

Introduction

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PART ONE. SOME CONTEXTS AND QUESTIONS

THE COLONIAL BOOK IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD is a collaborative history of the uses of print and books in the thirteen mainland British colonies that in 1776 formed the United States. Ours is a history of beginnings – of booksellers and the stores they opened, of printers using imported presses, of writers who sought in some manner to “publish,” and of readers who, in the strange setting of the New World, welcomed such familiar texts as the almanac, the catechism, and the Bible. Ours is also a story of change – of a book trade that, initially dependent on the patronage of the civil government or church and on importations from abroad, slowly became competitive and commercial, of shifting strategies for regulating printers and booksellers as licensing and censorship gave way to suits for libel and an ethos of “free inquiry,” and of new choices emerging for readers and writers. In this, the first volume of *A History of the Book in America*, we carry these threads of change and continuity down to the close of the Revolutionary period, when national independence had been declared and the new federal government had come into being.

Our purpose in this introduction is to specify what we mean by “the book” and to suggest in advance the main arguments or interpretations that unify our narrative. A story arranged chronologically and by regions has seemed the most adequate means of dealing with two centuries of time and the sharpness of regional differences in early America. But in keeping with the growing cosmopolitanism and consolidation that happened in the course of the eighteenth century, three chapters (II, 12, and 13), which are best understood as an interrelated whole, deal thematically and topically with that period. Here in this introduction, we want also to reflect on cer-

tain key terms or categories. In a separate, concluding section – placed where it is because the subject matter cuts across the chronological and regional structure of this volume – we describe the encounter between Europeans and Native Americans from the vantage of book history.

As we use the term “book” in these pages, it encompasses the familiar format of the codex, whether in manuscript or print, as well as its intellectual content. When the seventeenth-century colonists used the word “book,” they had in mind both writing and printing, sometimes differentiating the latter as “printed.”¹ For us, the term also encompasses items that had some of the uses of books: for example, single-sheet broadsides and issues of newspapers. Even though we understand the term this broadly, the totality of written and printed matter was even greater, for we exclude such matters as store signs and blank forms and, more for want of space than for any other reason, do not deal with printed images or music.²

The book history of early America must be generously defined in other respects, for it was framed by the great social, economic, religious, and political movements of the sixteenth century, movements that prompted the migration of thousands of Europeans to these shores. The title of this volume is meant to evoke the multiple connections with European history that are so consequential for the story that we tell. Three events or movements are especially pertinent: the two Reformations of the sixteenth century, but chiefly the Protestant; the strengthening of the civil state in several European countries, together with the rivalry between these states that was played out in the colonization of the New World; and mercantile capitalism. Let us consider each in turn.

The history of the book in early America was profoundly shaped by ideas and practices that emerged within the Protestant Reformation. Ever since the early centuries of the Christian era, Christianity had been a text-based religion.³ Protestantism was even more so, for the sixteenth-century Reformers rejected the “idolatry” of images as well as most forms of sacramentalism. Asserting the authority of the Word as revealed in Scripture and declaring that the door to salvation lay through knowledge of the Bible, the early Reformers labored to make it available in the vernacular by providing new translations. To abet the religious instruction of the common people, Protestants published an abundance of catechisms and other devotional or liturgical texts such as the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) in England. All together, these practices and expectations had a considerable impact: Book production in Germany exploded in the 1520s, reaching a level four times higher than in 1517.⁴

Another legacy of the Reformation was a particular understanding of printing, reading, and writing. Famously, the Reformers came to view the invention of printing as a divinely ordained means of emancipating the

Church from the “tyranny” of the Roman popes. “The Gospel freely preached” also meant the Gospel openly printed and dispersed in the vernacular: this axiom of the Reformation was represented on the illustrated title page of the English martyrologist and church historian John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (1563), which showed women and men who “sit listening to the Word with Bibles in their laps,” as contrasted with Catholics who merely finger their beads. Considering “to what end and purpose the Lord hath given this gift of printing to the earth,” Foxe argued that the new technology was part of God’s providential design: “the blessed wisdom and omnipotent power of the Lord began to work for his church; not with sword and target to subdue his exalted adversaries, but with printing, writing and reading: to convince darkness by light, error by truth, ignorance by learning.” Foxe also celebrated the expansive, multiplying consequences of the technology: “by this printing, as by the gift of tongues . . . the doctrine of the gospel soundeth to all nations and countries under heaven; and what God revealeth to one man, is dispersed to many, and what is made known in one nation, is opened to all.”⁵

This understanding of printing prevailed among the Protestants who colonized the mainland British colonies on which we focus. As a social and political event, the Reformation was no less consequential for these colonists. The divisions that arose between Catholics and Protestants in Europe, together with schisms and differences among Protestants themselves as they debated the nature of the true church, led to waves of persecution and exclusion. Among those so treated, some sought refuge or asylum in the New World. So it happened that the “Pilgrims” set out on the *Mayflower*, that thousands of English Puritans would follow soon thereafter, that English Catholics would simultaneously undertake the founding of Maryland, and that in the late seventeenth century Quakers, Mennonites, German sectarians, and Huguenots would begin to people the middle colonies. These groups would be joined by others who brought with them the traditions of a national or state church: the Dutch Reformed, Anglicans, and Scotch Presbyterians. Because these communities relied on books to sustain their religious practice, they were quick to import them from overseas and to patronize printers on this side of the Atlantic. Thanks to the uses of books within such groups, they were able to maintain a degree of coherence even though they were often decentralized or lacked strong regulating structures.

Each of the European civil states resisted the divisive consequences of the Reformation. On their own, moreover, these states were undertaking a major phase of consolidation, adding to the powers of the central government at the very moment when the exploration and colonization of the New World were getting underway, which in England happened by means of chartered, joint-stock companies. Peace among the settlements that arose

up and down the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of Mexico was always fragile and wars were recurrent, the most important of them being the series of conflicts between France, Spain, and Britain that broke out in 1689 and continued down to 1763. These conflicts spurred the English government to strengthen and extend its presence among the colonists, a process that also encompassed certain forms of recordkeeping the Crown imposed on the colonies and the regulating of trade via a series of laws collectively known as the Navigation Acts, the earliest of which was enacted in 1651.⁶

In England, this process of regulation extended to the book trades. No sooner had the new technology of printing taken hold in Europe than church and state interested themselves in what was being printed and distributed. Unable to regard opposition as legitimate, the early modern civil state treated the criticism and dissent that appeared in print as “sedition.” The civil state was no less anxious about the flow of news, which it wished to regulate for its own benefit. Hence it was that gossip, rumor, letters, and speech were deemed potentially subversive.⁷ Religious leaders were no less certain that any wavering from the official system was heresy. The outbreak of the Reformation brought a new intensity to the task of regulation, for the authorities, both civil and religious, had to contend with Protestants who believed in making the vernacular Bible available to everyone. Even before Henry VIII of England broke with Rome in 1536, control of the press remained a priority. In 1530 Henry denounced as “blasphemous and pestiferous” certain Protestant books on the grounds that their intent was “to stir and incense [the people] to sedition, and disobedience against their princes, sovereigns, and heads”; as for the vernacular Bible, the king ruled that its distribution “dependeth onely upon the discretion of the superiors [in the Church hierarchy], as they shall think it convenient.” Not only monarchs but also the most zealous of reformers rejected a free market in books lest the wrong kinds of texts reach the common people.⁸

