

# “All dutiful behavior and free and cheerful obedience”: The Paternalistic, Hierarchical, and Pro-Slavery Worldview of Samuel Johnson, Inaugural President of King’s College

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## Introduction

On April 24, 1767, the Anglican minister, missionary, and former president of King’s College in New York, Samuel Johnson, wrote from his home in Stratford, Connecticut, to his son William Samuel in England on the affairs of those residing in the Johnson household. The names and updates of three enslaved people were included in his letter: Prince, an enslaved man; Jenny, an enslaved woman; and Till, an enslaved woman who was pregnant:

Prince does as well as he can with good will, but Jenny is discontented and will be sold, and we will sell her I believe to Bill Thompson for 50 pounds, and have this day wrote to Nicky to get us another, but we cant Sell Till, till she lies in.[1]

Three weeks later, Johnson updated his son: “as to our domestic affairs, we get along pretty comfortably...Jenny sold to Bill Thompson...we have a wench of Mr. Lintot’s upon trial, who does pretty well, and if we can agree on the price we shall probable buy her.”[2] On June 8, Johnson again wrote his son:

I told you last that we had sold Jenny (at which I believe you are glad) and had Lintot’s wench on trial but we did not like her; upon which my daughter (I believe) wisely got Robin, who has been a 12night on trial, and we believe we may have him for 60 pounds, I hope 55. Nothing can be happier than he is, and if he continues to do as well as he has done, nobody needs wish to be happier in a servant than we shall be...Till has got a girl and has had a very good time; we could hardly keep her in a fortnight. My daughter can and will soon sell her.”[3]

Till, Till’s daughter, Prince, Robin, and Jenny were just five of the numerous enslaved people bought, sold, and owned by Samuel Johnson during his lifetime.[4] However, this short collection of letters from Johnson to his son William lays bare that Johnson demonstrated no moral qualms with actively participating in the violent and exploitative institution of slavery. In the case of Till and her newborn daughter, Johnson showed no signs of remorse when stating that his family intended to sell this woman and her infant child. Thus, Johnson’s routine and short lines regarding the sale of enslaved people begin to conjure a clear image of Johnson as an enslaver.

Yet, this image of Samuel Johnson as an active participant in the buying and selling of enslaved people is far from the picture painted by past historical studies of Johnson’s life and career. In the preface to historian Peter N. Carroll’s monograph *The Other Samuel Johnson: A Psychohistory of Early New England*, he writes that the “sermons, diaries, essays, letters, and memoirs” left behind by reverend and inaugural president of King’s College, Samuel Johnson, allow for the reconstruction of “an interaction between a man and his culture, a convergence between his personality and the wider contours of social activity.”[5] In Carroll’s work, along with other scholarship on Johnson, much attention is paid the reverend’s intellectual, theological, and pedagogical worldview, with historians noting his considerable influence on Colonial American thought and education. Historians have often placed an outsized emphasis on the intellectual

dimensions of his worldview, along with notable life events including his abrupt renunciation of orthodox Puritanism at Yale in the 1720s and his subsequent adoption of Anglicanism, his work as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and his foundational presidency of King's College.[6]

What this previous scholarship has left out, however, is how Johnson's worldview was influenced by his position as an enslaver.[7] A careful reexamination of Johnson's worldview is necessary; and Johnson's sermons, his academic and philosophical writings, and his personal correspondence help fill this glaring gap in the existing historiography of his personal, professional, and intellectual life. Further, the consultation of the works of his contemporaries and relevant secondary literature is crucial to placing Johnson's worldview in the broader context of colonial American thought and society. These sources indicate that Johnson's viewed the world through the lenses of paternalism and hierarchy and these views justified his participation in the violence of buying, owning, and selling enslaved people.

