



A Century in Captivity: The Life and Trials of Prince Mortimer, a Connecticut Slave (Revisiting New England)

Denis R. Caron

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On December 21, 1811, a Middletown, Connecticut judge sentenced Prince Mortimer, a sickly eighty-seven-year-old slave, to life imprisonment for attempting to poison his master by lacing his chocolate drink with arsenic. Prince spent the next sixteen years in Connecticut's notorious Newgate Prison, a colonial copper mine that had been converted into America's first state prison. In 1827 the dungeons at Newgate were closed forever, and the prisoners were transferred to the newly constructed Wethersfield State Prison. Wethersfield was supposed to be modern and progressive, but prisoners suffered there every bit as much as at Newgate. In 1834, Prince died there in his 31/2-by-7-foot cell, reportedly at the age of 110. From his capture into slavery as a child in Guinea in about 1730, through his more than eighty years as a slave and twenty-three years as a prisoner, Prince had endured more than a century in captivity.

In an astounding feat of historical inquiry and scholarship, author Denis R. Caron has assembled a mass of facts and insights that will mesmerize general interest readers and students of African American, regional, legal, and penal history alike. *A Century in Captivity* is a marvelous and sobering story previously lost to history, filled with dashed dreams of freedom, unrelenting miseries, and struggles for wealth and power.

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