossard, trans. and ed. Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Karoma, 1987), 688n; James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 107; *Single Brethren's Diary, 1753–1804* (Bethlehem, Penn.: Historic Bethlehem Partnership, 1996), July 14, 1756; Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren*, 699n.

moving in multiple directions from and to the Caribbean, North America, Africa, and Europe, they became agents of cultural exchange and in the process created a new circum-Atlantic Afro-Christian culture. That culture had its roots in all of the above-named regions but was so thoroughly affected by the violence and oppression of slavery as to be disassociated with any discrete national polity.³

Initially seeing themselves as Temne, Igbo, or Mandinka, or as members of even smaller social, linguistic, and familial groups, the newly enslaved did not think in terms of an African identity. Over the next one hundred years much of this parochial way of thinking dissolved as black captives reached out to each other for mutual support. For those who embraced Christianity in Britain's American empire, however, there was an important intermediate stage. While in the process of becoming African Americans, people of African descent also developed Afro-Atlantic Christian identities with less firm attachments to rigid political boundaries. Rather than being African American or Afro-British, they were Afro-Methodists, Afro-Baptists, and Afro-Moravians whose connections to transnational groups gave them more fluid identities. As such, eighteenth-century black Christians did not initially become African Americans, but only gradually integrated into the cultural mainstream over the succeeding one hundred years.⁴

To fully understand early black culture, we must expand our understanding of African American social and religious history in the eighteenth century beyond the plantations and plantation churches of Virginia and South Carolina to include the entire Atlantic world. The surprising mobility of early Afro-Protestants did much to help create a black evangelical discourse between the various worlds they inhabited, be it in the plantation South, the Caribbean, or elsewhere. Having been torn away from family and kin networks in Africa, exposed to the horrors of the Middle Passage, and somehow surviving the physical hardships and humiliations of American slavery, African captives and their children had to fashion new understandings of their worlds. Without supports from the familiar cultures

³Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: BBC, 2005), 336. Circum-Atlantic history has been defined by David Armitage as transnational and fluid, describing how the constant movement of people and ideas within the Atlantic system shaped culture and identity while shying away from single empires or nation-states. For a definition of circum-Atlantic history and how it differs from transatlantic and cisatlantic histories, see David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 11–27.

⁴For more recent discussions of the creation of African identity by New World blacks, see Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*; James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

of their homelands, but refusing to completely accept white folkways, people of color opted for a middle course. Afro-Atlantic Christianity was not wholly the intellectual property of Europe or the Americas, but neither was it completely African. Brought to blacks by usually lower-class and less-educated whites, early Protestant evangelicalism's racial bigotry was ameliorated by white believers' desire for stability and social justice. When that commitment to social equality dissolved after the American Revolution, black Christians in North America realized that the only chance they had to gain power and an independent identity lay with their ability to reach out to other black Christians within the Atlantic world. This paper details their initial attempts to foster an international black Christian community and the aid they received from Anglo-Caribbean evangelicals, and it shows how closely North American and Caribbean culture were integrated in the eighteenth century.

The evangelical movement known as the Great Awakening, which shook the very foundations of early American society, was not limited to Britain's North American colonies and Europe, nor was it restricted primarily to whites. From its very beginnings in the mid eighteenth century it included a larger spiritual and racial geography. Held together by networks of white and black evangelicals, this revival of religion encompassed a western Atlantic littoral spiritual community which included low-country South Carolina and Georgia, parts of coastal North Carolina, the British and Danish West Indies, and many of the people of African descent who lived there. These formal and informal networks employed hundreds individuals who traveled between the Caribbean and the American South's port cities, helping to spread and develop a common Afro-Atlantic form of spirituality. Blacks who embraced Protestant evangelicalism in this era consciously or unconsciously put their ethnically African cultures to the side, compartmentalizing them, while at the same time not wholly accepting Euro-American religion either. Afro-Protestants in the eighteenth century forged evangelical networks which spanned the Atlantic to places as scattered as Sierra Leone, the West Indies, North America, and Europe. Regional African cultures were still important for individual people of color, but they became just one of several spiritual reservoirs from which early black Protestants drank. Afro-Atlantic spirituality was a liberation theology, defined by its contact with British missionaries and their evangelical leaders who founded the early British abolition movement, examples of strong black churches in the West Indies independent of planter control, and the West Indian tradition of slave rebellion.⁵

⁵The scholarly debate over African cultural retentions in the Americas was initially taken up by Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941) and E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken, 1964). Since then, much of the

Initially stationed in places like Jamaica, Antigua, St. Kitts, St. Croix, and St. Thomas, many black and white missionaries and laymen were later assigned or transported to churches on the North American mainland. They brought with them certain beliefs about race and religion that were distinctively West Indian, which together influenced the development of the African American culture and the black church. Caribbean Afro-Protestantism contributed to the growth of the black church in North America in two principal ways. First, Caribbean evangelicals were some of the first black Christians to demand separation from white Protestants; second, Afro-Caribbean Christianity was heavily influenced by African-derived myalism, which emphasized the practical benefits of religion rather than the promises of other-worldly salvation offered by more orthodox white churches. Afro-Atlantic Christians built their churches in southern port towns like Charleston, Savannah, and Wilmington, North Carolina, fostering this Afro-Atlantic form of Christianity which then spread in multiple directions. While many factors influenced the growth of the African American church in the nineteenth century, the role played by Afro-Atlantic Christians in the eighteenth century was crucial.⁶

historiography has been shaped by Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon, 1976). African influences on the black church in America has been investigated by a wide range of scholars over the years, including Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979); Margaret Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullah* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008); Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*; David H. Brown, *Santeria Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sweet, *Recreating Africa*; and Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

⁶For work on the implications of the First Great Awakening, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001); Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 5; Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Traditions, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Patricia U. Bonomi,

From at least the 1730s, black and white evangelicals moved easily between the West Indies and mainland North America largely because of the close economic and political ties that connected the two regions. One of the “legs” of the Atlantic economy was based upon the trade that linked the Caribbean and North America. Planter politics also cemented the connections between the West Indies and the mainland colonies, particularly with South Carolina. In the colonial era, Carolinians enjoyed the services of no fewer than eleven governors who were either natives of or descendants of families who came from the Caribbean, principally Barbados.⁷ The economic, political, and social integration of Britain’s American colonies helped to create—along with the imperial policies of Spain and France—a greater Caribbean community. Somewhat diffuse, the greater Caribbean takes in an immense region that stretches from Guyana on South America’s northern coast, to the islands of the Caribbean basin,

Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 127–31; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982); Robert E. Shalhope, “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (April 1982): 340; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Harry S. Stout, “Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1977): 539–41; Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 188–94; Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966); and Perry Miller, *Errand Into The Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956). For an opposing interpretation, which asserts that there really was no distinct Great Awakening, see Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 306–10.

⁷Frank Moya Pons, *History of the Caribbean: Plantations, Trade, and War in the Atlantic World* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 2007), 112–43; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 112–16; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 227; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 8–9; and April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), passim. For the impact of rice culture on colonial South Carolina, see S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); William Dusbiberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); and Wood, *Black Majority*, 35–62.

the Gulf coast of North America, the Bahamas, North America's Atlantic coast from Florida to the Carolinas, and even extended as far east as the central Atlantic island of Bermuda. As far-flung as the greater Caribbean was, it was held together by the ties of imperial power and a slave system dominated by the cultivation of sugar.⁸

Quaker evangelicals were the first group of Protestants to take advantage of the greater Caribbean's cultural unity by proselytizing American slaves, beginning their crusade soon after George Fox founded the Religious Society of Friends in the mid seventeenth century. They traveled throughout the Caribbean and British North America on numerous and exhausting voyages, but they lacked the institutional infrastructure to maintain the kind of lasting presence in the West Indies necessary to convert many people of color. Though largely unsuccessful, Quakers and other groups of dissenters, such as Baptists and Presbyterians, put pressure on the Church of England to pay more attention to the spiritual welfare of its colonists in America. Beginning in 1701, largely in response to dissenter competition, Anglican Church officials began sending out missionaries under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, or SPG. By the 1730s SPG missionaries had converted only about one thousand black men and women, primarily in North America, though the meagerness of the Anglicans' success was not always a result of a lack of interest or effort. Between 1701 and the end of the American Revolution, the SPG sent three hundred clergymen to the Americas explicitly to bring the unchurched of all colors into the Anglican communion. The Church of England also disbursed funds to buy books, fund schools for black children in New York, Georgia, and South Carolina, and supplement the incomes of Anglican clergy who proselytized the slaves. Missionaries thus employed moved easily around the greater Caribbean, taking advantage of, and helping to develop, a western Atlantic littoral spiritual community while at the same time becoming some of the first trans-Caribbean missionaries.⁹

⁸Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 50–53. For arguments against the view that North America and the British West Indies shared a common culture, see Michael Craton, "Reluctant Creoles: The Planter's World in the British West Indies," in *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed., Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 314; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 335.

⁹For the Quaker mission to the slaves, see Larry Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009); Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: The Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820–1865* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Frederick B. Tolles, *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture* (New York: MacMillan, 1960); and Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolition* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute

By their very definition, missionaries of the eighteenth century were itinerants, moving from one mission station to another as they were needed and as their home organizations dictated. SPG missionaries were no exception, moving easily within Britain's Atlantic empire. Simon Smith, for example, spent thirty years working for the SPG in the "plantations," part of which time he spent as a naval chaplain. He was initially stationed in New York between 1696 and 1701 as a minister for the Church of England but then went to work as a missionary for the SPG at Falmouth Parish in Antigua until he retired. In 1720 it was reported that Anglican minister Thomas Phillips had worked for seventeen years in the Americas, beginning at Basseterre, St. Kitts, before spending a "season" in Newfoundland, and finally landing in Christ Church Parish, Maryland. Philip Brown, another Anglican missionary, after graduating from Queen's College, Cambridge, sailed to the West Indies for the SPG, where he spent a number of years. In 1733 he was recommended to the Bishop of London for a parsonage in South Carolina. Mr. Madison, though not a minister for the Church of England, was reported by Bermuda's SPG missionary Marischal Keith in 1795 as being a "Pastor of a Meeting House in the Centre of my 2 Parishes." Madison, Keith said, "came to this island some years ago from America in the character of a Methodist preacher, and after making a short stay revisited his native Country, from whence he returned a Presbyterian."¹⁰ Francis Le Jau was one of the only Anglican missionaries to actively proselytize blacks and Native Americans in the eighteenth century. Stationed in St. Kitts before being reassigned to South Carolina's Goose Creek parish in 1706, Le Jau had the opportunity to observe the violence of slavery in several settings and could never understand why white plantation owners treated their slaves so badly. Empathy for the condition of the oppressed did not result in many conversions, though; few African captives had joined Father Le Jau's church by the time he died in 1717. Anglican ministers did, nevertheless, help create a missionary network by continually moving from one pulpit and mission station to another within the Anglophone world. However maladroit the SPG's missionaries were as evangelizers to the empire's people of color, they forged vital links between the American mainland and the West Indies.

of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 62, 64–65.

