

# CHRYsalis

[kris-uh-lis]

from Latin chrȳsallis, from Greek khrusallis

1. the obtect pupa of a moth or butterfly
2. anything in the process of developing

## A CRITICAL STUDENT JOURNAL OF TRANSFORMATIVE ART HISTORY

SPECIAL ISSUE:

COMPARATIVE FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENT ANALYSIS

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**CHRYsalis** was created by Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson as a vehicle to showcase the most innovative, rigorous, and sophisticated research produced by students within the context of her Art History courses at McGill University (Montreal). Over the years, Nelson observed that undergraduate students in her courses were more than capable of producing exceptional research on par with that of graduate students, and at times even professional academics. Disappointed that the majority of these students were faced with a negligible audience (if any) for their incredible work, with the help of her graduate student Anna T. January (MA Art History 2014), Nelson came up with the idea to provide another platform for their research dissemination. CHRYsalis is that platform! Chrysalis has returned with an eighth issue and a new Managing Editor, Chris J. Gismondí (PhD Student, Art History, McGill University) whose important work is also featured in this issue.

CHRYsalis is an open access, electronic journal that will be published in several special issues on Nelson's research website: [www.blackcanadianstudies.com](http://www.blackcanadianstudies.com) The goal of CHRYsalis is transformation: to publish scholarship that seeks answers to exciting new questions, to encourage students to undertake primary research, and to open the discipline of Art History in ways that make it more welcoming to a diverse population of students. For more information please contact: [info@blackcanadianstudies.com](mailto:info@blackcanadianstudies.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

### MONTRÉAL, HALIFAX, NIAGRA TO NEW ORLEANS, GLASGOW, AND ST. CROIX: COMPARITIVE STUDENT RESEARCH ON CANADIAN FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS

Chris J. Gismondi

Throughout the Transatlantic World, the technology of the printing press had the revolutionary potential to disseminate ideas, spread literacy, and inform separated colonial communities in a global cosmopolitan network. As a case in point, the early issues of the Upper Canada Gazette which were first printed on 18 April 1793, were preoccupied with informing the Loyalist settlers in Niagara fleeing the American Revolution about the toppling French monarchy overseas.<sup>1</sup> But the potential of the printing press was not solely democratic. Indeed, printing technology was quickly exploited by slave owners and their surrogates to maintain the racial, social, and economic orders. As David Waldstreicher has noted,

“The slave system was...an important means of supporting print culture and the extralocal market that made print so expansive and interesting. The constitutive relation between slavery and print culture was reciprocal. When Samuel Keimer started the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1728, he offered each subscriber a free advertisement every six months. The first three advertisements to appear in the paper were for land, for a runaway servant, and a Negro Man: Enquire of the Printer’.”<sup>2</sup>

While the Upper Canada Loyalists were rebuilding their towns and communities, the government run press printed its first known fugitive slave advertisement three months later on 4 July 1793: “Five Dollar Reward. RAN away from the Subscriber on Wednesday the 25<sup>th</sup> of June last, a NEGRO MAN servant named John...” signed Thomas Butler, Niagara, 3 July 1793.<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1) The advertisement was repeated the following week, and demonstrated how slaving societies across the Atlantic utilized the medium of print as a foundational tool for selling, profiling, securing, and hunting the enslaved.

Unlike *slave sale advertisements* which commodified the enslaved and falsified information homogenizing them as “healthy” and “obedient” objects of sale, *fugitive* or *runaway slave advertisements* forced slave owners to individualize and detail the specific attributes of their human chattel.<sup>4</sup>

Slave owners and printers in these advertisements admitted and recorded the names of the enslaved (preferred and enforced), languages (European, African, accents, proficiency), dress and body type (clothing, hair styling, branding, scars),

in our Paper.

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**FIVE DOLLARS REWARD.**  
**R**AN away from the Subscriber on Wednesday the 25<sup>th</sup> of June last, a NEGRO MAN servant named JOHN, who ever will take up the said negro man and return him to his Master shall receive the above reward and all necessary charges. **THOMAS BUTLER.**  
**N. B. All Persons are forbid harbouring the said Negro man at their peril.—NIAGARA, 3d July, 1793.**

Figure 1: Thomas Butler, “FIVE DOLLARS REWRD,” Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle, 4 July 1793, Issue 1, volume 12, McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

gestures, valuable labour (sailor, carpenter, hairdresser, domestic, cook, field hand, tailor, distiller, music, literacy etc.) as well as their intelligence, intellect, and resistance to slavery. As such, these personalized and highly visual descriptions would require that readers translate the textual descriptions into an image for identification and re-capture.<sup>5</sup> The enslaved fugitives were recorded as criminals for what Marcus Wood has aptly described as a “paradoxical self-theft”.<sup>6</sup> However, according to Charmaine A. Nelson, they should be understood instead as “freedom-seekers” engaged in a tremendous “act of self-redefinition”.<sup>7</sup> Although the enslaved were customarily refused access to the cultural, material, and intellectual means to represent themselves, the archive of fugitive slave advertisements has fortunately left scholars with significant information, often in the form of uncomfortably intimate corporeal descriptions. It is this unique quality which has led Nelson to reason that these texts should be positioned as “individualized portraits,” albeit non-consensual representations of sitters who were evading capture.<sup>8</sup>

Scholarship on fugitive slave advertisements from tropical sites like the Caribbean or the American South was established earlier, but academics like Charmaine A. Nelson, Frank Mackey, Harvey Amani Whitfield, Jan Kurth, David Waldstreicher, Billy G. Smith, and Richard Wojtowicz have created rich momentum in the field of northern-temperate slavery and Canadian slavery focusing on sites like Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, New York, and Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> These sites created unique challenges for the enslaved who toiled in these spaces as well as unique considerations for the scholars working with these archives. These northern and temperate spaces meant that the enslaved and free blacks were a minority population and would have endured tremendous surveillance, scrutiny, social isolation, psychological trauma, and the harsh elements compounded by deliberate material-economic deprivation.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, this disproportionate population meant that the white readership of these newspaper advertisements were called upon to maintain white-supremacy by aiding in the recapture of enslaved runaways since dedicated slave-patrols were not employed. The language of legal threat or punishment for anti-slavery sympathizers was common like this advertisement published in New Brunswick:

RUN-AWAY FROM the subscriber, on Wednesday evening last the 15<sup>th</sup> instant, a negro woman named KEZIAH, about five feet high, has the marks of a cut and a burn, I believe on her right cheek, near her mouth, took with her two calico gowns...-Whoever will apprehend and take up said negro woman, so that her master may have her again, shall receive a reward of TWO GUINEAS, and all reasonable charges paid.

All Masters of vessels and others are hereby forbid carrying off the said Negro slave, as they will answer for their peril.

Aug. 17<sup>th</sup> THOMAS BEAN.<sup>11</sup>

Fugitive slave advertisements from both tropical and temperate settings have similarities as well. Only those who were deemed valuable enough for recapture and those who ran away long enough to force their owners to produce an advertisement are recorded in newspapers which were usually published weekly. If a freedom-seeker was recaptured promptly, there was no need for a printed notice. Thus, the existing archives of fugitive slave advertisements represent only a portion of the enslaved population who resisted through flight.

From the extreme detail of these advertisements we can deduce much about the physical violence and disabilities of the enslaved through the descriptions of things like scars, limping,

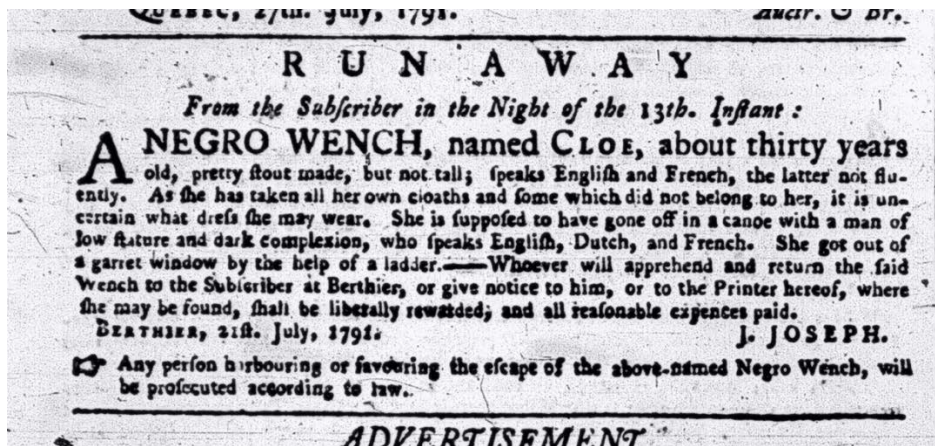


Figure 2: J. Joseph, “RUN AWAY” *Quebec Gazette*, 28 July 1791, in Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University press, 2010), no. 77, p. 334.

*Journal* which had only 28 of 131 runaway slave advertisements about females.<sup>13</sup> In Québec newspapers, Frank Mackey identifies that of the ninety-four slave advertisements, thirty-two were about women.<sup>14</sup> This raw data is misleading because many were *slave sale* advertisements, and one fugitive advertisement was for an indentured labourer named Eve.<sup>15</sup> As well the enslaved woman Bell escaped twice, as did the enslaved men Ishmael and Joe.<sup>16</sup> Thus, only eight adult, enslaved females have been unearthed as runaways in the case-study of Québec.<sup>17</sup> These gender discrepancies likely reflected family circumstances with women having the difficult choice of leaving children or jeopardizing flight by bringing them. Furthermore, enslaved women in temperate spaces often performed domestic work which meant heightened surveillance, plus a diminished knowledge of the outside landscape and less contact with potential escape collaborators. Despite these challenges, some enslaved women in Québec were able to find co-conspirators towards freedom.

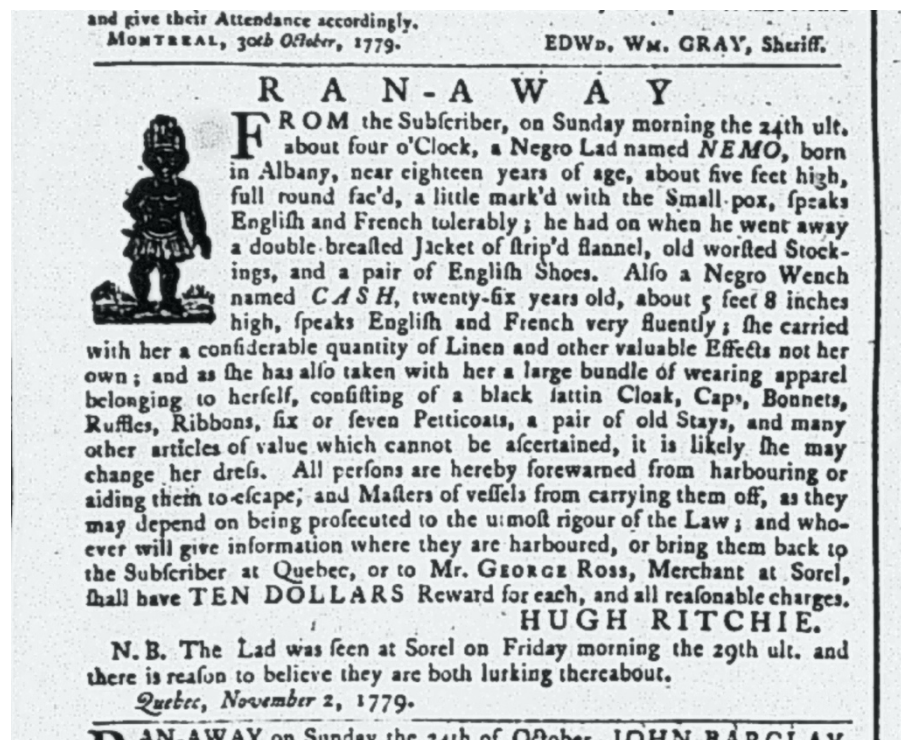


Figure 3: Hugh Ritchie, “RAN-AWAY” *Quebec Gazette*, 4 November 1779, in Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University press, 2010) no. 33, p. 323.

and wounds as well as the psychological states, cognitive development, and mental health coded in poor speech, defeated postures, or appearing “wild”.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the population represented in fugitive slave advertisements were predominately male like in the Hudson Valley *Poughkeepsie*

Exemplary, Cash and the enslaved man Nemo escaped together from the tailor Hugh Ritchie.<sup>18</sup> (fig. 3) Likewise, Cloe in Berthier after escaping from a window with a ladder was “supposed to have gone off in a canoe with a man of low stature and dark complexion, who speaks English, Dutch, and French.”<sup>19</sup> (fig. 2).

The innovative student scholarship featured here, compares fugitive slave advertisements from one Canadian site to another space of Transatlantic Slavery. The locations of the comparative research pieces here span Canadian sites like Fredericton, Quebec City, Montréal, and Halifax. However, Upper Canada, or Ontario also remains an underdeveloped field of study although some crucial foundation has been laid by Marcel Trudel, William Renwick Riddell, Robin W. Winks and contemporary contributions by Maureen G. Elgersman, Afua Cooper, and Natasha Henry.<sup>20</sup> The Upper Canada Loyalists were settlers rebuilding their towns after fleeing the American Revolutionary War on the north shore of Lake Ontario and utilized the government newspaper for preserving slavery. The advertisements that have been uncovered to date, lack the descriptive detail from other spaces and perhaps demonstrate that the close knit and small

population were intimately familiar with one another and their slave holdings. Printed 19 August 1795, an advertisement plainly reads “Ran away from the subscriber a few weeks ago, A NEGRO WENCH named SUE: - this is to forewarn all manner of persons from harboring said wench under the penalties of the laws. James Clark, Senior, Niagara, August 17, 1795.”<sup>21</sup> Another is similarly sparse with the President and Administrator of Upper Canada, Peter Russell publicly shaming his enslaved servant Peggy in York, 3 September 1803 and reprinted 24 September.<sup>22</sup> (fig. 4)

Canadian practices of Transatlantic Slavery

included enslaved Africans and their descendants and indigenous peoples known as *panis(e)*.<sup>23</sup> These colonies were simultaneously seizing land for settlement and resources for mercantile economies, in a parasitic “settler-native-slave” relationship theorized by Eve Tuck and Kayne Yang which played out throughout the Atlantic.<sup>24</sup> This linkage of settler colonialism to chattel slavery transformed African bodies into landless property, unlike the *excess labour* of indenture or wage labour.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, racial policing around nativeness and blackness relative to whiteness deliberately varied since African-slave identity was expansive while indigeneity was