This essay seeks to place his worldview in the context of a broader society that perpetuated the institution of slavery while using paternalism, hierarchy, and supposed benevolence as its justification. It will recount how through his position as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Johnson perpetuated a hierarchical structure of colonial society in the British Atlantic by working in an organization that was increasingly dominated by the slaveholding elite and their interests. Moreover, as an Anglican minister, he promoted an undifferentiated paternalistic worldview from his pulpit by conflating the different and unequal institutions of slavery and the colonial family unit. Furthermore, Johnson, the enslaver, failed to follow his undifferentiated worldview when interacting with the enslaved people he owned in his everyday life, treating his children and the enslaved people he owned very in a vastly different and unequal manner.[8]

## Colonial Hierarchy and Paternalism

To understand Samuel Johnson's worldview and its relationship to the institution of slavery, it is crucial to examine the social and cultural context in which it existed. During the eighteenth century, New England's British colonists lived in a society organized by a strict hierarchical and paternalistic structure. In *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, historian Gordon S. Wood argues that "like all Englishmen, the colonists continued to embrace deeply rooted assumptions about the order and stability needed in a monarchical society." This hierarchy extended from the monarch downwards, in which "to be a subject was to be a kind of child, to be personally subordinated to paternal domination."<sup>[9]</sup> Wood invokes David Hume's notion of a "long train of dependence" to describe this hierarchical societal structure, characterizing it as "a gradation of degrees of freedom and servility that linked everyone from the king at the top to the bonded laborers and black slaves at the bottom."<sup>[10]</sup> Wood's characterization is echoed in the writings of eighteenth-century colonial thinkers, even dissenting New Englanders who showed little deference to the crown. The prominent Calvinist minister Jonathan Edwards, for example, argued in his *The Nature of True Virtue* that "there is a beauty" in a society "when the different members...all have their appointed office, place and station, according to their several capacities and talents, and everyone keeps his place, and continues his proper business."<sup>[11]</sup> Jonathan Edwards was a student of Samuel Johnson's at Yale, where Johnson served as a tutor beginning in 1716 until the "Great Apostasy" in 1722.<sup>[12]</sup> Edwards's hierarchical philosophy extended to his own participation in the institution of slavery, as he regularly owned at least one enslaved laborer during any given time in his life.<sup>[13]</sup> The ownership of enslaved people was common among New England clergy, given their social status and the fact that they did little physical labor as the patriarch of a household.<sup>[14]</sup> Indeed, the comfort that ministers like Johnson enjoyed depended upon the labor of enslaved people working and residing within their households.

The colonial gentry that both Edwards and Johnson belonged to viewed unequal and hierarchical societal relationships through the lens of paternalism, often seeing their subordinates as children and themselves as parents. The family unit was the guiding

framework through which colonial American society described itself. Given that the household was the primary economic and social institution of the colonies, British colonists viewed their society as an assemblage of households to which all “isolated and helpless individuals” should be attached.[15] Subordinate members of households – that is, anyone besides the white male patriarch – were required to live in a state of absolute dependence upon the patriarch. The heads of households demanded that their dependents recognize their authority and deemed corporal punishment as an acceptable reaction to disobedience.[16] Slavery, then, can be seen in light of this all-encompassing paternalistic worldview. The wide-reaching influence of paternalism forced many unfree Americans – both black enslaved people and European indentured servants – into dependency, and up to one half of society was legally unfree at any given time during the colonial period. Further, while slavery was a much larger institution in the Caribbean and the southern colonies, slavery in the North was widely extant, with one-half of New York City households enslaving at least one person in 1746.[17] Enslavers in the colonies often viewed the people they bought, sold, and held in bondage as just “another kind of dependent” within the paternalistic structure of colonial households. Wood quotes the Reverend Thomas Bacon saying that “next to our children and brethren by blood, our servants, and especially our slaves, are certainly in the nearest relation to us. They are an immediate and necessary part of our household.”[18]

However, this paternalistic society had nothing to do with the ruling class providing and caring for the “helpless and isolated” enslaved people who they viewed as their dependents. Historian Eugene Genovese writes in his study of slavery in the Antebellum South, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, that “Southern paternalism, like every other paternalism, had little to do with Ole Massa’s ostensible benevolence, kindness, and good cheer. It grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation.”[19] The same can be said of paternalism in the colonial North, and it is thus essential to view the undifferentiated paternalism promoted by the gentry of colonial America not as a system of benevolence, but as a violent and exploitative system of unfree labor. It was within this society that Samuel Johnson lived:

a society whose guiding principles of hierarchy reinforced his paternalistic worldview and permitted him to violently exploit the labor of the enslaved people he owned.