¹⁰*Queries*, 1681–1749, Fulham Papers, vol. 19, Leeward Islands. Lambeth Palace Archives, London, England, 119–20; Fulham Papers, 1720, vol. 3, Maryland, 60; Gov. Edward Trelawney to Bishop Gibson, 7 December 1738, Fulham Papers, vol. 17, Jamaica, 281; William May to Bishop Gibson, 1 December 1740, Fulham Papers, vol. 18, Jamaica, 5–6; Marischal Keith to Bishop Porteus, 3 October 1795, Fulham Papers, vol. 17, Bermuda, 69–70; letter to Bishop Gordon, 29 December 1733, Fulham Papers, vol. 9.

Using this pre-existing network as a model, the black and white Methodists, Moravians, and later, Baptists and Presbyterians helped fulfill the SPG's mission of redeeming the souls of the unconverted of all races.¹¹

I. EVANGELICALS IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN

Learning from mistakes made by the SPG, the Methodists were among the first successful trans-Caribbean missionaries, second only to the Moravians in the number of new black members they attracted to Protestantism in the Caribbean during the eighteenth century.¹² They not only evangelized people of color in the West Indies but, because they frequently traveled between the Islands and North America, also acted as agents of cultural contact and even exchange, helping to spread Afro-Atlantic Protestantism to the northern mainland.

Recognizing the role white evangelicals played in fostering the black church in the eighteenth century is vital to our understanding of Afro-Atlantic religion. Of particular interest is William Hammet, who accompanied Methodist leader Thomas Coke on his pioneering trip to the West Indies in 1787 to evangelize people of color in Britain's sugar empire. In so doing, he committed himself to a new life in the Americas. Hammet is important because he later established a network of largely black churches in low-country South Carolina and Georgia, coastal North Carolina, and the British West Indies, which helped foster Afro-Atlantic Christianity in those regions. Strikingly, Hammet was himself pro-slavery, a position that on the surface seems contradictory given his association with the anti-slavery Methodists, his work evangelizing enslaved Africans, and his own bi-racial congregations. Hammet built his church by specifically targeting areas with large African American populations, such as Wilmington, North Carolina, and drawing on ministers with Caribbean experience for his clergy. As we will see, the competing influences of cosmopolitan abolitionism and the parochial, social, and economic demands of his new provincial home pulled Hammet in multiple directions.

¹¹*The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1706–1717*, ed. Frank W. Klingberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

¹²For descriptions of the Moravian Church's worldwide missionary efforts in the eighteenth century, see Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*; J. C. S. Mason, *The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England, 1760–1800* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 2001); C. G. A. Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren*; J. Taylor Hamilton, *A History of the Missions of the Moravian Church During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Bethlehem, Penn.: Times, 1901); and Hamilton, *A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church, or the Unitas Fratrum, or the Unity of the Brethren, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Bethlehem, Penn.: Times, 1900).

Born in Ireland and ordained a minister in 1786 by John Wesley, Hammet was himself a product of the Atlantic world. He could be a “fire and brimstone” preacher, but he was also a literate and thoughtful man as is evidenced by the numerous pamphlets he authored in later years. Little is known of his childhood or early career. Methodist outreach in Ireland had initially been successful in the island’s southern port cities and market towns, especially in areas where the British army garrisoned its troops. Wesley’s followers in Ireland spent much of their efforts converting the gentry, so Hammet was probably the second or third son of a merchant family from southern Ireland who received a university education that trained him for a career in the church.¹³ Though Hammet’s spiritual integrity should not be questioned, economic necessity certainly contributed to his decision to become a missionary. He was one of the many educated but poor Irish and Scotsmen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who, when given the opportunity, made the reluctant but measured decision to try to better their fortunes in the Americas.¹⁴

Shortly after arriving in the tropics, Hammet was stationed on the island of St. Kitts. His work there went well—so well that in less than two years church membership in St. Kitts had shot up to over seven hundred mostly black congregants. Hammet probably did not start from scratch given the large

¹³Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 191.

¹⁴Thomas Coke, *An Address to the Preachers Lately in Connexion with the Rev. John Wesley; Containing Strictures on a Pamphlet published by Mr. W. Hammet; Intituled, “An Impartial Statement of known Inconsistencies of Rev. Dr. Coke, &c.”*, School of Oriental and African Studies. University of London, 2. Besides the above pamphlet made note of by Thomas Coke, Hammet published *A rejoindre being a defense of the truths contained in An appeal to truth and circumstances: in seven letters addressed to Reverend Mr. Morrell* (Charleston, S.C.: I. Silliman, 1792); *An appeal to truth and circumstances* (Charleston, S.C.: printed for the author, 1792); *A sermon preached in the parish of St. Thomas, at the house and on the death of Mr. John Singletary in April, 1791* (Charleston, S.C.: William Price Young, 1791). All of these publications were part of a pamphlet war between Hammet, who later split from mainline Methodism, and the American Methodist Episcopal Church. For Irish and Scottish emigration to the West Indies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Nicholas Canny, “The Marginal Kingdom: Ireland as a Problem in the First British Empire,” Eric Richards, “Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic Empire,” and Maldwyn A. Jones, “The Scotch-Irish in British America,” all in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill: Published for The Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Hilary McD. Beckles, “A ‘riotous and unruly lot’: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644–1713,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 47, no. 4 (October 1990): 503–22; Trevor Burnard, “European Migration to Jamaica, 1655–1780,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 53, no. 4 (October 1996): 769–96; Bruce Kercher, “Perish or Prosper: The Law and Convict Transportation in the British Empire, 1700–1850,” *Law and History Review* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 527–84; Ned C. Landsman, “Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600–1800,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 463–75.

number of Afro-Caribbeans who were either African Christians originally from Catholic Kongo or who had been converted in other European colonies, whether Spanish, Dutch, Danish, French, or Portuguese.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his ability to bring so many of the faithful into his Protestant church was remarkable—a feat that was, as Coke later exclaimed dramatically, “almost unexampled in the history of modern times.” During that time he also trained four people of color as lay exhorters to aid him and continue proselytizing in his absence. Word quickly spread about the new pastor, and it was not long before Hammet received an invitation to minister to the slaves on the neighboring island of Nevis. Though a member of Nevis’ colonial assembly, lawyer William Brazier, made the request, word of the new white clergyman, whose specific purpose was to serve the spiritual needs of the island’s people of African descent, was probably first spread by slave communications networks. On the heels of his success in St. Kitts, Hammet was temporarily stationed in Tortola and then St. Croix to help jump-start missions on those islands before being reassigned to a larger and more prestigious post in Jamaica.¹⁶

Although he preached in the region for only four years, the charismatic Hammet was affected by Afro-Caribbean spirituality, and he also left his own imprint on black West Indian religion. Living in constant contact with slaves and free people of color almost twenty-four hours a day for over four years with only occasional visits from white Methodist colleagues, he absorbed Afro-Caribbean culture from various African ethnic groups. White society in the British Caribbean mostly shunned early Methodist preachers, so the only people missionaries like Hammet came in contact with on a regular basis were people of African descent. At the same time, the work that he and other white missionaries did had far-reaching effects on the religious beliefs of Afro-Caribbeans. Because of the efforts of Methodists like Hammet and his black assistants, as well as the many white and black Moravian missionaries already there, fully one quarter of the black population of the British West Indies embraced Christianity by the time Britain’s Parliament forced emancipation on Anglo-Caribbean planters in 1832. Together, black and white Methodists and Moravians made the

¹⁵Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 98; John Thornton, “On the Trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas,” *Americas* 44, no. 3 (1988): 261–78; Thornton, “The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750,” *Journal of African History* 25, no. 2 (1984): 147–67; Robert Farris Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 45.

¹⁶William Hammet, *Diary of William Hammet*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina; Thomas Coke, *A History of the West Indies, Containing the Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical History Each Island; With an Account of the Missions Instituted on those Islands, from the Commencement of their Civilization, but More Especially of the Missions which have been Established in the Archipelago by the Society late in Connexion with the Rev. John Wesley* (Liverpool: Nutall, Fisher, and Dixon, 1808), 2:58.

Caribbean a major center for Afro-Protestantism in the Americas and a source of inspiration for black Christians throughout the Atlantic world.¹⁷

Spreading the Protestant faith in the tropical and semi-tropical greater Caribbean was incredibly dangerous for both whites and blacks. An epidemiological nightmare for the foreign born, the West Indies was plagued by yellow fever, malaria, and a whole host of other afflictions that debilitated and killed hundreds of thousands over the course of four centuries. With fewer natural immunities, whites newly-arrived from England, Scotland, or Ireland died at a faster pace than Creole or African-born blacks. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Jamaica needed fifty thousand new white immigrants to increase its population by five thousand. For African captives, especially newly-imported saltwater slaves, the crowded conditions of slave ships, exposure to putrid water and disease-bearing insects, as well as insufficient diets and crushing workloads, meant that most did not live longer than two decades once they arrived in Jamaica.¹⁸ The effect of the Caribbean's unhealthy environment on efforts to proselytize the slaves was to force white missionaries, who sickened and died from yellow fever and malaria at an astonishingly high rate, to train Afro-Antilleans as lay exhorters and class leaders. The creation of a black clerical class in the British West Indies would, in the interval leading to emancipation in 1832, help build the movement for abolition by raising up blacks for the rest of the world to see as "civilized" and therefore worthy of freedom.

