Race and Redemption in Puritan New England (Religion in America)

Richard A. Bailey
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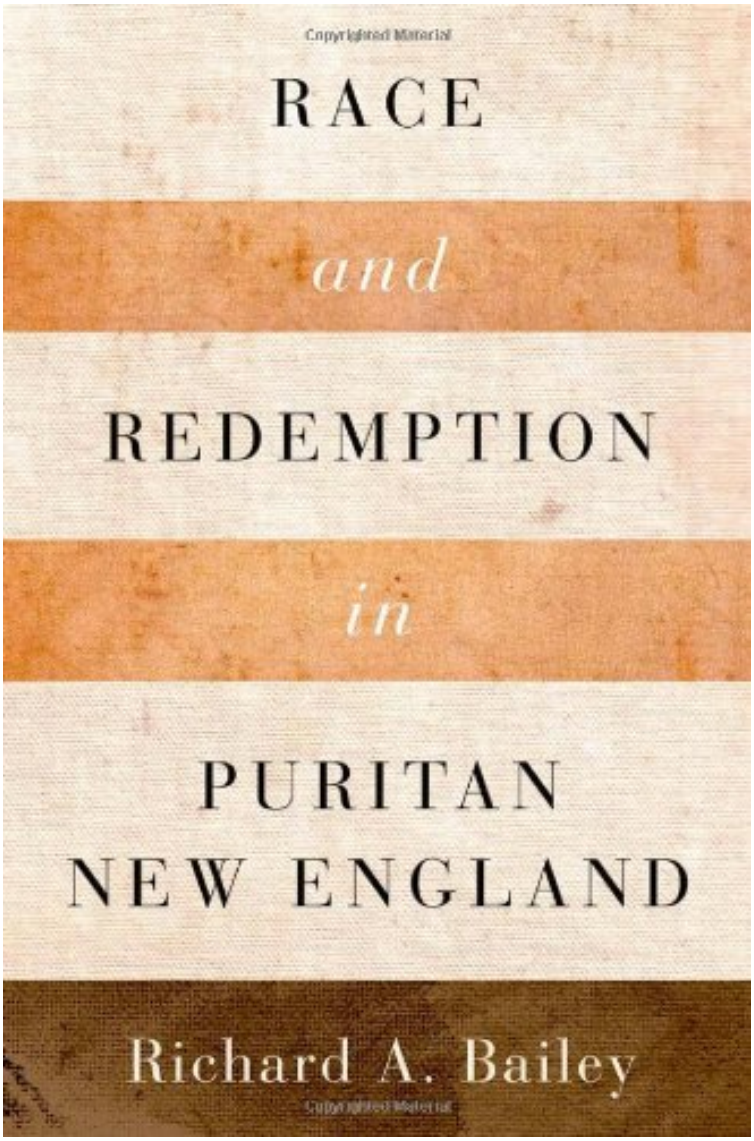

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Richard A. Bailey : Race and Redemption in Puritan New England (Religion in America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Race and Redemption in Puritan New England (Religion in America):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very good read!By Hope C. TaylorThis is a very well written book