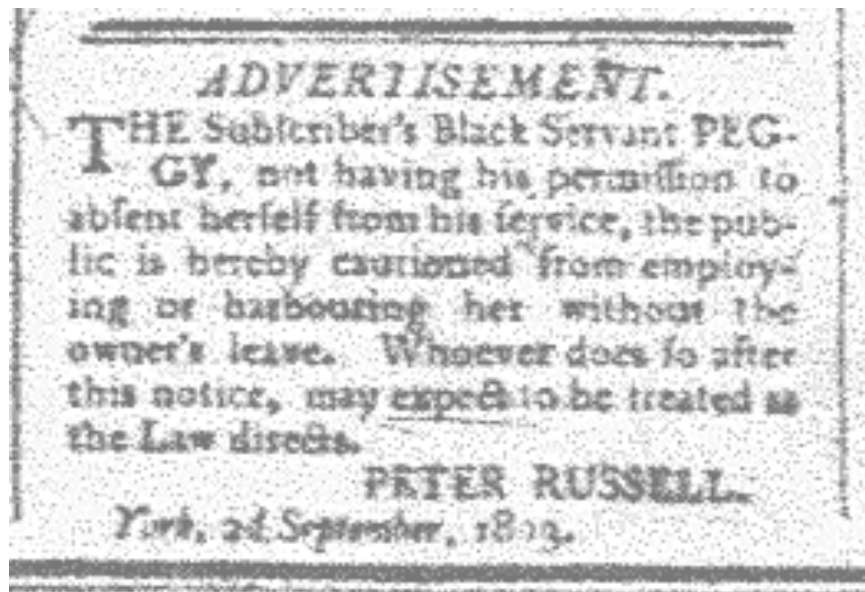


Figure 4: Peter Russell, “ADVERTISEMENT,” Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle 3 September 1803, Issue 13, volume 19 (reprinted 24 September 1803, Issue 13, volume 26), McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

Transcription: [The subscriber's Black Servant PEGGY, not having permission to absent herself from his service, the public is hereby cautioned from employing or harbouring her without the owner's leave. Whoever does so after this notice, may expect to be treated as the Law directs. PETER RUSSELL, York 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1803]



subtractive.<sup>26</sup> Racial sciences for indigenous peoples coincided with the genocidal goals of settler-colonialism to eliminate Native populations and exploit the land. Thus, while indigenous blood was reasoned as dilutable, a deliberate contrast followed blackness wherein sexual assault was incentivized in Transatlantic Slavery through its matrilineal structure and the construction of black ancestry as a pollutant embodied in such notions as the “one drop rule” always increased the enslavable labour force.<sup>27</sup> Upper Canada was an extension of existing British-American slavery practices, one which was encroaching onto newly stolen territories. Maritime historian Barry Cahill has noted that slavery’s expansion throughout Loyalist British North America is a “vivid reminder of how fundamentally exploitative that society was.”<sup>28</sup>

Scholar Marisa J. Fuentes reads the scars described in a 1789 fugitive slave advertisement for Jane in Bridgetown, Barbados, to explore the relationship between physical spaces, the body of the black female, and the biased textual documents that mediate our historical understanding “emanating from the silences within the runaway ad”.<sup>29</sup> The student work assembled here compare Canadian fugitive slave advertisements to a range of semi-tropical or tropical spaces like Jamaica, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, New Orleans, Virginia, and the Danish West Indies island of St. Croix as well as temperate spaces like London, England, Glasgow, Scotland, Bordeaux, France, and Pennsylvania and New Jersey, USA. The students draw innovative parallels between fugitive advertisements involving the plight of young enslaved women (fourteen, seventeen, and twenty-two years old; or in slave minority spaces), music and creolization (fiddles and violins), male head wrapping, dress, and clothing (allegations of clothing theft; hair styling; surveillance, tartan cloth and brass collars), evidence of African birth origin (“country marks”/scarification and branding), groups fleeing together (nuclear families; informal relationships; siblings; cross-sex collaboration or solidarity), motherhood in runaway advertisements, intelligence and forgery, and lastly unplanned or networked escape routes.

Together we push back against the colonial archive and the original use of these advertisements as tools of pursuit and re-enslavement. This endeavour also disrupts the ongoing academic and popular erasure of Canadian Slavery which was practiced by foundational figures like the Upper Canada government administrators Peter Russell or William Jarvis and the Montréal merchant-philanthropist James McGill.<sup>30</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Loyalist settlers were those British colonists in the American colonies who remained loyal to the King during the American Revolution. As monarchists re-establishing their towns and communities they would have been interested in the French Revolution and the overthrow of the monarchy in that country; Brian Tobin, The Upper Canada Gazette and its Printers, ed. Elizabeth Hylse (Toronto: Legislative Libraries: 1993).

<sup>2</sup> David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Mid-Atlantic,” The William and Mary Quarterly (April 1999), pp. 268.

<sup>3</sup> Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle, 18 April, 1793, issue 1, volume 1, McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

<sup>4</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “ ‘Ran away from her master...a negroe girl named Thursday’: Examining evidence of punishment, isolation, and trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive slave advertisements,” Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2018), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “ ‘Servant, Seraglio, Savage or Sarah’: Examining the Visual Representation of Black Female Subjects in Canadian Art and Visual Culture,” Women in the “Promised Land”: Essays in African Canadian History, eds. Nina Reid-Maroney, Boulou Ebanga de B’béri, and Wanda Thomas Bernard (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2018) pp. 48-49.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Wood, Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 79.

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<sup>7</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "From African to Creole: Examining Creolization through the Art and Fugitive Slave Advertisements of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Canada and Jamaica," McCready Lecture on Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada, 20 January 2016 (date of last access 30 July 2020) <https://ago.ca/events/mccready-lecture-canadian-art-charmaine-nelson#mccready-lecture-on-canadian-art-charmaine-nelson>

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, "From African to Creole".

<sup>9</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (New York: Routledge, 2016); Frank Mackey, Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Harvey Amani Whitfield, "Runaway Advertisements and Social Disorder in the Maritimes: A Preliminary Study" in Violence, Order, and Unrest: A History of British North America, 1749-1876, eds. Mancke, Elizabeth, Jerry Bannister, Denis McKim, and Scott W See (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830" NWSA Journal, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1988-1989), pp. 199-220; David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Mid Atlantic," The William and Mary Quarterly (April 1999), pp. 243-272; Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1790 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989)

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, Slavery, Geography and Empire, p. 62; Jesse Robertson, "The Shelburne Riots" The Canadian Encyclopedia (date of last access 1 April 2020) <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-shelburne-race-riots>.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, Black Slavery in the Maritimes: A History in Documents (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Jenifer L. Barclay, "Mothering the 'Useless': Black Motherhood, Disability, and Slavery," Women, Gender, and Families of Color, vol. 2, no. 2 (Fall 2014), pp. 115-40; Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master"; see Nicholas Raffoul published here.

<sup>13</sup> Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives" p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> Mackey, Done with Slavery p. 310.

<sup>15</sup> Boruck B. Levy, "Cinq Piastres de Récompense / Run Away" Montreal Gazette, 9 April, 1810, Mackey, Done with Slavery, no. 94, p. 339.

<sup>16</sup> See regarding Bell: Geo. Hipps, "RAN AWAY" Quebec Gazette, 20 August, 1778; "Run away from Mr George Hipps," Quebec Gazette, 5 November, 1778; regarding Ishmael: "TEN DOLLARS REWARD," Quebec Gazette, 29 July 1779; "FOURTEEN DOLLARS Reward," Quebec Gazette, 11 March 1784; "RUN away from the Subscriber," Quebec Gazette, 26 June 1788; regarding Joe: "RANAWAY from the Printing-office," Quebec Gazette, 27 November 1777; "RANAWAY from the Printing-Office," Quebec Gazette, 29 January 1778; "RAN AWAY from the Printing-Office," Quebec Gazette, 24 December 1778; "RUN-AWAY FROM the Printing-Office," Quebec Gazette, 23 September 1779; "BROKE out of his Majesty's Goal," Quebec Gazette, 23 February 1786; "BROKE out of His Majesty's Gaol in Quebec," Quebec Gazette, 4 May 1786; transcribed in Frank Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. 319, 320, 321-22, 326, 328-29, 331.

<sup>17</sup> See Bell above plus an unnamed "Girl," Susannah, Nemo (m) and Cash (f), Bett, Ruth, Chloe, and Robin/Bob (m) Lydia (f) and infant Jane; I. Werden "RUN-AWAY" Quebec Gazette, 1 September 1766; "RAN-AWAY," Quebec Gazette, 19 October 1769; Hugh Ritchie, "RAN-AWAY," Quebec Gazette, 4 November 1779; Johnston and Purrrs., "RAN-AWAY," Quebec Gazette, 8 March, 1787; John Saul, "RUN AWAY," Quebec Herald, 14 December 1789; J. Joseph, "RUN AWAY," Quebec Gazette, 28 July 1791; James Frazer, "NINE DOLLARS REWARD," Montreal Gazette, 20 August 1798; transcribed in Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," pp. 314, 317, 323, 329, 332, 334, 338.

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Ritchie, "RAN-AWAY" Quebec Gazette, 4 November 1779; transcribed in Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," p. 323.

<sup>19</sup> J. Joseph, "RUN AWAY" Quebec Gazette, 28 July 1791; transcribed in Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," p. 334.

<sup>20</sup> Marcel Trudel, Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage, trans. George Tombs (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2013); William Renwick Riddell, "Chapter V: Upper Canada, Early Period" and "Chapter VI: Fugitive Slaves in Upper Canada" and "The Slave in Canada", Reprinted from The Journal of Negro History, vol. 5, no. 3, (Washington DC: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, July 1920), pp. 54-96. <https://archive.org/details/slaveincanada00ridd/page/n9/mode/2up>; Robin W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Maureen G. Elgersman, Unyielding Spirits: Black Women and

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Slavery in Early Canada and Jamaica (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999); Afua Cooper, The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2010); Henry, Natasha, "Brought in Bondage: Downtown Walking Tour", Myseum of Toronto, (date of last access April 1 2020) <http://www.myseumoftoronto.com/ontario-black-history-society/#location1>

<sup>21</sup> James Clark Sr., "Ran away from the subscriber a few weeks ago, A Negro Wench," Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle, 19 August, 1795, Issue 2, volume 37, McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Russel, "ADVERTISEMENT. THE Subscriber's Black Servant PEGGY," Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle, 3 September 1803, issue 13, volume 19 (reprinted 24 September 1803, issue 13, volume 26), McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

<sup>23</sup> Brett Rushforth, Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Trudel, Canada's Forgotten Slaves; Erica Neegangwesgin, "Chattling the Indigenous Other: A historical examination of the enslavement of Aboriginal peoples in Canada," AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, vol 8., issue 1 (March 2012), pp. 15-26.

<sup>24</sup> Eve Tuck and Kayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society, vol. 1, no. 1 (2012), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Kim Tallbear, "DNA and Native America Identity," Indivisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas (Washington DC: Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian, 2009); Eve Tuck and Kim Tallbear, "Episode 4 – Red and Black DNA, Blood, Kinship and Organizing with Kim Tallbear," The Henceforward, audio podcast, 25 July 2016, 30 minutes and 41 seconds, (date of last access 4 August 2020), <http://www.thehenceforward.com/episodes/2016/7/25/episode-3-red-and-black-dna-blood-kinship-and-organizing-with-kim-tallbear>.

<sup>28</sup> Barry Cahill, "Habeas Corpus and Slavery in Nova Scotia: R. v. Hecht Ex Parte Rachel, 1798," University of New Brunswick Law Journal, vol. 44 (1995), p. 181.

<sup>29</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> For Russell and Jarvis see Henry, "Brought in Bondage"; for James McGill see Marcel Trudel, Dictionnaire des esclaves et de leurs propriétaires au Canada français (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 1990), p. 337; Charmaine A. Nelson ed., Slavery and McGill University Bicentenary Recommendations (Montreal: blackcanadianstudies.com, 2020) date of last access 30 July 2020, [https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations\\_and\\_Report.pdf](https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations_and_Report.pdf)

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Thomas Butler, “FIVE DOLLARS REWRD,” Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle, 4 July 1793, Issue 1, volume 12, McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

Figure 2: J. Joseph, “RUN AWAY,” Quebec Gazette, 28 July 1791, in Frank Mackey, Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), no. 77, p. 334.

Figure 3: Hugh Ritchie, “RAN-AWAY,” Quebec Gazette, 4 November 1779, in Frank Mackey, Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University press, 2010), no. 33, p. 323.

Figure 4: Peter Russell, “ADVERTISEMENT,” Upper Canada Gazette; or American Oracle 3 September 1803, issue 13, volume 19 (reprinted 24 September 1803, issue 13, volume 26), McGill University Library: AN61 U66 microfilm.

# CHARLOTTE, JACK, NEMO, AND CASH: FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS IN QUEBEC AND THE DANISH WEST INDIES

Amalie Alver Løseth

## Introduction

Both Canada and Denmark-Norway are amongst the several countries which for centuries profited from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its exploitation of an enslaved labour force, resulting in a countless number of deaths, as well as the structural racism and marginalization of black populations which exist to this very day. What these countries also have in common are their contemporary relationships to their colonial pasts, which often are characterized by the lack of acknowledgement through not carrying the “the burden of guilt”.<sup>1</sup>

In Denmark, it was not until the 2017 centennial, marking the sale of the Danish West Indies to the USA, that a national consciousness of Danish colonization and the slave trade subtly began to arise. As for Canada, a national consciousness of its colonial past is often erased in favour of the national celebration of how Canadian abolitionists “saved” enslaved African-Americans.<sup>2</sup>

One way of beginning to recuperate Canadian and Danish colonial history is to look at fugitive slave advertisements and its enslaved subjects, which figured both in Canadian newspapers as well as in the Danish newspapers of the West Indies. Due to many years of these states’ lack of acknowledgement regarding their colonial pasts, much archival research must be done in order to incorporate the narratives of the enslaved people. In this sense, the fugitive slave advertisements function as a humanizing and individualizing force in the midst of a deficient and dehumanizing archive and can thus be deemed as the first slave-narratives.<sup>3</sup>

Through an analytical comparison between two fugitive slave advertisements, one from the Quebec Gazette, and another from the Royal Danish American Gazette, I will examine what these advertisements can tell us about the conditions of slavery in their respective contexts. But importantly, I will also question what they *cannot* tell us, especially regarding the continuing lives of these subjects. While both of the advertisements describe the escape of a man and a woman running away together, they are also remarkably different in the amount of detail they offer. The traces of Nemo and Cash and Charlotte and Jack in these newspapers nevertheless serve as a testimony not only of the horrible conditions they endured during their flights and of the violence they would suffer if recaptured, but they are also a testimony of Canada and Denmark-Norway’s undeniable participation in colonization and the slave trade.

## The fugitive slave advertisement and subverting the archive

Studying fugitive slave advertisements, which figured in great amounts of newspapers all over the Americas, is one way of searching for humanizing and individualizing images that were reluctantly produced by slave owners in order to recapture runaways. Fugitive slave advertisements differed from slave sale advertisements in the information they delivered. For instance, it was not common for a sale advertisement to name the enslaved, however most fugitive advertisements did.<sup>4</sup> The objective behind the information that was given was also different; if a sale advertisement stated that the enslaved previously had suffered from the smallpox, it generally signified an increase in the enslaved person’s market value due to their immunity from the disease. On the contrary, this information would be delivered in a fugitive advertisement only to describe



the likelihood of smallpox scars on the body. In other words, every single type of information given was there to benefit the slave owner.