This is not to say, however, that all Colonial Americans accepted this societal structure. Resistance against slavery in the North manifested itself in differing ways, with enslaved people, European indentured servants, and others from the lower classes of society challenging and organizing to overturn the exploitative and hierarchical economic system that bound them. This effort was seen strikingly in 1741 during the alleged conspiracy in New York City, when a group of interracial laborers – enslaved Africans, Black Spaniards, indentured white laborers, and otherwise lower-class whites – were charged with plotting to seize the city by setting ablaze numerous properties and murdering slaveowners. Elite New Yorkers saw the possibilities and dangers of organizers of such a plot putting aside their differences in race and legal status in an attempt to topple the dominant hierarchical structure of eighteenth-century New York.[20] What's more, unlike Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Edwards, and Thomas Bacon, some colonial religious leaders demonstrated their fierce opposition to the institution of slavery. In New York, the Great Awakening of the mid-1700s led both Methodist and Quaker clergy to question the morality of slavery. Francis Asbury, a Methodist minister, promoted both the spirituality of enslaved people and encouraged his slaveholding congregants to manumit the people they owned.[21] It is thus fallacious to view Johnson's participation in and justifications of the institution of slavery as mere products of his era. It is clear that colonial Northerners of all social standings and backgrounds – enslaved, freed, indentured, low-class, and upper-class religious leaders – used their positions to organize against slavery, injustice, and the established tenants of paternalism and hierarchy. Samuel Johnson refused such an alternative.

## The Missionary Johnson: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Conversion of Enslaved People

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), founded in 1701, was an Anglican missionary organization that sought to extend the Church of England to Britain's colonial empire in the Atlantic. It was the leading missionary

organization in the British Atlantic during the eighteenth century, sending Anglican clergy around the empire, lobbying local political figures and proselytizing the general populace, and founding churches and educational institutions. Historian Travis Glasson writes that “the SPG worked for decades to Christianize enslaved people as a part of an ambitious program for making colonial societies more godly, orderly, and English.”[22] Early SPG missionaries and authorities were keen on evangelizing non-European people, with SPG members formally adopting the primary mission in 1710 of the “conversion of the heathens and infidels; and therefore that branch of it ought to be prosecuted to all others.”[23] During the first half of the eighteenth century, the SPG became increasingly involved in the institution of slavery. SPG affiliates sought to encourage the proper hierarchical structure of the colonies and to affiliate with civil leadership and therefore ally with the influential slaveholding elite. Individual SPG affiliates became slaveholders, with the organization itself owning the enslaved people of Codrington Plantation in Barbados.[24]

One such SPG slaveholding affiliate was the minister and philosopher George Berkeley, who first arrived in British North America in 1729.[25] Johnson idolized Berkeley, characterizing him as “that very extraordinary genius” who came to the colonies “with the most extensively benevolent intention of promoting both religion and learning throughout America among the heathen as well as the Christians.”[26] Berkeley was enthusiastic about converting Indigenous Americans and black people living in the British Atlantic and involved himself in multiple Anglican missionary efforts in the colonies. One such attempt sought to quell concerns voiced by slaveholders that the baptism of an enslaved person would lead to rebelliousness and potentially even their freedom. Berkeley lobbied the crown’s attorney general to issue an opinion that “a Baptism doth not bestow Freedom on him, nor make any alteration in his temporal Condition in these kingdoms.”[27] Fears were exacerbated by acts of resistance organized by enslaved people, such as the 1712 revolt in New York when armed enslaved people set buildings ablaze. Two students of an Anglican school for enslaved people run by SPG catechist Elias Neau were among the 21 enslaved New Yorkers executed as conspirators in the rebellion, with Neau writing that the “School was blamed as the main occasion of the barbarous plot.”[28]

Glasson argues that “the specter of rebellion made the Society even more anxious to stress its adherence to the emerging colonial order and at pains to emphasize how conversion would transform enslaved people into better servants.”[29] Berkeley demonstrated the SPG’s new emphasis in his 1725 “Proposal for the better Supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations, and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity, By a College to be erected in the Summer Islands, otherwise called the Isles of Bermuda.” “To the infamy of England,” he wrote, enslaved people in the British Atlantic “continue Heathen under Christian masters, and in Christian countries.” He argued:

It would be an advantage to their affairs, *to have slaves who should obey all things their masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, by, in singleness of heart as fearing God:* That gospel liberty consists of temporal servitude: and that their slaves would only become better slaves by being Christian.[30]

