

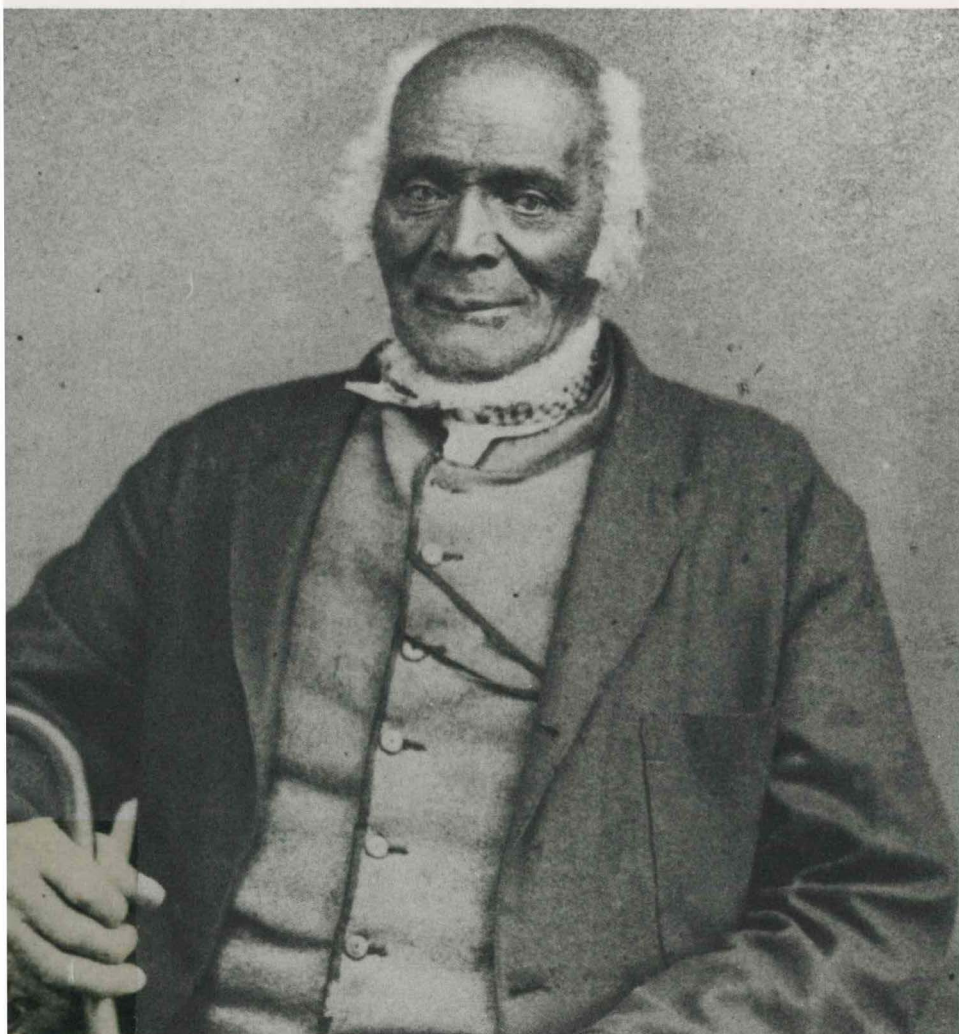


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Pauper Apprenticeship in Narragansett Country: A Different Name for Slavery in Early New England

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This essay widens the context of "slavery" in New England by focusing on a kind of bound labor that functioned as slavery but was called something else. During the eighteenth century, many Native American children living in southeastern New England were bound out as "pauper apprentices"—placed as indentured servants in households considered well-to-do by local officials with responsibility for the poor of the community. This widespread system of pauper apprenticeship had long been a staple of English poor relief and was adapted in the Anglo-American colonies early on.¹

The rationale was to keep orphaned, illegitimate, and abandoned children from being a drain on the public purse by placing them in "decent" homes where they would be provided with the necessities of life, and trained for a useful adulthood. The apprenticeship system had the potential to be a kind of adoption, or a kind of school, and in many cases no doubt this was what happened. But for Native American children, the system had ominous overtones, embedded as it was within the larger context of English conquest of New England's Native inhabitants.

In the early 1700s, when the pauper apprenticeship system began to surge in New England, many Anglo-Americans vividly remembered the terror of King Philip's War and feared further attack by Native Americans. Whatever hopes Roger Williams and other early leaders had entertained for peaceful co-existence with Native Americans and their eventual conversion to Christianity had died. Anglo-American fear and hatred expressed itself in the enslavement (and subsequent exile) of many Native people at the end of King Philip's War; many other Native people remained in New England, but trapped in servitude of such a questionable nature that colonial legislatures had to pass laws designed to prevent "abuses" by "evil-minded persons" trying to force Native Americans into bondage.² In this bitter context, Anglo-American officials turned to pauper apprenticeship as a means of punishing conquered people, as payment for damages done by other

1. John E. Murray and Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship," *Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 2 (June 2002): 356–82.