As Jan Kurth mentions in the essay “Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830” (1988-89), these escapes, which filled eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspapers, are evidence of an extensive dissatisfaction with the power structure throughout America, and are therefore deemed as a subversive force in these slave societies.<sup>5</sup> With that being said, Kurth also points out two deficiencies in the fugitive advertisement archives,

“scholarly attention has generally focused on the male runaway, particularly the slave... This focus on men, in and of itself, is not surprising. In virtually every study of the runaway slave, it has been found that men greatly outnumbered women.”<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, slavery in northern North America, like today’s Canada, is also underexplored.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although a useful archive through which to explore the experiences and lives of the enslaved, it is also clear that the lack of female representation in fugitive slave advertisements and northern research leaves us with a historical gap concerning these subjects.

### **Charlotte and Jack in the Danish West Indies**

The first fugitive slave advertisements I will examine appeared in the newspaper The Royal Danish American Gazette, which was published in Christiansted, the capital city of the island of Saint Croix. The advertisement was published in 1770, about 40 years after the Danish kingdom bought the island from the French.<sup>8</sup> Along with Saint Croix, the Danish West Indies consisted of the two other islands, Saint Thomas and Saint John, where Saint Croix itself functioned as a full-blown sugar plantation economy.<sup>9</sup> From the 1660’s to 1802, a triangular trade was carried out under the Danish flag, shipping about 100,000 Africans across the Atlantic to carry out forced labour under horrifying conditions.<sup>10</sup> Even though Denmark today proudly claims itself to be the first European nation to abolish slavery, the abolition of the *slave trade* in 1803 meant that slavery in the Danish West Indies continued until its “total” abolition in 1848.<sup>11</sup>

The conditions of the enslaved on tropical plantation islands were much harsher in some ways than that of northern North American settlements due to the minority status of the white ruling class;<sup>12</sup> the ideology of harsher punishments as an efficient means to control the enslaved majority could perhaps be the reason for Charlotte and Jack’s escape in Saint Croix, noted on 22 August 1770. The advertisement, which describes their escape, is fairly short, and it contains limited information on both of their appearances and mannerisms.

The first information we are given about Charlotte is her name and a racial and gendered characterization. Written in capital letters, Charlotte is described as a “negroe wench”, a word which originally referred to a “bold and forward girl of loose character,”<sup>13</sup> but which during the period of slavery also became a synonym for a “black or mixed-race female or a ‘Negress’ ”.<sup>14</sup> This tells us about how white colonial power, through language and discourse, had the authority to define enslaved subjects through their own systems of significations and ideologies. The conflation of black sexuality with lasciviousness and sexual excess of course served to justify the sexual exploitation of enslaved females for profit.

The fugitive notice then moves on to describe Charlotte’s appearance in minimal words, labelling her as “quite black” and “remarkably lusty about the hips.” (fig. 1) The description of

Charlotte is thus still limited to a racialized and sexualized description. The fact that the slave owner, Wm. McDougall, was referring to his enslaved fugitive as “remarkably lusty around the hips” indicates the possibility that Charlotte also suffered sexual abuse from McDougall. If so, Charlotte was not alone: a significant amount of research about enslaved women demonstrates how they were at an increased risk of being exposed to sexual abuse, often from their white male owners.

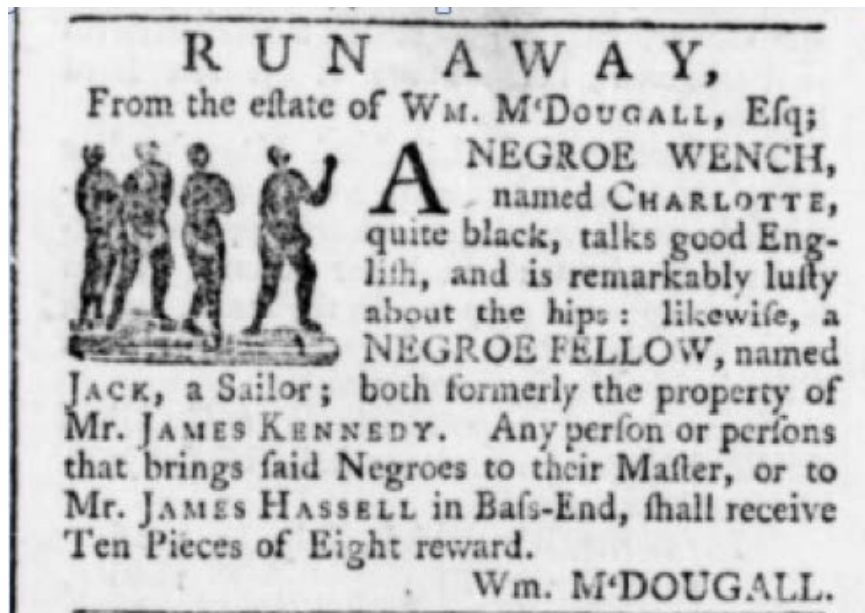


Figure 1: “Runaway”, The Royal Danish American Gazette (Christiansted, St. Croix), Wednesday, 22 August 1770, p. 1.

Another testimony of this is the slave narrative by Mary Prince, which revealed to the reader how she faced sexualized and abusive treatment from several of her white male slave owners from an early age.<sup>15</sup>

The notice also informs us that Charlotte ran away with a “NEGROE FELLOW” named Jack. He is said to be a sailor, and it is written that both of them were the former property of a man named Mr. James Kennedy. McDougall likely listed such information because the pair may have been heading back to Kennedy’s property to reunite with loved ones. However, Charlotte and Jack’s previous connection through Kennedy, also reveals the possibility that the two knew each other from the time of their previous service, either from growing up there or being sold to the same household at the same or different times.<sup>16</sup> This information alludes to how slave auctions and sales often caused the separation of family, friends, and loved ones. That being said, the notice does not disclose the relationship between Charlotte and Jack or how close they were; the advertisement does not mention the age of either of them, making it even more uncertain if theirs was a relationship based upon romance, family ties, friendship, or opportunity. However, what we do know is that Jack was a sailor, opening up the possibility of an escape by sea.<sup>17</sup>

This advertisement appeared in the Royal Danish American Gazette three times, the first printed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August as mentioned above. The advertisement also appeared three days later, in the edition on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, and finally four days later, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August. This likely meant that Charlotte and Jack were on the run for at least seven days. However, it is unclear whether they were recaptured or not. McDougall may have given up, deciding that paying for the advertisements was not worth the possibility of recapturing Charlotte and Jack.<sup>18</sup>

### **Nemo and Cash in Quebec**

Almost a decade later and about 3000 kilometres north of Saint Croix, another fugitive slave advertisement was published in the Quebec Gazette. On 4 November 1779, readers of the

paper may have noted that a woman named Cash, 26 years old, ran away with a man named Nemo, who was nearly 18 years of age. The advertisement stated that the two ran away in the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> October, but due in part to the weekly printing schedule of the publication, the advertisement was not printed until 4 November 1779. Unlike the advertisement about Charlotte and Jack, this one contains far more detailed descriptions of both fugitives, giving the readers of the newspaper a clearer


mental image of what to look for once they had read the notice. Nemo was described to be five feet high (about 152 cm), “full” and “round fac’d” and a little marked with the small pox. (fig. 2) Unlike Jack and Charlotte, his attire is thoroughly described, being a “double breasted Jacket of strip’d flannel, old worsted Stockings, and a pair of English Shoes.” (sic) Language wise, Nemo is described as speaking “English and French tolerably”. Since the advertisement also informs us that Nemo was born in Albany, his lack of English comprehension would indicate another origin, possibly Africa. Furthermore, Nemo’s lack of French seems to indicate that he was also not a residence of the province for long enough to master that language.

Nemo did not run away alone, but with a “Negro Wench” named Cash. Here again it is evident how this term indicates both a stigmatized, racist and sexualized depiction of enslaved women. Regarding physical appearance, Cash is said to be about 5 feet 8 inches tall (or about 172 cm), and unlike Nemo she spoke English and French very fluently, indicating that she may well have been born in Quebec, or arrived in the province at a young age. Although the advertisement does not describe the dress that Cash wore during her escape, it does devote a considerable amount of space describing the “Linen and other valuable Effects not her own” that she carried with her upon her departure. These included a “large bundle of wearing apparel *belonging to herself*, consisting of a black sattin Cloak, Caps, Bonnets, Ruggles, Ribbons, six or seven Petticoats, a pair of old Stays, and many other articles of value which cannot be ascertained.” (italics mine) It is remarkable that in a genre of advertising through which slave owners routinely attempted to vilify and criminalize the enslaved, Nemo and Cash’s slave owner, the tailor Hugh Ritchie, admitted Cash’s ownership of certain possessions.<sup>19</sup> As the advertisement also states, it is therefore likely that she may change her dress, as “extra clothing had an added strategic value in that it made a full description of the runaway more difficult, a fact that frustrated several owners.”<sup>20</sup>

and give their Attendance accordingly.  
MONTREAL, 30th October, 1779.

EDWD. WM. GRAY, Sheriff.

**R A N - A W A Y**



**F**ROM the Subscriber, on Sunday morning the 24th ult. about four o’Clock, a Negro Lad named *NEMO*, born in Albany, near eighteen years of age, about five feet high, full round fac’d, a little mark’d with the Small-pox, speaks English and French tolerably; he had on when he went away a double-breasted Jacket of strip’d flannel, old worsted Stockings, and a pair of English Shoes. Also a Negro Wench named *CASH*, twenty-six years old, about 5 feet 8 inches high, speaks English and French very fluently; she carried with her a considerable quantity of Linen and other valuable Effects not her own; and as she has also taken with her a large bundle of wearing apparel belonging to herself, consisting of a black sattin Cloak, Cap, Bonnets, Ruffles, Ribbons, six or seven Petticoats, a pair of old Stays, and many other articles of value which cannot be ascertained, it is likely she may change her dress. All persons are hereby forewarned from harbouring or aiding them to escape; and Masters of vessels from carrying them off, as they may depend on being prosecuted to the utmost rigour of the Law; and whoever will give information where they are harboured, or bring them back to the Subscriber at Quebec, or to Mr. GEORGE ROSS, Merchant at Sorel, shall have **TEN DOLLARS** Reward for each, and all reasonable charges.

**HUGH RITCHIE.**

N. B. The Lad was seen at Sorel on Friday morning the 29th ult. and there is reason to believe they are both lurking thereabout.

Quebec, November 2, 1779.

Figure 2: Hugh Ritchie, "RAN-AWAY," *Quebec Gazette*, 4 November 1779, vol. 740, p. 3; Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

It is noteworthy that Cash managed to carry with her a significant amount of clothing, and this leads to the question of whether this was a well-planned escape, or if it was simply a randomized assemblage of clothing in the midst of a spontaneous flight. Additionally, since it was only common for enslaved people to own one or two pairs of apparel at the time, Cash's abundance of clothing was likely related to her labour for her slave owner Hugh Ritchie, who was a tailor.<sup>21</sup> Cash was also more likely than her Danish West Indian counterparts to perform domestic labour in Quebec. This is also supported by the research showing what type of labour the enslaved in Quebec were hired to do. As Charmaine A. Nelson writes in Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (2016) "while slaves were generally sought after for agriculture, mining, and fishing, most black slaves in New France appear to have served primarily as domestics."<sup>22</sup>

This domestic labour also immediately meant that the conditions of the enslaved people in Quebec were far different than the lives of enslaved people in the tropical islands of the Caribbean such as the Danish West Indies. In Quebec, "the smaller slave holdings of individual owners meant that the enslaved were routinely and callously separated - at times across great distances - from their kin or other loved ones."<sup>23</sup>

The domestic labour in Quebec did not only result in isolation and separation, but also meant a heightened amount of surveillance, since the enslaved lived in the same households as their slave owners and did not have access to privacy. The excessive amount of detail about clothing and items in the fugitive slave advertisement placed for Nemo and Cash also serves as a testimony of the surveillance that enslaved people in northern regions, such as those that became Canada, had to endure. This surveillance could furthermore be a product of the fact that the black enslaved people were a minority in Quebec, which made them both invisible, but also highly visible all at once.<sup>24</sup>

According to Frank Mackey's archival research of newspaper notices regarding both slave sale and fugitive slave advertisements, Cash and Nemo were part of the minority of fugitives escaping during the colder months. Running away in the late fall or winter months, in the transit of October and November in their case, meant that the harbour could potentially be frozen, "leaving what was arguably the most desirable pathway of escape - the ship - closed to fugitives."<sup>25</sup> Leaving at this point in time could indicate an urgency or desperation, also taking into account, as Nelson writes, that the enslaved people in Montreal could have suffered more greatly than their enslaved Caribbean counterparts; as Africans once had experienced freedom during their lives, they were the most common fugitives on the Caribbean islands. In Montreal however, where the enslaved population was mostly comprised of Creoles (American born people), the high number of fugitives could mean greater suffering from isolation, abuse or the like, and therefore risking greater violence by escaping.<sup>26</sup>

### **Comparing the fugitives**

Comparing the fugitive slave advertisements of Charlotte and Jack, and Nemo and Cash, is also a comparison of two vastly different slave societies, but which nevertheless subjected its enslaved people to great suffering of a dehumanizing character. What is significant in these two advertisements is how they portray the escape of women, which both Kurth and Frank Mackey categorize as minorities in the fugitive slave archive. However, both of these women escaped together with a man, which Kurth puts in the category of family affairs, which often also included children.<sup>27</sup> There is no mention of children in these advertisements, leaving a question about the

relationship between the runaways. Since enslaved women were often set to domestic work or housekeeping (at least in the northern regions), as previously mentioned, they often suffered isolation from contact with black populations. This “hindered their access to runaway partners but also limited their ability to run alone.”<sup>28</sup> Cash and Charlotte found runaway partners, seemingly from a previous household or plantation in Charlotte and Jack’s case, and from the same household in the case of Cash and Nemo.

Still, it is important to stress that both Mackey’s and Kurth’s research is situated in the American north, leaving out the slave conditions of tropical climates. We must also consider if Saint Croix’s dominance in the sugar plantation economy meant that Charlotte was part of the plantation labour force, much like her female counterparts in Jamaica.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, being enslaved and female created an intersection that meant an increased risk of sexual abuse, no matter whether the female was situated in the colder climate of today’s Canada or the tropical climate of the Danish West Indies. This sexual abuse was often a factor contributing to a woman’s escape, and descriptions of women’s bodies in fugitive slave advertisements such as Charlotte’s could be a clear indication of such histories of violence.<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, the amount of details given is also a difference between the two advertisements; what are the origins of Charlotte and Jack and how old were they when they escaped? Apparently, Charlotte’s slave owner could not recall her clothing or much else about her physical appearance, apart from her “lusty hips” and dark skin, while it also does not seem that he was familiar with her runaway partner, Jack. As I have argued about the Quebec notice featuring Nemo and Cash, it is on the other hand evident that they suffered from a greater amount of surveillance; the excessive amount of detail given in Ritchie’s advertisement, together with the domestic labour in a society with a slave minority population, meant that Nemo and Cash were highly visible and therefore vulnerable.