Hammet himself made numerous entries in his journal about episodes of ill health. In July 1789, he complained that he had "sore eyes" so that he "could not preach." On his first day in Jamaica he was again too sick to give a sermon and had to wait until the next day to greet his new congregation. Between bouts of illness Hammet directed the construction of an impressive Methodist meeting hall in Jamaica that fronted Kingston's main parade ground and brought hundreds of mostly black Jamaicans into his church. It was sickness,

¹⁷Coke, *A History of the West Indies*, 2:59; Thomas Coke, *A Journal of Rev. Dr. Coke's Third Tour Through the West Indies: In Two Letters, to the Rev. J. Wesley* (London, 1791), 11; Barry W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1995), 105. For work on emancipation in Britain's empire, see Demetrius L. Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation in the British Caribbean and the U.S. South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wieners, 1997); William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976). Some scholars question the sincerity of many early slave conversions to Christianity since most also held onto their ethnic cultures and beliefs simultaneously. This argument is culturally biased given that many Euro-Americans in the eighteenth century maintained non-Christian beliefs in magic but have always been considered "true believers" even though they strayed quite far from Judeo-Christian traditions.

¹⁸Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 17.

as well as persecution by Jamaica's whites, that eventually drove the young Irishman from his Kingston pulpit. He became ill again in late 1790, and Coke, visiting Jamaica, decided to remove his ailing fellow missionary to Charleston. The plan was for Hammet to spend several months in South Carolina to recuperate and then return to his duties in the West Indies. It quickly became apparent, however, that Hammet enjoyed his new surroundings and, much to the consternation of Coke and other American Methodist leaders, had no intention of returning to Jamaica.¹⁹

Upon arriving in the low country's wet and steamy capital, Hammet immediately began to preach. His most receptive audiences, as had been the case in St. Kitts, Nevis, Tortola, St. Croix, and Jamaica, were the city's people of color. Some black Carolinians were already acquainted with Protestant Christianity, having attended Methodist meetings before William Hammet and Thomas Coke came on the scene in 1791. Methodism, however, did not come to Charleston and the low country until rather late. An attempt was made to establish a church in 1773, perhaps with the help of St. Croix native Henry Beverhout, but John Wesley's stand against slavery and Methodism's association with England during the American Revolution made the denomination unpalatable to most white Carolinians until the mid 1780s. In 1785 Methodist leader Francis Asbury journeyed to Charleston and was able to establish a fledgling congregation consisting of thirty-five whites and twenty-three people of color by the end of that year.²⁰ By 1787 church members managed to erect a meeting house but continued on occasion to gather for services at the city's public markets and tree-lined squares. In a recurrence of their treatment in Jamaica, roving gangs made up of the sons of the gentry attacked the Methodist assemblages, which were also subject to arrest by authorities for allegedly disturbing the peace. When

¹⁹Hammet, *Hammet's Diary*; D. A. Reily, "William Hammett: Missionary and Founder of the Primitive Methodist Connection," *Methodist History* 10, no. 1 (October 1971): 34. For mortality rates among slaves in the West Indies, see Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Michael Craton, "Jamaican Slavery," in *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 267–68. Considering the low country's unhealthy disease environment in the eighteenth century, it is remarkable that Coke brought Hammet to Charleston to regain his health. For South Carolina's precarious epidemiological climate, see John Duffy, "Eighteenth-Century Carolina Health Conditions," *The Journal of Southern History* 18, no. 3 (August 1952): 301–2; H. Roy Merrens and George D. Terry, "Dying in Paradise: Malaria, Mortality, and the Perceptual Environment in Colonial South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 4 (November 1984): 533–50.

²⁰For works on Francis Asbury and early American Methodism, see Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976); Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as it Developed Among Blacks in America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1976); Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).

Hammet appeared in 1791, the Methodists were still considered dangerous abolitionists, a reputation the young evangelist had to meet head on.²¹

As it turned out, Hammet's move to the low country was fateful for both American Methodism and the spread of Caribbean Afro-Protestant Christianity to the United States. His magnetic personality and fiery performances in the pulpit quickly gained Hammet a large and loyal following in Charleston. With almost half of the city's Methodists behind him, he felt emboldened to break with mainline Methodism. Citing cases of neglect and physical abuse that he and other missionaries had allegedly received in Jamaica at the hands of Bishop Coke, and the very fact that the Methodists were beginning to make use of such "popish" titles as bishop, Hammet took action. In one of the first schisms of the Methodist Church, the young Irish firebrand formed his own Primitive Methodist Church in Charleston and began establishing sister churches throughout low-country South Carolina and Georgia, coastal North Carolina, and as far away as the Bahamas.²²

Charleston in the 1790s was an exciting and dynamic place, filled with opportunities for ambitious men and women—opportunities that were not always restricted to the city's whites.²³ Besides enriching low-country planters, the city's middle- and lower-class mechanics, merchants, and sailors found Charleston a ready market for their wares and skills. Many of these lower and middling folk were the very people who found John Wesley's egalitarian message so appealing. Fostering social stability if not social mobility, Methodism appealed to the petty bourgeoisie who strained against Charleston's static hierarchy of inherited wealth whose representatives still filled the city's Anglican churches. We can get a snapshot of early Carolina Methodism by

²¹Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 139; Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780–1845* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965).

²²Hammet was not the only Methodist divine to be influenced by the era's revolutionary pull toward greater independence and republicanism. In Virginia, James O'Kelly also decided to break away from the American Methodist Church, forming the Republican Methodists in 1794. Taking thirty ministers and 20,000 church members with him who also could not abide being ruled over by a bishop, O'Kelly's Virginia Methodists eventually merged with a group of republican-minded Calvinist Baptists from Massachusetts led by Elias Smith in 1809 to form the Disciples of Christ denomination. William Hammet, *An Impartial Statement of the Known Inconsistencies of the Rev. Dr. Coke, in his Official Station, as Superintendent of the Methodist Missionaries in the West Indies: With a Brief Description of one of the Tours through the United States* (Charleston: W.P. Young, 1792), 8; Reily, "William Hammett," 38; Jerry O'Neil, "The First Schism in American Methodism: A Study of the Movement Begun by the Reverend William Hammett in 1791 in Charleston, South Carolina," senior research paper, The Divinity School, Duke University, 1963. For the O'Kelly schism, see Nathan O. Hatch, "The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People," *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 3 (December 1980): 548–49.

²³Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston!: The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 180.

looking at who rented pews at Hammet's new Charleston church. Like many early Methodist congregations, they came mostly from the middling ranks of society. In 1793 and 1794 the membership included four shopkeepers, one baker, one mariner, three carpenters, one shoemaker, one merchant, two bricklayers, one schoolmaster, and one blacksmith; of the sixteen people who rented pews at Trinity Methodist Church in those years, only one was listed as a planter. Methodism's anti-slavery stance probably did not disturb them greatly because for many white artisans black slaves were unwanted competition for jobs. Given his congregation's attitudes about race and Charleston's newfound prosperity, it is not surprising that Hammet chose the low-country capital for his new pulpit.²⁴

Over half of Hammet's church members were people of color, most of whom were probably free blacks or privileged slaves who, like their fellow white Methodists, were striving to better their circumstances. Mixed-race marriages, though hardly common, were not illegal in South Carolina in the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, perhaps because of the state's cultural links to the Caribbean where racial mixing was more accepted. Certainly Hammet's sojourn in the West Indies, where interracial unions were more common, led to his personal acceptance, or at least tolerance, of interracial marriage. Some of Charleston's people of color married whites as a way to ascend the social ladder. In December 1793 Hammet or one of his assistants performed the ceremony for free blacks Joseph Morton and Martha M. Kensey. In another wedding at Hammet's church in November 1791, George Bampfield, "a free mulatto," married Barbary Maia Cole. Cole's race was not identified, leaving open the possibility that she was white. In August 1798 James Creton, whose race was not noted, married "Bella Engles, free black," again leaving open the possibility that the groom was white. The races of both husband and wife were recorded when "James Lacklair (free coloured man)" married "Cat'ne Sheily (white woman)" in a November 1793 ceremony at Trinity Church.²⁵

²⁴Loren Schwener, "Slave Independence and Enterprise in South Carolina, 1780–1865," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 93, no. 2 (April 1992): 101–25; *Trinity Church Pew Renters, 1793–1794*, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 40; Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Church History* 63, no. 2 (June 1994): 180; John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11–12. For works on the appeal of Methodism to the middle class, see David G. Hackett, *The Rude Hand of Innovation: Religion and Social Order in Albany, New York, 1652–1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 98–99; Terry D. Bilhartz, *Urban Religion and the Second Great Awakening: Church and Society in Early National Baltimore* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), 21–22; Charles G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution, 1763–1812* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 253–72; and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 80–81.