From the start, the regulating mechanisms of the civil state were entwined with the self-interest of the book trade. For England, the key instrument of state policy became a system of licensing mediated through the Stationers’ Company, chartered by the Crown in 1557. According to the charter, every member of the Company was required to “register” the titles of books he wished to publish, to secure a license from ecclesiastical or governmental officials before proceeding any further, and to specify the name of the printer on the title page. Imported books were to pass through London, where inspectors examined them for any that were seditious or heretical. The Company willingly accepted these rules because the system of permissions or licensing was simultaneously a system for ensuring each bookseller the exclusive rights to publish certain texts. These rights to “copy” – that is, to multiply copies of a given text – served in principle to prevent any other

printer or bookseller from issuing a competing edition, a practice that book-sellers on both the Continent and in England condemned as “piracy.”⁹

In this respect, the Licensing Act of 1662, which renewed or restated the provisions of the charter of 1557, was typical. As Michael Treadwell has pointed out, it contained clauses specifically “designed for the commercial advantage of the Company and its copyright-owning members” and which reveal that “the Company feared sedition much less than it feared uncontrollable printing of other men’s copies.” When Parliament in 1695 did not renew the Licensing Act, as it had more or less routinely for thirty years, the reasons for this inaction were again commercial or economic – in this instance, a rising tide of complaints against the monopolistic practices of the Company.¹⁰ But these were eventually settled by the Copyright Act of Anne (1710), which for the first time recognized the limited right of persons outside the Company to their “copy.”

In actuality, this system of licensing was never fully effective. It lapsed from time to time, notably so during the 1640s and in 1679–1685, when King and Parliament were at odds. As happened during the early years of the German Reformation, this unintentional legitimizing of religious and political dissent during the Civil War period and the Popish Plot led to an explosion of imprints. Radicals like John Milton, moreover, urged the benefits to the progress of truth from free expression and criticized the monopolistic aspects of permissions and licensing. During those periods when the civil government was acting more effectively, an important alternative to state regulation was to operate a clandestine press or to print and import seditious and heretical texts from the other side of the Channel. Famously, the early English Protestant William Tyndale used the Netherlands as his base for producing Bibles in the vernacular. Almost a century later, the Separatist and exile William Brewster would do the same in order to publish manifestoes of the radical wing of the Puritan movement. Despite its dangers, the trade in underground books on the Continent and in England flourished, for, early on, printers and booksellers realized that suppression could stimulate demand. Another means of circumventing the system of regulation – the motive usually being to gain commercial advantage by subverting another bookseller’s rights to copy – was to disguise the piracy or clandestine text under a deceitful title or a false designation of place, date, or printer.¹¹ As for writers, they too adapted to the system of state regulation, some by circulating their work only in manuscript and others by a self-censorship that masked their real opinions.¹² Predictably, the attentiveness of the licensors waxed and waned, in keeping with the political winds of the moment.

When and under what circumstances these practices were employed in the colonies is a principal thread of the following narrative. In advance of

these chapters, it is important to reiterate that regulation occurred within the trade and, for that matter, within the act of writing as well as being imposed from without.

The third of the great movements affecting the book history of early America was mercantile capitalism, which financed the colonization of North America. The settlements that arose up and down the coast, whether initiated by the English, Dutch, French, or Spanish, would all participate in a vast network of trade, an Atlantic economy that bound together fisheries in the Gulf of Maine, sugar plantations in the West Indies, those in the Chesapeake and lower South that raised tobacco, rice, and indigo, and family farms in New England and the middle colonies that produced surpluses of lumber, grain, and cattle. European merchants provided the credit that enabled this system of exchange to function. The colonial economy was similarly dependent on the Atlantic world for its labor force. Labor was a commodity in the specific sense that ordinary people sold themselves into service for a fixed term of years in return for certain benefits. Thus it happened that tens of thousands of persons arrived in the mainland colonies as indentured servants. From Africa came many more thousands who, deprived of choice, had their labor bound in perpetuity and could not use writing to communicate with their home societies.¹³

The exchange structures of the Atlantic world included books, for they were also a commodity financed and distributed in keeping with the credit mechanisms and geographies of mercantile capitalism. This was not true of all books, for printers and booksellers were also subsidized by civil governments, churches, and learned or philanthropic societies; works of learning and belles lettres frequently attracted the support of private patrons, and some religious or social movements – notably the Society of Friends, or Quakers, in England, and the Pietists based at Halle, in Germany – developed their own systems of nonprofit production and distribution. But in general, the book trade relied on commercial credit to finance the acquisition of paper (the largest single cost in bookmaking) and to survive while waiting for returns from sales, which were always unpredictable and often slow in coming. The methods of advertising and distributing books included many kinds of catalogues, as well as fairs, like the international one held twice a year at Frankfurt, where booksellers exchanged each other's imprints or bought stock outright.¹⁴ The reach of the book trade was extended through merchants, who routinely carried stocks of books, and peddlers, who traveled the highways and byways of England.¹⁵

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the European economy entered a long phase of expansion that eventually prompted a "consumer revolution," or a heightening of demand for many kinds of goods, including books.¹⁶ Enterprising printers and booksellers abetted this heightening of demand

by experimenting with format, as the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius had done, in “a series of [classical texts] which would at the same time be scholarly, compact, handy, and cheap,” a feat he accomplished by “cram[ming] as much text as possible on to the octavo format which he allowed for his ‘pocket editions.’” Price was always a constraint, as was the extent of literacy, but certain forms of print such as chapbooks and broadsides, a format used for almanacs, “histories” (i.e., fiction), and ballads, were being printed in late seventeenth-century England in quantities that ranged well into the thousands.¹⁷

Not only must the early American book trade be located within the contexts of mercantile capitalism, an imperial state system, and religious reformation, it should also be understood as “colonial” in the sense of being structurally interrelated with the book trades of western Europe, and especially England. Isaiah Thomas, who wrote the first history of the American book trades, *The History of Printing in America* (1810), was aware of this dependence and filled his pages with accounts of the origin and progress of printing in Europe and the English colonies in the New World from Canada to the Caribbean. Thomas revealed something else in the structure of the *History*, a certain “cultural cringe,” as an Australian might call it, before the mother country. Without a qualified technical ancestry, the production of print in America seemed inexplicable to him, and he all too readily argued the descent of early colonial printers from the mere coincidence of names: of Stephen Day from the Elizabethan printer John Daye; of John Allen from Benjamin and Hannah Allen¹⁸ – fallacious arguments but, setting aside their cultural implications, based on sound instincts, for American imprints often relied on European authors for their texts and on European presses, paper, and type for their production.