2. "An Act to prevent Indians from being abused by designing and ill-minded Persons, in making them Servants" [1730], *Acts and Laws of the English Colony of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations* (Newport, R.I.: Samuel Hall, 1767), p. 150.

Natives and as a way controlling potential enemies. In 1723 the Boston town meeting voted "that every free Indian[,] Negro[,] or Molatto shall bind out, all their children at or before they arrive to the age of four years to some English master, and upon neglect thereof the selectmen or overseers of the poor shall be empowered to bind out all such children till the age of twenty one years."³ By sliding Native children into servitude at an early age, Anglo-Americans could extend the conquest of Native Americans generation after generation.

This essay concentrates on pauper apprenticeship in southeastern New England where the Narragansett Indian people were most populous in the 1700s (*Figure 1*). There, Anglo-American town officials targeted Native children for pauper apprenticeship, separating sons and daughters from their parents' culture, eliminating their independence, and training them for a life of menial labor in an Anglo-American hierarchy where they would remain at the bottom ranks of society. Children of color were frequently among those bound (see *Table 1*) and their attractiveness as servants increased over time. The percentage of children of color bound in such apprenticeships grew even as the aggregate number of indentures declined in the late 1700s and early 1800s. By 1820, it was rare for an Anglo-American child to be bound as a pauper apprentice. Some officials, no doubt, viewed servitude as an appropriate fate for all Native Americans, a fate that should be acknowledged and accommodated. Magistrates revealed their prejudices in the language they used to describe Native pauper apprentices. All too often, these were not true "apprentices," bound to learn a skill or trade, but rather servants and laborers. "Indian" girl Elisabeth Spywood was described as an "apprentice or servant"⁴; Indian boy Moses was to "be bound a servant."⁵ The blurring of the line between slavery and pauper apprenticeship is revealed in the case of Dinah and her five children, the "property" of Jamestown widow Rebecca Martin. When the town council put Martin under guardianship "for want of prudent management" of her property, they also bound out her children as pauper apprentices. One son, Newport, was described in his indenture as a "slave child."⁶

3. Boston Town Meeting, 11 March 1723, Boston Town Records (1700–1728), p. 423; reproduced as *A Report of the Record Commissioners*, vol. 8 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1883), pp. 173–74.

4. Order to bind out Elisabeth Spywood, Town Council Meetings minutes (hereafter cited as TCM) 11 February 1750, Warwick Town Council Records (hereafter cited as TCR) 2:89–90. The town council records of each community are located in its town hall.

5. Order to bind out Indian boy Moses, TCM 15 April 1741, Jamestown TCR 1:303.

6. TCM 9 November 1791, Jamestown TCR 2:247–28; order to bind Newport Martin, 8 September 1787, 14 February 1789, and 24 December 1791, Jamestown TCR.