Berkeley’s argument compelling slaveholders to allow the conversion of enslaved people was indicative of the “reformist zeal” present in the early SPG ranks who “envisioned a more paternalistic and Christian form of slavery emerging” in the colonies.[31]

It was in this era that Samuel Johnson began his service as a missionary and minister for the Society starting on November 4, 1723, in Stratford, Connecticut.[32] Johnson “hoped...he might be instrumental in promoting Christian knowledge in the country, and consequently a more Christian temper.”[33] As the eighteenth century progressed, however, Johnson’s record as a missionary for the SPG did not reflect the Society’s early desire to convert the enslaved people of the colonies. Johnson was required to write a biannual *Notitia Parochialis* to the secretary of the Society. These *Notitia Parochialis* provided the SPG in England with information on a missionary’s progress among both Europeans and non-Europeans in their station’s vicinity.[34] Johnson’s *Notitia Parochialis* reflects his efforts to catechize and baptize black people residing in his parish. Johnson’s report from September 10, 1739 recounts that “since



my last I have baptised 27 of which one was a negro woman, and 2 negro children.” This *Notitia Parochialis* lists the number of “heathen” in Johnson’s parish was “about... 10 or 12.”[35] His report from six months later reads that “since my last I have baptized 20,” three of which were “negro children.”[36] These reports also reveal the existence of numerous unbaptized black people who lived in Stratford. Johnson’s *Notitia Parochialis* from March 25, 1742 reads:

- I. No. of Inhabitants, of Families in this town, above\_\_\_\_\_ 400
- II. No. of Baptised here and in places adjacent by the  
missionary in this town\_\_\_\_\_ 580
- III. No. since my last of which 2 were adult and 2 negroes\_\_\_\_ 15
- IV. No. of Actual Communicants\_\_\_\_\_ 130
- V. No. of those that profess the Church, Families\_\_\_\_\_ 84
- VI. No. of Dissenters – all the rest; papists only \_\_\_\_\_ 1
- VII. No. of Heathen (except many unbaptized negroes), about\_\_\_\_ 10
- VIII. No. of Converts etc. – no remarkable instances, generally a sober people.[37]

All of the reports published in *Samuel Johnson, President of King’s College: His Career and Writings* after the March 1742 *Notitia* mention the number of “heathen” congregants, with a special notation indicating the many unbaptized black people living in his parish.[38] Johnson’s reports obscured the legal status of the black people baptized, failing to note whether they were free or enslaved. Free people comprised

one-sixth of the population of black people in Connecticut by the middle of the eighteenth century, which leads to the conclusion that the majority of the unbaptized black people in and surrounding Johnson's parish were enslaved.[39] What's more, Fairfield County, in which Stratford is located, was a central region in Connecticut's slave economy.[40]

Johnson's lack of success in baptizing a large number of enslaved people in the middle of the eighteenth century may well have been due to the geographic location of his missionary work. Upon his appointment to Connecticut by the SPG, Johnson wrote that "the people here are generally rigid Independents and have an inveterate enmity against the established church." [41] The religious establishment of Connecticut was firmly Puritan, and it saw Johnson and the Anglicans as an immediate threat. A missionary would not have been able to proselytize an enslaved person without an enslaver's permission. Anglican missionaries in Connecticut appealed to people of lower social status, given that these people felt dissatisfied with the dominant Puritan culture. Consequently, Anglican missionary efforts were ridiculed by the Puritan majority. Carroll writes that "the penalty for questioning" the Puritan majority was "ostracism and humiliation." [42] Johnson's congregants were perhaps of a lower status than the slaveholding Puritan elite of the state, and thus did not own enslaved people to be baptized in the first place.