²⁵*Trinity Church Register, 1793–1803*, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina; *Trinity Church Marriage Register, 1791–1802*, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the*

The African ethnicity of the people of color in Hammet's church is impossible to know with certainty; however, given South Carolina's relatively low rate of slave importation compared to the West Indies (especially during the American Revolution when the supply of slaves from Africa was cut off and between 1793 and 1803 when South Carolina imposed an outright ban on buying foreign slaves), the percentage of native Africans was likely relatively low. As a whole, South Carolina's people of color were an ethnic hodgepodge from all over West and West Central Africa and the Caribbean. It is believed, however, that between 1733 and 1807, at the height of the slave trade into Carolina, fully 40 percent of the colony's and state's imported slaves came from Angola. Another 20 percent were shipped to the region from Senegambia, 16 percent came from the Windward Coast, and 13 percent arrived from the Gold Coast. The remaining 10 percent were sold from the coasts of Sierra Leone, the Bight of Biafra, and the Bight of Benin. Given these statistics, it is not surprising that facets of Angolan culture, which included a long history of African Christianity originally brought to Central Africa by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, made Christian churches more appealing to some blacks.²⁶

Charleston's importance as the South's major port of entry drew Angolans, Igbo, Irish Catholics, German Lutherans, French Huguenots, and English dissenters to its docks and markets. Therefore, Charleston's population was far more heterogeneous than Dixie's rural hinterland. It was home to multiple European ethnicities and religious groups, as well as West Indian émigrés and Africans. People of diverse backgrounds mingled in close proximity and were exposed to and influenced by exotic ideas, products, and customs. Charleston's heterogeneity and position as an entrepôt, therefore, makes it an excellent place to study transatlantic religious movements.²⁷

Many of Charleston's whites did not perceive the city's religious, ethnic, and racial diversity as unalloyed blessings, especially during the 1790s. Anxieties about race relations were heightened by the arrival in 1792 of five hundred refugees fleeing the Haitian Revolution, and many more descended upon the region in the following years. Between 1791 and 1795 some twelve

Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 10.

²⁶Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On*, 24; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 156–57; Thornton, "On the Trail of Voodoo"; Thornton, "African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo."

²⁷Cynthia M. Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston's Urban Slave Society* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2–4; Fraser, *Charleston*, 179; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 267.

thousand people of color from Saint Domingue were brought to the United States by French masters. Lower South states tried to bar the entry of West Indian free coloreds but were largely unsuccessful. By the late 1790s Charleston and Savannah became home to large free black populations, which began cultivating their own black ministers who, it was feared, aroused the hopes of local slaves for their own emancipation, whether through manumission, suing masters, or running away.²⁸

White North Americans usually regarded Caribbean slaves with suspicion, and with good reason. Though the mainland colonies and states had experienced a number of slave revolts and conspiracies up to 1800, the number was quite small compared to the West Indies where bloody insurrections occurred with stunning regularity. If slaves implicated in Caribbean revolts escaped execution, they were usually sold out of their colonies, often to North American buyers and off-loaded at Charleston's docks. In 1795, whites became even more anxious when rumors began to circulate that "a vast number of French Mulattoes and Negroes [were] ready for any mischief and since arriving in the city there [had] been three or four different attempts to set the town on Fire." The atmosphere became so frightening for whites that in 1797 three slaves were executed for conspiring to burn down the city and kill its white population. As with many so-called slave conspiracies, however, the evidence against the accused was flimsy or nonexistent.²⁹ The controversy touched Reverend Hammet directly in the early 1790s when one of the black members of his church, a slave named Peggy, asked him for a pass so she could move about the city unhindered. A Charleston ordinance passed in 1712 mandated that all slaves have a "ticket," or pass signed by their masters, when they went about business in the city. Because of white fear of independent blacks, as well as Hammet's own insecure position as a member of a denomination with an ambiguous position on slavery, he denied the request.³⁰

II. RELIGIOUS DILEMMA OVER SLAVERY

Historians have staked out several positions on how early southern white evangelicals viewed the institution of slavery and the prospects for

²⁸Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 35; Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Madison, Wisc.: Madison House, 1999), 45; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 427, 653.

²⁹Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International, 1993); Kennedy, *Braided Relations*, 59; Fraser, *Charleston*, 184.

³⁰Kennedy, *Braided Relations*, 61; Egerton, *He Shall Go Free*, 32; Hammet, *Diary*.

emancipation. One group has argued that the South's Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were initially firm abolitionists but were forced to come to an accommodation with the peculiar institution and southern patriarchy so the greater good of spreading the Christian gospel could be achieved. Dee E. Andrews points out that Methodist leaders Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury were initially militant abolitionists, sometimes risking their lives to preach emancipation in the post-Revolution South. Their stance on slavery evolved toward amelioration only when it became clear in the late 1780s that most slave owners in the South refused to give up their human property and would leave the church if made to do so. Agreeing with Andrews, John H. Wigger explains that there was actually considerable anti-slavery feeling among white Methodists, especially in the Upper South, in the years following the American Revolution. Even after many church leaders bowed to expediency on the issue, many individual conferences and preachers remained ardent abolitionists as late as the second decade of the nineteenth century. Pressure to remain neutral on slavery was intense in South Carolina, Wigger argues, because unlike in the Upper South, there had been few emancipations in the immediate aftermath of the war.³¹

Some evangelicals in the Upper South may have voiced their objections to slavery, but according to other scholars, the issue was less complicated for most New Light denominations. According to Donald G. Mathews and James A. McMillin, the vast majority of white southern evangelicals had always held firm to preconceived notions about the inferiority of people of color. For whites, Mathews argues, blacks were just too culturally different to ever gain acceptance in Euro-American society. Most southern white Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were slaveholders who simply refused to give up their slaves, and the evangelical anti-slavery leaders were too committed to advancing their movement to take a stand in favor of emancipation.³²

In a more recent re-imagining of early southern evangelicalism, Randolph F. Scully admits that white paternalism dominated the movement from its earliest years. In spite of this, it succeeded among whites and black slaves together because it also provided opportunities for people of color and other oppressed members of southern society to openly criticize the conditions of their subordination. A slave in early nineteenth-century Virginia, for example, had the right to bring his master before their commonly shared

³¹Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760–1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 127; Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 148–49, 137.

³²Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 71; James A. McMillin, *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783–1810* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

church council to seek redress for any wrongs he felt had been committed against him. As long as he could prove that the master had acted in a way inconsistent with the law of God, he had a chance of winning. Evangelicals' primary concern, Scully concludes, was to maintain a stable society ordered by godly principles; it would be folly, many early Baptists believed, to get mixed up in human institutions like slavery.³³ Scully echoes Mathews in contending that evangelicals knew that achieving a perfectly moral society here on earth was not possible. For early evangelicals, the expurgation of evil could only be achieved in the individual; attempting to fix an entire social system by fighting slavery, therefore, lacked humility and piety.³⁴

Methodism's internal debate on slavery was influenced by its connections with the British Atlantic and the growing abolition movement in England. American Methodism's attachment to its British parent remained strong well into the nineteenth century, only disavowing emancipation after English Methodist leader Thomas Coke made his last tour through North America in 1804. Even then, a native of North America was not named a bishop of the American Methodist Episcopal Church until 1808 with the investiture of William McKendree.³⁵ Given the cultural connections and geographical proximity of the American South and the British West Indies, the way Methodists dealt with slavery in one region tended to influence policy in the other. The issue became heated in the Bahamas in 1803, for example, when a Methodist missionary in New Providence, Brother John Rutledge, married a woman who owned slaves. Rutledge came under fierce criticism from fellow missionaries, but he held onto both his wife and her slaves without receiving official censure from Methodist leaders in London. However, fellow Methodist minister in the Bahamas, William Turton, was outraged and demanded that Rutledge leave the ministry, calling him "a hypocrite" and "a deceiver" and adding that "whatever excuse he may make, it was Mrs. Glover's money he married and nothing else."³⁶

The British West Indian connection also worked in the opposite direction to support the South's slave society. Caribbean itinerant William Hammet's Primitive Methodist offshoot, which had thoroughly accommodated itself to the slave regime, put considerable pressure on Asbury's Methodists to abandon abolitionist agitation, at least in the low country. Hammet's church

³³Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740–1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 239.

³⁴Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 78.

³⁵Andrews, *Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 4, 197.

³⁶Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 650; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 154; A. Dean Peggs, ed., *A Mission to the West India Islands: Dowson's Journal for 1810–17* (Nassau, Bahamas: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), 80–81.

had made impressive gains in the course of only a few years during the 1790s and appeared poised for even more growth in the Deep South. To head off this dangerous rival, American Methodist leaders decided after 1800 that they had to come to terms with slavery—an accommodation they made at the expense of the slaves.

Christopher Leslie Brown offers another nuanced examination of British influence over American evangelicals' view of slavery. According to Brown, British and American evangelicals did not initially oppose slavery; they were far more interested in saving the slaves' souls than bringing about a general emancipation. Though individual evangelicals spoke out against slavery, Brown notes, it was not until defeat in the American Revolution sparked a crisis of identity among the British about the association between England and freedom that Wesleyan Methodists in Great Britain began lobbying effectively for anti-slavery measures.³⁷

For Hammet and the Methodists in Charleston during the 1790s, the issue of abolition was just as explosive as it was in Virginia, if not more so. As a city divided in the postwar decade between loyalists and patriots, rich and poor, low country and backcountry, planter and artisan, and native and immigrant, white Charleston only found unity in the perpetuation of slavery and the subordination of all people of color. The Methodists' did their cause little good when they called for immediate emancipation in a church conference in, of all places, Charleston in 1795. Tensions boiled over again five years later, this time in the shadow of Gabriel Prosser's slave conspiracy in Virginia when two of the denomination's preachers were forced to flee Charleston for their lives only steps ahead of an angry mob. They were suspected of encouraging servile insurrection, though once again the evidence against them was flimsy. The fear of being tarred as an abolitionist, and worse, a British abolitionist, had probably been one of Hammet's primary reasons for splitting with mainline Methodism in 1791. He quickly came to believe that his continued association with a church that advocated emancipation, no matter how tepidly, was nearly suicidal for a minister in the Lower South.³⁸

Though his firm pro-slavery stand endeared him to the Charleston mob, his white parishioners, and the city's rulers, Hammet did not escape criticism from some of his fellow Atlantic-world evangelists and felt the need to defend his

³⁷Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 337.