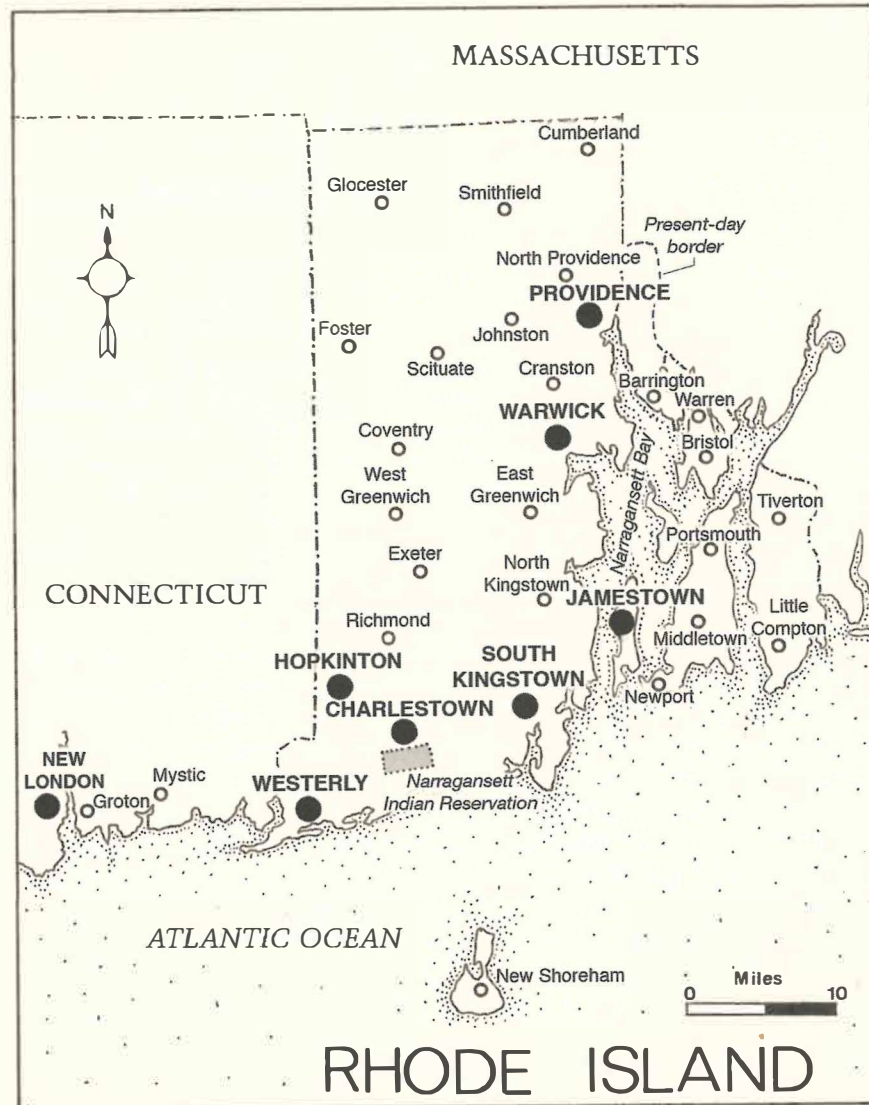


Figure 1. Rhode Island in the eighteenth century showing the locations of six communities where Narragansett Indian people were the most populous. (New London, Connecticut; and Jamestown, Providence, South Kingstown, Warwick, and Westerly, Rhode Island.)

As these examples suggest, pauper apprenticeship for children of color bore a close resemblance to "gradual emancipation childhood," or *post nati* service, which was practiced in the northern states during the revolutionary era. By this system, sons and daughters born to slave mothers after a date designated by the state legislature remained under the control of their mothers' masters until adulthood, variously

established by law as anywhere from age eighteen to age twenty-eight.⁷ Although these children were technically free at birth, their masters were entitled to their labor for the duration of their childhood and (in some cases) well into their young adulthood. Since slavery was legal everywhere in New England throughout the colonial period, state legislators had experience with both slavery and pauper apprenticeship and were informed by both systems as they devised gradual emancipation laws. During the late eighteenth century, many children of color, whether born of free or slave mothers, grew up in bondage with little hope for economic independence as adults.

In one significant respect, pauper apprenticeship differed from *post nati* service: pauper apprenticeship was governed by a paper contract, a formal indenture, which set out the terms of the master-child relationship. This contract obligated the master to provide necessities of life and (in many cases) literacy education and training in a manual skill. The contract obligated the child to live with, obey, and labor for the master until adulthood, an age which varied with the sex and race of the child. Different levels of maintenance, education, and eventual payment written into the indentures show that New England officials did not intend to treat with equity all children who came under their care. Rather, pauper apprenticeship prepared different children for different futures.

This study of pauper apprenticeship rests in part on an analysis of 759 indentures enacted between 1720 and 1820 in six communities, each of which had a significant Narragansett presence in the eighteenth century: New London, Connecticut; Westerly, South Kingstown, Jamestown, Warwick, and Providence, Rhode Island, towns which lay in a swath from southwest to northeast along the Atlantic coast of southern New England.⁸ Westerly and South Kingstown, Rhode Island, claimed land that had been the heart of the Narragansett royal sachems' territory, containing sites of winter encampments in

7. Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), summarizes the effect of these laws on children of slaves: "masters could have the services of young Negroes merely for the expense of raising them to working age" (p. 200). Specific laws include "An Act authorizing the manumission of negroes, mulattoes, and others, and for the gradual abolition of slavery" (February 1784) and "An Act repealing part of an Act entitled 'An Act authorizing the manumission of negroes, mulattoes and others, and for the gradual abolition of slavery'" (October 1785), in *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England, 10: 1784-1792*, ed. John Russell Bartlett (Providence, R.I.: Providence Press Co., 1865), pp. 7-8 and 132-33. See also Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), esp. pp. 50-118.

8. Westerly includes two towns that were carved out of Westerly in the mid-1700s, Hopkinton and Charlestown. This set of 759 indentures is a subset of a larger database of over 2,200 pauper apprenticeship indentures drawn from various New England town records for the period from 1720 to 1820.

the woods and summer villages near the shore. In 1709 an area of Westerly near the South Kingstown border was officially reserved for the Narragansett, but the geographic boundaries of this reservation did not respect the access of the Narragansett to customary fishing sites, hunting sites, sacred ceremonial sites, and the transportation network that united the region; nor did it take into account the economic and social pressures that propelled Native people outward to seek a livelihood in English-speaking communities, especially in port towns. Thus, throughout the eighteenth century, many Narragansett continued to live year-round or seasonally in these six towns, often attracted by work opportunities associated with agriculture, commerce, and seafaring.