However, of more consequence than these political and demographic concerns were the broader changes underwent by the SPG as the eighteenth century progressed. Glasson observes that "while pious hopes for the conversion of slaves remained, by the early 1740s the SPG as a body was no longer willing to challenge colonial masters. Instead, conciliation and cooperation with slaveholders became increasingly common." [43] SPG clergymen themselves also came to more frequently own enslaved labor as the century progressed. [44] This increase in slaveholding SPG affiliates meant that missionaries began to identify more closely with slaveholders, as they themselves owned enslaved people. [45] In 1742, the Society announced that it would not support a legal requirement enforcing that slaveholders convert the enslaved people they owned. Glasson argues that while this action "could have been partly a

tactical decision” to minimize dissenting opposition or because they viewed the enactment as unfeasible, it “also reveals how closely the SPG as a body had come to identify its own interests with those of slaveholders by this time.”[46]

Johnson’s *Notitia Parochiali* from between 1742 and 1754 followed these shifts in SPG policy and sentiment. Johnson never referenced any specific efforts to convert black people living in Stratford in his biannual reports, demonstrating how he perhaps sought to act in accordance with the SPG’s waning desire to compel slaveholders to baptize enslaved people. Of greater importance, however, is that Johnson himself owned enslaved people during this period, with a 1746 inventory of those residing on his Stratford property mentioning eighteen “servants,” sixteen of whom were enslaved people.[47] As a slaveholding clergy, Johnson probably came to identify and align with the community’s slaveholding elite, even those who did not wish to have the enslaved people they owned baptized. In avoiding conflict with his fellow slaveholders, Johnson’s actions reflect the SPG’s increasing commitment during this period to defending established political and social hierarchies in which slaveholders were dominant.[48] It was within this organization that Johnson worked for over three decades, and it was its mission of affirming the slaveholding elite’s hegemony over the colonial society that he propagated. Using his position of religious and moral authority, he helped the Society reinforce his and his slaveholding colleagues’ dominant position over the enslaved people they owned.

## The Undifferentiated Paternalism of Samuel Johnson

It is clear through the actions of the SPG that in eighteenth-century colonial America, religion reinforced paternalism and hierarchy. The established Anglican church was the foremost proponent of royal authority, with Anglican religious authorities insisting that colonists should respect and venerate those whose political and societal stations were above their own.[49] The sermons Samuel Johnson delivered as an Anglican minister and missionary embodied the Anglican emphasis on following the established hierarchical and paternalistic structure of society. Johnson also placed this hierarchy within the framework of paternalism that viewed subordination as a system of

asymmetrical but reciprocal duties. In his 1745 “Sermon on the Eternal Rule of Justice,” Johnson wrote that “all that God aims at in all his dispensations towards mankind” is that “we promote the happiness of others as we would wish them to promote ours, which will be the same things as to promote our own happiness by doing all that we reasonably can do to promote the happiness of others,” a “rule” that “enters into all the relations wherein we do or can stand with regard to others.” Johnson proposed that “as this great law or rule of justice is more clearly conspicuous in social duties between man and man, I propose to consider and explain it more particularly with regard to them.” He goes on to consider “the social duties between man and man” as they related to “the several particular relations wherein we stand.” On the relationship between parent and child, Johnson wrote:

...If I am a parent, I should reasonably expect all submission and dutiful obedience and reverential deportment from my child, and that he should avoid everything that is untoward and undutiful; for the same reason if I am a child, I must think it my duty to avoid all untowardness, and undutifulness and whatever may be grievous to my parent, and behave with all reverence, submission and dutiful obedience towards him or her...And if I am a child, I should in all reason expect to be provided for with all necessary instruction and support from my parents according to their ability, and be treated by them with all proper tenderness so far as can consist with my being duly governed and conducted to my best good; so I must think it my duty if I am a parent, to provide to the utmost of my ability for the subsistence and instruction of my children, and treat them with all tenderness that can consist with the government which is necessary to train them up to the best advantage.

He continued his sermon with a discussion on the relationship between “masters” and “servants.” He wrote:

...If I am a master, I must put myself as near as I can in the condition of my servant and consider what it would be fit and reasonable to expect in that condition with regard to necessary instruction and comfortable subsistence, and must accordingly be just to him

and provide what may make his life comfortable and instruct him in what is necessary for his everlasting welfare, knowing I also have a master in heaven. And if I am a servant, as I can't but know if I was in the condition of my master I should reasonably expect all dutiful behavior and free and cheerful obedience and all honesty and faithfulness; these therefore must be my duty towards him.[50]