Both fugitive advertisements can tell us a lot about the lives of these enslaved people and the circumstances they had to suffer, but still these notices cannot give us the full historical or personal accounts of what happened to them. This resembles what Marisa J. Fuentes in the introduction of her book *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016) calls “archival violence”.<sup>31</sup> The colonial archives are filled by gaps due to the white colonial power that was once, and still is to many degrees today, powerful enough to influence what the archive consists of and therefore what histories are written. A concrete example in this case is not just the lack of actual archival material regarding enslaved people and especially women, but also how the population of today’s US Virgin Islands has not had access to their own archives. Once sold to the US in 1917, Denmark left the island along with its archive, mostly written in Danish, which was then stored in Copenhagen.<sup>32</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In March 2017, the large-scale statue *I Am Queen Mary* by the artists Jeanette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle was raised in front of the Danish West Indian warehouse in Copenhagen, depicting one of the leaders in the 1878 “Fireburn” labour revolt at St. Croix.<sup>33</sup> Still, despite public sentiment, no official apology has yet been given to the US Virgin Islands on behalf of Denmark.<sup>34</sup> In a similar sense, the discussion in Canada about the removal of statues portraying the white supremacist colonial elite of the past, such as James McGill, is ongoing.<sup>35</sup> This reveals the controversy of criticizing the colonial elites of the past, and how Canada still paints a self-portrait of being the abolitionist saviour of enslaved African Americans in the context of the Underground

Railroad (1833-1865). Through this lack of action and acknowledgement, both Canada and Denmark take part in an active erasure of their colonial histories.

To access the archive through fugitive slave advertisements such as those of Charlotte, Jack, Nemo, and Cash is therefore an important part of the revision of the colonial histories and its depictions of enslaved people. These fugitive advertisements illustrate one aspect of the vast expansion of slavery, from the tropical climates of the Danish West Indies, to the cold northern regions of today's Canada. While the reading of these fugitive advertisements reveals the individual attributes of the enslaved subjects they describe, they also make visible the dehumanizing ideologies permeating the archives and the stark imbalance of power that existed between slave owners and the enslaved. The narratives of Charlotte and Jack, and Nemo and Cash will never be fully recovered, but through their rebellious escapes, their names and parts of their stories remain.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Bolette Blaagaard, "Whose Freedom? Whose memories? Commemorating Danish colonialism in St. Croix," in Social Identities, Vol. 17, No 1 (Routledge, 2011), p. 463.

<sup>2</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Introduction," Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteen-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2016), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self- Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18th c. Mid-Atlantic," The William and Mary Quarterly (April 1999), p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Mackey, "Appendix 1: Newspaper Notices," Done with Slavery: the Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 308.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830," NWSA Journal, vol. 1., no. 2 (Winter 1998-1989), p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives", p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives", p. 201; Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2016), pp. 4-8.

<sup>8</sup> Erik Gøbel, "Danish Shipping Along the Triangular Route, 1671-1802: Voyages and Conditions on Board," in Scandinavian Journal of History (Routledge, 2011), p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> "N.A.T Hall, Empire Without Dominion: The Danish West Indies, 1671-1848," in Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Gøbel, "Danish Shipping Along the Triangular Route," p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Gøbel, "Danish Shipping Along the Triangular Route," p. 135.

<sup>12</sup> N.A.T Hall, " 'The doom of the Almighty': Slaveowning Ideology," Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, ed. B. W. Higman (Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1994), p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, " 'Servant, Seraglio, Savage, or 'Sarah': Examining the Visual Representation of Black Female Subjects in Canadian Art and Visual Culture," Women in the "Promised Land": Essays in African Canadian History, eds. Nina Reid-Maroney, Boulou Ebanga de B'béri, Wanda Thomas Bernard (Toronto: Women's Press, 2018), p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Nelson, " 'Servant, Seraglio, Savage, or 'Sarah' , " p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave , ed Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 19, 24, 27.

<sup>16</sup> However, a prior relationship between Charlotte and Jack is not a given since plantations in the Danish West Indies routinely enslaved many people. Still, with an enslaved population of 18,121 in 1792 on the island of Saint Croix, 70 percent of the estates had a work force of 100 or less. For example, 70 of the 197 estates only had 0-5 workers. See: N.A.T Hall, "The Rural Milieu: Slavery on the Plantations," Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1994), p. 72-73

<sup>17</sup> Enslaved people, especially men, routinely attempted to escape slavery by leaving the region of their slave owner's residence altogether, often by sea travel. In response, slave owners in various regions used fugitive slave notices to warn their readers of the potential of an escape by sea and also to threaten ship captains with legal action

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if they aided enslaved runaways. A fugitive notice placed in a Halifax newspaper by Michael Wallace for an enslaved black man named Bill claimed that he had “mediated an attempt to get on board a ship... bound to Newfoundland”. See: Michael Wallace, “Twenty Dollars Reward,” *The Weekly Chronicle*, Saturdays, 8 February 1794, vol. vii, no. 402, p. 1; 15 February 1794, vol. vii, no. 403, p. 1; 22 February 1794, vol. vii, no. 404, p. 1; 15 March 1794, vol. vii, no. 407, p. 1; PANS MFM #8165, Reel 8165, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Halifax

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, “ ‘Servant, Seraglio, Savage, or ‘Sarah’,” p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “Cash’s Bundle: Fugitive Slave Advertisements, Clothing, and Self-Care,” *The Junto: A Group Blog on Early American History*, 14 February 2017 (date of last access 9 April 2020) <https://earlyamericanists.com/2017/02/14/roundtable-cashs-bundle-fugitive-slave-advertisements-clothing-and-self-care/>

<sup>20</sup> Kurth, “Wayward Wenches and Wives”, p. 207.

<sup>21</sup> Nelson, “Cash’s Bundle”.

<sup>22</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “A Tale of Two Empires: Montreal Slavery under the French and the British,” in *Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteen Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2016), p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, “A Tale of Two Empires,” p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, “A Tale of Two Empires,” p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Nelson, “A Tale of Two Empires,” p. 56.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson, “A Tale of Two Empires,” p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Kurth, “Wayward Wenches and Wives,” p. 202.

<sup>28</sup> Jan Kurth, “Wayward Wenches and Wives,” p. 203.

<sup>29</sup> Lucille Mathurin Mair, “Women Field Workers in Jamaica During Slavery,” *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader*, eds. Verene Sheperd and Hilary McD. Beckles (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2000)

<sup>30</sup> Kurth, “Wayward Wenches and Wives,” p. 208.

<sup>31</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, “Introduction,” *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archives* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2016), p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Blaagaard, “Whose Freedom? Whose Memories?”, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> The 1878 “Fireburn” labour revolt at Saint Croix took place 30 years after the Danish West Indies abolished slavery in 1848. After abolition, working conditions for former enslaved people did not improve much, and as they were no longer considered property, the plantation owners did not have obligations to provide for the old and disabled. On 1 October 1878, the one day a year workers were allowed to change jobs, black workers gathered in Frederiksted on Saint Croix for drinking and celebration. After some disturbance in the streets, police brutality sent labourer Henry Trotman to hospital. His rumoured death made the uproar escalate, and that night the buildings of Frederiksted were set on fire. Around 50 plantations and most of Frederiksted were destroyed by the fire that night. The rebellion led to slight improvements in the workers’ conditions, including higher pay. Today, three women who participated in the rebellion are called the “Fireburn Queens” and figure as a symbol of resistance to the colonial power in the Danish West Indies: Queen Mary, Queen Agnes, and Queen Mathilda. See: “Fireburn: The Uprising of 1878,” *Nationalmuseum*, (date of last access 27 April 2020) <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/historical-themes/danish-colonies/the-danish-west-indies/fireburn/>

<sup>34</sup> Blaagaard, “Whose Freedom? Whose Memories?”, p. 62. Additionally, when former prime-minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen visited Saint Croix in 2017 on the centennial of the sale of the Danish West Indies, he talked about the common history of the US Virgin Islands and Denmark, stating that slavery is “unforgivable.” However, he never made an official apology during his speech, despite acknowledging that the history of slavery has impacted the conditions on the islands today. See: “Debatten om en officiel undskyldning for Slaveriet i Dansk Vestindien, 1998-2017,” *danmarkshistorien.dk* (date of last access 27 April 2020) <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/debatten-om-en-officiel-undskyldning-for-slaveriet-i-dansk-vestindien-1998/>

<sup>35</sup> See: Charmaine Nelson, “Racist Monuments Don’t Belong In Public. But They Could In A Museum,” *Huffingtonpost*, 28 September 2017. (date of last access 27 April 2020) [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/charmaine-nelson/racist-monuments-dont-belong-in-public-but-they-could-in-a-museum\\_a\\_23224080/](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/charmaine-nelson/racist-monuments-dont-belong-in-public-but-they-could-in-a-museum_a_23224080/)

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: “Runaway,” The Royal Danish American Gazette (Christiansted, St. Croix), Wednesday, 22 August 1770, p. 1.

Figure 2: Hugh Ritchie, “RAN-AWAY,” Quebec Gazette, 4 November 1779, vol. 740, p. 3; Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

# MUSICAL TALENT IN FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS: A MODE OF RESISTANCE CENTRAL TO BLACK DIASPORIC CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY

Lucia Bell-Epstein

Fugitive slave advertisements are crucial, often overlooked sources which document enslaved resilience and resistance to Transatlantic Slavery. Newspapers from the eighteenth century and nineteenth century printed runaway advertisements, a primary record of slave narratives told from the perspective of slave owners.<sup>1</sup> By studying these archival documents, the attributes of enslaved persons are revealed: their clothes, trades or skills, linguistic ability, and ethnic or racial identity.<sup>2</sup> Musical talent was a recurring skill detailed in runaway advertisements, by which slave owners exhibited enslaved people's intelligence and cultural ingenuity, contradicting core notions upon which the practice of slavery was built. The 1775 notice (fig. 1)

for "a Negro man" named Lowcanes, who "plays the Violin very well" in the Quebec Gazette has great similarities to and some stark differences from the 1824 advertisement (fig. 2) for "a Negro man" named Yett, who "plays upon the fiddle," published in an unknown newspaper in Oppenheim, New York.<sup>3</sup> A comparative analysis of

these advertisements for Lowcanes and Yett will demonstrate how music served as a form of resistance and a means for enslaved people to maintain African cultural traditions. Concurrently, their musical skills were exploited by slave owners for personal entertainment and economic profit. The advertisements for Lowcanes and Yett expose the intertwined histories of slavery and music, and establish music as core to black diasporic cultural expression and identity.<sup>4</sup> I advocate for and strive to exercise Marisa J. Fuentes's ethical approach to the study of archival material, as I analyze these fugitive slave advertisements to unveil a history of resilience and illuminate music as a medium of resistance and cultural preservation in both colonized Quebec and New York.<sup>5</sup>

It is critical to first situate Lowcanes and Yett in relation to where and when their advertisements ran, and

**R**UN AWAY from the Subscriber (on the Eighteenth Instant) a Negro man named *Lowcanes*, aged twenty five Years, thin faced, and remarkable long hair tied behind, about five feet ten inches high, speaks good French, no English, plays the Violin very well. He had on when he went off a light coloured short coat with a red cape to it, waistcoat and breeches. Whoever secures the said Negro man so that his Master may have him again shall have sixteen Dollars reward, and charges from  
22d November, 1775. WILLIAM GILL.

Figure 1: "Run Away," Quebec Gazette, 22 November 1775; 30 November 1775; 1770-1776 MFM KEQ77, McGill University Library.

**Fifteen Dollars Reward!**  
**NOTICE**  
 I hereby given, that my Negro man named YETT won't stay at home, but runs at large, to and fro. All persons are therefore forbidden to harbor, trust or employ said run-away, even one hour, on penalty of the law; and no excuse will be taken of those who transgress this injunction.  
YETT is pretty large sized; not of the blackest order; speaks Low-Dutch and broken English; and plays upon the fiddle.  
The above reward will be paid to any person who will safely return said Negro into the custody of the subscriber, residing about two miles from *Ingham's Mills*.  
Simon I. Toll.  
Oppenheim, March 24, 1824. c33t3

Figure 2: "Fifteen Dollars Reward!," Unknown Newspaper, Oppenheim, New York, 1824; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed February 5, 2020, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-bcfe-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

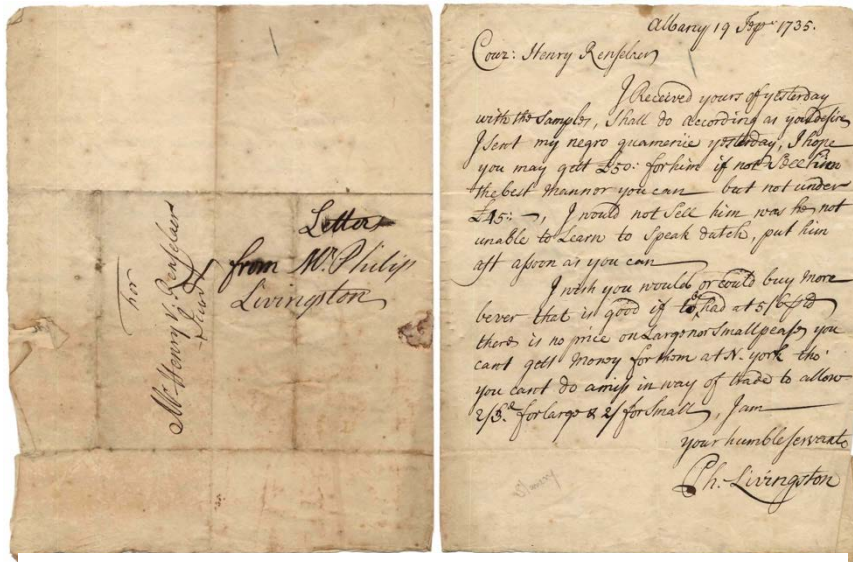


Figure 3: "Philip Livingston Letter," *George A. Plimpton Papers*, 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1735, Albany, New York; *Student Exhibits | Columbia University and Slavery*, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://slaveryexhibits.ctl.columbia.edu:443/items/show/53>.

within the larger context of print newspapers, which as a practice, sustained and reinforced slavery.<sup>6</sup> By choosing to publish fugitive slave advertisements, newspapers were complicit in the institution of slavery by economically sustaining their printing presses at the cost of enslaved people's freedom.<sup>7</sup> However, these newspapers unwittingly created a valuable future archive of evidence of enslaved people's active resistance to slavery and their mastery of musical instruments. These advertisements individualized Lowcanes and Yett and should be read as

documents that acknowledge their identity as named human beings, not simply enslaved persons.