regarding the history of the puritans as it relates to race and redemption. It is eyeopening and sad to look into why slavery was not deemed wrong in the sight of the majority of Puritan Pastors. I would recommend people of all ethnicity to read this.5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Interview with the AuthorBy David George MooreMoore: How did you decide to write on this particular topic?Bailey: David, thank you for the opportunity to share this conversation about my book.For me, Race and Redemption in Puritan New England developed from two rather personal strains. The first strain was a fascination with philosophy, theology, and religious history. Some of my interest in this regard, I think, stemmed from being reared in a pastor's home with a constant stress placed on the significance of theology and the history of the church. This rearing was reinforced throughout my undergraduate experience, where I concentrated a bit more on philosophy and the history of ideas. Then, in my early graduate school years, I found the opportunity to transcribe one of Jonathan Edwards's ordination sermons for an article in The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology. Through the wise counsel of a few friends, I was able to turn that one sermon into the occasion to transcribe and edit a collection of Jonathan Edwards's sermons published with Gregory Wills as The Salvation of Souls (Crossway, 2002).The second strain is a bit more circuitous perhaps. I grew up in north Alabama in the community of Tanner, which had the reputation of being a community that consisted in large part of African Americans, lower middle-class whites, and migrant workers. While I knew and heard firsthand at times what people outside of our little community said and thought about my friends and me, I can't say that I really ever grasped any sort of bigger picture at that time. These were my classmates, my friends, my basketball teammates, and my mentors. Sure, I knew that we differed physically and ethnically. But I was generally seen as a "Tanner boy," with all that entailed. My consciousness of "race" as an identity really never registered until I went away to college and then people didn't know me or construct me as a boy from Tanner, but simply as a young white student at a predominantly white private liberal arts institution. So, as a college student and as a Masters of Divinity student at a similar sort of school, I wrestled with some questions and constructions that I never had previously. And these wrestlings occurred simultaneously with a deepening appreciation of religious history and especially the theology, philosophy, and legacy of English Puritanism. So, when I ended up at the University of Kentucky to pursue a Ph.D. in early American history under the tutelage of Joanne Pope Melish and Daniel Blake Smith, I had the perfect mentors to shepherd me into seeing how these two strains potentially intersected in colonial America.So, those fascinations, the developing skillset to read a notoriously difficult handwriting, and the direction of Joanne and Dan, I think, all combined nicely to allow me the opportunity to concentrate on the intersections of religious convictions and racial constructions in puritan New England.Moore: Give us your working definition of the Puritans.Bailey: Strictly speaking, I would define Puritans as a group of nonconformist English Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who primarily adhered to Calvinist theology and were especially concerned with the extent to which the Church of England had experienced the Protestant Reformation. Given such a tight definition, I think we are pretty hard-pressed to label colonial New England "Puritan" in any real sense, at least after the first generation or so of its existence, which is a subject Thomas Kidd explores nicely in his The Protestant Interest (Yale University Press, 2004)Moore: Why you consistently utilize the lower case when writing puritans?Bailey: As I got into the archives and wrestled with who was leaving primary documents I could analyze from the period, I realized that a strict definition of Puritans really didn't fit the people I was studying. Though Kidd's work helped me realize this fact, perhaps the most useful work to me in this regard was Stephen Foster's The Long Argument (University of North Carolina Press, 1996). In the end, I chose to focus on puritans, whom I define as a more inclusive and amorphous religious movement of progressive, reformed Protestants whose efforts to continue the reform of the Church of England extended beyond theology to the social and the political contexts of colonial New England.Moore: It seems that the Puritans were caught between the proverbial rock and a hard spot. On the one hand, their theology underscored the value of all people, yet they benefitted in many ways by allowing slavery to continue. Would you elaborate on this for us?Bailey: I think this is an interesting point, David, or maybe several interesting points. On one hand, Puritan theology, as you put it, underscored the value of all people. Of course, it also stressed the sinfulness of all people and the need for redemption through the gracious atoning work of Christ. It seems this dichotomy allowed New England puritans, at least, to locate people at various levels of value. And this shows up, at least in part, in the social hierarchy that dominated life in England and in the North American colonies. Value and worth could be and was attached to one's station and then used to justify the use or treatment of people in their differing stations.On the other hand, one of the issues that I try to show New England puritans wrestling with is whether or not African or Native Americans were even people at all. English thinkers weren't always consistent in how they answered that question. Or in how they benefitted from their varying answers. In the end, I argue, racial thinking often, though not necessarily always, lay behind both types of understandings of value.Moore: You mention Lemuel Haynes, the first black minister who had a largely white congregation. He was a truly remarkable man. I did some digging around in several major works of American history and church history. He is hardly ever mentioned. Why is that?Bailey: That's a great question. I'd imagine some of it has to do with the availability of sources. There's also the fascination of the American public with the "founding fathers," right? I'd guess that plays into it, as well. Though Haynes fought in the American Revolution and certainly could be rightly considered a member of the "founding brothers," to borrow a phrase from Joseph Ellis. I'd contend, though, that