The similarities between Johnson's paternalistic conception of the duties of a father and master and those of a child and servant are apparent. He required both fathers and masters to provide both "subsistence" and "instruction" for their children and servants. Conversely, Johnson argued that children should behave with "dutiful obedience" towards their parents, while he claimed that servants must exhibit "dutiful behavior and free and cheerful obedience" towards their masters. "The Eternal Rule of Justice" demonstrates how Johnson's worldview embodied paternalism; that is, he viewed differing societal institutions as resting upon the same basic principle that all inferiors were wholly dependent upon, and therefore must be entirely submissive to a dominant patriarchal authority. In mentioning that masters "also have a master in heaven," he further cast God as the overarching patriarch upon which all humans were dependent, therefore characterizing his paternalistic worldview as divinely ordained. The similarities between Johnson's descriptions of parent-child and master-servant social relationships reveal how he preached an undifferentiated paternalistic worldview, viewing the several distinct and unequal social institutions in Colonial America through the same lens.[51]

However, even as Johnson preached this undifferentiated paternalism to his congregants, he did not practice as he preached in his personal life. A handful of Johnson's personal letters reveal the stark differences between his actions in his position as a parent and an enslaver. In his dialogue *Raphael or the Genius of English America: A Rhapsody*, Johnson wrote of raising children that in order "to prevent them from contracting vicious habits," it is necessary to "reclaim them by seasonable and serious admonitions and if need be, by severe reproofs and corrections." To do so, argued Johnson, "it may be highly useful to take them alone and in a serious and

dispassionate manner explain to them the mischief of any ill courses they are in danger of.” He further argued that parents ought to “take care what company” their children kept and to “see that it be such as is virtuous and orderly,” as “bad company is very contagious.”[52] This parenting philosophy can be seen in a letter from Johnson to his son, a then nineteen-year-old William Samuel who was staying with the Anglican minister and educator Timothy Cutler in Cambridge, Massachusetts in June of 1747. Samuel wrote to William, “I am extremely well pleased with the remarks you make on the advice I gave you about the infectiousness of vice and the great danger of bad company, and the resolution you express to be upon the strictest guard, which I pray God you may steadfastly abide by.”[53] Johnson’s letter embodies his parenting strategy. It implied that in a previous letter, Samuel had followed his own argument in *Raphael* and warned William by “serious and dispassionate admonition” against the dangers of bad company.[54]

As an enslaver, however, Johnson took little time to pull the enslaved people he owned aside “to explain to them the mischief of any ill courses they are in danger of.”[55] Instead, he severely punished them for any seditious behavior. In an August 16, 1760 letter to Anne Johnson (née Beach), wife of William Samuel, Samuel wrote of his discontent with Horace, an enslaved man that lived with Johnson in New York:

I am very sorry to tell you Horace has been so bad that I can’t keep him any longer & so am obliged to send him to Stratford, & hope you can keep him at least till my Son can dispose of him. I cant but hope he has yet some good Dispositions, & would be tolerable if he be but out of the way of the bad Company that have bewitched him to Gaming which has tempted him to steal & thence to Lye, so that the best thing for him is to place him out of the way of Temptation, in which Case I hope his good nature may yet issue in some good...[56]

That Horace was engaged in gaming surely would have been highly distressing to Johnson, as he abhorred the activity. In his exposition of his child-rearing philosophy in *Raphael*, he wrote that youth have the talent of being “active” and that “gaming...is the

most powerful temptation to the wasting of that precious talent.” He argued that improving youth’s bodies through “manly exercise” and their minds through “reading histories or other books...would prevent a vast deal of quarrelling, swearing, cursing and other hateful vices and mischiefs” that accompanied gaming.[57] However, Johnson did not respond to Horace’s gaming by encouraging him to exercise or read. Johnson wrote, “I send Horace with his Baggage to go on board of Gorham & behold he was gone, so I must e’en keep him a little longer, & perhaps, as he has been severely punished he may do better, as he gives great promises.”[58] In October of the same year, Samuel wrote to William Samuel that “Horace is pretty good ever since.”[59]

Instead of educating Horace about the ramifications of gaming, Johnson “severely punished” him. Though he goes no further in explaining how he punished Horace, it is clear that Horace did not disobey Johnson again as a result. Johnson’s attitude towards Horace – implicitly violent and wholly non-educational – was a far cry from his educational approach to disciplining youth outlined in *Raphael*. The story of Horace thus demonstrates a paradox in Johnson’s undifferentiated paternalistic worldview outlined in his “Sermon on the Eternal Rule of Justice:” that the institutions of slavery and child-rearing were vastly different, yet Johnson characterized them as highly similar. This dissimilarity is most evident in letters written by Johnson himself. His stern yet informative warning on the ills of bad company given to his son William Samuel bear no resemblance to the severe punishment that Johnson inflicted upon Horace. This drastic contrast between Johnson’s private actions as a patriarch and his public advocacy for an undifferentiated and asymmetrically reciprocal paternalistic society demonstrates how he, in the words of Genovese, used paternalism “to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation.”[60] Further, these differences reveal how Johnson himself failed to act in accordance with his purported worldview, therefore proving his ideal of the benevolent master a farcical one employed to justify his position as an enslaver.