The *Quebec Gazette* published Lowcanes's fugitive advertisement on 30 November 1775, eight days after it was initially dated and twelve days after Lowcanes had escaped on 18 November 1775. Since the advertisement was published twelve days later, this demonstrates that Lowcanes escaped long enough to make Gill publish an advertisement about him. William Gill, Lowcanes's English slave owner, settled in Quebec prior to the American War of Independence, and was a ship captain and merchant.<sup>8</sup> On the reward notice in Oppenheim, New York from 24 March 1824, the slave owner Simon I. Toll wrote that Yett should be returned to "the subscriber residing about two miles from Ingham's Mills" and all persons harbouring Yett for "even one hour" would face "penalty of the law."<sup>9</sup> Yett is described as a man who "won't stay at home, but runs at large, to and fro." The language in this phrase indicates that Yett had run away several times before and had been recaptured. Yett's ongoing resistance should lead us to question what steps Toll took, like the use of corporal punishment, to curtail his behaviour. Gill offered readers "sixteen Dollars reward and charges," for Lowcanes's recapture, a dollar more than the "Fifteen Dollars Reward!" printed in large, bold lettering that Toll offered for Yett. Lowcanes and Yett were probably valued for higher reward amounts because of their musical talents.

Both advertisements racially identify Lowcanes and Yett as "Negro" men, but Yett is described as "not of the blackest order," suggesting his lighter skin colour was perhaps a result of racial mixing.<sup>10</sup> Lowcanes spoke "good French [and] no English" and Yett spoke "Low Dutch and broken English." Lowcanes and Yett's facility with French and Dutch reveals that they had likely been born in or lived a long time in their respective locations, and that their language skills reflect the household languages used by their owners.<sup>11</sup> New Amsterdam became New York and was initially colonized by the Dutch, and Quebec had once been New France, colonized initially by the French.<sup>12</sup> A 1735 letter from New York details the sale of an enslaved person because he was unable to learn Dutch, therefore, perhaps Dutch was privileged in New Amsterdam as French was in Quebec (Fig. 3).

Lowcanes and Yett's names also hint at their origins. Historian Frank Mackey suggests that Lowcanes could be the English name for an enslaved person who "spoke good French" and "no

English."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Mackey suggests "Lowcanes" was the English pronunciation of "Léogane," the town in St. Domingue of the same name, indicating Lowcanes's potential birthplace.<sup>14</sup> Yett's language skills imply that his owner Toll was probably Dutch and other fugitive slave advertisements of the late eighteenth century in New York reveal that it was typical for enslaved peoples to speak Dutch at that time (Fig. 4, 5).<sup>15</sup>

Lowcanes and Yett's music skills connect them to the history of music during Transatlantic Slavery. The fiddle, also known as the bowed lute, is primarily from West Africa in the Savannah or Sudanic region (Fig. 6).

The fiddle dates back to the eleventh or twelfth century and is the generic term for any bowed (stringed) instrument, including the violin.<sup>16</sup> The fiddle and violin are differentiated by how they are played and the genres of music with which they are associated. The violin is one of the most commonly mentioned instruments in slave advertisements of the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

The fiddle has been historically represented in the United States as a symbol of European and Anglo-American culture; when African Americans are identified with the fiddle, it is typically in the context of "emulating or imitating Europeans."<sup>18</sup>

According to Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, professor of Ethnomusicology, the fiddle has been historically misrepresented in the USA due to the lack of acknowledgement that, "fiddling [w]as [a] tradition identified with blackness, but primarily a product of whiteness."<sup>19</sup> The misconceptions of African American and African Canadian music impacted the development of black music.<sup>20</sup> While American scholarship, like DjeDje's work, tackles these misconceptions, there is an absence of Canadian scholarship on the history of African Canadian music and its intrinsic connection to the history of Canadian slavery.<sup>21</sup> This makes the fugitive advertisement for Lowcanes all the more valuable, because it helps fill a gap in the history of Canadian Slavery and the study of histories of African Canadian music. The noting of instruments in Lowcanes and Yett's advertisements represents a musical "acculturation." Rather

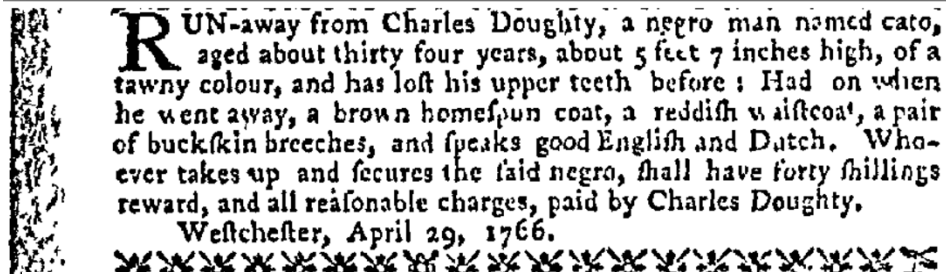


Figure 4: "Runaway Slave Ad of Charles Doughty," *New York Mercury*, 1766, *Student Exhibits | Columbia University and Slavery*, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://slaveryexhibits.ctl.columbia.edu:443/items/show/42>.

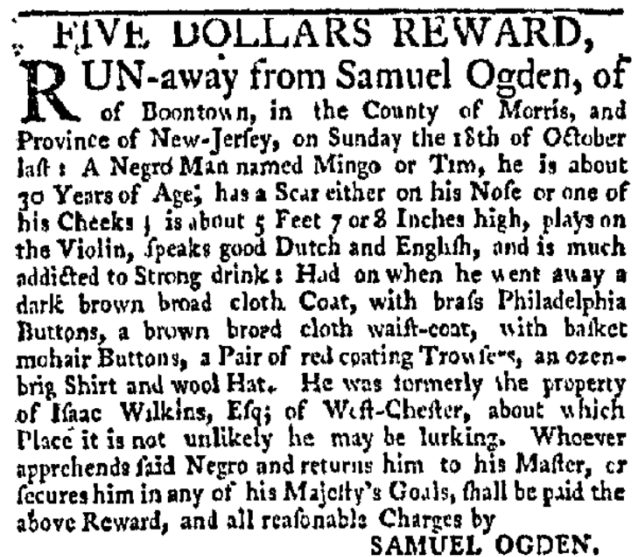


Figure 5: "Runaway Slave Ad of Samuel Ogden" *New York Gazette*, 1772; *Student Exhibits | Columbia University and Slavery*, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://slaveryexhibits.ctl.columbia.edu:443/items/show/22>.

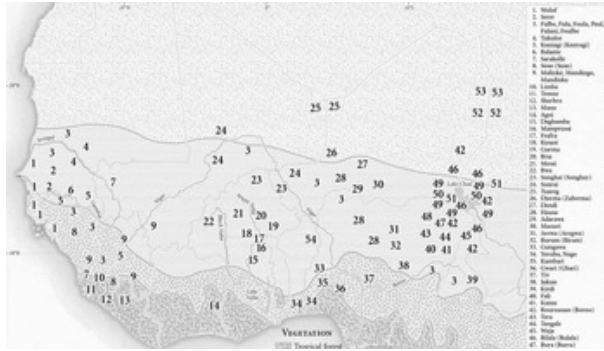


Figure 6: “Distribution of people in West Africa who use the one-stringed fiddle,” Map by David L. Fuller, based on a map in Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, “Distribution of Ethnic Groups in West Africa Using the One String Fiddle,” in *Distribution of the One String Fiddle in West Africa* (Los Angeles: UCLA Program in Ethnomusicology, Department of Music, 1980), pp. 40–41; and in *Fiddling in West Africa: Touching the Spirit* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 24.

than a loss of tradition, acculturation is defined by DjeDje as the regionalization of sound and tradition with the incorporation of European or Native American culture.<sup>22</sup>

Acculturation did not occur naturally, rather, it was a product of enslaved people’s musical talent and traditions that were forcibly exploited by slave owners for their own entertainment. Frank Mackey’s *Done with Slavery: the Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840* (2010) documents how enslaved people who played instruments, usually the fiddle, were often forced to perform at private frolics.<sup>23</sup> Solomon Northup’s memoir and slave narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) describes how his violinist skills were exploited by his white slave owners who forced him to perform for their family and guests.<sup>24</sup>

Solomon’s story sheds light on Lowcanes and Yett, as it reveals the value placed upon music as a source of leisure and entertainment for white slave owners. It can be assumed that Lowcanes and Yett were forced to perform for their slave owners as well, who recognized their musical talent as evidenced by the descriptions in the fugitive notices. Toll revealed his value of Yett by stating he “plays upon the *fiddle*,” individualizing Yett and publicizing his intelligence. Gill went so far as to praise Lowcanes by proclaiming that he “plays the Violin very well.” Gill acknowledged that Lowcanes possessed an exceptional talent that was highly esteemed by whites, thereby contradicting the rationale used to justify slavery, that Africans were intellectually and culturally inferior.

While African music survived the Middle Passage, it was utterly transformed by slavery.<sup>25</sup> Philip Morgan argues that not only did rhythm, percussion, and complex musical instruments cross the Middle Passage, it is important to recognize how the enslaved, “adapted traditional instruments, invented new ones, and borrowed Anglo-American ones.”<sup>26</sup> By playing the violin and fiddle, Yett and Lowcanes were a part of the African music tradition; even as their traditional instruments were adapted for white entertainment, they carried a history of fundamental African principles.<sup>27</sup> Music was not only used by white slave owners for entertainment, but as a means of control and manipulation, as seen on slave ships during the Middle Passage, and also through the practice of hiring out enslaved musicians for profit.<sup>28</sup> The enslaved were forced to dance to music on ship decks as a form of forced exercise, with an economic incentive, so that they would be fit for sale after the long transatlantic journeys.<sup>29</sup>

While African music was altered by slavery, it nonetheless served as a source of resilience, a language for enslaved peoples to use to communicate with each other and to culturally preserve their voices through time. In his memoir, Solomon Northup describes the popular nineteenth-century black “patting” tradition, which accompanied the fiddle, and was a percussion technique that the enslaved performed by “striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, the left with the other—all the while keeping time with the feet, and singing.”<sup>30</sup> Enslaved people’s use of their bodies as



instruments symbolizes the violence enacted upon black bodies, but also a reclamation of one's body by using it to produce music; in this way, the holistic music of the enslaved was a form of resistance, comfort, and survival all at once. The use of one's voice, hands, and mind to create and play music became a cultural tradition of sounds, even as it became creolized in the colonial context of Quebec in the late eighteenth century and in New York in the early nineteenth century.



Figure 7: George Heriot, "Minuets of the Canadians" (1807), 23 x 36.7 cm, print, McCord Museum, Montreal, Canada.

Like race, creolized forms of musical practices emerged. Nelson articulates how white owners pursued, adapted, and cross-pollinated their musical traditions with those of enslaved persons: "despite the pervasiveness of Eurocentric ideals of cultural superiority, white desire for African rhythms, music, dance, and expressive culture was undeniable."<sup>31</sup> George Heriot's print Minutes of the Canadian (1807) [Fig. 7] illustrates this creolization in the print's mix of black and white musicians in Quebec.<sup>32</sup> Nelson argues that the multi-racial band in this print could be the result of Quebec's shortage of African enslaved musicians, compared to the "demographic majorities of enslaved blacks in the American South and the Caribbean."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Minutes of the Canadian may reveal the need for musicians of any race to perform together due to Quebec's demographic minority of enslaved persons. In this print, the black musicians appear to preserve specific African cultural musical traditions through their African instruments or musical gestures.<sup>34</sup> For example, one black musician kicks his leg up to tap his tambourine. Nelson cites cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who argues that blacks used their bodies to write; enslaved people were largely illiterate, and instead spoke and transcribed their history through rhythms and percussion performed on and with their bodies, as well as with instruments, like the black musicians that appear in Heriot's print.<sup>35</sup>

The two most popular instruments used by black enslaved musicians at white gatherings were the European fiddle and African banjo.<sup>36</sup> While the drum was outlawed for fear of uprisings, the fiddle was never banned, perhaps because it was seen as a significant cultural symbol to European Americans. Moreover, the fiddle, banjo, drum and various instruments were used by slave owners as an economic tool to control the enslaved through forced performances.<sup>37</sup> Since the growing season was short, there was no full-time crop to tend which created more opportunities for enslaved musicians to work as hired out labourers.<sup>38</sup> If they were hired out, Lowcanes and Yett would have had more contact with other enslaved people, which could have helped facilitate escape attempts. However, the weather conditions at the times of their escapes might also suggest otherwise.

It is particularly important to note that Lowcanes fled from his owner in Quebec in the cold autumn month of November, suggesting that Gill's treatment of Lowcanes was so

unbearable that he ran away during a time of year that was less common because of its treacherous conditions.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the clothing that Lowcanes sported, “a light coloured short coat with a red cape to it, waistcoat and breeches,” probably did not protect him from the November cold and possibility of snow. To study and question what was not mentioned in the fugitive advertisements is as important as studying and questioning what was. How protective were Lowcanes shoes and do his clothes suggest that his escape was planned or unplanned? Yett’s clothing is not described, but the month of March suggests cool if not cold temperatures in upstate New York. Since spring begins between March 19-21 and winter begins on December 21, Yett’s escape was closer to winter than Lowcanes, which was in the autumn. Due to the cold climate in upstate New York in early spring, Yett’s March escape, like that of Lowcanes late autumn one, might well have been unplanned.

The question of whether or not Lowcanes and Yett would have been paid for their musical performances, as enslaved persons in the south were, is hard to answer. Learning how to play the violin took practice and skill, which begs the question: when did the enslaved have time to spare? How did Lowcanes and Yett learn to play the violin/fiddle so well, and how were black enslaved people not only able to learn instruments, but obtain them in the first place? Much work needs to be done to investigate the historical roots of black Canadian and American music in the African Diaspora.<sup>40</sup>

Both of these fugitive slave advertisements suggest individual acts, which David Waldstreicher argues reshaped black lives in the North, and placed pressure on the entire regime of slavery. Lowcanes and Yett represent a community of resistance and conditions that led to running away alone.<sup>41</sup> It was not until 1827, when slavery in New York state became illegal, that the abolitionist system known as the Underground Railroad came into existence.<sup>42</sup> We cannot know if Yett, who escaped just three years prior, benefited from this system. Individual runaways constituted a separate but linked community of resisters from different generations and different places.<sup>43</sup>

These Quebec and New York advertisements are historically linked as evidence of likely lone resistance, heroic acts by two male musicians escaping from slavery in the Northern hemisphere. Yet, the advertisements also indicate Yett and Lowcanes’s significant differences. They lived in different regions that had different languages and customs. Fuentes reminds us of the ethical importance of treating subjects of study as individuals, so when we compare them, it is critical not to conflate the experiences of Yett and Lowcanes, which were ultimately incomparable in obvious ways and in ways we can never know.<sup>44</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18th c. Mid-Atlantic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* (April 1999), p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways” p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> I requested the newspaper source that printed Yett’s advertisement from the New York Public Library Digital Collections and have not heard back. The unknown source of this advertisement demonstrates the faults of archival practices, and the need for more transparency.

<sup>4</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: Insomniac Press, 2003), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, “Introduction,” in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p 7. According to Fuentes, the problem is not the dearth of archival material to be studied, but rather that these documents are not made to give access to this history from the perspective of the enslaved. I attempt to read between the lines when situating and comparing these advertisements to recover the dignity of the enslaved in archival practices.

