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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
IRVINE

Subsumed Childhood: The Indentures of New York's Children 1690-1710

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

by

Hayley Margules Arden

Thesis Committee:  
Associate Professor Joan Malczewski  
Associate Professor Andrew Highsmith  
Associate Professor James Robertson

2019



## **DEDICATION**

To

Everyone who has supported me along the way.

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I thank the New York Historical Society for their commitment to providing historical records for public consumption. I also thank the University of California, Irvine for their financial support throughout this process and for giving us the space to form such an incredible intellectual community.

## **ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS**

Subsumed Childhood: The Indentures of New York's Children 1690-1710

By

Hayley Margules Arden

Master of Arts in History

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Joan Malczewski, Chair

The conception of children as historical subjects has been a long time coming in the field of history, starting with authors like Philip Greven arguing that children must be considered as more than just extensions of family units. Despite acknowledgement of the importance of children in colonial history, there has been little work done on the ways that attempts to maneuver children through economic and social life reflected parental attitudes about childhood. Little work has been done to address the frequent dearth of research into how children's identities were purposefully constructed by indenture in the colonial period. My paper addresses these issues by taking a close look at the historical archive of New York's indenture records at the turn of the 18th century. In particular, this paper looks for narrative threads as well as changing attitudes towards indenture across time. I argue that adults, both parents and indenturers, used indenture as a means to shape and control the next generation of New York by strengthening class dynamics and ensuring citizen status for children engaged in indenture contracts. This project sheds light on the use of indenture to construct childhood and accomplish a wide range of social normalizations from reinforcing contemporary gender rolls to creating a pseudo-parenthood through the master-servant relationship.





## INTRODUCTION

December 4th, 1699 was likely a chilly day with a reasonable chance of rain. The Collections of the New York Historical Society relate quite the chilling occurrence. Richard and Elizabeth Buckmaster brought their children Richard, Mary, and Hannah before the future mayor of New York City, Jacobus van Cordlandt, and long-time New York city clerk, William Sharpas in order to apprentice them to three different indenturers.<sup>1</sup> In turn-of-the-century New York, indenture and apprenticeship went hand-in-hand. A careful read of William Sharpas's New York city-clerk records shows that while not all apprentices were indentured, the vast majority of those indentured were apprentices.<sup>2</sup> No other record of the Buckmasters is readily apparent, though I cannot dismiss the possibility that an archive somewhere in New York may contain other scraps of information as to their fate. Far from a unique case, the Buckmasters are only one example of children signed to labor in colonial New York. What we do know is that each Buckmaster child was sent to serve a different master, away from their parents and siblings. Richard, Mary, and Hannah were not alone. From 1690 to 1710, hundreds of children started or continued indentureships in New York City and the surrounding areas.

Historiography on indentured children has frequently highlighted their dual status as children and workers. In exploring indenture, this paper leans heavily on the rich class history that surrounds colonial Massachusetts, the early Republic period, and indentured servitude. The construction of social position in Seth Rockman's *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* discusses the household as an economic unit as well as servants in

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<sup>1</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1885*. 21, 582, 583.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

their masters' class creation, and the perpetuation of class generationally.<sup>3</sup> This ties neatly into *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*, edited by Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, who analyze place and parental authority as it relates to servanthood, relating the economic status of servant and child.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Barry Levy's article "Girls and Boys: Poor Children and the Labor Market in Colonial Massachusetts" connects religious concepts with the role of authority in New England.<sup>5</sup> These works and others demonstrate the power dynamics within a household as coming from a lordship over members of the household, often equating regal, parental, and household authority. This paper particularly explores parental authority and how it is transferred from the head of one household to another in indenture contracts. I specifically look at the contractual terms and exceptions in these documents to consider how the language of indentureship contracts constructed an understanding of parental authority wherein parents transferred that authority to indenturers. The language of indentureship contracts demonstrates adult efforts to socialize children through this transfer of parental authority. I identify how adults sought to incorporate children into an imperial workforce.

