documents provide examples of mothers running away with their children, and participating in and revealing revolt conspiracies.

Morgan’s dependence on demographic evidence throughout this study foregrounds the problem of what can be known and recreated about the enslaved women’s experience through the data left by the white slaveowners. While the modern historian has little access to the perspective of non-literate enslaved people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Morgan still walks a fine line between legitimate and excessive extrapolation from data to subjective experience. Though she claims that motherhood is a culturally individualized experience, Morgan risks essentializing childbearing potential as the defining aspect of enslaved women’s experience to the exclusion of other factors such as the size and location of the plantation, the crop cultivated, or how many generations separated individuals from their origins in Africa. Finally, there is the problem of representing the agency of an enslaved person, especially in terms of choosing to pursue or avoid pregnancy, which undoubtedly was imposed on enslaved women in many cases. Morgan, however, avoids the issue of paternity almost as assiduously as the slaveowners’ wills did, and though she mentions women’s “vulnerability” to both black and white men, her prose tends to credit the women with the ability to make reproductive choices. Undoubtedly, the realities of rape and the lack of reliable birth control also shaped the experience of reproduction for enslaved women. Nevertheless, Morgan’s book will be of use to those who study the slave trade in the Americas from its beginning to the mid-eighteenth century and to those who are interested in tracing the evolution of gendered ideologies of race from sixteenth century travel writings through its reification and practice in New World slavery.

Robert Tarule has written a fascinating book that initiates the reader into the secrets of seventeenth-century colonial American woodworkers. Included are carpenters, coopers (barrel-makers), wheelwrights, turners (lathe-workers), and joiners (furniture-makers). In many ways, the skills of these artisans represented a medieval rather than an early modern world. It was a time when settlements passed law after law in an ongoing desperate effort to protect their trees, which were particularly vulnerable to the colonists' need for firewood during New England's long winters. Approached in an agricultural manner, wild arbors were “managed” through selective harvesting and reforesting practices. Trees, especially oaks, were considered so valuable that tradesmen had to petition their community for grants to fell them or else face censure and fines. Prepared pieces of white oak, moreover, were sometimes used as currency, paralleling the occasional function of tobacco as currency in the southern colonies.

Tarule, who fashions replicas of seventeenth-century furniture, focuses primarily on Thomas Dennis, an English joiner who immigrated to Ipswich in 1663. By the time of his death in 1706, his particular joining skills were passé, supplanted by more fashionable sawn-board cabinet work. Nevertheless, in his day Dennis was highly regarded as an artisan, and today his carved furniture is collected by connoisseurs. In 1670, it is interesting to note, he was convicted of and fined for felling more trees than his community grant permitted.

Much of what Tarule reveals is imagined through Dennis's eyes, as in this well-wrought description of an early morning in his shop, located in the center of Ipswich village:

Dennis could hear cow bells here and there and the sounds of chickens and pigs. Up the river to the west a few hundred yards away the gristmill had begun its work, the slapping of the stones muffled but distinct. Down the river from the mill, the cooper Wilson was driving hoops onto a barrel, which echoed like a drum. A little farther beyond, the quick regular blows of a heavy hammer on an
anvil came from John Safford’s blacksmith shop, followed by a short pause as the smith waited for the iron to reheat in the charcoal fire. (89)

It is particularly an oak chest fashioned by Dennis in the late 1600s that interests Tarule, who reads this artifact closely (as if it were a text) in the course of retracing every step the joiner took while creating it.

*The Artisan of Ipswich* is replete with illuminating details, including how joiners identified the right kind of trees for their various products. White oak, the reader also learns, splits easily in half, yielding two pieces with little to plane. Only pieces cleft on a tree’s radius do not become deformed when they dry. Another little-known fact: protecting a field from domestic animals was the responsibility of the field’s owner rather than the animals’ owner.

A book so full of facts is liable to err here and there. Tarule is mistaken when he mentions that each tree ring represents a year of growth. Trees, especially when rainfall is plentiful on both sides of an extended period of drought, can produce more than one annual growth ring. Likewise Tarule’s economic explanation for the decline in English immigrants to the American colonies in 1643 is not quite on the mark. The majority of New England settlers were non-conformist émigrés fleeing persecution in their homeland. When non-conformists were perceived as likely to prevail during the Civil War in England, the previous rationale for leaving their homeland significantly diminished. In fact, a reverse migration occurred, causing economic discomfort in New England. Such non-essential slips, however, hardly detract from Tarule’s informative and well-told story.