Though we in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* resist imposing autonomy on the practices we describe, others before us have worked from different premises in attempting to describe how a book or broadside printed in the colonies differed from an import. The mistakes that have been made in this enterprise of favoring American originality and difference – an enterprise paralleled among historians of art, literature, religion, and politics in early America – have been repeated in the practice of imprint bibliography: The fact that hundreds of entries in Charles Evans’s *American Bibliography* (1903–1955) are based solely on advertisements of British imports underlines the possibility of confusion. Important as it has been to identify these “ghosts” and to exclude them from Evans’s descendants, the purified text has become less representative thereby of a confused historical reality. Imprint bibliography, as exemplified in the work of three great scholars – Evans, Douglas McMurtrie, and Roger P. Bristol – defines an American imprint as a book printed in the area that would one day become

the continental United States. A very different picture (and a different form of bibliography) would emerge if we considered with Edwin Wolf 2nd the predominance of English books in the catalogues of colonial libraries, in the advertisements and sale catalogues of booksellers, and in the rather more loosely described contents of probate inventories. As another bibliographer has sadly observed, Evans and Bristol “[do] not tell one very much about what was being read in America, or even what was available in bookshops.” Their continuations by Clifford K. Shipton and James E. Mooney tell us even less. Indeed, the *Short-Title Evans*, unlike its equivalents for England, theoretically excludes even titles that were printed abroad for sale in the national area.¹⁹

Eschewing, we trust, a perspective that values any book printed in America more highly than those imported from overseas, we use the term “colonial” deliberately in order to emphasize the continuing dependence of the book trade in the mainland colonies on its European (chiefly British) sources of supply for paper, type and presses, as well as for books, texts, and wider cultural practices. Within cultural and social history, the colonial situation meant that the colonists were minor figures in a commercial and intellectual traffic that originated within cosmopolitan centers on the other side of the Atlantic. Although this traffic ran in both directions, the realities of dependence, coupled with the frustrations that came in the train of trying to keep up with and not seem inferior to the metropolis, account for a certain restlessness, a confusion of identity, among the colonists that found notable expression in writers at the turn of the century such as William Byrd II and Cotton Mather. For our volume, therefore, the term “colonial” designates not only certain structures of the British empire and the Atlantic economy but also long-lasting aspects of intellectual life and cultural identity.²⁰

The book history of early America intersects with several other arguments about print and culture, each of which we shall briefly describe.

1. Orality, Writing, and Print. It is common within some versions of cultural and social history to evoke a great transition from orality to literacy or writing or from the age of the manuscript book to the age of printing. Each of these transitions has been represented as deeply consequential, even “revolutionary,” in its consequences for western culture. The case for printing as “an agent of change” has been forcefully argued by the historian Elizabeth Eisenstein. Limiting herself to the literate, learned community that was already accustomed to owning and using manuscript books, she proposes that the technology of printing, by making it possible to duplicate a text in large quantities, opened the way to standardization, order, and much wider dissemination; hence she contrasts the emergence of alphabet-

ical indexes, the purification of corrupted texts, and the operations of science and natural history in the early modern period with the “disorder” and limited reach of texts in the age of scribal production. Her larger goal is to link the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the beginnings of the scientific revolution with a “communications revolution” caused by the shift from script to print.²¹

The transition from orality to literacy as sketched by Walter J. Ong is less chronologically precise, for Ong’s purpose is twofold: To sketch a decline in the “presence of the word” as it was displaced by the visual (i.e., printed) word, and yet to emphasize the residual presence of orality in the West. For him, a major difference between orality and writing is that the latter lends itself to “elaborate analytical categories to structure knowledge.” Writing separates and isolates; it leads to “abstractions.”²² A third possibility, argued half a century ago by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, is that writing should be understood as a form of power that overcame and suppressed the authority of speech.²³

What is the pertinence of these assertions to our history? Eisenstein is right to argue that printing as a technology made a difference, for it greatly enlarged the scale by which texts could be reproduced and lowered the cost of these copies. This was a problem as well as a solution, however, since it also raised the cost of entry into the market, and the sheer numbers of copies outran their initial markets. Both factors figured in the making of the Reformation.²⁴ By the mid-seventeenth century in England, moreover, printing was clearly overtaking and, in certain situations, displacing oral and scribal publication; proclamations and the structure of legal “memory” are cases in point. Yet we fall into difficulties, at once conceptual and practical, in attempting to specify a “logic of print,” as though the technology were itself an actor, and in pinpointing when this logic may have become dominant.²⁵ Indeed Ong’s grand narrative has seduced some historians of early America into proposing this or that moment as marking the definitive rupture with orality.²⁶

But let us rethink the terms of the problem. One way of understanding Ong’s narrative of decline is to regard it as an episode in the “anxiety about language” that, within western culture, may be traced back to Aristotle and the New Testament. The literary historian Sandra Gustafson, to whom we owe this suggestion, goes on to remark that the cultural historian of the post-Gutenberg period inevitably encounters a series of oppositions that have shown a remarkable persistence: “stable text/dead letter; living speech/demonic speech.” The same could be said of assertions about writing as power; here, the anxiety about the possibilities for freedom, resistance, and subversion within a routinized, bureaucratic (and, for others, patriarchal and racist) culture is palpable. But as Gustafson aptly observes, the task of the

historian, as distinct from that of the prophet or cultural critic, is not to reiterate these oppositions but to uncover “the cultural and historical imperatives that bring one opposition to the fore, and thus privilege speech or writing in a given community at a given period.”²⁷ For us, therefore, orality is a flexible category or practice, persisting in America well into the nineteenth century. We have also attended to the practice of scribal publication and some of the ways in which it competed with or was eventually displaced by printing.

2. Literacy and Illiteracy. Like printing, literacy (usually signifying the ability both to read *and* write, a misleading conjunction as we will see) can be considered an autonomous skill, a technology that carries with it certain automatic consequences. But for us, literacy is akin to orality in being not a fixed term or condition but a practice that was mediated by different frames of meaning and social circumstances. The polarity of literacy and illiteracy or of literacy and orality must give way, therefore, to a contextualized description of the uses – discursive or ideological as well as practical or social – to which literacy was put. Otherwise, we run the risk in early American history of representing literacy as hierarchical and excluding, labels that overlook the important distinction between reading and writing literacy and that ignore the possibilities for knowledge and participation among the so-called illiterate.²⁸

3. Print and the Public Sphere. According to Jürgen Habermas, printing abetted the construction of a “bourgeois public sphere” in eighteenth-century Europe, a space that enabled the work of social criticism and the forming of public opinion to proceed to the point of becoming an alternative to the mystifications and personal rule of the monarchy.²⁹ Yet on this side of the Atlantic, social and political criticism were never fully differentiated from the language and practices of radical Protestantism, which during the English Civil War had already fashioned a certain kind of public sphere. In the American colonies, moreover, political, religious, and social authority was remarkably local and decentralized in comparison with France, Britain, or Prussia. Here, too, the term “bourgeois” is less applicable, and the consequences of printing and bookselling for the making of a public sphere are less easily differentiated from the world of commerce. Nor can we equate “public” with any broad distribution of printed matter, for the simple reason that, with very few exceptions, no such distribution occurred in eighteenth-century America. For these reasons, we have preferred to describe the emergence of a “republic of letters” and an ethos of “free inquiry” that flourished within learned culture and that made it more legitimate to expose the private and sacred qualities of personal rule.³⁰ Our narrative also takes account of literary and cultural coteries, some of which

preferred the medium of scribal publication to the “public” medium of print.