### **Child and Parent in Early America**

Children rarely leave written records. Studying their lived experiences in the colonial period is difficult, just as it is difficult to study the lived experiences of any oft-ignored group in North American history. To explore the construction of childhood by their parents and

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<sup>3</sup> Seth Rockman. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press), 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Wallis Herndon, and John E. Murray, eds. *Children Bound to Labor the Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Barry Levy. "Girls and Boys: Poor Children and the Labor Market in Colonial Massachusetts." *Pennsylvania History* 64 (1997): 287-307.

indenturers, we must necessarily reconsider documents left about children, not by them. As Philip Greven, Lisa Wilson, and others have argued that does not mean that we cannot treat children with respect, and as historical subjects.<sup>6</sup> Children are the subjects of this article, not the agents of this article. By looking at children's contracts, this article's focus is on the adults who wrote them. Those creating the expectations of children in indentureship contracts are adults. It is these adults and their relationships, desires, and hopes for children that those children must contend with as they approach adulthood. After all, these children grow up. As John Demos and Stephanie Coontz have argued, childhood is constructed, sometimes deliberately and sometimes unintentionally, as adults try to make children perform how they want.<sup>7</sup> Children take and leave aspects of this construction as they develop and grow.<sup>8</sup>

The construction of childhood often depended upon where children were born. For children in turn of the seventeenth century New York, whether or not they were to grow into valued members of society depended largely on their ability to own property. If their parents wanted them to earn a stable income, they would have wanted their children to be farmers, artisans, or merchants.<sup>9</sup> It is a common theme throughout English North America that parents

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<sup>6</sup> For more, read Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 1977. Also, Lisa Wilson, "Patriarchy and Marriage in Colonial New England." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1998. Also, Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, "Reflections on the History of Children and Childhood in the Postmodern Era." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 2000. Also, Stephanie Coontz, "Mythology and History in the Study of the American Family." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Coontz, "Mythology and History in the Study of the American Family." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1992. John Demos, "Digging Up Family History: Myths, Realities, and Works in Progress." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1986.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Coontz, "Mythology and History in the Study of the American Family." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1992. John Demos, "Digging Up Family History: Myths, Realities, and Works in Progress." In *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Wallis Herndon, and John E. Murray, eds. *Children Bound to Labor the Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

attempt to construct a childhood by focusing on what is most important to their societies.<sup>10</sup> Up the coast in the Massachusetts Bay, for example, being a member of a church was the only real way to be a full member of society.<sup>11</sup> In New York, freemanship allowed for participation in the political sphere. In Massachusetts, the issue of church membership had already caused many social conflicts for the colony. With the Halfway Covenant in the 1660s, when the powerful of the founding generation of Massachusetts Bay weakened religious standards in the colony to ensure that their children would maintain a hold on power in the coming decades. Massachusetts was a religious colony.<sup>12</sup> New Netherlands was decidedly a merchant venture.<sup>13</sup> In New York, societal advancement and participation relied on being a “free person”, granted freeman status by the city, or being apprenticed to a freeman.<sup>14</sup> Indentureship was one of the key ways in which the children of non-free persons became free persons. This connection is further reinforced in the records left by William Sharpas, where a single collection includes freemanship records and indentureship records. In English North America, parents maneuvered within existing structures to advance what they perceived as the interests as their children.

Understanding parenthood in the context of these exchanges is important to identifying the ways that parental authority was subsumed by an indenturer. When a New York family indentured one of their children, that child entered a new household.<sup>15</sup> In *Children Bound to*

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<sup>10</sup> Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977)

<sup>11</sup> David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Owen Stanwood, *The Empire Reformed: English America in the Age of the Glorious Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> England and Wales. *An Act for Exempting Their Majesties Protestant Subjects, Dissenting from the Church of England, From the Penalties of Certain Laws*. By Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb. London: Printed by Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb, Printers to the King and Queens Most Excellent Majesties, 1689.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray. “A Proper and Instructive Education: Raising Children in Pauper Apprenticeship.” In *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.