This essay rests not only on the indenture records of these towns, but on Narragansett oral tradition, preserved over generations by elders appointed for this task, and presented here by Ella Sekatau; she has also researched written documentation concerning Narragansett families, a project undertaken as part of her work as tribal genealogist in preparation for the tribe's federal application for formal re-recognition and acknowledgment, which was achieved in 1983. This evidence shows the Narragansett were well aware of the threat pauper apprenticeship posed to their children and they responded to this threat by emphasizing the importance of old traditions in religious and ceremonial practices, deliberately seeking to preserve their culture and carry it forward.

Identifying the Native children bound as pauper apprentices requires careful research, since magistrates employed racial designations ambiguously in the written record, changing the terms used and sometimes describing Native Americans as "Negro," "black," or some other term. Lewis, the young son of "Indian Betty" was described as "Indian or mustee [half-"Indian"]," by the Warwick clerk who wrote out his indenture in 1747.⁹ A child named Santee, bound in 1757, was described by the Providence clerk as "Indian" in one copy of the boy's indenture and "molatto" in another copy.¹⁰ The labels used and the meanings attached to those labels shifted over time and varied from place to place. Consequently, this study includes all children identified in the record as other than Anglo-American, but pays particular attention to children who can be readily identified as Native American, either because record keepers used such terms as "Indian" and "mustee" that most reliably indicated Native parentage, or because other sources specifically identified children as Native. For example,

the clerk who wrote out Lydia Pisquish's indenture in 1746 did not refer to her as Native but rather described her as the "daughter of Jacob Pisquish," and other records identify Jacob Pisquish as an "Indian" man.¹¹

At least one-third of all the children bound out were identified as "Indian," "mustee," "mulatto," "Negro," "black," or "of color" (251 of a total 759 indentures, or 33 percent). More than half these children of color were specifically labeled as "Indian" or "mustee" (129 of 251), and another 20 percent were labeled "black" (52 of 251), a term which definitely included people who were in fact Native American.¹² In the towns under study, Native American children were clearly overrepresented in pauper apprenticeship.¹³

Table 2 summarizes the inequitable terms of these pauper apprenticeship indentures. In general, boys received more favorable contract terms than girls, and Anglo-American children received more favorable terms than other children, especially those identified as "Indian" or "mustee." Native children were usually bound at earlier ages and for longer terms; they received less adequate training in basic literacy and in work skills. Overall, Native girls were the most disadvantaged by the system—bound at an earlier age, freed at a later age, and promised less education and training than all other bound children.

The children bound out were predominantly male. Overall, two-thirds of the indentures were for boys, although girls and boys were nearly at parity in the general population, according to the 1782 census.¹⁴ This does not mean that girls labored any less than boys, only that female labor was less frequently secured formally in a contract regulated by local authorities. The documentary record is dotted with instances of girls of color working for Anglo-American masters without an official indenture, and oral tradition relates that Narragansett

11. Order to bind out Lydia Pisquish, TCM 9 June 1746, Warwick TCR 2:43; Jacob Pisquish was one of several "Indian" men appointed as jurors on the inquest concerning the death of "an Indian woman named Sarah," 30 June 1720, Warwick Justice Court Records, 1718–1729, MS 221, Rhode Island Historical Society.

12. Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau, "The Right to a Name: Narragansett People and Rhode Island Officials in the Revolutionary Era," *Ethnohistory* 44:3 (1997): 444–47.

13. Colonial census records did not distinguish Native American from African or African American; instead the usual categories were "black" and "white." At mid-century, the population in the study towns were counted as follows: 522 "blacks" constituted 8.9 percent of the total population of 5,888 in New London (1774); 114 "blacks" constituted 5.0 percent of the total population of 2,291 in Westerly (1755); 516 "blacks" constituted 27.0 percent of the total population of 1,913 in South Kingstown (1755); 156 "blacks" constituted 30.2 percent of the total population of 517 in Jamestown (1755); 227 "blacks" constituted 11.9 percent of the total population of 1,911 in Warwick (1755); and 262 "blacks" constituted 8.2 percent of the total population of 3,159 in Providence (1755). Figures extrapolated from Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), pp. 59, 67.

9. Order to bind Lewis, son of Indian Betty, TCM 20 June 1747, Warwick TCR 2:59.

10. TCM 29 November 1757, Providence TCR 4:163.; Indenture of Santee, 29 November 1757, Providence Town Papers (hereafter PTP), 1:139, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, R.I.

girls took on such menial service as a means to earn a few pennies. But officials were especially interested in securing by contract the labor of boys, who would be doing more lucrative farm and craft work and thereby creating a greater profit for their masters.