## Conclusion

Throughout his ecclesiastical career, Samuel Johnson used his position as an Anglican clergy and missionary to strengthen the established British colonial hierarchy.

This hierarchy was dominated by the slaveholding elite of the colonies, of which Johnson was a member. He promoted the interests of enslavers through preaching an undifferentiated worldview in which all members of society were similarly dependent upon the white and male patriarchal authority. However, Johnson's personal correspondence reveals that he failed to realize his own worldview, as his benevolence towards his son and his violence towards Horace demonstrate. He also was a longtime missionary for the SPG, an organization whose initial mission was to solidify slaveholder's hegemony by arguing that baptized enslaved people were of greater utility to their owners, as was supported by Johnson's idol George Berkeley. Johnson's SPG career, however, demonstrates how he and his SPG colleagues abandoned the mission of converting people of African descent after the organization increasingly began to identify with the interests of slaveholders. This was in large because SPG affiliates, clergy, and the organization itself owned enslaved people.

These were instrumental features of the legacy of Johnson's career as he ascended to his position as the inaugural president of King's College in 1754.[61] Johnson's position within the slaveholding elite allowed him to partially identify with the new trustees of the college, many of whom were slave traders and owned enslaved people.[62] King's under Johnson also saw its number of trustees who participated in the slave trade increase during the 1750s.[63] During Johnson's tenure, the trustees to King's continued to come from New York's merchant elite, including descendants of Livingstons and Philipses, two families long associated with the slave trade in the city.[64] This was King's under Johnson: a college funded by slaveholders and traders, spearheaded by a slaveholder, and perpetuated for decades by slaveholders and their descendants. This image of Samuel Johnson, the enslaver and advocate for slavery, is integral to recognizing a more complete and accurate history of Columbia University. To this date, the Columbia University website's history section fails to mention how integral slavery was to its foundation.[65] Through a greater understanding how intrinsic the institution of slavery was to its first president's worldview, perhaps new revelations surrounding Columbia's foundation and its founder's true rationale behind founding the college can be exposed.



## Endnotes

[1] Samuel Johnson to William Samuel Johnson, April 24, 1767, in [*Samuel Johnson, President of King's College: His Career and Writings*, eds. Carol and Herbert Schneider (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), (Hereafter abbreviated to SJCW)], 1:401.

[2] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to William Samuel Johnson, May 17, 1767, 1:402.

[3] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to William Samuel Johnson, June 8, 1757, 1:403-404.

[4] For an excellent and necessary account of the numerous unfree laborers who Johnson owned throughout his lifetime, see Rachel Page's Paper, "A pleasant and good Family': Domestic Enslavement in Samuel Johnson's Household, 1723-1772," Columbia and Slavery Seminar, 2020.

[5] Peter N. Carroll, *The Other Samuel Johnson: A Psychohistory of New England* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1979), 9.

[6] Examples include Carroll, *The Other Samuel Johnson*; Don R. Gerlach and George E. DeMille, *Samuel Johnson of Stratford in New England* (Athens, GA: Anglican Parishes Association Publications, 2010); Robert McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[7] In Carroll's work, a single line references Johnson's views on slavery and his ownership of enslaved people, see *The Other Samuel Johnson*, 163.

[8] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, any physical access to the documents contained within Columbia's Rare Books and Manuscript Library (RBML) was cut off in mid-March. However, my classmate, Rachel Page, had transcribed many primary source documents contained within the Samuel Johnson Papers at RBML, and I am grateful to her for sharing these sources with me. Additionally, *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College: His Career and Writings*, a four-volume collection edited by Carol and Herbert Schneider, proved invaluable to this project. I urge future scholars studying Johnson's pro-slavery thought and Johnson as an enslaver to further engage with the Samuel Johnson Papers at RBML.

