

GEORGE WHITEFIELD (1714–1770)

A LETTER TO THE INHABITANTS OF MARYLAND, VIRGINIA, AND NORTH AND SOUTH CAROLINA (1740)

As I recently passed through your provinces in my way hither, I was sensible touched with a fellow-feeling of the miseries of the poor Negroes. . . I must inform you in the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that I think God has a quarrel with you for your abuse of and cruelty to the poor Negroes. Whether it be lawful for Christians to buy slaves, and thereby encourage the nations from whom they are bought to be at perpetual war with each other, I shall not take upon me to determine. Sure I am, it is sinful, when bought, to use them as bad, nay worse, than as though they were brutes . . . for your slaves, I believe, work as hard if not harder than the horses whereon you ride. These, after they have done their work, are fed and taken proper care of.

Your dogs are caressed and fondled at your tables. But your slaves, who are frequently styled dogs or beasts, have not an equal privilege. They are scarce permitted to pick up the crumbs which fall from their masters' tables.

When, passing along, I have viewed your plantations cleared and cultivated, many spacious houses built, and the owners of them faring sumptuously every day, my blood has frequently almost run cold within me, to consider how many of your slaves had neither convenient food to eat or proper raiment to put on, notwithstanding most of the comforts you enjoy were solely owing to their indefatigable labors.

Enslaving or misusing their bodies would, comparatively speaking, be an inconsiderable evil, was proper care taken of their souls. But I have great reason to believe that most of you, on purpose, keep your Negroes ignorant of Christianity; or otherwise, why are they permitted through your provinces, openly to profane the Lord's Day, by their dancing, piping, and such like? I know the general pretense for this neglect of their souls is that teaching them Christianity would make them proud, and consequently unwilling to submit to slavery. But what a dreadful reflection is this on your Holy Religion?

Most of you are without any teaching priest. And whatever quantity of rum there may be, yet I fear but very few Bibles are annually imported into your different provinces. God has already begun to visit for this as well as other wicked things. For near this two years past, he has been in a remarkable manner contending tending with the people of South Carolina. Their houses have been depopulated with the smallpox and fever, and their own slaves have rose up in arms against them. These judgments are undoubtedly sent abroad, not only that the inhabitants of that, but of other provinces, should learn righteousness. And unless you all repent, you all must in like manner expect to perish. God first generally corrects us with whips; if that will not do, he must chastise us with scorpions.

Taken from George Whitefield, "George Whitefield Admonishes Southern Slaveholders, 1740," in *Interpreting a Continent: Voices from Colonial America*, eds. Kathleen DuVal and John DuVal (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 181–185.