The average age at binding for all the children in this study was between seven and eight years of age for girls and between nine and ten years of age for boys. However, more "Indian" and "mustee" children were bound between the ages of three and four than at any other age, reflecting both Native custom of acknowledging a child as a member of the community after three winters and the Anglo-American custom of gender segregation around this age. The predominance of such children among the apprentices suggests that Anglo-Americans had recognized the laboring potential of young Native boys and girls.

Forty-eight percent of Anglo-American pauper apprentice boys were promised full literacy training of reading, writing, and cyphering. Only 15 percent of boys of color were promised this training and, significantly, less than 5 percent of boys labeled "Indian" or "mustee" were promised such training. Girls of color were rarely promised reading and writing (much less math), and only one of the 56 Native girls was promised education in writing. Clearly, pauper apprenticeship was not a reliable means of literacy education for Native children.

Skill training was customarily promised to pauper apprentices. Most frequently, this meant "husbandry" or "farming" for boys and "housewifery" for girls. But about 40 percent of Anglo-American boys were promised some additional trade such as carpentry, navigation, or blacksmithing. Less than 6 percent of boys of color were promised some trade (three of the boys were Native), and in these cases it was always the least remunerative trades such as ropemaking or shoemaking. Only three girls of color, all three Native, were promised any skill training, and in each case it was weaving. Pauper apprenticeship did not customarily train Native children in trades that would enable them to earn an independent living as adults.

The age at which a pauper apprentice was set free, the "age of freedom," was conventionally eighteen years of age for Anglo-American girls and twenty-one years of age for Anglo-American boys, but children of color were frequently bound for longer terms. Over one-third of the girls of color were bound past age eighteen (usually to age twenty-one), and nearly one-quarter of the boys of color were bound past age twenty-one (usually to age twenty-four). Significantly, "Indian" and

14. According to the Rhode Island 1782 census, the sex ratio for children 0–15 years of age was 103.6 males for every 100 females. (Jay Mack Holbrook, *Rhode Island 1782 Census* [Oxford, Mass.: Holbrook Research Institute, 1979], p. ix.) Of the 507 indentures for Anglo-American children in this study, 347 (68.4 percent) were for boys and 160 (31.6 percent) were for girls. Of the 251 indentures for children of color, 161 (64.1 percent) were for boys and 90 (35.9 percent) were for girls.

"mustee" children were almost always the ones bound for these longer terms; only three of the boys and two of the girls labeled "Indian" or "mustee" received lesser terms. Prolonged service was a hallmark of the Native children's indentures.

Freedom dues, the eventual remuneration for labor that the master was obligated to pay the servant at the end of the contract term, were usually written into the indenture. The standard was for a child to be promised a new outfit (or two) of clothing, with rarely anything further specified. The quality and quantity of the clothing varied widely according to the conventions of the community about what was "suitable" or "fitting" for the servant. Narragansett oral tradition relates that Native children were all too often set free during the warmer months, when the previous year's clothing would pass as "suitable" freedom clothing. The indentures written into the town records confirm this: only 14 percent of "Indian" and "mustee" children were freed during the coldest months of November, December, January, and February (6 of 42 cases where a freedom month was indicated); the great majority, 86 percent, were freed during the milder seasons of the year. In contrast, 24 percent of Anglo-American children (28 of 117 cases) were freed during these winter months.

By the terms of their contracts, then, Native children were disadvantaged in literacy and skill training, age at binding and age at freedom, and freedom dues; they were less prepared for independent adulthood than Anglo-American children. To understand how this apprenticeship system threatened Native culture and functioned as slavery, it is necessary to move beyond the contract terms to the "big picture" of pauper apprenticeship presented in written and oral records.

How did Native children come to the attention of authorities? Town leaders usually bound out a child in response to a "complaint" lodged by an inhabitant, and in these cases the informant was often someone in whose household the child had been living. "Indian girl" Elisabeth Spywood, for example, had been living for some years with Samuel Stafford's family, when Stafford asked the Warwick council for an indenture of the child.¹⁵ Similarly, David Larkin asked for an indenture of an eleven-year-old "black boy" who had been living at his house ever since he was about three years of age.¹⁶ The reason for the child's presence was often because the mothers were working there as domestic servants or as other kinds of day laborers, bound economically if not legally. These were not parentless children; as in slavery, the child took the status of the mother, and a servant mother "made" a servant child in many cases. "Indian Betty," the mother of Lewis, was the "servant woman" of Richard Greene, who wanted her son as a