³⁸Fraser, *Charleston*, 184–87; Kennedy, *Braided Relations*, 57; Frederick E. Maser, "Further Branches of Methodism Are Founded," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 1, ed. Maser and George A. Singleton (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 618; James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1997.

stance on the peculiar institution. Of all the subjects Hammet commented on in his journal, his rationalizations of slavery exceed all others. Most of the standard arguments appear: that slavery was the custom of the land; that slave labor was needed because white servants were scarce; that anyone who sells a slave will spend the profits on extravagant and sinful living; and that St. Paul had sent a slave back to his master rather than freeing him. As transparent as these platitudes were, they found ready audiences among increasing numbers of evangelicals in the 1790s. Not all of his fellow preachers, however, succumbed to slavery's logic. Hammet later complained that John Phillips, one of his own missionaries who subsequently broke with him over the issue of slavery, said that "he could hold no communion or fellowship with me because I was a member of the freemasons and on account of my having a slave in my possession." Though anti-slavery (and anti-elitist) sentiment lingered in the South, most southern white evangelicals hardened their attitudes toward abolition and embraced slavery as the nineteenth century progressed. Methodist ministers went along with the prevailing social climate; by 1843 1,200 Methodist preachers owned some 1,500 slaves, and 25,000 church members kept 208,000 people of color in bondage.³⁹

The philosophical problems and inconsistencies that slavery posed for Christianity concerned trans-Caribbean missionary Thomas Coke in particular, perhaps because he had such an unparalleled opportunity to observe plantation slavery in its numerous settings. Addressing the eternal theological question of how God could allow evil—in this case the evil of New World slavery—to exist, Coke appears to lapse into mysticism, asserting that God's ways were inscrutable. But his acceptance of the unknowable design of an all-powerful deity did not mean that Coke condoned slavery or passively accepted its legitimacy. Though trusting in God, he believed slavery "affords to the contemplative mind one of the most questionable forms in which the providence of God can, perhaps possibly, appear." As a former lawyer whose education was influenced by the Enlightenment, Coke saw the world as rational and orderly. In writing about slavery, he seemed to be pleading with himself and with his readers to make sense out of nonsense. Instead of praising the God of love and mercy, Coke struggled to divine the "wisdom and equity of God," which was "enveloped with shadows and involved in mysteries" that "still lies buried in a vast abyss." Only when mortal men ascend to heaven, he concluded, would a "scene . . . open in which he shall justify his ways to man." Coke reveals in his anguished contemplations of slavery an internal conflict he and many other Methodists experienced over their firmly held belief in Arminian self-salvation as opposed to the attractions of Calvinist predestination. Though eager to

³⁹Hammet, *Hammet's Journal*; Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 651, 661.

believe that sin and sinners were instruments in God's plan, the brutality of slavery in the West Indies and much of the American South tested Coke's faith.⁴⁰

The decline of the authority of biblical scripture caused by the advent of Enlightenment rationalism made Coke's and other missionaries' work in the American plantations more difficult. Prior to the eighteenth century, scripture had usually been interpreted to emphasize monogenesis, in which all of humankind descended from the sons of Noah after the flood. Seventeenth-century antiquaries pointed to Noah's grandson Gomer as the precursor of the Celts, while they attributed Gomer's son Ashkenaz as the forefather of the Germanic peoples. The children of Shem were credited as the distant though direct progenitors of the Abrahamic line, as the sons of Ham were thought to be the ancestors of black Africans. By collapsing race into lineage, the Old Testament served to inhibit racial prejudice. At the same time, however, the Bible was sometimes interpreted as ascribing the dark color of Africans to the divine curse supposedly placed on the descendants of Ham to exacerbate negative attitudes toward the racial "other." Since sacred anthropology served to both diminish and exacerbate racism, those evangelicals, like Coke, who leaned toward abolition found only a welter of confusion on the subject in the Bible, making it difficult to condemn slavery without reservation. Conversely, Coke and other New Lights knew that if they rejected the fundamental unity of the human race they would undermine the very essence of the Christian story. The transmission of original sin from Adam to the whole human race as well as Christ's atonement would not be possible if polygenesis became accepted. As the nineteenth century dawned, moreover, scientific inquiry into the roots of mankind gained the upper hand over theology in the popular imagination. The scientific drive to classify all things gave new legitimacy to polygenesis, which in turn made racial slavery and racism much easier for theologians and churchgoers to accept.⁴¹

III. PRIMITIVE METHODISM IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN

William Hammet, if he spent much time contemplating the theological harm that chattel slavery did to Christianity, did not let those concerns get in the way of an aggressive program to expand his church. In 1794 only three years after proclaiming his denomination's independence, Hammet's

⁴⁰Coke, *A History of the West Indies*, 1:39–40. For the accommodation by evangelicals of scientific rationalism with spiritual mysticism, see James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 72; John Saillant, "Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity: Anne and Elizabeth Hart in the Eighteenth-Century Black Atlantic," *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 86–115.

⁴¹Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19–22, 25.

Primitive Methodist Church counted twelve ministers and missionaries sent into the field to found new congregations. All the new churches were majority black, some were headed by black preachers, and all were intentionally built facing the Atlantic Ocean. Hammet identified with the greater Afro-Caribbean world and wanted his new church “connexion” to remain within that intellectual and geographical orbit. As other religious denominations moved into the trans-Appalachian West following the tide of American migration, he chose to expand along the familiar western Atlantic littoral, close to the seaports of the American South and the West Indies. Hammet also recognized that most African American Protestants, a group vital to the success of his church, were city dwellers who lived close to or directly on the Atlantic coast. In the Carolinas and Georgia before 1800 most black Methodists lived in and around Charleston and Georgetown, South Carolina, Wilmington, North Carolina, and in Savannah, Georgia. Total numbers of black Methodists in those urban enclaves were impressive. In Charleston, the city’s 1,800 Afro-Methodists comprised fully 20 percent of the African American population of 11,000 in 1790. By 1817 Charleston’s 5,699 black Methodists made up 45 percent of the port city’s blacks. Many of them were free or privileged slaves who had the time and the resources to attend and support churches of their own. As a proportion of the entire African American population, though, the number of black Christians in North America was quite low. By 1830 only 12 percent of African Americans went to Christian churches on Sunday. As late as 1860 a mere 25 percent of all the South’s plantation slaves were Christian. As these statistics reveal, most North American Afro-Protestants during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not plantation residents; instead, they lived in Atlantic-facing communities, which benefitted from a constant influx of people and ideas that came floating in on the ocean currents.⁴²

Knowing that many of his potential converts lived within sight of the ocean and being personally inclined toward staying close to the Atlantic anyway, Hammet built two churches in Charleston. The first was Trinity Primitive Methodist Church, which he led with the assistance of Nevis native William Brazier after the split with Francis Asbury’s Methodist Episcopal Church in 1791. Trinity Church grew by the mid-1790s to over five hundred black members, making it necessary to build another schismatic church, St. James, in Charleston’s suburbs. Yet another trans-Caribbean Methodist missionary

⁴²Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 157; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 256; John C. Willis, “From the Dictates of Pride to the Paths of Righteousness: Slave Honor and Christianity in Antebellum Virginia,” in *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, ed. Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 37–38.

from Jamaica, Brother Israel Mund, led the undertaking. Hammet's first church outside of Charleston was in Georgetown, South Carolina, a port town fifty miles up the coast from the low-country capital. Like its sister church in Charleston, Georgetown's Primitive Methodist Church was overwhelmingly black, with some three hundred people of color sharing Sunday services with only eighty-five whites by the end of the century. By all indications, Georgetown's first Methodist church was organized by people of color who, in their turn, invited William Hammet to send a preacher to lead them. The Methodist church in America, which Hammet took as his model, was centrally organized, but the center never had absolute power over the periphery and actually depended upon laypeople acting independently to establish new churches in frontier areas. So when Georgetown's black folks started their own church, the white Methodist preachers who came later would not have been surprised.⁴³

The church in Georgetown was followed soon thereafter by one in Savannah, Georgia. It was initially led by yet another veteran West Indies missionary, Phillip Mathews, who in 1787 had been one of the first Methodist ministers to preach in the Georgia capital after the Wesley brothers left four decades earlier. Not much is known about the Primitive Methodist church in Savannah, or if it was a success. Self-appointed Methodist itinerant minister Lorenzo Dow journeyed to the coastal Georgia city where as late as 1802 he found no "regular" Methodists but instead one of "Hammet's party, Adam C. Cloud," who, Dow explained, "gave me the liberty of his preaching house that night" where "I spoke to about seventy whites and blacks." Lorenzo Dow was an experienced transatlantic preacher, itinerating from his Connecticut home to the Deep South, then across the ocean to try his hand at converting the Catholics of Ireland. While in Savannah, he was also invited to give a sermon at the "African meeting house," which was probably a reference to Afro-Baptist Andrew Bryan's church. Bryan himself was at the center of a network of Afro-Baptist churches that encompassed Jamaica, Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone, the Bahamas, as well as his native Georgia. Georgia had been established in the early part of the eighteenth century as a refuge for religiously persecuted groups from around the Atlantic rim, so it is not surprising that its black and white evangelicals maintained connections with disparate religious organizations throughout the Anglophone world.⁴⁴

⁴³Richard Coté, "Renegade: The Reverend William Hammet, 1756–1803," (unpublished manuscript, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S.C., 1982), 107, 133; J. Gordon Melton, *A Will to Choose: The Origins of African American Methodism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 156; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 435; Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 22.