4. Authorship and Intellectual Property. For France and Britain in particular, some historians have argued that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the “birth” of the author, as evidenced by the construction of an “autonomous” literary sphere and changes in the understanding of rights to intellectual property in relation to capitalism and state control.³¹ Such a transition occurred for *some* writers in Europe (Alexander Pope comes immediately to mind). We may also understand this transition as the creation of distinctive social sites for the practice of belles lettres. The literary history of early America was affected by this transition. Yet our literary history also encompasses a quite different understanding of writing, authorship, and literature, one that denied the very possibility of literature being separated from moral and social life. Moreover, the earliest legal privileging of authors only occurred at the very end of our period.³²

5. The “Reading-Revolution.” It has been argued by Rolf Engelsing and others that a “reading-revolution” (*Leserevolution*) unfolded in the eighteenth century as fiction began to displace the traditional stock of devotional texts and as more books became available. Here, too, while we take note in a subsequent chapter of changes under way by the time of the Revolution, the situation in America seems less advanced than in contemporary Europe, in part because of the slower advent of the consumer revolution on this side of the Atlantic and the continuing strength of Protestantism. Reading is perhaps the least understood – or the most difficult to conceptualize – of our topics. Is it the rules within a text or its typographic form that govern the act of reading? If every reader remakes the text, can we make any generalizations about the practice?³³ The familiar antithesis between intensive and extensive reading, which, it is argued, coincided with a decline in the importance of religious texts and a surge in the production of fiction, does not seem pertinent to eighteenth-century Americans except, perhaps, for certain urban reading circles.³⁴

The history of reading also intersects with two other important questions or issues, one being gender, the other the categories of “high” and “low.” Did women act in a different manner than men as consumers of print, and did they become significantly more visible as consumers in the course of the eighteenth century? These questions we address in Chapter 11, where we also reflect on the argument that genres and readers can be arranged along a spectrum of “high” to “low,” elite to popular. To signal in advance our point of view, we prefer a history of reading that acknowledges a middling social and cultural space in which many texts seem to have circulated widely. The principal exception to this rule (and for the seventeenth century, a gendered

exception) is learned culture, which was fashioned around a distinctive set of reading practices and a competency in foreign languages. Recognizing, as we do, the social dimensions of reading, literacy, and book ownership, we have also sought to describe reading as a cultural practice mediated by differing rules or representations of readers and texts.

Having indicated our thinking on these broad questions, what should readers expect from *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*? We remind our readers that this book is not an encyclopedia but a narrative history. Accordingly, anyone seeking information about a particular printer or bookseller, library or writer will often be disappointed. For the most part we have also forgone explicit comparisons with British and Continental practices, though Chapters 1 and 3, especially, are informed by a comparative perspective. We have chosen, of necessity, to work within certain larger restraints. Ours is not a history of “communication” in early America, which would require a much larger canvas. Nor is it a *histoire totale* of society and culture. Yet we have constantly endeavored to locate our story of writers, readers, and book-trade practices within a wider history of social structures and social movements. These include the workings of the imperial system and the factionalism that drove colonial politics, the religious insurgencies that attempted to extend the Reformation, the evangelical campaigns of the eighteenth century that conventionally are entitled “the Great Awakening,” demographic and social tendencies as the population of the mainland colonies began a remarkable phase of expansion after 1700, and in relation to literary and learned culture, the emergence of new forms of sociability and new sites of cultural production that competed with older, long-persisting structures.

The central purpose of *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* is to provide a sustained description of book-trade practices, including journalism. Our account of book-trade practices foregrounds the doings of booksellers and establishes the very limited scope of printing and bookselling in the colonies for the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries. In appendices that conclude the volume we provide further information on book production in the colonies and new republic, books imported from overseas, book prices, and popular authors and titles. We urge every reader to pay close attention to the first of these appendices and, in light of what is said therein about the limitations of our knowledge, to exercise due caution in citing any of our charts and tables that specify book production. However, we find suggestive the relationships that these charts and tables expose.

No less central is the history we provide of reading and writing, and of efforts to regulate writers, readers, printers, and booksellers. The story that we tell of readers and writers has many dimensions to it. First and foremost is our effort to narrate the changing understandings of writing and, more nar-

rowly, of “literature” or “literary culture.” Another important dimension of this story concerns the social contexts or “communities” within which writing and reading occurred, and the differing rhetorics that writers employed in addressing these communities. Here, too, we concern ourselves with self-censorship by authors and whether they controlled the transmission of their texts. No less important is our description of what we term the “modalities of reading,” or the differing frameworks of meaning that mediated the practice. We attempt as well to describe the circumstances of literacy, book distribution, and book ownership, together with the history of libraries. The arguments we have advanced earlier in this introduction about orality and literacy, performance and scribal publication, reading and authorship are, we hope, sustained by the details that follow. Much remains to be learned about all of these matters; ours is “a” history of the book in early America, not “the” definitive account. We emphasize that, in experimenting with a fuller synthesis than heretofore attempted, we have often been reminded of what we did not know. That this book will serve to suggest many opportunities for further study and research is, for us, a prospect we welcome and encourage.

PART TWO. THE EUROPEANS’ ENCOUNTER WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

THE COLONIAL BOOK IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD is a story of ongoing exchanges between the Old World and the New – of books and paper for tobacco, of intellectual recognition in return for a local naturalist’s shipment of native flora and fauna. The Europeans who explored the coast and the colonists who followed in their wake entered into a similar relationship with the Indians, trading clothes, weapons, utensils, and alcohol for information, sustenance, furs, and land. Colonists and Indians were alike – if unequally successful – in using each other to gain political and economic power. Treaties and alliances were the visible signs of these negotiations, which involved an ever-shifting coalition of tribes, colonial governments, and European civil states.³⁵

These modalities of exchange coexisted with contradictory attitudes and policies. Notwithstanding the colonists’ dependence on the Indians, the English engaged in displays of force and episodes of wholesale slaughter. These actions flowed from the assumption that the colonists were dealing with “bestial dogs” enslaved by Satan. These same actions were regarded as

necessary to intimidate the Indians, who it was feared, would rise up and overwhelm the colonists, as nearly happened in Virginia in 1622 and in New England during King Philip's War (1675–1676).³⁶ Racism, intimidation, war, and the relentless expansion of settlements onto Indian lands were conditions that eventually destroyed the system of exchange.

Nor did exchange prevail in the project of converting the Indians to Christianity, a project premised on the Europeans' assumption that they had much to give and little to receive, other than the satisfaction of saving souls from hell. The instrumentalities of this program were preaching, books, schools for introducing the Indians to literacy in their own languages and in those of the Europeans, and communities or settlements where Indians were brought together to live in a new, more "civilized" manner.