*Labor*, Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray relate the economic and social status of servant and child.<sup>16</sup> They confirm what William Sharpas's documents show—that an indenturer assumed responsibility over the child to train them in a craft, to teach them to speak and write English, and to train them for labor.<sup>17</sup> An indenturer's responsibility and their authority went hand in hand.

The Crown instructed the Massachusetts Bay Colony specifically to indenture every poor child “belonging to such town, to be apprentices” for a period lasting until the boys were twenty one, and girls were eighteen or married.<sup>18</sup> Indentured children in New England were considered to be under contract “as effectual to all intents and purposes as if any such child were of full age, and by indenture of covenant had bound him or herself.”<sup>19</sup> In New England, then, the power of state authority was already supplanting that of not only the churches, but also of the parent. State authority objectified parenthood as exchangeable between one parental authority and another. In Massachusetts, this was codified in the official charter. In New York, the colony seems to have taken it upon themselves through the official acknowledgement of indentureship contracts. In each childhood indenture relayed in Sharpas's records, parents ceded parental authority to people who required additional labor and were responsible for not only providing educational support to a child, but also for subsuming the role of parent.<sup>20</sup>

### **Educating for a Protestant Labor Force**

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1885*. 21.

<sup>18</sup> The charter granted by Their Majesties King William and Queen Mary, to the inhabitants of the province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England, 163.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 163.

<sup>20</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1885*.

For parents in Early America, preparing their children for the rest of their lives took many forms. As Philip Greven argues in *The Protestant Temperament*, ideas about religion dramatically impacted parental priorities for scholastic education. The earlier Dutch colonial project instituted a near-universal schooling plan that allowed for almost all children to learn to read the Bible, and passed laws allowing for corporal punishment to the end of raising more moral children.<sup>21</sup> With the transition from Dutch to English control in 1674, Dutch schools that had been previously run by the city were transferred to the church.<sup>22</sup> These schools still taught religious principles, reading, and writing, but they did not serve as the main source of career education for young members of New York society. Like in the rest of the English Empire, indentureship did that.<sup>23</sup> Because indenture and apprenticeship served not only as methods of entering society as a freeperson, but also as preparation for a trade, they served as critical times that adults could use to shape children's understandings of the world and act on their own authority to expose children to what they wanted.

### **Control of a Colony**

Adults in colonial New York tightly identified with their Empire's imperial projects.<sup>24</sup>

Their thoughts about those projects translated to what they taught their children. Adults equated

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<sup>21</sup> William E. Nelson, *The Common Law in Colonial America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013). Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). 113.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ruth Wallis Herndon, and John E. Murray, eds. *Children Bound to Labor the Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009. Levy, Barry. "Girls and Boys: Poor Children and the Labor Market in Colonial Massachusetts." *Pennsylvania History* 64 (1997): 287-307. Ceppi, Elisabeth. *Invisible Masters: Gender, Race, and the Economy of Service in Early New England*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2018. Newman, Simon P. *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Salinger, Sharon. "Labor, Markets, and Opportunity: Indentured Servitude in Early America." *Labor History* 38, no. 2-3 (1997): 311-38.

<sup>24</sup> Owen Stanwood, *The Empire Reformed: English America in the Age of the Glorious Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate*

state and parental authority. When the English took the colony in 1674, New York's still largely Dutch population inhabited an evolving colonial space. New York was in a state of flux at the turn of the seventeenth century. Back in the English imperial metropole, religion played a key part in the cultural conception of what it meant to be English. The reign of James II, deemed a Papist in 1685, entailed many a conflict over the Divine Right of Kings and religious freedom.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, Englanders and New Englanders would not stand for a Catholic king, and both preferred a Dutch Protestant over the sitting monarch of England. England acquired New Amsterdam, a formerly Dutch colony, and William of Orange, a Dutch noble, acquired England. William of Orange finished the Glorious Revolution and claimed the English throne in 1688.<sup>26</sup> He held it until he died in 1702.<sup>27</sup> Anne, James's daughter, claimed the throne upon William's death. These Protestant rulers continued the colonial project in English North America.<sup>28</sup> For New York, this meant the primacy of Protestant modes of thought and Protestant ideas about the importance of work.<sup>29</sup> For New York parents, this reinforced the importance of providing a path to what they considered good, respectable labor that would enrich their children economically and morally.