[9] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992), 11.

[10] Ibid, 19.

[11] Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, (Boston, 1765), ed. William K. Frankena (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 35.

[12] Carroll, *The Other Samuel Johnson*, 106-108.

[13] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 255; For a more in-depth examination of Edwards and his view of and participation in the institution of slavery, see Kenneth P. Minkema, "Johnathan Edwards's Defense of Slavery," *Massachusetts Historical Review*, vol. 4, *Race and Slavery* (2002): 23-59, [www.jstor.org/stable/25081170](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25081170).

[14] Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 20.

[15] Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 43-44.

[16] Ibid, 49.

[17] Ibid, 51.

[18] Ibid, 54.

[19] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 4.

[20] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 43.

[21] Ibid, 47.

[22] Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-4.

[23] Ibid, 27. Early SPG affiliates often referred to all non-European people encountered in the Atlantic world as “heathens,” referencing the non-Christian indigenous Americans and black people in the British Atlantic. This, argues Glasson, stemmed from SPG affiliates’ view that “it was religion and culture, not the body, that were essential markers” of difference (*Mastering Christianity*, 4). However, these attitudes changed along with developments in intellectual thought during the eighteenth century, as SPG backers “frequently saw Europeans as separated from other people by a deep, almost unbridgeable gulf,” Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 71; For an intellectual history of the SPG and Slavery during the eighteenth century, See Chapter 2, “Natural Religion and the Sons of Noah,” in Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 41-71.

[24] Ibid, 75-76.

[25] Carroll, *The Other Samuel Johnson*, 142.

[26] SJCW: *Autobiography*, 1:24.

[27] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 86.

[28] Ibid, 82-83.

[29] Ibid, 85.

[30] George Berkeley, *Proposal for the better Supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations, and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity, By a College to be erected in the Summer Islands, otherwise called the Isles of Bermuda* (London: printed by H. Woodfall, 1725), 4-5.

[31] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 109.

[32] SJCW: Samuel Johnson, *The Autobiography*, 1768-1770, 1:19.

[33] SJCW: Ibid, 1:19-20.

[34] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 35.

[35] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to the Secretary of the Society, September 10, 1739, 3:224-225.

[36] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to the Secretary of the Society, April 5, 1750, 3:225.

[37] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to Dr. Bearcroft, Secretary of the Society, March 25, 1742, 3:231-232.

[38]SJCW: "Ecclesiastical Correspondence," 3:224-256.

[39] Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 178.

[40] Ibid, 177.

[41] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, January 18, 1724.

[42] Carroll, *The Other Samuel Johnson*, 135.

[43] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 112-113.

[44] Ibid, 112.

[45] Ibid, 110.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Samuel Johnson, "People who have been of my household," 1746, Samuel Johnson Papers, vol.1, pp. 105, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries.

[48] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 113.

[49] Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 18.

[50] SJCW: Samuel Johnson, "A Sermon of the Eternal Rule of Justice," 1745, 3:475-476.

[51] Ibid.

[52] SJCW: Samuel Johnson, *Raphael or the Genius of English America: A Rhapsody*, 1963, 2:558.

[53] SJCW: Samuel Johnson to William Samuel Johnson, June 23, 1747, 1:125.

[54] SJCW: Johnson, *Raphael*, 2:558.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Samuel Johnson to Mrs. William Samuel Johnson, August 18, 1760, Samuel Johnson Papers, vol.2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, 113.

[57] SJCW: Johnson, *Raphael*, 2:559.

[58] Samuel Johnson to Mrs. William Samuel Johnson, August 18, 1760, Samuel Johnson Papers, vol.2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, 113.

[59] Samuel Johnson to William Samuel Johnson, October 6, 1760, Samuel Johnson Papers, vol. 2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, 115.

[60] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 4.

[61] More research must be done on Johnson's pedagogical thought and how his paternalistic and hierarchical worldview showed itself during his tenure as president of King's. I also urge future scholars to explore how Johnson advanced this worldview in the classroom as an educator of the colonial elite and leader of a then-emerging elite intellectual institution.

[62] Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of American Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, 60-66.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid, 68; Ibid, 50-53.

[65] "History," Columbia University in the City of New York, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.columbia.edu/content/history>.

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