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<sup>6</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Fugitive Slave Advertisements," art history seminar 411B 2020, *James McGill was a Slave Owner: Slavery and the History of Universities McGill University*, Montreal, Canada, 10 February 2020. The history of printing fugitive slave advertisements is paradoxical: slave owners had to express their enslaved person's individuality, in order to identify them and get them back, which contradicts the notion that blacks did not possess the individuality to make their own choices.

<sup>7</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," p. 247.

<sup>8</sup> Mackey, Frank, "Notes to Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 539.

<sup>9</sup> Inghman's Mills exists today as a hamlet located in the Town of Oppenheim, which is in Fulton County, New York.

<sup>10</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," *Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2016), p. 133. Nelson describes cross-racial contact as exhibiting the "*perverse intimacy*" that slavery created "through which white imposed themselves upon black on a biological level." This is one possible explanation for Toll's racial description of Yett.

<sup>11</sup> Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle," *Journal of the Society for American Music*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2016), (date of last access 10 February 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196315000528>.

<sup>12</sup> Edgar J McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 4, 6, 23. In search of labour for New Netherland's production and development, the West India Company imported enslaved persons, transforming the colony from a "commercial out-post into a permanent settlement" (4). A majority of enslaved people were transported from Curacao, which was the primary slave port of the Dutch in the West Indies. (6) They were imported from various sources which helped stabilize the New Netherland economy. In 1664, with the establishment of English control, New Netherland became New Amsterdam (and later New York), and slavery entered a future of expansion (23).

<sup>13</sup> Mackey, Frank, "Notes to Appendix I," p. 539.

<sup>14</sup> Mackey, Frank, "Notes to Appendix I," p. 539. Léogane was a French colony on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola from 1659 to 1804.

<sup>15</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," p. 295. Language skills documented in advertisements not only revealed enslaved persons intellect, but their value on the open market.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Montagu, "fiddle," *The Oxford Companion to Music*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), (date of last access 10 February 2020) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-2499>. Both instruments are physically the same or similar but played differently.

<sup>17</sup> Theresa Jenoure, "The Afro-American Fiddler," *Contributions in Black Studies*: vol. 5, article 6 (2008), p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music," (date of last access 10 February 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music," (date of last access 10 February 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music," (date of last access 10 February 2020).

<sup>21</sup> One contribution to the study of African Canadian music in the period of Canadian Slavery is Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music," (date of last access 10 February 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Mackey, Frank, "Jacks Of All Trades," *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2008), p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 593; cited in Charmaine A. Nelson "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 134. British conquest took place in 1760, revealing the mixing of British and French traditions, as well as Dutch, seen in Yett's advertisement, with the African musical traditions.

<sup>27</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> The documentation of instruments on ships from the Middle Passage links the fiddle/violin to its West African roots.



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- <sup>29</sup> George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies*, 2 vols (London: Baldwin, 1816), vol. 1, p. 102; cited in Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 136, 154 endnote #151.
- <sup>30</sup> Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, p. 219.
- <sup>31</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 133.
- <sup>32</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 134, endnote #161. The print depicts a gathering of twenty-six mainly white men, women, and children. Three musicians are clearly outlined in the left of the image. According to Nelson, "a white male in a coat and plumed hat shake a tambourine above his head, a seated white male in a coat plays a fiddle, and a standing black male in a busy-looking horizontally striped coat and vertically striped pants plays another tambourine with his foot." Nelson also states that the original 1807 watercolor differs from the 1809 print (endnote #161).
- <sup>33</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 138.
- <sup>34</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 143.
- <sup>35</sup> Stuart Hall, "What is the 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," *The Black Studies Reader*, eds. Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley, and Claudine Michel (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 259; cited in Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 139.
- <sup>36</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 136.
- <sup>37</sup> Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music," (date of last access 10 February 2020); Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 144.
- <sup>38</sup> A. J. Williams-Meyers, "The African (American) in the Mid-Hudson Valley before 1800: Some Historiographical Clues," *Transformations of an American County*, eds. Joyce Ghee, Melodye Kaltz, William McDermott, and Richard Wiles (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Dutchess County Historical Society, 1986), pp. 107-116; cited in Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives," p. 200.
- <sup>39</sup> Mackey, Frank, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 310. Mackey notes that of the fifty escapes advertised, the majority occurred between the milder months of April and October when the rivers were navigable. Only six documented escapes took place in November, two of which were jailbreaks, and one was a repeated attempt by an enslaved person in Quebec who had already tried to escape the previous summer. It is significant that Lowcanes escaped during the harsh autumn month of November.
- <sup>40</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Representing the enslaved African in Montreal," p. 143.
- <sup>41</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," p. 245.
- <sup>42</sup> Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives," p. 206.
- <sup>43</sup> Billy G. Smith, "Runaway Slaves in the Mid-Atlantic Region during the Revolutionary Era," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *The Transforming Hand of Revolution: Reconsidering the American Revolution as a Social Movement* (Charlottesville, Va., 1995), 199-230; cited in David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," p. 245.
- <sup>44</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, "Introduction," *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p 7.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: “Run Away,” Quebec Gazette, 22 November 1775; 30 November 1775; 1770-1776 MFM KEQ77, McGill University Library.

Figure 2: “Fifteen Dollars Reward!,” Unknown Newspaper, Oppenheim, New York, 1824; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections. (date of last access 5 February 2020), <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-bcfe-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Figure 3: “Philip Livingston Letter,” George A. Plimpton Papers, 19 September 1735, Albany, New York; *Student Exhibits | Columbia University and Slavery* (date of last access 8 February 2020), <https://slaveryexhibits.ctl.columbia.edu:443/items/show/53>.

Figure 4: “Runaway Slave Ad of Charles Doughty,” New York Mercury, 1766, *Student Exhibits | Columbia University and Slavery* (date of last access 8 February 2020), <https://slaveryexhibits.ctl.columbia.edu:443/items/show/42>.

Figure 5: “Runaway Slave Ad of Samuel Ogden,” New York Gazette, 1772; *Student Exhibits | Columbia University and Slavery* (date of last access 15 February 2020), <https://slaveryexhibits.ctl.columbia.edu:443/items/show/22>.

Figure 6: “Distribution of people in West Africa who use the one-stringed fiddle,” Map by David L. Fuller, based on a map in Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, “Distribution of Ethnic Groups in West Africa Using the One String Fiddle,” Distribution of the One String Fiddle in West Africa (Los Angeles: UCLA Program in Ethnomusicology, Department of Music, 1980), pp. 40–41; and Fiddling in West Africa: Touching the Spirit (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 24.

Figure 7: George Heriot, Minuets of the Canadians (1807), 23 x 36.7 cm, print, McCord Museum, Montreal, Canada.

## DRESS CULTURE IN FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS

Lucy Brown

Runaway or fugitive slave advertisements found throughout newspapers in North America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries offer a wealth of information on enslaved people in the USA and Canada. Runaway advertisements have not only become valuable tools to identify and document the lives of enslaved people, but also offer a unique perspective into their use of culture as resistance. Therefore, this essay will seek to examine fugitive slave advertisements specifically as they relate to the “stealing” or “carrying off” of clothes and other material objects during the escape of an enslaved person. When escaping one’s owner, one could assume that an enslaved person would take only the essentials for escape and survival. Missing or misplaced household objects could have alerted the owner to the planning of an escape and the weight of such objects would have surely slowed the pace of one’s flight. However, when advertisements placed in the news describe fugitive slaves who “carry’d away” a large number of clothes and dress items, one is led to ponder the purpose and goal of taking such objects. This essay seeks to investigate the relationship between enslaved people and the clothes they took with them, as well as the significance of material and dress culture within slavery and, more broadly, the colonies of North America. The two runaway notices analyzed as sources are that of Angolo from Connecticut, USA, and Prince from Margerville, New Brunswick in Canada.

On 29 June 1792 in New Brunswick, a notice was placed in the *Saint John Gazette* by John Agnew, advertising for the recapture of “Prince,” an enslaved fugitive (fig. 1). From the sources available, it appears as though this specific advertisement was printed only once. However, it is clear that Prince had already escaped in the past, because Agnew mentions that he had “attempted twice before this to runaway.”<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, there is very little in the advertisement that describes Prince’s physical appearance. Instead, Agnew took pains to malign his character, describing him as “artful,” and a “daring liar” with a “gloomy and malevolent look”. Such strategic character assassinations of those who resisted enslavement was common. Furthermore, Prince’s bravery and determination to make a life for himself as a free man no doubt frustrated John Agnew who appears to have greatly disapproved of Prince’s rebellious nature and wished to make it publicly known. To describe Prince as “artful” was another way of indicating Prince’s supposed cunning or deceitfulness. Often, by characterizing enslaved people in such negative terminology, the owner or writer of the runaway notice intended to discredit the enslaved person they wished to catch and primarily blame their actions on “unruly” behavior.<sup>2</sup> Today, scholars argue that such descriptions of enslaved people are, in fact, evidence of their continued resistance to their owners.<sup>3</sup>

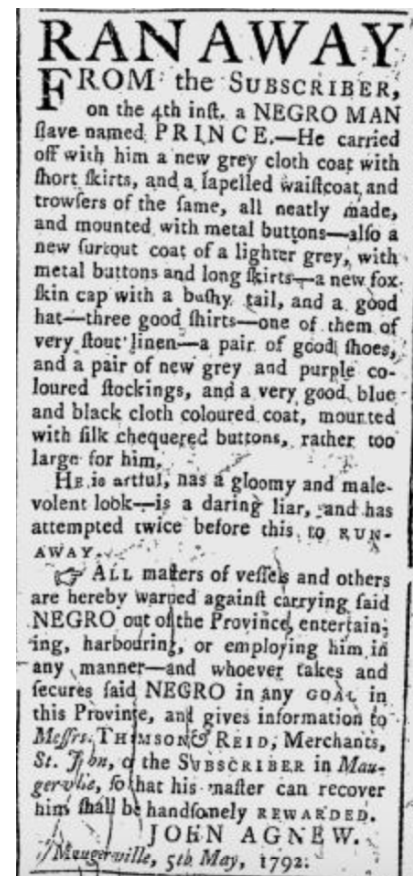


Figure 1: John Agnew, “RAN AWAY,” *Saint John Gazette*, 29 June 1792

The only piece of information that could help someone identify Prince and his physical appearance is found at the end of the description where Agnew described the clothes Prince had taken with him. Specifically, Agnew claimed that a blue coat he had taken was “rather large for him.” Therefore, one could assume that for this detail to be included, Prince may have been relatively small in stature or that he had been given clothing that was ill-fitting and too large for his frame. Agnew was clearly hoping that if Prince was seen wearing the clothes he had taken they would be noticeably ill-fitting. There is no mention of a specific reward for Prince’s capture, though Agnew wrote that whoever returned Prince would be “handsomely rewarded.” Clearly, Agnew had an extensive network of people to aid his hunt for Prince and several contacts are listed at the bottom of the advertisement through which one could collect the reward for Prince’s capture.

John Agnew was an ardent Loyalist from Virginia.<sup>4</sup> He had become the chaplain of the regiment the “Queen’s American Rangers” in 1778, but was captured by a French squadron alongside his son Stair Agnew in 1781.<sup>5</sup> Both father and son remained imprisoned for the rest of the war, only to find that upon their subsequent return to Virginia, they were no longer welcome.<sup>6</sup> Both father and son eventually settled in British North America, specifically Saint John in New Brunswick, where John Agnew remained for the rest of his life.<sup>7</sup> Agnew, therefore, represents the Loyalist migration to northern British lands following the Revolutionary War and he most likely brought his enslaved person with him, like many other American Loyalists.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to the Revolutionary War, an earlier fugitive slave notice from British North America also displayed considerable interest in the dress of the enslaved person. On 29 October 1744, a notice was placed in *The New-York Gazette* by Samuel Willis of Middletown, Connecticut, detailing the escape of Angolo, a “20-year old” enslaved person (fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> Angolo’s fugitive slave advertisement features a more detailed description of his appearance, citing him as “bow-leg’d” with “toes spread pret[t]y much.” Whether as possible evidence of physical abuse that Angolo had endured, as signs of scarification or perhaps because he had contracted and survived smallpox, the advertisement also describes him as having “small scratches [on] each side of his face.” Interestingly, the advertisement also states that at times Angolo wore a “Bobb” in his ear, such as an earring or jewelry. Samuel Willis was offering forty shillings as a reward for his recapture. Much like with Prince’s case, it is unclear whether the advertisement was reprinted in the newspaper, due to a lack of sources. However, if both notices were never reprinted in their respective newspapers, Angolo and Prince were either caught quickly, before the next weekly edition of the paper, or their owners had given up on finding them, which would seem unlikely.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of both advertisements is the detailed descriptions of the clothes Angolo and Prince “stole” during their escapes. In the advertisement by John Agnew, he wrote that Prince had taken with him

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**R**AN away from *Samuel Willis of Middle-*  
*town in Connecticut, a well set Angolo, Negro Fel-*  
*low aged about 20 Years, a little bow-Leg'd, and his*  
*Toes spread pretty much, he has small Scratches each*  
*Side of his Face, sometimes has a Bobb in his Ear, and*  
*is a good Cook, he carry'd away with him several Sut's*  
*of striped and white Velts, and a brown Holland fly*  
*Coat an old pair of Pumps a Pair of Worsted Stockins,*  
*a Worsted Cap or two, some Silver Money, a black Vel-*  
*vet Stock, with a Silver Clasp, a Pair of Knee Buckl's,*  
*whoever takes up said Negro, and brings him to his*  
*Matter, or secures him so that he may be had again,*  
*shall have forty shillings Reward, and all Reasonable*  
*Charge paid by Samuel Willis.*

Figure 2: Samuel Willis, “*RAN AWAY*,” *The New-York Gazette*, 29 October 1744

“a new grey cloth coat with short skirts, and a lapelled waistcoat, and trousers of the same, *all neatly made*, and mounted with metal buttons - also a new fur coat of a lighter grey, with metal button and long skirts - a new fox skin cap with a bushy talk, and a *good* hat - three *good* shirts - one of them of very stout linen - a pair of *good* shoes, and a pair of new grey and purple coloured stockings, and a *very good* blue and black cloth coloured coat, mounted with silk chequered buttons.” [italics mine] (sic)

By analyzing the text, it is clear that the clothes Prince had taken were of very high quality, which Agnew stresses on multiple occasions. Similarly, Samuel Willis wrote that Angolo had taken with him “several suits of ‘suts’ of striped and white vests, and a brown Holland fly coat an old pair of pumps a pair of worsted stockings a worsted cap or two, some Silver Money, a black velvet stock, with a silver clasp, a pair of knee buckles” (sic). The clothes which Angolo had taken do not appear to be of the same quality as those listed in Prince’s advertisement, yet he is also described as having taken objects such as clasps and buckles alongside coins, all of which could indicate an appreciation of the monetary value these pieces represented. By examining the items both enslaved people had carried off, it is perhaps possible to infer the motivations Prince and Angolo had to depart with the clothes when escaping.