15. Order to bind Elisabeth Spywood, TCM 11 February 1750, Warwick TCR 2:89–90.

16. TCM 12 September 1791, Warwick TCR 4:303–4.

pauper apprentice.¹⁷ The mothers of "Indian garle" Cate and "mustee girl" Jinney also were in bound service to Anglo-American masters; they agreed to let their daughters be bound out in order to avoid official harassment associated with the "charges" and supposed lost work time when their babies were born.¹⁸

Why did masters desire to have these children as apprentices? The language of the indentures suggests that most masters probably thought in terms of potential earnings, that is, how the child's labor might profit the master's family. For example, one South Kingstown man offered to take an indenture of Jeremiah Londoner if the council would "give him four pounds in money with sd boy" and extend the contract to the boy's twenty-second birthday.¹⁹ In Lydia Pisquish's case, the value of her labor was obvious: her master was required to pay the town 65 shillings "in cash, for the privilege of taking her an apprentice."²⁰ Such cases underscore how pauper apprenticeship for Native children was not far removed from the buying and selling of slavery.

Jeremiah Londoner's case shows how a master's economic motivation could be revealed by his efforts to secure a prolonged indenture. Similarly, Richard Greene asked that "Indian boy" Lewis be bound to age twenty-three; the Warwick council considered his request, but decided the boy would be free at age twenty-two.²¹ Another master asked that the indenture of his "mustee" servant be rewritten, because the original contract had mistakenly bound the boy only to age twenty, when the council and master intended that he be bound to age twenty-four.²²

The longer binding of Native American children was usually explained as appropriate payback for the master's prior care of the child, thus exposing the long-term relationship through which such children often came to pauper apprenticeship. Richard Greene justified his request for Lewis's lengthy indenture by reason of the boy's having been "some considerable charge to him."²³ Similarly, Joseph Underwood asked that the "mustee" child Pharoh be bound to age twenty-four because the child had been "left" with him "near a year since" by the boy's mother, "an Indian squaw called Bethia."²⁴ Oral

17. Order to bind Lewis, son of Indian Betty, TCM 20 June 1747, Warwick TCR 2:59.

18. Orders to bind out Cate and Jinney, TCM 6 February 1727 and 12 April 1756, South Kingstown TCR 2:43-44 and 5:24.

19. Order to bind out Jeremiah Londoner, TCM 14 June 1742, South Kingstown TCR 3:168.

20. Order to bind Lydia Pisquish, 9 June 1746, Warwick TCR 2:43.

21. Order to bind Lewis, son of Indian Betty, TCM 20 June 1747, Warwick TCR 2:59.

22. TCM 20 August 1753, South Kingstown TCR 4:237.

23. Order to bind Lewis, son of Indian Betty, TCM 20 June 1747, Warwick TCR 2:59.

tradition relates that such contracts were less real payment for the supposed costs of a child's maintenance than an opportunity for masters to coopt labor as compensation for losses and injuries they had sustained at the hands of other Native Americans.

The Narragansett hated this system of pauper apprenticeship. They deplored the suggestion or assumption that Native pauper apprentices were parentless children who had been abandoned by their mothers and rescued by Anglo-Americans. Native people perceived that magistrates and masters labeled some children "mustee," naming the mother (the "Indian") but not the father, in order to deny these children a full Native ancestry and, as "Negro" slavery became more widespread in New England, give officials a ready excuse to coopt the youngsters' labor. Native mothers characterized in the record as "leaving" their children had, in many cases, simply gone away for a few days, participating in Native ceremonies or separating themselves temporarily from the company of others during their menstrual cycles; in any case, they had given their children into the care of other servants during their absence. In other cases, as oral tradition and the town records confirm, Native women unable to care for their children independently in a house of their own deliberately placed their children in the best non-Native household available, putting them where they were most likely to receive reliable care. Moll Pero, for example, "left" her five-year-old son in Joseph Underwood's household in 1752. Five years later, Underwood appealed to the Jamestown councilmen to give him an indenture of the boy, since the mother "though often called upon still refuses to bind him." In all likelihood, Pero had found a way to ensure the competent care of her son in a nearby household, probably one in which she labored periodically, without having to sign a formal indenture until absolutely necessary.²⁵

Some Native mothers placed their children where they themselves labored on a regular basis, so that they could continue to tend the children while they worked for their employers. These children might be by colonial law under the authority of an Anglo-American master, but their day-to-day care was managed by relatives who kept a close eye on them. Or a Native mother might place two children together, so that one could care for the other. Dan Weeden asked the Jamestown

24. TCM 15 April 1747, Jamestown TCR 2:11.

25. TCM 27 March 1762, Jamestown TCR 1:143-44. Another particularly illuminating case is that of Marcy Scooner, who "left" her daughter Hannah at the household of Matthew Greenhold before Scooner departed the town to pursue work elsewhere (TCM 3 September 1766, Jamestown TCR 1:229). This placement strategy occasionally had an air of desperation, as in the case of two-year-old "Indian" girl Sarah, who was "left" at George Babcock's house by an "Indian squaw" who was "unknown" to Babcock; the South Kingstown council bound the toddler to Babcock until she was twenty years old (TCM 9 April 1770, South Kingstown TCR 5:228).