## Sources and Methodology

The archive that provides a backbone for this project comprises the remaining notes and collections of New York city-clerk William Sharpas. The New York Historical Society could

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*Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Owen Stanwood, *The Empire Reformed: English America in the Age of the Glorious Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Owen Stanwood, *The Empire Reformed: English America in the Age of the Glorious Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).



only manage to preserve a portion of the notes Sharpas stored. Pages of Sharpas's notes are missing from what was preserved, much less what was never recovered. Our archive is limited, from what was preserved or lost to what Sharpas and other city officials saw as important to record in the first place. The fact that these are records rather than original copies means that we need to consider what may have been changed.

In 1885, the New York Historical Society published New York's Indentures of Apprenticeship from 1694 to 1708. There are approximately one hundred and ten total records in this document, and approximately one hundred of those are for indentured children.

These records, without fault, document the name of the person indentured, the name of the indenturer, their trade, how long the indentureship will last, and the terms of the agreement—though sometimes only stipulating usual terms, as mentioned above. Thirty-seven records specifically record the age of the child. Where age is not specified, I deduce from additional information in the record, including whether or not their parents had to affirm the legality of the agreement, the length of the term, and where the master was required to provide for the indentured individual's schooling, a different stipulation in these records from whether or not the indenturer was required to teach the indentured to read, write, or perform arithmetic. These additions to the record, as well as a comparison to the stipulations in the contracts where age was specified, has me fairly comfortable in claiming that the records I am dealing with are records to do with the indentureships of children, and where I am not certain, I will not include the case. This archive is constructed by William Sharpas and the other clerks in New York as agents of the English Empire and the city of New York.

### **Contractual Terms and Normative Parental Authority**

This study revolves around a consideration of the language of indentureship contracts. With the grounding provided above regarding what the contracts looked like more broadly, we can now consider how the language operates on a micro-level—these contracts both delineated expectation and exception to expectation. William Sharpas employs the phrase “usual terms” in almost every contract other than the first dozen, likely as a time-saving measure to ease his record keeping. Exceptions are often delineated with the language “the usual terms and”. Earlier contracts spell out what these “usual terms” were. While the phrase “usual terms” is not itself the object of study, what those usual terms were directly impacts the overall expectations and exceptions for indentured and indenturer.

For ten-year-old Nicolas Auger, the indenture contract spells out both his obligation to his indenturer, and his indenturer’s obligation to him, including restrictions for the exercise of his sexuality. As the first example in Sharpas’s preserved records, there are no abbreviations of details withheld the way that later contracts use the shorthand “usual terms”. From this and the similarity to other early contracts, we can deduce that these are those usual terms:

[...] **[Nicolas]** well and truely shall serve the comandments of his master lawfull & honest everywhere he shall gladly doe. The goods of his said master he shall not purloyn waste or destroy nor them to any body lend att dice or any other unlawfull game... Matrimony he shall not contract, taverns he shall not frequent From ye service of his said master day or night he shall not absent himselfe [...] <sup>30</sup>

These values are connected with Protestant morality. Typically, Nicolas’s parents and his church leaders would have been expected to teach him to be a moral actor—not to steal, to be honest and lawful, not to gamble, not to drink heavily, and not to fornicate.<sup>31</sup> However, the contract

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<sup>30</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1885*. 567.

<sup>31</sup> Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 1977.

transfers his obligation from his parent to his indenturer Wessell Evertson . This indicates that the authority and responsibility traditionally expected of a parent was being legally transferred to the indenturer. It appears from the language in these contracts that indenturers took on the role of guardian and guide for an indentured child’s early life, including the responsibility to control an indentured child’s sexuality. Where a parent would normally be involved in the arrangement of a marriage, Nicolas’s parents ceded that authority to Evertson.