⁴⁴Coté, "Renegade," 133; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 436; Lorenzo Dow, *The Eccentric Preacher: Or, a Sketch of the Life of the Celebrated Lorenzo Dow, Abridged from his Journal; and Containing the Most Interesting Facts in his Experience. Also, an Abridgement of his*

The next Primitive Methodist mission was established twenty miles south of Savannah, in the port town of Sunbury, Georgia, in 1795. Its minister, Reverend Wefley, began his career in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England's North Country, followed by a sojourn in the West Indies as one of Thomas Coke's missionaries, before he accepted an invitation from Hammet to take over his new church in low-country Georgia. Liberty County, where Sunbury was situated, had a black to white ratio of four to one in the 1790s. Though records for the Sunbury Primitive Methodists have not survived, it is reasonable to conclude given the county's demographics and black dominance of most other Methodist churches in the region that the majority of its members were people of color. Hammet chose Sunbury as a site for one of his churches because of its large black population and because of its ties, as a busy port, with the West Indies. He undoubtedly knew of the southeast Georgia town when he lived in the Caribbean and believed it was an ideal place to extend his trans-Caribbean ministry. Hammet may also have read and appreciated William Bartram's description of Sunbury's harbor, which the Philadelphia naturalist described in 1774 as being "capacious and safe, and has water enough for ships of great burthen." Though in eclipse after the damage it sustained from British assaults during the American Revolution, Sunbury was still Georgia's second largest port in the early 1790s and seemed a likely place to build a new church.⁴⁵

Hammet's Wilmington, North Carolina, church was established in 1795 specifically to minister to that port city's African Americans. Blacks in the

Celebrated Chain! And of his Curious Thoughts on Matrimony! (Lowell, Mass.: E. A. Rice, 1841), 58. On Andrew Bryan and Atlantic-world Afro-Baptism, see Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers*, 154, 163; Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*, 71; Christopher Brent Ballew, *The Impact of African-American Antecedents on the Baptist Foreign Missionary Movement, 1782–1825* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2004); Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004); Alfred Lane Pugh, *Pioneer Preachers in Paradise: The Legacies of George Liele, Prince Williams and Thomas Paul in Jamaica, the Bahamas and Haiti* (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Paradise, 2003); Alan Gallay, "The Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism: George Whitefield, the Bryan Family, and the Great Awakening in the South," *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 3 (August 1987): 369–94; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 24, 38, 268, 288, 314, 316; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 424, 654, 655.

⁴⁵Coté, "Renegade," 107; Coke, *Extract of the Journals of Rev. Dr. Coke*, 78; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 82; Charles C. Jones, Jr., *The Dead Towns of Georgia* (Savannah, Ga.: Morning News Steam, 1878), 157, 171; Paul McIlvaine, *The Dead Towns of Sunbury, Ga. and Dorchester, S.C.* (Ashville, N.C.: Groves, 1976), 5–68; William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia* (Atlanta: Cherokee, 1913), 1:149–50; Haygood S. Bowden, *History of Savannah Methodism: From John Wesley to Silas Johnson* (Macon, Ga.: J. W. Burke, 1929), 46; Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 21–22; William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Dover, 1955), 32–33.

area surrounding Wilmington had originally come from South Carolina. Through ties of family, friendships, and travel between the two regions, people of color in Wilmington probably heard about Hammet from kin who lived in Charleston and requested that he send them a minister. Communication by people of color between the two cities was made easier, moreover, because a relatively large number of Afro-Carolinians were sailors who traversed the inland waterways that intersected the entire low country. The relative autonomy Wilmington's blacks achieved as mariners was part of their long history of struggle for independence and attempts at upward mobility. As early as the 1760s, blacks in the lower Cape Fear area taught each other how to read with books supplied by the Associates of Dr. Bray, a missionary society connected to the Church of England. When Francis Asbury came to the area in the 1780s, he was met by a committee of blacks requesting he appoint a minister, implying that they had already organized a church.⁴⁶ Apparently Asbury was unwilling or unable to supply a minister, so Wilmington's people of color turned to William Hammet. He appointed Reverend Luke Rushton to his Wilmington mission to keep him employed following his failed appointment as a Primitive Methodist missionary in the Bahamas. As a person of color, Rushton encountered opposition in both the Bahamas and Wilmington, and he was eventually forced to leave both stations by fearful and angry whites. As an African-American preacher who moved around the greater Caribbean and was connected to an established church, Rushton, despite his inability to keep his clerical seats, was a foremost example of a trans-Caribbean minister who helped propagate Afro-Caribbean spirituality.⁴⁷

White preacher William Meredith, who had been a colleague of Hammet's in St. Kitts under Thomas Coke in the 1780s, joined his former comrade as a minister, first in the Bahamas, and then as a replacement in Wilmington for the by-then exiled Reverend Rushton. Though initially successful in building membership in his all-black church, Meredith soon fell afoul of Wilmington's white rulers. In 1798, exactly one hundred years prior to another spasm of racial violence in this Cape Fear port town that killed scores of local African Americans, his church was attacked and burned to the ground by an angry white mob. Meredith was lucky to escape with his life. This veritable pogrom, during which white terrorists torched most of Wilmington's black quarter, was sparked in part by white fears of several maroon communities made up of runaway slaves in the swamps along the lower Cape Fear River. Led by a slave called "the General of the Swamps," the maroons were able to maintain their independence from the American Revolution until they were finally

⁴⁶Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken my Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 14.

⁴⁷Hammet, *Journal*.

subdued in 1795. After their capture, many of those found guilty were decapitated and had their heads stuck on poles which were then put on display across the river from Wilmington at a place local whites derisively called “Nigger Head Point.” Those same whites would not countenance an independent black church in their midst so soon after their victory over the maroons.⁴⁸

The attack on southern African American congregations that tried to separate themselves from white control, of which the burning of Wilmington’s Afro-Methodist church is an example, was also an attempt by local whites to secure the “whiteness” and insularity of the early republic’s identity. Wilmington’s black Methodists purposely invited ministers associated with Great Britain, and by extension the British abolition movement, to lead them rather than a white American-born preacher, which would have been much less risky. Because they selected both a black man with experience in the Atlantic world and an Anglo-Caribbean as their ministers, they were attacked by local whites who were fearful not only of a black-controlled church but also because they recognized that the church was a direct challenge to white American hegemony and identity separate from Great Britain and the threatened emancipation it represented.⁴⁹

Following Rushton’s expulsion and Meredith’s death in 1799, Wilmington’s black Methodists carried on without them and without the aid or guidance of white Methodists like Francis Asbury or Thomas Coke. It was several years before Asbury appointed a white preacher to minister to Wilmington’s black and white Methodists, and even then the black branch of the church continued to operate autonomously. During the first decade of the nineteenth century, black stewards led church classes and administered most of the daily business of the church. Not until 1813, when white membership had increased markedly, were blacks forced to relinquish their leadership roles. Throughout this period, people of color dominated Methodism on the lower Cape Fear, outnumbering white members there 360 to 60 in 1801. Seven years after the church was destroyed, though, Methodist leader Francis Asbury visited Wilmington and looked approvingly over the large Methodist chapel, which held “1500 hearers,” filled this time, however, “with both colors.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸Coté, “Renegade,” 110; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 81; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 21–23; W. L. Grissom, *History of Methodism in North Carolina from 1772 to the Present Time* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1905), 1:222; David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Peter Hinks, ed., *David Walker’s Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), xviii.

⁴⁹Sean X. Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 1–20.

⁵⁰Hinks, *To Awaken my Afflicted Brethren*, 17; Grissom, *Methodism in North Carolina*, 222; Melton, *A Will to Choose*, 164; Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 128.

Defeat in Wilmington failed to dampen Hammet's missionary zeal. He first heard about the need for missionaries in the Bahamas from Joseph Paul, a black Methodist who had migrated to the Bahamas as a Loyalist refugee during the American Revolution. It was Paul, in fact, who first brought Methodism to the Bahamas. The Afro-Methodist exhorter moved from South Carolina to Abaco in 1783 and relocated to New Providence a year later. Apparently self-educated, Paul soon opened a school for blacks and free people of color in Nassau. A Methodist chapel soon followed the school. Paul's invitation to Hammet in Charleston to send a preacher rather than Thomas Coke in London or Francis Asbury in Baltimore is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is an indication of the uncertainty many people felt about the Methodist Church's future; with John Wesley dead in 1790 and various factions splitting away, the young church's survival was far from assured. Second, it is a testament both to Hammet's reputation as a trans-Caribbean minister and to the close ties that connected blacks in low-country South Carolina to the British Atlantic world. Finally, and most significantly, Bahamian Afro-Methodists believed they had the freedom to choose their own ministers and felt empowered to exercise that choice without asking white authorities for permission.⁵¹

It is probable that Joseph Paul learned of Hammet from a black woman on New Providence Island (Nassau) whom a later missionary identified as "Old Mrs. Wallace." This Afro-Methodist woman led an adventurous and well-traveled life, even if involuntarily. Born an Igbo in West Africa, she was sold into slavery as a young girl and transported to Jamaica. She spent many years there, probably working in her owner's house as a domestic servant because she subsequently moved with her owner's family to Pensacola in British West Florida. During the American Revolution, Wallace and her owners were forced to flee Pensacola, first to British occupied Charleston, then as loyalist refugees to St. Augustine, and finally to New Providence. While it is unclear when or where she became a Methodist, it is likely that other Afro-Methodists circulating throughout the greater Caribbean brought her into the church.⁵²

The Primitive Methodists sent four missionaries to the Bahamas during the 1790s at the behest of Joseph Paul and "Old Mrs. Wallace." Hammet's first missionary was a free black exhorter from Charleston named Samuel Hunt who went to New Providence in 1793. Nothing is known of his work in the Bahamas or his subsequent fate, but Hunt is significant nonetheless as one of

⁵¹Peggs, *Dowson's Journal*, 48; Whittington B. Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas, 1784–1834: The Nonviolent Transformation from a Slave to a Free Society* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 61.