councilmen for indentures of two Indian children, a four-year-old boy and a fifteen-year-old girl, whose mother, the Indian woman Betty Jack, had "left" them with him "for a maintenance" for the previous six months. Weeden viewed the indentures as "satisfaction" for the "extraordinary trouble" of feeding and clothing the children for six months; in fact, he probably had been well recompensed by the fifteen-year-old girl's labor during that time. Betty Jack apparently viewed the indenture as a way of making sure her daughter and son lived together in a household of her own choosing.²⁶ Similarly, "Indian" brothers Cesar and Jemmy (sons of Indian woman Tabitha) and "mustee" siblings Harry and Sarah (children of Indian woman Betty) were placed together in South Kingstown.²⁷

Narragansett people understood that pauper apprenticeship turned Native children into laborers. They were trained in Anglo-American workways, expected to labor every day without respect for Native work traditions. They were trained to accept the unfair allocation of labor and inequitable remuneration for it. By virtue of such coerced labor, Native children contributed significantly to the construction of New England, building the stone walls and dwelling houses, the fields and pastures, the churches and shops of Anglo-Americans.

In other ways, too, the Narragansett perceived that pauper apprenticeship made captives of Native children and undercut the continuity of Native culture. Pauper apprentices were taught English. They were raised to respect Anglo-American gender relations, family relations, and racial hierarchies. They were expected to participate in Christian rituals and practices, attending church with the master's family, listening to Bible reading and prayers at home. Virtually every indenture specified that children were to be provided with clothing suitable for attending church on Sundays, and some indicated that a Bible should be included in freedom dues. Native children were kept in service throughout their growing up years, with no legal access to the rites of passage associated with their mothers' culture. Marriage and parenthood were delayed while these young people were exposed to exploitation both in terms of sex and in terms of labor by abusive masters.

As part of their cultural captivity, Native American children were often robbed of family names, severing their connection to their parents: "an Indian boy called Moses"; "an Indian garl called Nans."²⁸ In some cases, not even a first name is recorded: South Kingstown magistrates ordered the binding out of "a mustee boy of eleven years of age," without ever recording the child's name.²⁹ This practice of eliminating

26. TCM 27 August 1754, Jamestown TCR 1:75-76.

27. TCM 13 September 1742 and 13 October 1772, South Kingstown TCR 3:176 and 6:7.

28. TCM 15 April 1741, Jamestown TCR 1:303; Order to bind out Nans, TCM 30 August 1731, Westerly TCR 2:260.

family names left the way clear for the child to become associated with the master's name, as in slavery. For example, Mary Perry, "mustee" servant of William Mumford, gave birth in 1743 to a "mustee" daughter, Rexom, who was bound as a pauper apprentice to her mother's master. Rexom in turn gave birth to John, who was then bound as a pauper apprentice to his mother's master. When John was recruited as a soldier in the Revolutionary War in 1781 (at age seventeen), he was listed as "John Mumford" and a little later his mother was listed as "Rexom Mumford."³⁰ Three generations of bondage had made the descendants of Mary Perry into Mumfords.

The plight of Native American children is revealed especially well in the case of "Jem" (no last name), a seven- or eight-year-old "mustee" child bound out in Jamestown in 1762. Joseph Clarke explained the boy's history this way: Several years previously, Jem (then about five years old) had been "left" by his mother, an Indian woman called Mary, in the household of Samuel Clarke, Joseph Clarke's father. But Samuel Clarke had died recently, and Joseph, his son and heir, wanted a more formal arrangement. Joseph Clarke perceived that Jem, at seven or eight years of age, was now "grown fit for business." But Jem's mother "intends to take him away," Clarke reported. The council agreed to bind the boy until he turned twenty-one years old, "a matter of thirteen or fourteen years."³¹

A surface reading of the town records might suggest that Jem had been abandoned by his mother Mary and that the household of Samuel Clarke rescued this little boy and raised him (with no profit to themselves) for several years. Clarke's son Joseph, with a better head for business than his now deceased father, asked for reasonable repayment for this care. The town fathers ordered the indenture, thankful that this parentless Indian child did not become a strain on the town's treasury. Such an interpretation, however, does not account for the presence of Jem's mother, Mary, who apparently constituted a serious threat to Clarke's control of Jem.