The missionary project originated with the Spanish who, under Cortez, invaded Mexico in 1519. Four years later, in 1523, a small group of Franciscans arrived in Mexico City to begin the task of teaching Christianity to the Indians. Because books were deemed critical to the tasks of conversion and education, the Bishop of Mexico established in 1539 the first printing office in the New World, using it to issue books of religious instruction. By the close of the seventeenth century, Franciscan missionaries in Sante Fe and other nearby outposts were using books produced in New and Old Spain and in Antwerp to instruct the local Indians.³⁷ To the east, in Florida, and to the north, in French Canada, missionaries were also at work. The earliest reports from Florida and the southwest told of an extraordinary number of baptisms – tens of thousands in the Southwest, some eight thousand in Florida.³⁸

The insincerity of such mass conversions offended Jesuits and Protestants alike, who both insisted on rigorous proof of their converts' faith – a task in which the Jesuits were more successful, in part because they were better organized and more tolerant of Indian culture, in part because Catholic ritual and devotion were more appealing, in part, it must be said, because European emigration to Canada was sparser.³⁹ The religious medals the French Jesuits distributed are found in grave sites as far south as Rhode Island, and the English colonists savagely resisted their incursions in "the Eastern parts" (Maine) and Iroquoia. In Maryland, the Jesuits had to overcome opposition from the Proprietor before undertaking to live among the Indians, as four of them did in 1638; in their annual letter to the head of the English province, one wrote how his companions had dispersed themselves "in places far distant – doubtless because they expect thus to obtain an earlier acquaintance with the barbarian language, and propagate more widely the sacred faith of the Gospel." Three years later, one of the priests succeeded in composing "a short catechism, by the aid of an interpreter."⁴⁰ The task of mastering

a native language that seemed to have no rules of grammar was daunting; of those who tried, relatively few succeeded, even with the help of native intermediaries.⁴¹

English Protestants responded as confusedly as French Catholics to the Indians, reporting in almost the same breath that “a more kinde and loving people there can not be found in the worlde,” and yet calling them idolators who worshiped Satan.⁴² In principle, the English were zealous in the cause of evangelism, the main motive specified in royal charters for the enterprise of colonization. The letters patent of the Virginia Company of London (1606) described the venture as “a work which may . . . tend to the glory of his divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian religion to such people, as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.”⁴³ The seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company depicted an Indian uttering the “Macedonian plea” to St. Paul of Acts 16:9: “Come over and help us.” Notwithstanding these icons and pronouncements, the Protestant colonists were slow to act and never had the same success as their Catholic counterparts, a success these Protestants refused to acknowledge.⁴⁴ Protestant and Catholic missionaries were also handicapped by the inroads that disease and war made on the Indians who lived in the areas of first contact and settlement. The sharp decline of this population, and the threat of pro-French sentiment among Catholic converts in Iroquoia, dictated that the scene of endeavor move inland during the eighteenth century to the New York and Pennsylvania frontier.

Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Moravians each played a role in these eighteenth-century missions. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, chartered in England in 1701, supported Anglican clergy in the colonies, a few of them specifically as missionaries to the Mohawks of New York; after 1715, these clergy used a translation into Mohawk of parts of the *Book of Common Prayer* (Fig. I.1). The Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1701 as the Society for the Reformation of Manners, supported a variety of American missions from 1730 on. Another international network was responsible for the effort of the Moravians, who applied their ethic of peace, love, and Biblical simplicity to the mission field in Pennsylvania. Here at midcentury they established a series of communities, most notably, Gnadenhutten, where whites and Indians were to live together.⁴⁵

Among the seventeenth-century English colonists, only the Puritans in New England were able to initiate missions of any scale. Like their contemporaries in Canada and New Spain, the Puritans had to decide whether literacy was requisite to becoming a Christian and, if so, whether to translate religious texts from English into native languages or to teach the Indians to

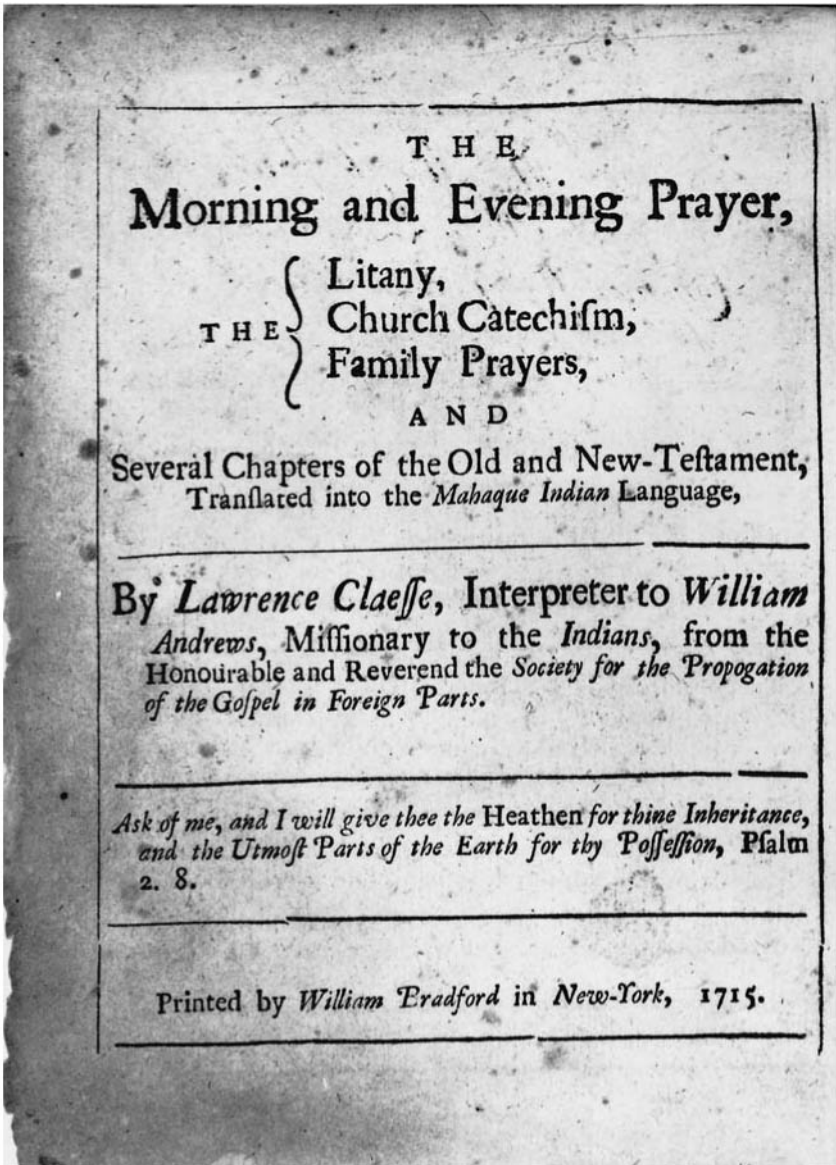


Figure 1.1. Church of England, *The Morning and Evening Prayer* = *Ne Orhoengene neon Yogaraskhagh Yondereanayendaghkwa* . . . translated into the Mahaque Indian language, by Lawrence Claesse (New York: William Bradford, 1715). Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

J. h. Jones N E *PMP (A G M) Virg.*
Orhoengene neoni **Yogaraskhagh**

1719 **Yondereanayendaghkwa**, *Givca by*

N E { Ene Niyoh Raodeweyena, *Mr Andrews*
 Onoghfadogeaghtige Yondadderighwanon-
 doentha,
 Siyagonnoghfode Enyondereanayendagh-
 kwagge,

Yotkade Kapitelhogough ne Karighwadaghkwe-
agh Agayea neoni Ale Testament, neoni Niyadegari-
wagge, ne Kunninggahaga Siniyewenoteagh.

