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Bibliographic Note

POVERTY AND CRIME IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

PRIMARY SOURCES

The best beginning point for an exploration of colonial attitudes is with ministers' sermons. Students are especially fortunate to have the pamphlets listed in Charles Evans's *American Bibliography* readily available in microcard editions, and without difficulty I was able to read the many charity and execution sermons of the period. One of the best examples of this material is Benjamin Colman, *The Unspeakable Gift of God: A Right Charitable and Bountiful Spirit to the Poor and Needy Members of Jesus Christ* (Boston, 1739); a more cautious note is struck by Charles Chauncy, *The Idle Poor Secluded from the Bread of Charity by Christian Law* (Boston, 1752). Typical of the execution sermons are: John Rogers, *Death the Certain Wages of Sin to the Impenitent . . . Occasioned by the Imprisonment, Condemnation, and Execution of a Young Woman who was Guilty of Murdering her Infant begotten out of Whoredom* (Boston, 1701), and *A Brief Account of the Life and Abominable Thefts of Isaac Frasier* (New Haven, Conn., 1768). Reprinted too in this series are the constitutions and descriptions of colonial voluntary associations, giving a sense, albeit limited, of the scope of private philanthropy.

Another critical source for eighteenth-century attitudes and practices is the public law. Practically every colonial code is in print; and although the volumes are not often subject-indexed, or in one cumulative edition, still, legal research in the colonial period is not tedious to conduct. The best starting points for poor laws and criminal codes are with Massachusetts, which influenced New England practices, and with Virginia, which exerted a similar influence among southern colonies. Of course, the laws must not be used alone, and English precedents were of major importance. Still, colonial laws are an excellent indicator of prevailing attitudes, concerns, and procedures.

Town and court records form an indispensable guide to colonial