In order to understand and interpret Prince and Angolo’s motivation for taking clothes during their escapes as well as what they intended to use them for, it is essential to analyze dress culture broadly within the eighteenth-century North American economy as well as slavery. During the eighteenth century, the majority of clothes worn by both enslaved people and white colonists in North America would have been imported from England.<sup>10</sup> The trade and purchase of clothes from England in the colonies were a large portion of the “imperial economy,” due to their necessity and transportability.<sup>11</sup> Clothes also offered those at all levels of society the ability to self-create their identities and mitigate social standings. Those at the bottom of society, including enslaved people, could create their own aesthetic and status through the clothes they wore. As a result, clothes offered two unique opportunities to enslaved runaways, social mobility, and economic capital. By stealing the clothes of their owners, an enslaved person could often change their wardrobe to remain unnoticed or pass as a free person.<sup>12</sup> Clothes were also a valuable source of wealth and could have possibly been exchanged for money, food, a place to sleep, and even one’s silence. However, when wearing the “stolen” clothes, runaway enslaved people had to be acutely aware of how finely they dressed. There have been cases of black people who were sent to prison in the 1700’s for dressing too nicely.<sup>13</sup> They would have been perceived as dressing in clothes above their position in society, and therefore, attracted the suspicion of whites who assumed that they could only have come by such expensive outfits through criminal action or force.<sup>14</sup> To pass unnoticed and yet also blend in required a very calculated understanding of appearances and social status.<sup>15</sup>

In order to begin a specific investigation into the case of Prince and Angolo, it is essential to note that both men most likely had time to plan their escapes. Leaving with such an extensive collection of clothes, with a specific purpose in mind for each item, would most likely entail detailed preparation and planning. In the fugitive slave notices of both Prince and Angolo, the slave owners provided such detailed and specific descriptions of the clothes that had been taken from them to ensure the safe return of their property, to describe what the enslaved men might be wearing, and to criminalize them in order to incentivize the public’s cooperation in their detention. By advertising the particularities of the clothes, Willis and Agnew were not only attempting to identify Prince and Angolo, but also reclaim the clothes and other items that had

been taken from them. For instance, through the repetition of words “new” and “very good” to describe the quality of the clothes in the notice, Agnew recognized the value of his clothes and, therefore, was not only advertising for the loss of Prince, but also his clothes. When advertising the loss of their clothes alongside the loss of their enslaved person, slave owners were essentially equating the runaways with the material and commodity value of clothing.<sup>16</sup>

Slave owners such as Agnew and Willis were also aware of the fact that Prince and Angolo would perhaps use the attire as a means of disguising themselves. Not only would one be able to identify Prince and Angolo through their physical appearance, but also by the clothes they had with them or were wearing, all of which could then be returned to their owners. It was common for most people to have a minimal wardrobe during the eighteenth century, especially enslaved people for whom material deprivation was common. As a result, one could be identified by their usual outfit.<sup>17</sup> It is for this reason that runaway advertisements would often describe in detail the clothes enslaved people had been wearing when they escaped. When an enslaved person ran with multiple changes of clothing, the slave owners’ printing of such details sought to ensure that they could be identified in all their “disguises”.<sup>18</sup> By being able to change one’s clothes, depending on the outfit, the perception of one’s social status could also be shifted; enslaved people could “become” the free person that would allow them greater mobility within North America.

An analysis of the text in both Prince and Angolo’s runaway notice can provide valuable insight into their motivations and use of the clothing. Beginning with Prince, it is made exceedingly clear by Agnew, his owner, that the clothes he carried were of very high quality. As a result, one could interpret the notice as indicating Prince’s desire to use the clothes as a disguise to create the impression of a higher social standing, that of a free man. It should be noted that due to the lack of Prince’s physical description, Agnew intended for the readers of the notice to identify him by the clothes he had “stolen”. Therefore, one could assume that perhaps Agnew also suspected that Prince intended to wear the clothes and pass as free. Furthermore, Agnew’s use of the word “artful” could be indicative of his understanding of Prince’s supposedly deceptive nature. Having escaped twice before, Prince would have been very conscious of his plan and choices and would have understood the necessity of camouflaging himself within the look of a higher status person.

However, interpreting Angolo’s notice is slightly more difficult because there is little mention of his “personality” by Willis, and the clothes he carried off do not appear to be of very high quality. The fact that he had taken with him silver coins and metal buckles could suggest that he needed money and intended to sell some of the finer clothes he had taken with him to buy himself safe passage, food, or other necessities. It is worth noting that Angolo was described as wearing jewelry, the “Bobb” in his ear, symbolic of his self-care, dress culture, and possible vanity.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it could be entirely possible that he continued the process of self-identification and appreciation of dress by wearing some of the clothes he had taken. An ability to disguise oneself through fashion would firstly rely on a keen awareness of the population of one’s region and the sartorial distinctions across class and racial identities.

However, in the case of Angolo, it is crucial to consider that the advertisement was printed during late fall in New England. Weather conditions in October would have most likely been relatively cold and would only be getting much worse. It would, therefore, seem likely that items such as the “brown Holland Fly coat, old pair of Pumps Worsted stockings [and] a Worsted cap” would offer Angolo protection from the frigid temperatures during the approaching winter. It is unusual for enslaved persons to escape during the winter months<sup>20</sup>



though Angolo appears to have intentionally chosen to run away in October or at least been prepared enough to do so.

While one can make inferences about the intentions, plans, and purposes Angolo and Prince had during their escape from their owners, specifically as they relate to the clothes, they “carried off,” it is essential to remember that runaway advertisements were written exclusively by white slave owners. Therefore, even when given a glimpse into the lives of Angolo and Prince, it is from a skewed perspective that may not have been entirely truthful or particularly accurate. However, Angolo and Prince demonstrated through their actions that they were attuned to the value of clothing within eighteenth-century North American culture. The clothes they stole offered them unique opportunities as enslaved people. Their ability to transform and self-fashion their identities through clothes not only allowed Prince and Angolo the chance to escape, but also essentially to become the free people they desired to be. Most clearly demonstrated by Prince and his collection of fine clothing, the dress culture of the colonies could be utilized to one’s advantage. Meanwhile, Angolo and his earrings exemplify the value enslaved people placed on identity through dress and self-adornment. However, the most critical element of fugitive slave advertisements like those for Prince and Angolo is their demonstration that not only were enslaved people capable of mastering and exploiting the technicalities of culture, status, and fashion, but they were also active participants in the creation of culture during the 1700’s.<sup>21</sup> Prince and Angolo were consumers and producers of dress culture and the thriving economy that accompanied it. When examining fugitive slave advertisements as sources through which to understand slavery in North America, one must acknowledge enslaved people as resistant, and dynamic actors within their society, rather than only as passive victims.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Agnew, “*RAN AWAY*,” *Saint John Gazette*, 29 June 1792.

<sup>2</sup> David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 254-55.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio T. Bly, “A Prince among Pretending Free Men: Runaway Slaves in Colonial New England Revisited,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 14 (2012), pp. 94-96.

<sup>4</sup> W. A. Spray, “Agnew, Stair,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (date of last access 1 May 2020) [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/agnew\\_stair\\_6E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/agnew_stair_6E.html)

<sup>5</sup> Spray, “Agnew, Stair,” (date of last access 1 May 2020)

<sup>6</sup> Spray, “Agnew, Stair,” (date of last access 1 May 2020)

<sup>7</sup> Spray, “Agnew, Stair,” (date of last access 1 May 2020)

<sup>8</sup> Spray, “Agnew, Stair,” (date of last access 1 May 2020)

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Willis, “*RAN AWAY*,” *The New-York Gazette*, 29 October 1744

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Hunt-Hurst. “ ‘Round Homespun Coat & Pantaloon of the Same’: Slave Clothing as Reflected in Fugitive Slave Advertisements in Antebellum Georgia,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (1999), pp. 727-40.

<sup>11</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 252.

<sup>13</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” pp. 253-54.

<sup>14</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 253.

<sup>15</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” pp. 252-54.

<sup>16</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” pp. 253-54.

<sup>17</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 252.

<sup>18</sup> Bly, “A Prince among Pretending Free Men,” pp. 87-118.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio T. Bly, “Pretty, Sassy, Cool: Slave Resistance, Agency, and Culture in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (2016), p. 471.

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<sup>20</sup> Frank Mackey, “Notes,” Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. 419-552.

<sup>21</sup> Shauna J. Sweeney, “Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834,” The William and Mary Quarterly, 76, no. 2 (2019), p. 200.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: John Agnew, “*RAN AWAY*,” Saint John Gazette, 29 June 1792.

Figure 2: Samuel Willis, “*RAN AWAY*,” The New-York Gazette, 29 October 1744.

## FUGITIVE SLAVE ANALYSIS: MALE HEADWRAPPING IN MONTREAL AND CHARLESTON


Simone Cambridge

Fugitive slave advertisements provide insight into the lives of persons in bondage who were denied the means to document their own lives and experiences. This essay will attempt to recover the legacies of two enslaved black men, Andrew and Paul, who escaped from Montreal and Charleston respectively in the eighteenth century. Both men, although enslaved in different cities and from different backgrounds, practiced the African dress custom of head wrapping and made multiple attempts at resisting bondage. While criminalizing the enslaved men's act of self-theft, the slave owners advertisements for the return of their enslaved men ironically created a record of resistance.<sup>1</sup> This record can be used to understand the differences and similarities within the institution of slavery across regions.

Andrew, a black enslaved man, escaped from his slave owner, James Crofton, in Montreal, Quebec, on 3 May 1767.<sup>2</sup> Eleven days after his flight, Crofton placed an advertisement in the *Quebec Gazette* on May 14<sup>th</sup> for Andrew's recapture, promising a reward of eight dollars upon his return. (Fig. 1) The same advertisement appears again in the *Quebec Gazette* on 21 May 1767, suggesting that he avoided recapture for at least three weeks.

The advertisement describes Andrew's origins, age, height, behaviour, bodily features, and potential forged papers he may have possessed. Crofton likely mentioned that Andrew was "born in Maryland" as a means of tracking him if he attempted to return to his previous home. Andrew additionally may have had a regional accent that would have alerted captors. Andrew also spoke at least four languages according to Crofton, including English, French, Dutch and Earse,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that Andrew may have been owned by multiple slaveholders across several regions.

In Charleston, South Carolina, Paul, a enslaved black man called Polydore or Polydon by his slave owner William M'Donnald, first "absented" from his slaveowner on 7 March 1792.<sup>4</sup> Ten days later, M'Donnald advertised Paul's escape in the *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, offering a reward of five dollars to anyone able to deliver Paul to the workhouse or to his downtown Charleston home and thirty dollars reward for "conviction of any white person or persons harbouring him." (Fig. 2). This advertisement contains details about Paul's age, height, hair, dress at the time of escape, behaviour, network of personal relationships, and employment and purchase history. Paul was caught soon after the first advertisement was printed since a notice for his recapture does not appear again until 8 May 1792, documenting his second escape



**R**UN-AWAY, from *James Crofton*, Vintner in Montreal, the Third of May, 1767, a Mulatto Negro Slave, named Andrew, born in Maryland, Twenty-three Years of Age, middle sized, very active and sprightly, has a remarkable large Mouth, thick Lips, his Fingers crooked, speaks good English and French, a little Dutch and Harfe; is supposed to have with him forged Certificates of his Freedom, and Passes. Whoever takes up and secures the said Negro, so that his Master may have him again, shall have EIGHT DOLLARS Reward, besides all reasonable Charges, paid by Mr. HENRY BOONE, Merchant, at Quebec, or JAMES CROFTON, at Montreal.

N. B. He is remarkable for being clean dres'd and wearing a Handkerchief tied round his Head; is very well known to all the Gentlemen at Quebec, that has been in Montreal, and who have used my House, and was Three Months with Mr. JOSEPH HOWARD, of Montreal Merchant, last Summer in Quebec.

**I**L s'en est fuit du service de JACQUES CROFTON, Tavernier, à Montréal, le 3 de Mai, 1767. Un Negre Mulatre Esclave, nommé ANDRE', né en Maryland, âgé de vingt trois ans, de la moyenne taille, fort vif et alert, ayant la bouche extraordinairement grande, les levres grosses et les doigts croches: Il parle bon Anglois et François, et un peu Hollandois et Ecoissois: L'on suppose qu'il porte avec lui de faux certificats de sa franchise et de faux passeports. Toute personne qui l'arrêtera et qui le mettra en lieu de sûreté, de façon que son dit maître puisse l'avoir, recevra HUIT PIASTRES de récompense, outre tous frais raisonnables, qui lui seront payés par Mr. HENRY BOONE, Négociant, à Québec, ou par JACQUES CROFTON, à Montréal.

N. B. Il est remarquable pour se mettre proprement, et pour porter un mouchoir attaché autour de sa tête; il est bien connu par tous les Meilleurs de Québec qui ont été à Montréal, et qui ont fréquenté ma maison; et il a resté à Québec pendant trois mois de l'Été dernier, avec Mr. Joseph Howard, Négociant de Montréal.

Figure 1: James Crofton, "RUN-AWAY, from *James Crofton*," *Quebec Gazette*, 14 May 1767, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

on 14 April 1792 (Fig. 3). This second fugitive advertisement includes an additional description of clothing in Paul's possession and potential reasons for his first and subsequent escapes. In the second notice, Paul is also advertised alongside another fugitive enslaved man called Purey or Pierdy. This advertisement was reprinted again on 11 May 1792, suggesting that Paul and Pierdy resisted capture for at least three days. (Fig. 4)

Race was described differently in Montreal and Charleston. Andrew is referred to as "Mulatto Negro Slave," while Paul is described as "black complexioned" and as a "very black skinned negro." "Negro" is used interchangeably with "Negro Slave" in Andrew's advertisement and "negro" is the only word used to signify Paul's status as enslaved. This suggests that being black had become synonymous with enslavement in the eyes of white slaveholders in the late eighteenth century. Andrew and Paul's slaveholders also attempt to describe the skin colour of the men. It is unclear whether "Mulatto Negro" indicated that Andrew was a light-skinned black man, a man of mixed-race heritage, or the son of a Mulatto and "full-black" (Negro) parents. On the other hand, Paul is described in the advertisement as having a "dark complexion."

Both escapes took place in urban settings. Montreal, around the late eighteenth century had a population of about nine thousand and merchant commerce, which provided imported goods to Quebec residents, was common.<sup>5</sup> The white settler population of Montreal largely outnumbered the enslaved black population of the settlement.<sup>6</sup> Andrew as a fugitive enslaved person would have been hyper-visible due to the relatively small number of enslaved black people in Montreal and he likely experienced a heightened risk of recapture due to his increased visibility and the lack of a sizeable free black community to which he could flee.