Tehoenwenadenyough Lawrance Claesse, Rowenagaradatsk
William Andrews, Ronwanha - ugh Ongwehoenwighne
Rodirighhoeni Raddiyadanorough neoni Ahoenwadi-
gonuyofthagge Thoderighwawaakhogk ne Wahooni
Agarighhowanha Niyoh Raodeweyena Niyadegogh-
whenjage.

Eghtferaggwas Eghtjeeagh ne ongwehoonwe, neoni ne
fiyodoghwhenjooktannighhoegh etho ahadyeandough.

Figure I.I. (Continued)

read the Bible and other books in the colonists' own tongue. The decision in favor of translation was largely the doing of John Eliot, the minister of Roxbury, Massachusetts, who spent the last forty years of his life both as pastor and as missionary. To this latter task, he brought the same assumptions that guided his pastorate in Roxbury: converts to Christianity and candidates for admission to church membership should know the Bible, be familiar with Christian doctrine as outlined in a catechism, manifest their faith in a "relation" of spiritual experience, and lead a moral life. Behind this framework of assumptions lay long-established expectations about literacy and reading as crucial to religion. Ritual, sacraments, and images would not do; the true Christian was someone who knew how to read.⁴⁶

In September 1646, Eliot traveled to a nearby Indian settlement, where he conducted a prayer service (in English), with a sermon (in Massachusett), followed by questions and answers. Encouraged to continue by the colony government, which authorized certain grants of land, and aided by funds raised in England by a philanthropic organization, the Society for Propagation of the Gospel in New England (chartered for this purpose in 1649, rechartered in 1662, and known informally as the New England Company), Eliot and co-workers such as Daniel Gookin devised a three-part missions program. Unlike the Franciscans and the Jesuits, Eliot did not propose to live among the Indians himself. Instead, he wanted to introduce the Indians to "civilization," which meant detaching them from their customary ways of living and resettling them in "praying towns" where European patterns of work, dress, and household structure would prevail. Schools where native children learned to read Christian texts translated into Massachusett were a feature of these towns, some fourteen of which had been organized in Massachusetts by 1674. So were churches. The earliest effort at organizing a gathered congregation occurred at Natick in 1652, with a small number of Indians offering spiritual testimony before an audience of visiting clergy. This effort was unsuccessful, but after further testimonies had been received in 1659, the missionary succeeded.

The second part of Eliot's program was to alphabetize the Massachusett language for a translation of the Bible and related texts, in order to print and distribute copies in sufficient quantity to sustain religious instruction and devotion among the Indians. "I having yet but little skill in their language," Eliot wrote to Edward Winslow in 1649, "I must have some Indians, and it may be other help continually about me to try and examine Translations." Aided by three teachers and interpreters, a Montauk Indian from Long Island named Cockenoe and two Massachusett Indians, John Sassamon and Job Nesutan, he was able to see a complete Bible through the press by 1663 (Fig. I.2a). He began, however, with a simpler text, a catechism that was

issued in 1654. Along the way, three parts of the Bible – Genesis, the Gospel of Matthew, and a metrical translation of the Psalms – were printed in order to test the adequacy of the translation and to encourage English donors to support so grand a project. Meanwhile, Abraham Pierson, the minister in Branford, Connecticut, prepared another catechism, published in Cambridge in 1659, “to sute these southwest partes where the language differs from theires whoe live about the Masacheussets.”⁴⁷

With the Bible completed, Eliot decided that the next step was to provide “Books for [the Indians’] private use, of ministerial composing. For their help,” as he explained in 1663 to the English minister Richard Baxter, “though the Word of God be the best of Books, yet Humane Infirmitie is, you know, not a little helped, by reading the holy Labours of the Ministers of Jesus Christ.” A year later, his translation, an abridgment of Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, was published, followed in 1665 by a shortened version of Lewis Bayly’s *The Practice of Piety* and in 1689 of Thomas Shepard’s *The Sincere Convert*. Eliot’s most important contribution to the teaching of Massachusetts was the *Indian Primer* of 1669. Including the reprintings that were done before and after Eliot died in 1690, some of them occasioned by the destruction of books during King Philip’s War, and texts written or translated by others like Josiah Cotton and Experience Mayhew, the number of Indian imprints had reached approximately twenty-eight by 1730.⁴⁸ Thereafter, the program came to an end, save for very occasional reprints.

The reasons for giving up on the program of translations were several. From the outset, not everyone shared Eliot’s passion for getting books in their own language into the hands of the Indians. Some doubted that the vocabulary of Christian doctrine could be rendered into so different a language. Roger Williams, for one (Fig. I.2b), had remarked on the “mighty paines and hardships undergone by my selfe, or any that would proceed to such a further degree of the Language, as to be able in propriety of speech to open matters of salvation to them.”⁴⁹ It had been Eliot’s hope that Massachusetts was derived from Hebrew, which he and others regarded as the original language of all the children of Adam. This expectation, which was linked to his assumption that the Indians were descended from Shem,⁵⁰ was not borne out by his struggles with Massachusetts. Meanwhile his English sponsors were being told that some New England tribes could not understand the dialect into which he was translating the Bible. The New England Company also pressed on him the importance of using teachers and intermediaries who were fluent in the native language. The press also employed a Nipmuck Indian, named by the English James Printer after his trade, to set type and correct the sheets.⁵¹