⁵²Peggs, *Dowson's Journal*, 49.

the first African Americans to be sent on a foreign mission by an American denomination. After years of being exposed to remarkable black exhorters in the West Indies and being influenced by British-Atlantic evangelical thought, Hammet appeared to have had complete confidence in Samuel Hunt's ability to act independently and evangelize people of color in the Bahamas. Unfortunately, his ministry in the Bahamas was brief, perhaps cut short because Hunt, as a free black Methodist from the United States who preached to predominantly enslaved congregations, was considered a threat to Bahamian white supremacy and racial slavery. White Bahamians probably considered him an unwanted and dangerous intruder whose departure, or even re-enslavement, was deemed necessary. Whatever his fate, Hunt was replaced the following year by James Johnstone, whose stay in the Bahamas was even shorter than Hunt's. Reverend Johnstone quickly lost favor with his congregation, in part, because of his wife. She was a woman of alleged inconstant chastity and apparently considerable physical strength who was said to regularly drag him "on the house floor by the hair of his head." Johnstone was forced to leave New Providence, however, not because of his domestic troubles, but because he conducted several marriage ceremonies for his Afro-Bahamian congregants without a state license, thus falling afoul of Governor Lord Dunmore and Bahamian law. People of color could not be legally married in the Bahamas until complete emancipation came in 1839, and even then the marriage ceremony could only be conducted by a minister licensed by the colonial government. Johnstone may also have been dismissed by his black congregation, who probably preferred a person of color like Samuel Hunt as their pastor. Whatever the reasons for Johnstone's fall from grace, after he lost his pulpit it was rumored that he "was under the necessity of going a-privateering" to make his living.⁵³

The next Primitive Methodist preacher sent to the Bahamas was the aforementioned Luke Rushton, who like Samuel Hunt was a free black exhorter from South Carolina. According to a later white missionary, Rushton was an abusive alcoholic who repeatedly beat his parishioners, but the fact that he was black may have been the true cause for his dismissal. White Bahamians, already nervous in the mid-1790s about the presence of autonomous blacks in their midst because of the on-going black-led revolution against white rule in nearby Saint Domingue, did not want a local black church led by a free person of color who could not be easily controlled. Though Rushton may have been, as his critics alleged, a second-rate preacher, white fear of servile insurrection was probably the cause of his flight and hasty removal to North Carolina. Though the next missionary

⁵³Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas*, 61; Peggs, *Dowson's Journal*, 48; Pugh, *Pioneer Preachers in Paradise*, 105.

William Hammet sent to the Bahamas, William Meredith, was white, local authorities' suspicions of the Methodist church by that time were so intense that he was also forced to abandon his mission. Meredith left New Providence in 1795 for his ill-fated assignment in Wilmington. He would be the last Primitive Methodist Hammet sent on an overseas mission.⁵⁴

Meredith's departure in 1795 did not mean that Methodism was dead for people of color in the Bahamas. After the last of Hammet's multi-racial missionaries had left, trans-Caribbean evangelist Joseph Paul reassumed leadership of his small church. He and other local Afro-Methodists petitioned Thomas Coke for a replacement, but it took five years before an acceptable successor came to New Providence. In the interim, the Afro-Methodists of Nassau persevered, raising up within their church three exhorters and preachers of color. Though considered dangerous by local white leaders, such independent action by people of color in the Bahamas was not new. In 1792 Anglican priest William Gordon observed the presence and activities of black Methodists in New Providence. He discovered that many of them were originally from New England and included among their number several "Negro preachers." Gordon knew two of the black exhorters, calling them "conscientious and as sensible Negroes as any in the Bahamas." The New England Afro-Methodists in New Providence were probably Loyalist refugees who came via New York City after it was evacuated by the British army in 1783. Most of the black Loyalists who left the new United States from New York went to Nova Scotia, but about a thousand sailed south to the Bahamas between August and November of 1783. Most were free people of color, having gained their freedom through service to the British army or through manumission. Many of these black American migrants were later re-enslaved by whites who claimed that they had never gained their freedom either before or during the American Revolution, a claim backed by British Governor Lord Dunmore's government.⁵⁵

By the time a missionary who had been appointed to the position by the English Methodists arrived in 1800, New Providence's Afro-Methodist

⁵⁴Coté, "Renegade," 113; Peggs, *Dowson's Journal*, 48–50; Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas*, 61.

⁵⁵Coke, *History of the West Indies*, 3:201; William Gordon to Bishop Porteus, 7 September 1792, *Fulham Papers*, vol. 15, Exuma, Lambeth Palace Archives, London, England, 87–93; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 182, 185–86. That Dunmore freed the slaves of disloyal Virginians who joined the British army in 1775 but subsequently helped to re-enslave so many in the Bahamas points to the political expediency of his "Proclamation." For Lord Dunmore's activities and their effect on the coming of the American Revolution in Virginia, see Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, & the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omhundo Institute for Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 133–63.

church had split. One faction was led by Anthony Wallace, (the husband of “Old Mrs. Wallace”) and a free black from South Carolina who had enough resources to procure a place to live for the newly arrived missionary, William Turton. Wallace handed over to Turton control of the sixty-member church he and his wife had led between 1796 and 1800. The ease with which Turton gained acceptance among his black parishioners and assumed authority over Wallace’s New Providence church probably stemmed from the fact that Turton was a person of color—the son of a white Barbadian planter who impregnated one of his female slaves. The mulatto Turton began his career as a missionary associated with the British Methodists in Tobago in 1795, but he was forced to flee that island that same year when French forces invaded. Turton’s next mission station started the following year in the Swedish colony of St. Barts in the Lesser Antilles. He stayed there until his reassignment to the Bahamas. As a person of mixed racial ancestry, he found himself in a netherworld, not quite black, but also rejected by white society. He made his situation even more precarious when he married a local white woman, thus making himself *persona non grata* to white officials in Nassau, though the marriage was not voided. Only after two white missionaries, John Rutledge and William Dowson, were dispatched by English church officials in London several years later did the denomination gain some measure of acceptance by the Bahamas’ white ruling class.⁵⁶

The other faction of New Providence’s Afro-Methodist society was led by Joseph Paul and, after his death in 1802, by his two sons Joseph, Jr., and William. Perhaps as a reaction against the missionaries sent by William Hammet who caused the church to come into conflict with local white leaders—but also because of close ties to the local Anglican Church and a desire to maintain some autonomy—Paul and his sons steered their small congregation away from the Methodists. For over twenty years the Pauls’ church remained an adjunct of Nassau’s white Anglican Christ Church, but it was never completely subsumed within it. Throughout the 1810s and 1820s, William Paul and his successor Joseph G. Watkins routinely held Sunday worship services that included an opening prayer, the recitation of several psalms, and a sermon. After completing his own service, Paul led his congregation down the road to Anglican Christ Church to hear another sermon and to take communion. In an oppressive slave society, the Pauls used their experience in the Atlantic world to find a middle way that did not threaten white hegemony yet still allowed for a measure of independence.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 331; Joan A. Brathwaite, ed., *Methodism in the Caribbean: 200 Years Plus and Moving On* (Barbados: Methodist Church, 1998), 11.

⁵⁷Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas*, 62.

IV. DENMARK VESEY AND WEST INDIAN INFLUENCE

Famous for his alleged plot to raze Charleston, free the slaves, and sail to Haiti, Denmark Vesey also fits within the trans-Caribbean missionary motif. Like his fellow Danish West Indian, Henry Beverhout, Vesey absorbed a great deal of Afro-Caribbean social and religious culture before coming to the United States, making him an agent for cross-regional evangelization and extra-nationalism. The connection that linked Denmark Vesey to William Hammet and the larger world of Afro-Caribbean Protestantism is an example of the influence of Afro-Caribbean religion on the United States. John Vesey, the son of Kezia and Joseph Vesey, appears on Hammet's Charleston Primitive Methodist Church register as a pew renter. Joseph Vesey was a ship captain and slave trader who sailed to ports throughout the Atlantic basin. Until 1800 he owned a slave named Telemaque, whom he employed first as a cabin boy on his ship, and then as a trusted assistant in his chandler's shop in Charleston. We do not know if Denmark Vesey, as Telemaque later called himself, ever attended church with John Vesey, but given his later career as a preacher in Charleston's African Methodist Episcopal Church and the fact that he was married in Hammet's Charleston church by Nevis native William Brazier, the chances are good that he was a Primitive Methodist.⁵⁸

Denmark Vesey was born or had at least spent his early years in the Danish West Indies, which since 1732 had been home to a large and flourishing Afro-Moravian mission. Records from the era show that in 1770, when Denmark Vesey was only three years old, St. Thomas had a population of just under 5,000 people, 90 percent of whom were people of color. The Moravian Church on the island counted 2,332 black members in 1768, meaning that almost every person of African descent on St. Thomas was either a Moravian or associated with people who were Christians. It seems inescapable that by the time he was sold off the island in 1781 at the age of fourteen, Vesey had been influenced by and knew a great deal about Moravian Protestantism. Though the Moravians supported slavery, they also encouraged their black members to be independent, autonomous actors within the church. The example of black leadership that Denmark Vesey witnessed in St. Thomas as a child would shape his later life. Besides his experiences with the Brethren in the Danish West Indies, Vesey made numerous voyages to the Caribbean as a member of his master's crew and

⁵⁸*Trinity Church Pew Renters, 1793–1804*; Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*, 190; Egerton, *He Shall Go Free*, 25. On Vesey's life, conspiracy, and trial, see Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*; David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999); Edward A. Pearson, ed., *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 267–74.

had opportunities to soak up the region's Afro-Protestant culture, as well as its notions of rebellion against white rule.⁵⁹

Though it is unclear whether Vesey actually planned to burn Charleston, kill its white inhabitants, and free its slaves in 1822, what is clear is that he more closely identified himself with his greater West Indian roots and with his Afro-Atlantic Methodist faith than with the white regime in Charleston that oppressed him as a free person of color and enslaved his brothers and sisters. William Hammet also viewed himself as a citizen of the greater Caribbean and as a Methodist rather than as an American or Briton. He rejected both the American and English Methodist churches, and he looked with some ambivalence on the people of his adopted home, calling Carolinians "as changeable as the sand which blows over their soil." Just as Carolina's whites wrestled with their own identities as citizens of the United States, something they continued to do all the way to the Civil War, so too did the white and black West Indian Christians in their midst. The Afro-Caribbean Protestantism that leaders such as Denmark Vesey, Joseph Paul, William Hammet, and Henry Beverhout disseminated was a palpable presence throughout the entire western Atlantic littoral. This western Atlantic littoral spiritual community helped to sow the seeds of the black church in the United States and the larger Atlantic world, which in turn nurtured the spiritual freedom of many of the African Americans who encountered it. It also fertilized other, more explosive expressions of emancipation.⁶⁰

Just as importantly, by separating themselves from both the American and the English Methodists, Vesey, Paul, Hammet, Beverhout and their majority black and all-black congregations were consciously forging autonomous Atlantic-world identities. They lived in an era of political and religious revolution, and they took advantage of unstable governments and the shifting sands of political and religious loyalty to create a new Afro-Caribbean faith that crossed international boundaries. The Hammetites, along with many other Afro-Caribbeans, traveled throughout the greater West Indies in the final decades of the eighteenth century as agents of religious and cultural exchange. From its beginnings in the South's port cities and towns where it dominated, Afro-Caribbean Christianity then moved west

⁵⁹Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 5; Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren*, 625.

