

1711. Governor Hunter Orders Religious Instruction for Enslaved Africans

Source: Hodges, G. (1999). Root & Branch, African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 61.

The Church of England (Anglican) and its missionary arm, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, made a concerted efforts to convert the enslaved African population of New York City. In 1703, Elias Neau opened the first Anglican school for New York's Black population. In 1706 the New York Assembly passed a resolution to insure masters that the baptism of slaves did not mean "they would become free and ought to be set at liberty." In 1711, Governor Robert Hunter issued a Proclamation ordering masters to permit enslaved Africans to attend religious instruction. Source: Hodges, G. (1999). Root & Branch, African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 53-63.

By his Excellency Robert Hunter, Esq; Captain General and Governour in Chief of the Provinces of New-York, New-Jersey, and all the territories thereon depending in America, and Vice Admiral of the same, etc., A Proclamation.

Considering that true religion and piety are the only firm foundations of the propriety of any people, and irreligion, immorality and prophaness the causes of their misery and destruction, are truths attested by the Holy Scriptures, and confirmed by Suffrages of Ages.

Wherefore, that the service of God may be advanced, his judgments averted, and his blessings bestowed upon us, I have thought it fit to publish this proclamation, strictly charging and requiring all judges, mayors, sheriffs, Justices of the Peace, constables, and all others whom it does or may concern, to be vigilant and strict in the faithful and impartial execution of the laws made against prophanation of the Lord's day, cursing and swearing, blasphemy, drunkenness, lewdness, and all other immoral and disorderly practices, which have too much obtained in this province, to the dishonor of almighty God, and the great scandal and reproach of our holy religion. . . .

And to the intent that Christian knowledge, religion and good manners may flourish and increase in this province, I earnestly recommend and exhort that all persons decently and reverently attend the worship of God on every Lord's day, and other days set apart for religious worship and that all heads of families do promote the service of God in their respective families, and instruct their children and servants in the principles of piety and virtue.

That in the City of New-York, where the venerable the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, have in their great zeal to the enlargement of Christ's Church, appointed Mr. Elias Neau, a person well qualified with piety and knowledge to catechise and instruct children, servants, Negro and Indian slaves in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that all parents, masters, and mistresses of families be assisting in accomplishing of a work so good and commendable, by sending and encouraging to go to such instruction, their children and servants, Negro and Indian slaves.