Indenture contracts did not only obligate indentured children to behave towards their indenturer as they would to their parents. The contracts also contain stipulations for what the masters must do to care for their apprentices. From the same contract, we can read that Wessel Evertson was required to provide Nicolas:

[...]the science or trade ... which he now useth... teach and informe or cause to be taught & informed the best way that he may or can...and also shall finde... apparell meate drinke & bedding & all other nessessaries meet and convenient for an apprentice during the term of aforesaid **[apprenticeship][...]**<sup>32</sup>

The obligations of indenturer to indentured were key components of the exchange. Indentured children with deceased parents would have entirely relied on their indenturer for sustenance, room, board, education, and training. Even when parents were still alive, the normative contract highlighted that the indenturer legally took on these parental obligations. We know that Nicolas Auger’s father lived in New York and worked as a joiner.<sup>33</sup> Even so, Nicolas was to “dwell and live” with Evertson.<sup>34</sup> Nicolas’s indenturer fully assumed all provisions for Nicolas’s care, in the way his parents did before.

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<sup>32</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1885.* 567.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 567.

<sup>34</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1885.* 567.

Nicolas Auger's apprenticeship contract is not unique. One year later, in 1695, John Molet indentured Cornelius Hendricks.<sup>35</sup> In exchange at the completion of his term, two suits, one for church and one for work were to be provided.<sup>36</sup> In several other examples, two suits are mentioned as the person's due at the end of their indenture, though there are several exceptions, such as Jonah Thomasson who in 1701 was to be granted additional clothes, shirts, and scarves, at the end of his indenture.<sup>37</sup> All the same—the usual those for these indentures implied that those young people entering them would be provided for by indenturers.

The majority of indentured children were indentured to artisans, like coopers, turners, shipwrights, and joiners. While there is one example of an indenture to a lawyer, and the third largest indentureship type was to merchants, this demonstrates that the primary indenturers while only sometimes rich, were established in society. Children like John Reade, indentured to a cordwainer, and William Reade, indentured to a tailor, were “fatherless and motherless”, and indenture provided a personal security as well as trade education through the imposition of a new guardian. John and William Reade, and the other children indentured in these documents would learn skills critical to operation as an artisan, which would have provided them with a path forward when their indentureship ended.<sup>38</sup>

Indenture contracts built a particular understanding of the parental role through the specific details that contractually bound individuals. By transferring the obligations of a parent to the indenturers, these contracts reinforced a patriarchal ideal of obedience and service. Indenturers would prepare indentured children for the rest of their lives, and in the meantime, benefit economically from their labor.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid 593-594.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 593-594.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid 616-617.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 616-617.

## Shaping a Contract

Exceptions are the rule for indenture contracts, with additional requirements for education, provisions for the death of a family member, and particular payments, care, or contractual obligations being major repeating presences from the beginning to the end of the period that the archive covers. These exceptions constructed a particular understanding of childhood that was unique to colonial New York. Many indentures are for orphans, but even more have one or more parents present and signing the documents. While many cases demonstrate exceptions to the usual terms and can clarify our understanding of how New York colonizers understood childhood, the three cases outlined below are a departure from the norm. However, by exploring the more customized terms and conditions used by parents to shape indentureship contracts, we can better understand the meaning and purpose of all indentureship contracts. By exploring what people specify to be different, we gain a sharp insight to the normative expectations of indenture.

Today, the Schuyler family is best known for their role in Alexander Hamilton's life vis-a-vis the Broadway musical "Hamilton", but in 17th and 18th century New York they were an economic and political force. They were frequently involved in the governance of the colony, and they were some of the richest merchants in New York.<sup>39</sup> It is no surprise that this wealthy merchant family was able to secure beneficial terms for their indentured sons. What is surprising is that such established members of society would indenture their children at all. But, indenture allowed adults to transfer certain expectations for children into law. The two Schuyler boys who entered indentureship did so under very different conditions than most. Their fathers expected

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<sup>39</sup> Ron Chernow. *Alexander Hamilton*. (New York: Penguin Press), 2004.