Haynes’s neglect is not so innocuous.In her Disowning Slavery (Cornell University Press, 1998), Joanne Pope Melish writes convincingly of the “virtual amnesia” of slavery and enslaved Africans and Native Americans in early New England, showing how this lack of remembering was effected by whites in the New England states of the early republic. Not only do I think Joanne is correct, but I also think this “virtual amnesia” explains why remarkable men and women, like Lemuel Haynes and Lucy Terry, often remain largely forgotten. Remembering them raises questions we’d rather avoid.Thankfully, scholars are working diligently to remedy these amnesias. I think my book seeks to do that, as does the work of Margot Minardi, Rebecca Goetz, Edward Andrews, Linford Fisher, and Christopher Cameron (to name a few). In the specific case of Lemuel Haynes, of course, there is the fine study by John Saillant, Black Puritan, Black Republican (Oxford University Press, 2003) and the more popular, but equally significant treatments by Thabiti Anyabwile.Moore: What is your definition of racism?Since I view “race” as an ideological and historical construction, I see racism as a theory of history that locates historical causation in the belief that ethnocultural differences are innate, indelible, and unchangeable and then attempts to establish a system of order validated by those perceived differences. I know that’s a lot of jargon. I get it, but racism is more than simply racial prejudice or antipathy. It is a life and world view of sorts.Moore: It is not well known that Jonathan Edwards owned slaves. How should we think of Edwards in light of this reality?Bailey: I am not 100% certain how to answer this question, David. I am glad that this fact about Edwards is becoming more commonly known and I am glad that my book can have something to do with that fact.But how to think of Edwards? Well, Jonathan Edwards is certainly more than simply a slave owner. He is an important figure in the development of American evangelicalism and the modern missions movement. He is one of America’s most prominent philosophers and theologians. He certainly ought to be remembered for those sorts of legacies. But he also was a purchaser of human flesh. He actively defended and participated in the slave trade. And I’d argue he must be remembered for that, as well. I think that is what it means to take on the virtual amnesias of our pasts.The one way I would encourage people NOT to think of Jonathan Edwards is as “a man of his time.” That sort of phrase doesn’t really mean anything; rather, it is a way of not thinking about Edwards. And I hope people will continue to think about him, relying of the historical work of George Marsden in Jonathan Edwards: A Life (Yale University Press, 2003) or the recent novel by Susan Stinson, Spider in a Tree (Small Beer Press, 2013) to get a more complete picture not only of the man, but also of the society and culture of which he was a part.Moore: There are some tough parts in your book, especially the accounts of slaves being treated worse than animals. Did the Puritans foster this kind of cruelty?Bailey: While I feel uncomfortable saying the Puritans fostered this kind of cruelty, my research and the sources clearly illustrate that at least some did. New England puritans were not above physically, emotionally, and psychologically abusing men, women, and children who were ethnically and culturally different. Some puritans, like John Eliot and Cotton Mather, did so with their words and ideas. Others, like Stephen Williams and James MacSparran, did so on occasions with their hands or other tools of torture and discipline. That said, though, there were other puritans, like Samuel Sewall, Levi Hart, Lemuel Haynes, and Samuel Hopkins, who fought against the abusive institution of race-based slavery in North America.Moore: In what ways has your mind changed about the Puritans after writing this book?Bailey: I don’t know that my mind has changed that much about puritanism. But I will say that I see puritans as real people in a way I probably didn’t early in my exposure to their various writings. During college and my early graduate school years, my interest in English Puritans and in their American counterparts, like Jonathan Edwards, was primarily theological and intellectual. I read Richard Baxter, John Owen, Richard Sibbes, and Jonathan Edwards for their ideas as ideas. But those ideas are historically situated. Ideas don’t exist in a vacuum. And that matters. I guess that’s the sort of thing that the writing of Race and Redemption in Puritan New England really reinforced for me.

As colonists made their way to New England in the early seventeenth century, they hoped their efforts would stand as a "citty upon a hill." Living the godly life preached by John Winthrop would have proved difficult even had these puritans inhabited the colonies alone, but this was not the case: this new landscape included colonists from Europe, indigenous Americans, and enslaved Africans. In Race and Redemption in Puritan New England, Richard A. Bailey investigates the ways that colonial New Englanders used, constructed, and re-constructed their puritanism to make sense of their new realities. As they did so, they created more than a tenuous existence together. They also constructed race out of the spiritual freedom of puritanism.

"[T]his book begins to consider the fascinating and universal question of how a people intent on distinctiveness handled mundanity."--William and Mary Quarterly "Many scholars will find this book important and insightful, whether they are interested in New England Puritans or the history of race...Race and Redemption in Puritan New England makes an essential contribution by revealing New England Puritan society in a new light."--Journal of Interdisciplinary HistoryAbout the AuthorRichard A. Bailey holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of Kentucky. He is Associate Professor of History at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York.