Another interpretation of the record, informed by the larger context of documentary evidence and oral tradition, illuminates the way pauper apprenticeship could put Native children in a tug-of-war between

29. TCM 11 April 1748, South Kingstown TCR 4:145.

30. Order to bind out Rexom, daughter of Hannah Perry (TCM 14 April 1746, South Kingstown TCR 4:94); order to bind out John, son of Rexom (TCM 13 July 1767, South Kingstown TCR 5:184); enlistment record of John Mumford, Fifth Company of the Rhode Island Regiment (4 January 1781, "Regimental Book, Rhode Island Regiment, 1781-82," 92, Rhode Island State Archives [RISA]; pay certificate of John Mumford ("Certificates of the Rhode Island Line [1784]," 25, RISA).

31. Order to bind out Jem, son of "Indian woman called Mary," TCM 27 March 1762, Jamestown TCR 1:143. Samuel Clarke's death is verified through the record of his will and inventory of his personal estate, 26 December 1761, Jamestown Wills 1:135 and 1:139-40.

parent and master. The Indian woman named Mary probably worked in the household of Samuel Clarke. Mary probably made an agreement with Clarke, whereby she gave her son daily care while she performed work for her employer, cooking, cleaning, gardening, laundry. As was common with Native American servants, Mary may have left Clarke's household periodically, to participate in Native ceremonies or seasonal travels, and when she did so, she probably "left" the boy temporarily in the care of other female servants in Clarke's household. The arrangement suited both Clarke and Mary. But then Samuel Clarke died. Mary did not wish to work for the son, nor did she wish her son to be maintained in the Clarke household any longer. When Joseph Clarke learned of Mary's intent to leave, he was galvanized to action. Clarke valued Mary's labor—perhaps the smooth functioning of his household depended upon the services she performed—but he had no legal way to force her to stay. So he concentrated instead on Jem, figuring that if he could bind the son, the mother would stay as well, out of concern for the boy's welfare. Hence Clarke requested a formal contract.

Joseph Clarke successfully argued that thirteen or fourteen years of Jem's labor was appropriate repayment for two or three years of the child's being fed, clothed, and lodged at Clarke's expense. It was this sort of strange calculus that benefited Anglo-American masters and worked to the detriment of Native children. Narragansett oral tradition tells us that many Anglo-American farmers, shopkeepers, and other householders profited in this way from the system of pauper apprenticeship, enjoying long years of practically free menial labor performed by Indian youngsters and their mothers.

In the hands of New England officials, pauper apprenticeship bound Native children in a system of "unfreedom" that functioned much like slavery. The system grew out of bitter relations between embattled enemies and waged war on children who had not been destroyed at Mystic or the Great Swamp. The evidence of both documentary and oral sources indicates that this form of unfree labor provided economic profit to the masters, separated children from their parents' culture and placed them in an inferior position in another culture, and trained young people for an adulthood of menial service on behalf of others. Pauper apprenticeship was a different name for slavery.

Table 1. Pauper apprenticeships of all children and children of color in six New England towns: New London, Connecticut; and Jamestown, Providence, South Kingstown, Warwick, and Westerly, Rhode Island.

	All Children	Children of Color
Five Year Intervals	Total	Total
1720–25	10	2
1726–30	20	13
1731–35	17	5
1736–40	16	10
1741–45	26	12
1746–50	41	18
1751–55	56	22
1756–60	50	28
1761–65	73	15
1766–70	59	16
1771–75	65	12
1776–80	71	17
1781–85	43	12
1786–90	42	10
1791–95	67	11
1796–1800	43	13
1801–05	16	11
1806–10	13	8
1811–15	18	11
1816–20	12	5
Grand Total	758	251

Table 2. Summary of Apprenticeship Indentures.

	European American Children	Children of Color	Native American Children
Total number	507	251	155
Females	160 (31.6%)	90 (35.9%)	56 (35.7%)
Males	347 (68.4%)	161 (64.1%)	99 (64.3%)
Age at binding, girls	7.6	7.1	7.1
Age at binding, boys	10.0	8.27	7.26
Age at freedom, girls	18	18	37% bound to 21
Age at freedom, boys	21	21	23% bound to 24
Read and write (girls)	46 (28.8%)	7 (7.7%)	1 (2.2%)
Read, write, cypher (boys)	167 (48.1%)	24 (14.9%)	4 (4.8%)
Skill training, girls	10 (6.25%)	3 (3.3%)	3 (6.5%)
Skill training, boys	138 (39.8%)	9 (5.6%)	3 (3.6%)

Source: Indentures for Charlestown, Hopkinton, Jamestown, South Kingstown, Warwick, and Westerly, Rhode Island, are contained in the town council records, located in the individual town halls. Indentures for Providence, Rhode Island, are contained in the Providence Town Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, and in the Providence town council records, Providence City Hall. Indentures for New London, Connecticut, are located in Selectmen Indentures [1740-1795], New London Town Papers 1674-1925, Box 3, Archives Record Group 62, Connecticut State Library, Hartford.