these indentureships to prepare them for adult life. The difference is that they expected their sons to occupy a very different position as adults than other indentured children. While most indentures in the period are to well-off the Schuyler boys are indentured to two of the wealthiest men in the City.<sup>40</sup> John Barberie indentured Oliver, and Benjamin Faneuil of the merchant Faneuil family who built Faneuil Hall in Boston indentured Phillip.<sup>41</sup>

Where most contracts cede all or almost all parental authority, the Schuyler family contracts use indenture differently. Oliver Schuyler's contract outlines that his father must pay for his clothes, pay to have him bathed, and provide housing while his master, John Barberie, would be responsible only for food while travelling.<sup>42</sup> By specifying that he would feed, bathe, and lodge his son, he undercuts the transfer of parental responsibility that was so present in other indenture contracts of the period. For a wealthy merchant, lodging and clothing a boy would cost a pittance, certainly compared to the outlay for an artisan. These are the only contracts in Sharpas's record where a parent insists that they will pay for things for their children, and it seems like no coincidence that Arent and Brandt are also the wealthiest people indenturing their sons. The most compelling reason for this specification seems to be the maintenance of parental authority where it was ceded in other contracts. Both Schuyler men retain provisioning their sons in some respect but still indenture the teenage boys to other men for labor. They did not train their own sons, they placed them under contract with merchant-elite peers. This seems contradictory when juxtaposed with the usual terms of indenture contracts. Other than merchant's sons, children were placed in indenture with people who had different professions from their parents.

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<sup>40</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1885.* 594, 595.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* 594-595.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* 594.

Other parents were able to exert some control in the indenture exchange, albeit not to the same extent as Arent and Brandt Schuyler. In 1699, city officials William Sharpas, Kiliaen van Rensselaer, and Jacob van Cordlandt presided over the indenture of Sarah Baker, a child whose mother, Marietta Damean, they call a “free Indian woman”.<sup>43</sup> We do not know her nation. We do not know how old Sarah was, except insofar as when a girl’s age is given in the other contracts in this document, their indenture is bound to end when they are seventeen.<sup>44</sup> Sarah’s indenture was set to end after seven years, which would mean she was likely ten years old or so when the contract was signed. Sarah’s contract specifies usual covenants.<sup>45</sup> Sarah’s mother Marietta consented to her daughter entering indenture with Captain Peter Matthews and his wife Bridgett, who were responsible, according to the document, for teaching her to speak and read English, and to provide for her in exchange for physical labor.<sup>46</sup> Marietta insists on a few special provisions for her daughter before agreeing to the indenture, particularly that her daughter not be taken out of New York.<sup>47</sup> This much is enshrined in the contract.

Given that the man Sarah was indentured to—Peter Matthews—was an English military commander, it was very likely that he would be called away from New York, perhaps even more likely than it would be that international merchants like Benjamin Faneuil would be on the move. Peter Matthews was not even present when this contract was signed.<sup>48</sup> The fact that Marietta Damean insisted on her daughter remaining in New York and was successful in getting it in the final document reveals some of the power she was able to exercise in the exchange. This highlights the primacy of parental authority in the construction of indenture contracts. In this

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<sup>43</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1885.* 606.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 596, 603, 606-608, 614, 623, 627, 636, 644.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* 606.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* 606.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* 606.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* 606.

case, with the man soon to assume a parental role not even present, Marietta Damean's authority ensured that she would be able to see her daughter in the future.

In the two case studies above, parents encoded legal exceptions as they negotiated the proper division of labor between parents and indenturer. In the 1699 indenture of John Reede, indenturer Rip Van Dam seems to have been acting to protect those dependent on him. This matters because where most contracts include only terms for the indenturer to provide for the indentured, the special terms of John Reede's contract include caring for Rip Van Dam's widow if Rip dies.<sup>49</sup> Like the two merchants who come to indenture the Schuyler boys two years later, Rip Van Dam is a merchant.<sup>50</sup> He specifies that he may send John overseas alone in the final year of his contract. This contract is one of the few with special terms upon the death of the master. Where others may include limits on who could inherit the contract, John Reede's contract would imply he would inherit the venture, and provide for Rip's living family. For as long as Rip Van Dam would legally require this, he did in the contract. Once he died, the responsibility as head of the house would fall to John Reede.