⁶⁰Michael P. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (Oct. 2001): 916; Genovese, "From Rebellion to Revolution," 48; Hammet, *Hammet's Journal*. In an attempt to contain the contagion of Afro-Caribbean rebelliousness, South Carolina legislators passed a law in 1823 which prohibited any free person of African descent from Mexico, South America, or the West Indies from entering the state. Free black sailors who docked at Carolina ports were also not allowed to leave their ships, and if they did they were imprisoned. See Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 275.

with the American frontier, making significant contributions to the development of African American Christianity.⁶¹

The black and white evangelical Protestants who came to North America from the West Indies brought with them a number of ideas and attitudes distinctive to the Caribbean that influenced the development of African American Christianity. For white missionaries like Hammet, Coke, and Meredith, their years in Britain's sugar island colonies changed them profoundly. After long exposure to slavery, Coke and Hammet, who had initially been firm abolitionists, seemed to come to an accommodation with it. Hammet embraced the "peculiar institution," bought a slave, and separated from a church that, at least through the end of the eighteenth century, viewed slavery as, if not sinful, then an unfortunate necessity. Coke kept slavery at arms' length, believing it encouraged extravagance, luxury, and hedonism among slave owners, and sexual license among the slaves. He could not, however, entirely escape its influence. In 1787 the thought struck him that, after years of preaching in the American "plantations," he had acquired a "peculiar gift for speaking to the Blacks." He took it as a sign that he should eventually proselytize in Africa, though he never did. Thomas Coke spent the final quarter century of his life trying to persuade African Americans to embrace the Christian gospel, but it seems likely that people of African descent in both the Caribbean and North America influenced him as much as he did them.⁶²

It is not surprising that white ministers were affected by black culture, considering that most of the congregations in the greater Caribbean in which eighteenth-century evangelical missionaries preached were majority black. The early Methodist church in Charleston appears to have been overwhelmingly African American. Coke noted in 1787 that the new church building held up to 1,500 people, and when services were held at five o'clock in the morning, 300 parishioners showed up. Holding church at such an early hour suggests that many of those attending were slaves, forced to attend to religion before their workdays began. Coke also commented on how astonishingly fast the new chapel was constructed, considering that there were "no more than forty whites here in Society." By 1791 more whites had joined Charleston's Methodist Cumberland Church, but people of color still dominated, with 119 black members to only 66 white members. Racial balance came closer for Hammet's Primitive Methodist church in Charleston by 1798, but he still counted only 100 whites in his church compared to 114 people of African descent. These numbers reflect the

⁶¹Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 7–8.

⁶²Thomas Coke, *A Farther Continuation of Coke's Journal: In a Letter to Rev. J. Wesley* (London, 1787), <http://galenet.galegroup.com>, 4.

overall racial diversity of low-country South Carolina. In 1791 African Americans outnumbered whites in Charleston county 34,846 to 11,801. Within Charleston's city limits the racial ratio was not so skewed, but blacks still enjoyed a majority of 8,831 to 8,089 whites in the census of 1790. Early Methodist churches in the entire South were largely black institutions, while even white-controlled southern Baptist churches in the eighteenth century had large black memberships.⁶³

Demographics aside, that the majority of Primitive Methodists were black was also a product of West Indian influence. When Hammet sent William Meredith to Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1795, he was able to raise a small congregation of the city's blacks, but no whites. Perhaps this was so because the Methodists were generally disapproved of in this Cape Fear River town which still had a strong Anglican church. It may also have been Meredith's intention. As a veteran of mission work in the Caribbean, Meredith was accustomed to all-black congregations and may have been observing Thomas Coke's earlier admonition that Methodist missionaries in the West Indies only evangelize among the slaves to the exclusion of whites. Many ministers who had worked in the West Indies, moreover, took away from the experience a rather jaundiced opinion of planters and their white subordinates. Long exposure to the Caribbean master class motivated many of those ministers to preach only to people of color.⁶⁴

The influence that Afro-Caribbean religion had on people of African descent in North America is strong and clearly defined. Blacks who moved within the greater Caribbean region possessed a heightened desire for separation from white culture. The Afro-Methodists of William Meredith's Methodist church in Wilmington faced persecution and ultimate destruction when they split from the white church, but they still chose to do so. In New Providence, Bahamas, Joseph Paul refused to give up his church to white English missionaries in 1800 since Bahamian blacks had successfully maintained their church without white help even before the advent of the first white mission in 1792. Non-Christian religious belief also filtered into North America from the West Indies. Afro-Caribbean spiritual healing practices, called obeah, were carried to the mainland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by slaves from places like Jamaica, St. Kitts, and Antigua. Black conjurers in South Carolina employed scorpion heads, sarsaparilla, spiders, and glass bottles to make fetishes and charms in much

⁶³Coke, *A Farther Continuation*, 4; Hammet, *Hammet's Journal*; Reverend John O. Wilson, *Sketch of the Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, 1887*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Fraser, *Charleston*, 178; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 137; J. Gordon Melton, *A Will to Choose: The Origins of African American Methodism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 26–28.

⁶⁴Grissom, *History of Methodism in North Carolina*, 222.

the same way that obeah-men did in Jamaica. Canes and wands decorated with entwined serpents and frogs were also important parts of the ritual practices of North American conjurers and West Indian obeah-men.⁶⁵

Denmark Vesey was perhaps the most outstanding agent of greater Caribbean evangelism. He merged easily into Charleston's well developed West Indian culture, becoming a leader of the city's free black and enslaved community, and helping build its first black church separate from white control. When Charleston's African Methodist Episcopal Church was shut down by fearful whites in 1819, it was in part Vesey's exposure to Afro-Caribbean spirituality that inspired him and his comrades to move forward with their plans for insurrection in 1822. Having lived in and traveled throughout the West Indies during his youth, Vesey no doubt picked up important features of the African-derived and communally oriented myalist religion. Problems like poverty, corruption, illness, and oppression were, many black West Indians believed, the product of sorcery that myalism could eradicate. As such, myalism was a powerful force in opposition to white values and control, and it was at the heart of Afro-Caribbean political protest. Myalism was a force for change, moreover, because it placed far more emphasis on solving the problems of this world rather than the "otherworldly" salvation and peace that white Protestant evangelicals were offering as a panacea for slavery's brutality. Though Denmark Vesey had many sources of inspiration, his exposure to Afro-Caribbean myalism certainly played a role in pushing him to take action in 1822.⁶⁶

V. LOOKING EAST

The dissolution of William Hammet's Primitive Methodist Church after his death in 1803, as well as the stresses put upon evangelical networks that connected the western Atlantic littoral spiritual community, came as a result of the inherent conflicts between their Afro-Atlantic roots and the emergence of white identity in North America's new Republic. Most of the Primitive Methodist churches in the greater Caribbean were dependent upon people of color as preachers, missionaries, and parishioners. Hammet, however, attempted to reconcile his congregation's Afro-Atlantic character with the growing identification of American Protestantism with "whiteness." Hammet brought to his churches in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and New Providence a European cosmopolitan intellectualism tempered by black

⁶⁵Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 621.

⁶⁶Monica Schuler, "Myalism and the African Religious Tradition in Jamaica," in *Africa and the Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link*, ed. Margaret E. Crahan and Franklin W. Knight (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 69.

West Indian culture and the active leadership of Afro-Caribbeans. He attempted to recreate in North America what existed in the West Indies, but the late eighteenth-century crisis of white identity in the United States made such reconciliation impossible.⁶⁷

When President Thomas Jefferson bought Louisiana in 1803 and oversaw the end of the importation of slaves in 1808, many former connections to the Atlantic world became less vital. Though foreign trade remained important, white Americans increasingly began to focus on the trans-Mississippi West and to rely on domestic sources for spiritual inspiration and cultural discourse. Social contact between North America, Africa, and the West Indies, though, was never cut off. Eighteen three also marked the year South Carolina renewed its participation in the international slave trade, a trade which continued at a high volume until federal law closed it again in 1808. Beyond 1808 the number of illegally imported foreign slaves that continued to flow into the United States, many of whom came from or at least through the West Indies, is estimated at some fifty-four thousand captives. People of African descent from the West Indies also continued to stream into North America through Spanish Florida. One group of captives was brought from Jamaica to Florida shortly before the United States acquired the territory. They are known to history because like many of their Caribbean brethren they rebelled against their white masters. In the spring of 1820 Florida's Afro-Jamaicans put up such a fight that a detachment of U.S. army troops had to be dispatched to quell this Caribbean-born disturbance.⁶⁸

Finally, planters and poorer whites who moved into what would become the new "cotton kingdom" of the Lower South took with them people of African descent who had absorbed an Afro-Protestant religion shaped and influenced by Afro-Atlantic spirituality. An example of a black Christian who moved west of his own volition is Joseph Willis. Born a free person in South Carolina in 1758, Willis started going to church as a young man. In 1805 he moved to Louisiana where he subsequently founded the first Baptist church west of the Mississippi along with four other churches which he organized into the Louisiana Baptist Association. Inspired by the attempts of Afro-Atlantic Christians to gain separation from repressive white-dominated congregations, Willis gained strength from the examples of black churches in Charleston, Savannah, Wilmington, New Providence, and places further afield such as Antigua, St. Croix, and Haiti. Willis and other black

⁶⁷Mark A. Noll, "Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Influence in North American Societies," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990*, Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 129–31.

⁶⁸Egerton, *He Shall Go Free*, xviii; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 266; Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), 114.

Americans accepted evangelical Protestantism in part because other people of color in the greater Caribbean had embraced it, modified it, and made it their own. The product of this rich heritage was a unique African American Christianity. Though many white and black Americans refocused their attention toward the country's vast interior, many Afro-Protestants continued to look to the Caribbean and the entire Atlantic world for sources of religious and cultural identity.⁶⁹

⁶⁹Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings*, 51.