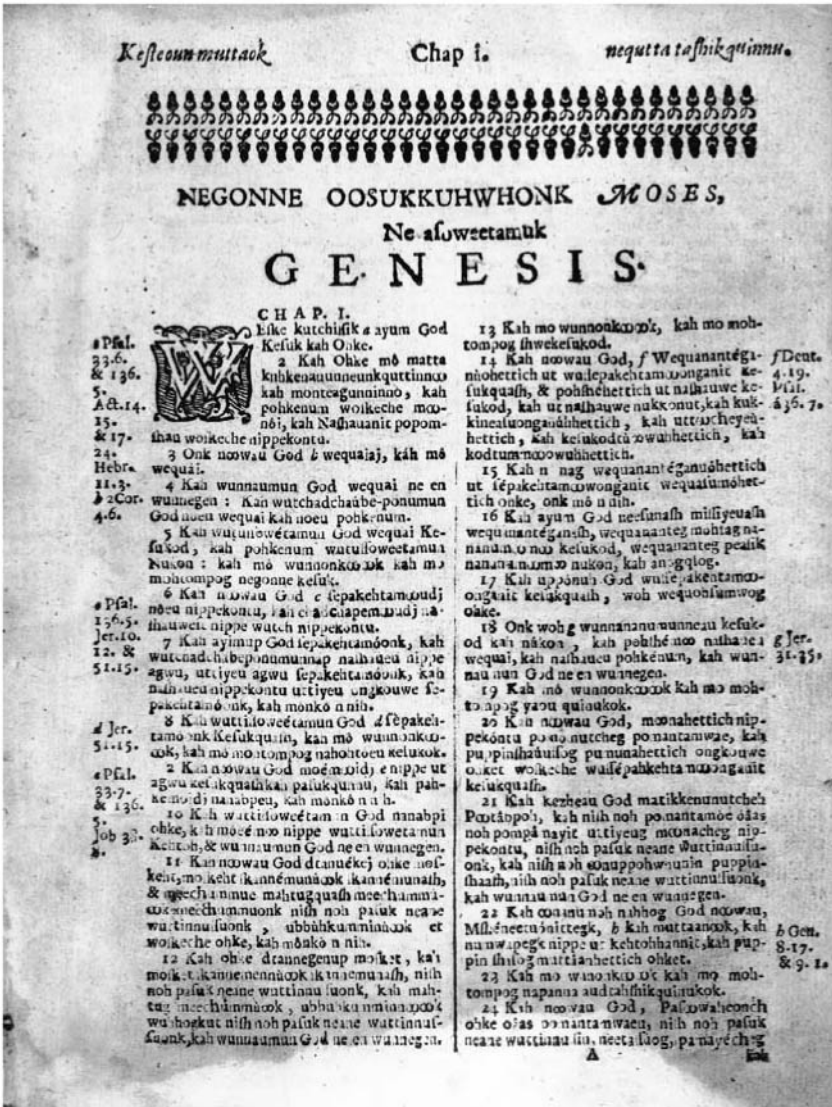


Figure 1.2a. The creation myth (Genesis 1:1-13) in Natick and Narragansett: the Eliot Indian Bible (Cambridge, 1661-1663) (American Antiquarian Society); and (1.2b) Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (London, 1643). Note the "learned" diacritics of Williams's version, helpful for nonnative speakers. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

Of their Religion.

Maunaūog Mishauina- work.	<i>Many, great many.</i>
Nētop machàge.	<i>Friend, not so.</i>
Paūsuck naūnt manit.	<i>There is onely one God.</i>
Cuppissittone.	<i>You are mistaken.</i>
Cowauwaūnemun.	<i>You are out of the way.</i>
A phraſe which much pleaſeth them, being proper for their wandring in the woods, and ſimilitudes greatly pleaſe them.	
Kukkakótemous, wá- chit-quáſhouwe.	<i>I will tell you, preſently</i>
Kuttaunchemókous:	<i>I will tell you newes.</i>
Paūsuck naūnt manit kééfittin keeſuck, &c	<i>One onely God made the Heavens, &c.</i>
Napannetaſhēmittan naugecautūmmo- nab nſhque.	<i>Five thouſand yeers ago and upwards.</i>
Naūgom naūnt wuk- keſittinnes wáme teāgun.	<i>He alone made all things</i>
Wuche mateāg.	<i>Out of nothing.</i>
Quttataſhuchuckqún- nacauf-keefitinnnes wáme.	<i>In ſix dayes he made things.</i>
Nguittaqúnne.	<i>The firſt day Hee made</i>
Wuckéſitin wequái.	<i>the Light.</i>
Néſqunne.	<i>The ſecond day Hee</i>
Wuckéſitin Keéſuck.	<i>made the Firmament</i>
	<i>Shúcl</i>

Figure 1.2b.

The need to convince the New England Company of the feasibility of the project explains why the “Indian library” included a handful of bilingual texts, in which English was interlined with Massachusett: Pierson’s catechism (for which Thomas Stanton, Sr., a trader, provided assistance), a preliminary edition of the translation of Genesis (1655), and the *Christian Covenanting Confession* used in admitting persons to church membership. Until 1700, however, the other texts were almost entirely in the native language. But by 1710, the Boston minister Cotton Mather voiced a general opinion when he wrote the New England Company that “The best thing we can do for our Indians is to Anglicise them in all agreeable Instances; and in that of Language, as well as others.”⁵² Increasingly thereafter, the texts included in the Indian library were bilingual.

A third part of the program was to provide additional training – even, it was hoped, at Harvard College – for a handful of young men who, having learned English and accepted Christianity, would become teachers and ministers among their own people. As Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, Jr., a lay missionary on Martha’s Vineyard, realized, only thus would a sufficient number of spiritual leaders be available for native churches and communities. “I find it hopeless,” Eliot wrote in 1671, “to expect English Officers in our Indian Churches; the work is full of hardship, hard labour, and chargeable also.” It followed, therefore, that natives “must be trained up to be able to live of themselves in the ways of the Gospel of Christ.” Though the Harvard end of things was unsuccessful because of the early deaths of some of the most promising Indian students, dozens of persons on Martha’s Vineyard and the mainland took on these roles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several becoming ordained ministers. They were complemented in their public ministry by women converts who were literate.⁵³

Of all the intermediaries who participated in the missionary project, the most famous in his own day was the Mohegan Samson Occom, born near New London in 1723 in a “heathen” family. The religious revivals of the late 1730s and early 1740s having led to a renewed concern among the colonists for evangelism, a wave of conversions among the yet unchristianized Indians in New England followed, Occom’s being one of them. Setting himself the task of becoming literate in English, he learned within a year “to Read in the New Testament without Spelling.” His mother, now herself a Christian, asked a nearby minister, Eleazer Wheelock, if he would instruct her son “in Reading,” which Wheelock agreed to do. Training in English was followed by lessons in Latin and, with a different minister, in Hebrew. Because troubles with his eyes prevented him from attending college (which his teachers thought he could do successfully), Occom served briefly as a schoolteacher among Indians on Long Island before being ordained as a

Presbyterian minister in 1759, having delivered a “trial sermon” and been examined “in the learned languages.” The organizers of this event had in mind the missions then being instituted among the Oneida in New York, where Occom took up his ministry in 1761, preaching through an interpreter while he started to learn the language.