Unlike most other contracts where the purpose appeared to be the advancement of the child's job training, the indenture of John Reede seems as if it were made for the benefit of Rip Van Dam. Normally, a son or daughter would be responsible for caring for their widowed mother in the case of the death of their father, and certainly Van Dam does not appear to have been poor, so financial concern would not have been why John would need to stay and care for Mrs. Van Dam. John Reede's contract reinforces that we can read adult efforts to shape the understanding of parental authority in the language used to contractually obligate each party. In a

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<sup>49</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1885.* 579.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid* 579.



very different way from most of the contracts, John Reede isn't only obligated to take on the role of child as servant, but child-as-heir to Van Dam's head-of-household in the case of death. The payment at the end of John's term of indenture is twenty-five pounds, a much larger sum than normally specified in the contracts.<sup>51</sup> Together, it appears that John serves as a type of insurance policy, potentially even testing the waters for John to inherit part of an heirless fortune.

Each case above highlights a unique, different element of customization or control expressed through adult changes to the usual terms within indentureship contracts. While they express interesting exertions of adult and parental power over children and contract, almost all contracts contain some amendment or additional terms, especially when they involve a guardian. The exceptions do not matter in-and-of themselves except for the people they helped, like Marietta Daemon or Brandt Schuyler. In each case, the specificities of the contracts alters or highlights some aspect of parental authority, whether that is provisioning the child, the right of the parent to control their child's movement, or the provision of care for the indenturer's family. The exceptions demonstrate that indenture contracts were not static, but rather were individually shaped to advance a specific parental agenda. They were living agreements that contractually perpetuated and codified parental authority and the responsibilities of children.

## **The Head of House**

The centering of parental authority in contracts reflected the general preparation for adulthood that children underwent. In preparing to interface with imperial systems of power, indentured children were understood to be subjects of their parents and masters, just as all people

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<sup>51</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1885*. 568, 579, 584, 590. Other indentures were frequently guaranteed a lump sum payment from three to eight pounds or, in many cases, no payment at all except as a wage during their contract.

were understood to be subjects of the monarch. Robert Filmer's 1680 book *Patriarcha; Or the Natural Power of Kings* assumed that all English readers would understand the obedience one owed to a head of house. *Patriarcha* was one of the top five bestselling books in early modern England and the English colonies, with some estimates that it was the second bestselling book of the time after the bible.<sup>52</sup> Filmer wrote that restricting the king to the requests of his subjects was a Papist plot, and that the first kings were heads of households.<sup>53</sup> He wrote that subjects owed allegiance to the king the way that wives and children owed allegiance to their husband and father.<sup>54</sup> In so writing, he wrote of the household as a microcosm of the nation, and of the head of house as the king. In one of the most read books in this area in this time, children and adults were taught a particular brand of obedience. Indentureship contracts, like Nicolas Auger's, that require indentured servants to follow their master's commandments, embody this understanding of household authority, and as a legal contract, equate parental authority with the indenturer's authority.

Allegiance to the head of house took different forms for different people. In these indenture contracts, we see direct parallels or echoes of English common law and the expectations of boys and girls. In English common law, women were primarily granted rights and privileges through the men in their lives. This system of coverture meant that a woman was first beholden and part of her father's house, protected by his reputation, his status in society, and only removed from her father's authority when she found a husband to replace parental with