But by the mid-sixties, Occom was more interested in a school for teaching English to native youth (both boys and girls) that Wheelock was struggling to sustain in eastern Connecticut, Occom’s home ground. On behalf of this program and with the support of George Whitefield, the great itinerant revivalist, Occom and a clerical companion toured England and Scotland in 1765–1768, soliciting donations that eventually totalled £12,000. A living witness to the transformations wrought by civilization and Christianity, Occom was something of a celebrity in English society, and admirers had his portrait painted. It shows him in clerical dress pointing to a folio Bible open to the New Testament; a bow and arrow hang on the wall in the background (Fig. 1.3). Not much went right thereafter in Occom’s life; with some justice, he felt that his singular identity had been exploited by Wheelock, whose decision to move the Indian school to New Hampshire, where it evolved into Dartmouth College, was another blow. In the aftermath of the Revolution, Occom helped organize a movement among the Indians who remained in eastern Connecticut to resettle in the west.⁵⁴

Occom was the first Native American to publish in English.⁵⁵ Before him, the persons whose spiritual histories were collected in John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew’s *Tears of Repentance* (London, 1653) and in Experience Mayhew’s *Indian Converts* (London, 1727) had told their stories through an intermediary. Occom’s opportunity to publish arose in 1772, when he was asked to preach a sermon on the day that a Native American convicted of murder was executed in New Haven. A contemporary newspaper remarked on Occom’s “honest simplicity and Gospel sincerity”; in his preface, he made a point of having spoken so that ordinary people, both whites and Indians, would understand him. The sensational aspects of the event, however, were probably why his sermon, a plea for temperance, was reprinted three times in the space of three months and another eight times within the next year and a half, as well as being issued as a broadside. In 1774, Occom published a longer work, *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, some of which were of his own composing and others the work of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. Any reference to race was conspicuously absent from the title page, for Occom was identified as “Minister of the Gospel” and the subtitle read, “Intended for the Edification of sincere Christians, of all Denominations.” That the collection was used by the Indian communities he was organizing in the west seems certain, but the dozen or so editions that ap-

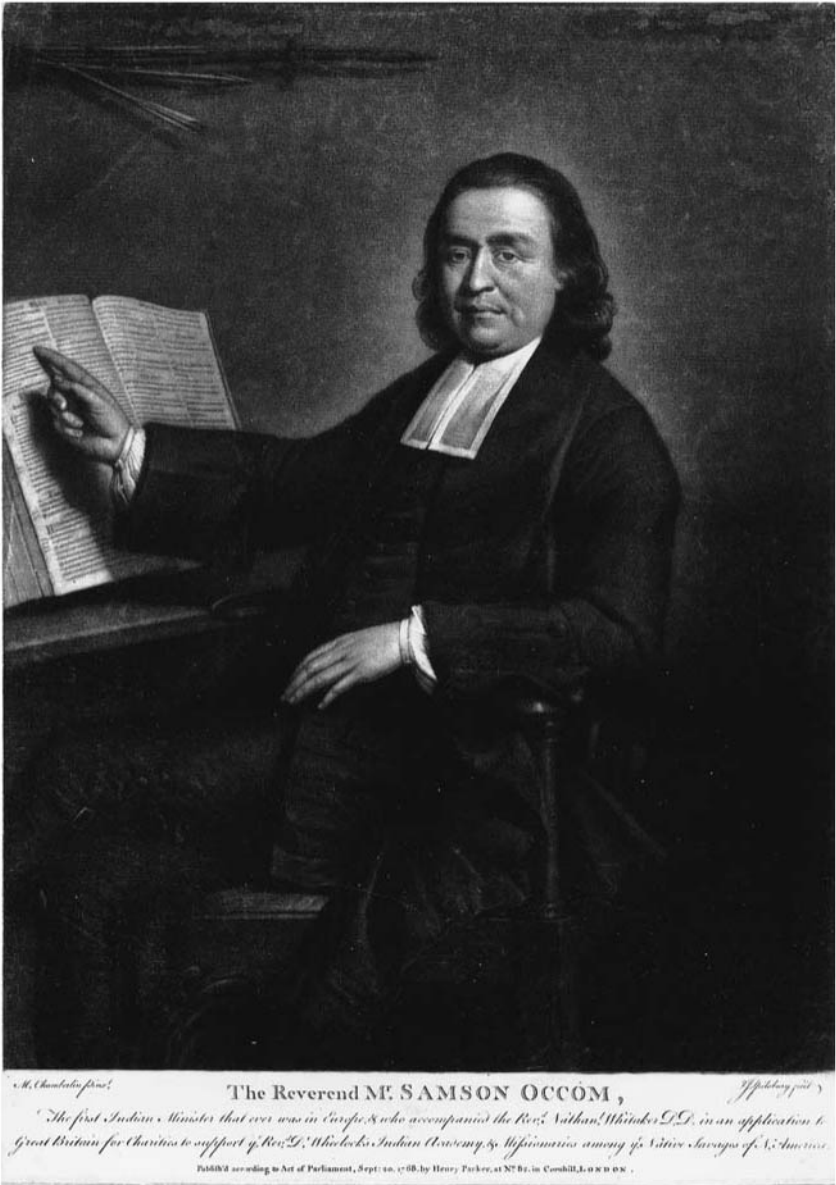


Figure 1.3. “The Reverend Mr. Samson Occom,” mezzotint (London, 1768) by Jonathan Spilsbury after a lost contemporary portrait by Mason Chamberlain. Courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.; gift of Mrs. Robert W. Birch.

peared by the first decade of the nineteenth century suggest a wider audience and, for Occom, an identity as a Christian that, as in his London portrait, drew much of its force from his past as a “heathen.”⁵⁶

The uses of books and literacy among the Native Americans can only be touched on briefly.⁵⁷ Early reports from Europeans who showed them books and writing describe a response of wonder. One such story, which, like others of its kind, may be a European fantasy, told of the “unlettered stupiditie” of Indians who “could not conceive the force of writing of Letters; . . . the poore Indian would marvaile how it should be possible that he to whom [a letter] came should be able to know all things . . . : And thereupon divers of them did thinke, that there was some kinde of Spirit in the paper, and marvelously stood in feare of such a thing as a Letter was.”⁵⁸ If they existed, these feelings of awe and inferiority gave way, in time, to a realism and expertise in the making of records, dealing with civil courts, and handling treaties, a considerable number of which were printed in the eighteenth century for the benefit of each party to the exchange thus formalized in writing.⁵⁹ As for how the Indians responded to the thousands of catechisms, psalters, primers, and Bibles printed for their benefit, the narratives collected by Experience Mayhew in *Indian Converts*, together with the material evidence in surviving copies – marginal annotations, signatures of owners, much evidence of being handled – are signs that some Indians became active users of these books.⁶⁰ Yet an archeologist’s discovery of a native grave site in Connecticut that contained, among other artifacts, a leaf torn from a Bible, suggests that books, or pages from books, may have played a variety of functions far beyond what Eliot and the missionaries intended – possibly as grave goods, perhaps as signs or instruments of healing, or as elements in some system of exchange quite apart from the program set up by the colonists. That the “Indian library” was put to diverse ends seems clear.⁶¹ And that Eliot (in contrast with the missionary work of Thomas Mayhew, Jr. of Martha’s Vineyard) did everything possible to override native culture, imposing Eurocentric assumptions about language, speech, author, book, and literacy on the Indians, is all too evident as well.⁶² On the other hand, there is abundant evidence that Christian Indians adapted writing to their own purposes. Writings in Massachusetts ranging from town records and land transactions to a list of marriages reveal the uses of vernacular literacy as late as the 1770s in support of an oral culture.⁶³