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<sup>52</sup> Owen Stanwood, "Political Theory: Monarchism, Liberalism, Republicanism" (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, February 13, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha; of the Natural Power of Kings. By the Learned Sir Robert Filmer Baronet* (London: Richard Chiswell), 1680.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

marital authority.<sup>55</sup> Indenturers heavily restricted marriage until the end of the contract. A girl's economic value reigned. Even when an indenturer might have allowed a girl to enter into a romantic relationship, the lack of exposure to potential age-appropriate partners may have complicated finding a marriage partner. By limiting attendance at taverns, limiting the ability to marry, and instructing the indentured person to obey commandments of masters, indenturers like James and Guartery Crooke forged a quasi-parental relationship with their new indentured servants.<sup>56</sup> Becoming a housewife was central to girl's contracts. Eighty percent of girl's contracts mention housewifery or sewing and plainwork, and sixty percent mention the indenturer's spouse by name.<sup>57</sup> These gendered obligations and trainings were both implicit and explicit in the indenture contracts and in the responsibilities outlined for indenturers therein. Clearly for girls, it was seen as more important that the wife of the indenturer be involved, or they would not have been included six times more often than in boy's contracts.

The household politics inscribed in contract above were not the only ways that adult authority and expectation were encoded into indenture contracts. As discussed earlier in this paper, New York was highly motivated by a particular brand of Protestantism. In English North America education was a priority given the importance of children learning to read the bible. Many contracts required education to be provided by indenturers. This implies that most children would not have had access to education if it were not provided by a parental figure. Of approximately one hundred contracts investigated, twenty-three obligate the indenturers to ensure that indentured children learn to read, and another fifteen legally bind them to provide for

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<sup>55</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982. Paula A. Treckel. *To Comfort the Heart: Women in Seventeenth-century America*. New York, N.Y.: Twayne Publishers. 1996.

<sup>56</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1885*. 592-593.

<sup>57</sup> Only eleven percent of boy's contracts mention the spouse by name.

schooling or to “allow them” to study.<sup>58</sup> Another contract claims that a child must be provided with schooling for six months “as is customary”.<sup>59</sup> This contract, that of Cornelius Vanosten’s indenture to James Bussey, a cordwainer, contains an unusual amount of detail compared to other contracts from the same year of 1705. The contract explicitly states that Bussey would support Vanosten in becoming a freeman as required by law.<sup>60</sup> If it was required by law, why did it need to be recorded in the contract, when this legal requirement is hidden in “usual terms” almost everywhere else in the document? It seems likely that Vanosten’s contract is simply more explicit than most. This would imply that other contemporary contracts also were assumed to include provisions for a child’s education. Every contract for a boy contained an implied or explicit requirement for them to become a freeman. Vanosten’s contract does not contradict this, but rather implies that the usual terms commonly understood at the time included provision for some education.

Given the lack of access to formal education, particularly for working children, it is noteworthy that education was so frequently mentioned as a requirement for indentured children. This tells us that indenture was not just seen as an avenue for employment. Rather, indenture was meant to serve as training to integrate the child into the community and prepare them for adulthood how their parents wanted.

## **Conclusion**

On Monday morning, December 4th, Richard, Mary, and Hannah Buckmaster woke up as their parents’ children but by night, they had signed or been signed to labor with a baker, a

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<sup>58</sup> New York Historical Society. *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866: Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1885*. 590, 591, 600, 605, 609, 610, 611, 616, 620, 621.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid 610.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid 610.

shipwright, and a joiner. On Tuesday morning, December 5th, they woke up to begin new lives that had been shaped in legal contract, set in motion by adult desires to socialize them to a particular kind of childhood created by a particular understanding of parental authority. They left no other significant records that we have available, but we do know that their lives were not easy, that they were bound to not marry, to go to taverns or alehouses, or disobey their masters as those new families assumed parental responsibilities for and power over each child.

Adults shaped indentureship contracts with the usual terms to create the relationship of apprentice and student between child and adult, while the specific terms highlighted the particular conditions of their parent's lives. Finally, the unwritten goal of these children's indentures was implicit. Richard Buckmaster would be a baker, his sisters Hannah and Mary would be housewives or perhaps tailors or manto-makers if they showed promise. These stories and so many others are contained within the indenture contracts. By looking at the language these contracts used, we can understand how adults understood the role of childhood and the linguistic, contractual, and social elements that made up indenture. Parents and indenturing adults alike shaped the contracts over time to reflect this reality.

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