Similarly, during the period of 1790-1810, black enslaved people were outnumbered by white colonizers in South Carolina.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, there was a much larger black population in the state than in Quebec.<sup>8</sup> Paul thus may have been able to avoid capture by hiding amongst the significant population of free and enslaved black people. M'Donnald's first advertisement for Paul, however, suggests a high level of surveillance due to the detailed description of clothes he wore when he fled. M'Donnald listed the exact colours and patterns of Paul's clothing and displayed evidence that he had detailed knowledge of Paul's possessions by explaining that Paul may change his clothes. The slaveholder also

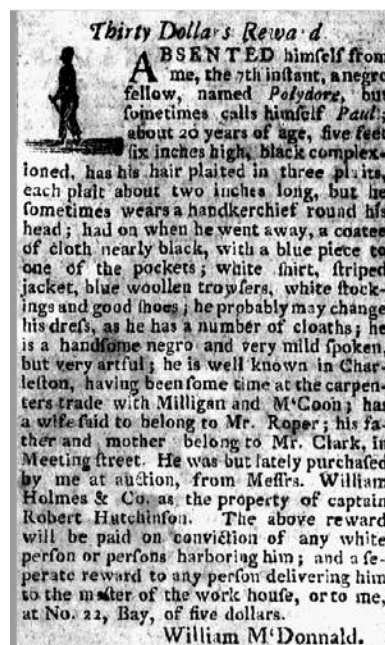


Figure 2: William M'Donnald, "Thirty Dollars Reward," *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 17 March 1792, Charleston, South Carolina, Readex Early American Newspapers Digital Series, McGill University Library.

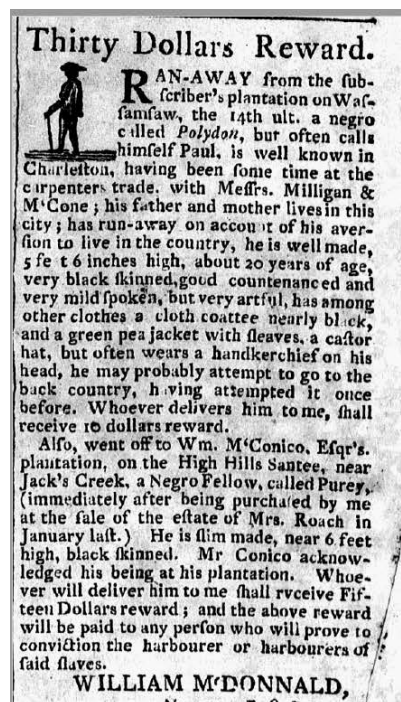


Figure 3: William M'Donnald, "Thirty Dollars Reward," *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 8 May 1792, Charleston, South Carolina, Readex Early American Newspapers Digital Series, McGill University Library.



**Thirty Dollars Reward.**

**R**AN-AWAY from the subscriber's plantation on Wadsworth, the 14th ult. a negro called *Polydore*, but often calls himself Paul, is well known in Charleston, having been some time at the carpenters trade, with Messrs. Milligan & McCone; his father and mother lives in this city; has run-away on account of his aversion to live in the country, he is well made, 5 feet 6 inches high, about 20 years of age, very black skinned, good countenance and very mild spoken, but very artful, has among other clothes a cloth coat nearly black, and a green pea jacket with sleeves, a castor hat, but often wears a handkerchief on his head, he may probably attempt to go to the back country, having attempted it once before. Whoever delivers him to me, shall receive 30 dollars reward.

Also, went off to Wm. McCone, Esq's. plantation, on the High Hills Santee, near Jack's Creek, a Negro Fellow, called Pierdy, (immediately after being purchased by me at the sale of the estate of Mrs. Roach in January last.) He is slim made, near 6 feet high, black skinned. Mr. McCone acknowledged his being at his plantation. Whoever will deliver him to me shall receive Fifteen Dollars reward; and the above reward will be paid to any person who will prove to conviction the harbourer or harbourers of said slaves.

**WILLIAM M'DONNALD,**  
No. 22, East-Bay.  
May 8. tuf

Figure 4: William M'Donnald, "Thirty Dollars Reward," *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 11 May 1792, Charleston, South Carolina, Readex Early American Newspapers Digital Series, McGill University Library.

possessed detailed information about Paul's personal relationships, noting the last names of former slaveholders and location of Paul's wife, father, and mother. This further suggests that these relationships were policed and any potential harbouring of Paul by his kin likely increased his chance of recapture.

The advertisements for Andrew and Paul also document that both enslaved men practiced resistance through dress. Crofton mentions that Andrew was "remarkable for being clean dress'd" and that he wore "a Handkerchief round his Head." (sic) This suggests that Andrew regularly took care in his appearance and wrapped his head in the style of African dress.<sup>9</sup> Andrew's headwrap set him apart from other enslaved people, making him "well known" to visitors of Crofton's home. Andrew is the only enslaved person, male or female, described as having practiced headwrapping in the fugitive slave advertisements of the province of Quebec.<sup>10</sup> Paul is also described by M'Donnald as having worn "a handkerchief round his head" in all of the fugitive advertisements printed for his recapture.

The headwrap, a popular style of dress worn by black enslaved people, originated in West Africa and survived the Middle Passage although enslaved Africans were not allowed possessions onboard slave ships.<sup>11</sup> This style was commonly worn by women as an act of "courage that evoked an image of true homeland."<sup>12</sup> This visible evidence of the preservation of cultural tradition is significant because to actively practice and maintain head wrapping, Andrew and Paul must have been taught how to wrap their heads by kin or other black caretakers.

The time allowed for an enslaved person's self-care was minimal at best because slaveholders controlled the enslaved person's time and the means available for grooming and care. In a world where material deprivation was common for the enslaved and deliberately imposed by slaveholders, the men had to seek out already scarce material and carve out moments of limited time to dress and groom themselves. Head wrapping, despite the challenges and restrictions, can be seen as a display of pride in African heritage and trans-generational knowledge and is therefore an act of self-preservation and daily resistance. The advertisements of Andrew and Paul, therefore, become records of repeated resistance, culminating in escape.

Interestingly, evidence suggests that both Andrew and Paul resisted bondage multiple times during their lifetimes. From 1762-1764, Andrew (André) petitioned the Montreal court for his freedom from his then owner Gershon Levy, a prominent merchant in the city.<sup>13</sup> Andrew claimed that Levy only had rights to his labour for four years, which had then expired, under the conditions of his former owner.<sup>14</sup> Levy argued that Andrew could not prove his claim, stating that he had purchased Andrew from his former owner without knowledge of any such agreement.<sup>15</sup> The court ruled in favour of Levy and Andrew was later sold to James Crofton, another Montreal merchant.<sup>16</sup> Andrew was familiar with legal forms of resistance, but was denied his freedom under the law. This possibly motivated Andrew to escape three years later.

The household of James Crofton also may have been particularly violent. On 26 July 1764, Crofton placed an advertisement for a fugitive white indentured servant named Catherine

Elizabeth Renoe.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that conditions working for Crofton were dangerous for black and white servants, regardless of enslaved status, to the point where escape was deemed necessary. Andrew's advertisement also mentions that he was leased for three months during the summer of 1766 to Joseph Howard in Quebec.<sup>18</sup> From the years 1765 to 1767, several businesses of Joseph Howard's partners defaulted on fur trading deals and his business suffered. The following year, Howard was five thousand pounds in debt to the London firm, Brook Watson.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, during the time Andrew was leased to Howard, he was likely overworked. As Andrew neared the average age of first attempt at flight for enslaved men in Montreal, twenty-six, it is likely that he became increasingly frustrated with life in bondage and eventually decided to flee.<sup>20</sup>

While Paul did not argue for his freedom in Charleston courts, Paul also resisted on multiple occasions. After his first escape on 7 March 1792, Paul fled William M'Donnald for a second time on 8 May of that same year. M'Donnald noted Paul's "aversion to live in the country" and his attempt to get further away. This suggests that Paul had tried repeatedly to resist the dictates of M'Donnald.

The advertisements of the City Gazette also characterize William M'Donnald as a slaveholder who placed his enslaved persons in violent working conditions. Two other enslaved men escaped from M'Donnald within a five-year period.

"Purey" or "Pierdy" was advertised alongside Paul as a fugitive in the City Gazette and Daily Advertiser on 8 May 1792 and 11 May 1792. According to M'Donnald, Pierdy had been recently purchased that January and had been owned by M'Donnald for just a few months before making his escape. A third black enslaved man, Peter, also fled from William M'Donnald on 6 June 1797 (Figs 5 and 6). Like Andrew in Montreal, all three men were being leased to other slaveholders who likely subjected the men to intense labour. The renting of an enslaved person was a short-term investment and renters had little cause to maintain an enslaved person's health or consider their longevity. Harsh labour conditions probably forced Paul, Pierdy, and Peter to run for their lives.

The advertisements placed for the return of Andrew and Paul lead us to ask important questions about dress and resistance across regions. Both men were subjected to intense labour and violence from slaveholders, while using head wrapping as a method of resistance and self-care, eventually leading to flight as a fugitive. Using fugitive slave advertisements to recover information about Andrew and Paul, enslaved in Montreal and Charleston respectively,

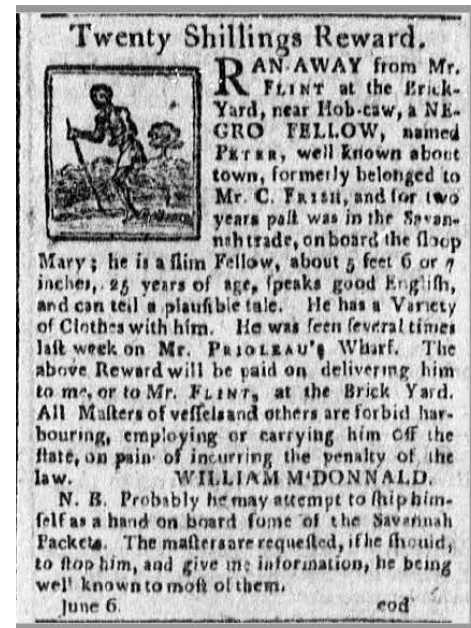


Figure 5: William M'Donnald, "Twenty Shillings Reward," City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 6 June 1797, Charleston, South Carolina, Readex Early American Newspapers Digital Series, McGill University Library.

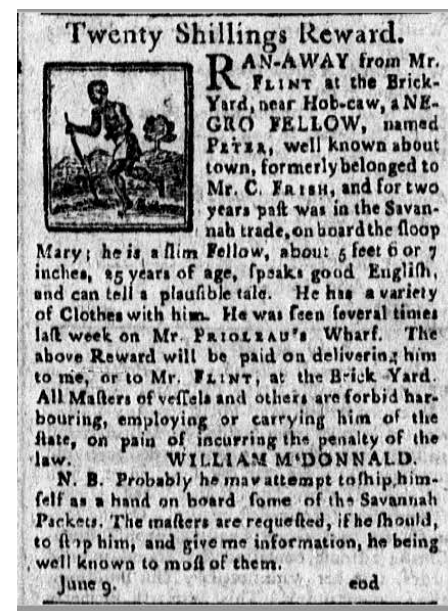


Figure 6: William M'Donnald, "Twenty Shillings Reward," City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 9 June 1797, Charleston, South Carolina, Readex Early American Newspapers Digital Series, McGill University Library.



allows us to repurpose records originally created to criminalize the enslaved and reinforce the institution of slavery.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Wood, "Rhetoric and the Runaway: The Iconography of Slave Escape in England and America," Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865 (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> James Crofton, "RUN-AWAY, from *James Crofton*," Quebec Gazette, 14 May 1767.

<sup>3</sup> Earse is a Gaelic language spoken in Scotland until the nineteenth century. This language may have been spoken by Andrew's previous slaveholders. "Erse," Dictionary of the Scots Language, (date of last access 17 February 2020) [https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/erse\\_adj\\_n2](https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/erse_adj_n2)

<sup>4</sup> In the first fugitive advertisement placed for Paul printed on 17 March 1792 he is called "Polydore" by M'Donnald. Later in the advertisements printed on 8 May 1792 and 11 May 1792 he is called "Polydon." William M'Donnald, "Thirty Dollars Reward.," City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 17 March 1792, p. 3; William M'Donnald, "Thirty Dollars Reward.," City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 8 May 1792, p. 3; William M'Donnald, "Thirty Dollars Reward.," City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 11 March 1792, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Mackey, "Things As They Were," Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal & Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press), pp. 108-135; Hilda Neatby, "Pierre Guy: A Montreal Merchant of the Eighteenth Century," Eighteenth Century Studies, vol. 5, no. 2 (Winter 1971-1972), pp. 224-242.

<sup>6</sup> Scholars have found it difficult to pinpoint the exact ratio due to unreliable census records of Montreal during the eighteenth century. Mackey, "Things As They Were," pp. 108-135.

<sup>7</sup> However, before and after this period until 1930, black people outnumbered the white population in South Carolina. "The Negro," South Carolina: A Guide to the Palmetto State, Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of South Carolina, American Guide Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 45-51.

<sup>8</sup> John Kellogg, "Negro Urban Cluster in the Postbellum South," Geographical Review, vol.67, no.3 (July 1977), pp. 310-321.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Bradley Foster, New Raiments of Self: African American Clothing in the Clothing in the Antebellum South (Oxford; New York: Berg, 1997), pp. 272-293; Andrea Freeser, "South Carolina Indigo in the Dress of Slaves and Sovereign Indians," Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2013), pp. 27-42.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. 307-344.

<sup>11</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Journal of Southern History, vol. 61, no. 1 (February 1995), pp. 45-76.

<sup>12</sup> Foster, New Raiments of Self, pp.272-293; Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Journal of Southern History, vol.61, no.1 (February 1995), pp. 45-76.

<sup>13</sup> Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," p.315; William Renwick Riddell, "Notes on the Slave in Nouvelle-France," The Journal of Negro History, vol. 8: no. 3 (July 1923), pp. 326-327.

<sup>14</sup> See note 14 in Frank Mackey, "Notes," Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p.531; Frank Mackey, "What Slavery?" Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 31. Black indentured servants were commonly enslaved by their white employers after their indentureship expired in Nova Scotia. This seems to be what happened to Andrew. Harvey Amani Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova Scotia: 1750-1810," Journal of Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society, vol. 13 (2010), pp. 23-42.

<sup>15</sup> Mackey, "What Slavery?," p.31; Riddell, "Notes on the Slave in Nouvelle-France," pp. 326-327.

<sup>16</sup> Mackey, "What Slavery?," p.31; Riddell, "Notes on the Slave in Nouvelle-France," pp. 326-327.

<sup>17</sup> The advertisement reads "a High-Dutcher, named Catherine Elizabeth Renoe, about 20 Years of Age, sworthy-Complexion, short Stature, inclined to Fat, speaks good English and a little French" (Quebec Gazette, 26 July 1764); transcribed in Frank Mackey, "Notes," Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p.351.

<sup>18</sup> James Crofton, "RUN-AWAY, from *James Crofton*," Quebec Gazette, 14 May 1767.

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<sup>19</sup> “Joseph Howard,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography, (date of last access 17 February 2020)  
[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/howard\\_joseph\\_4E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/howard_joseph_4E.html)

<sup>20</sup> The average was calculated using the advertisements provided by Frank Mackey. Mackey, “Appendix I: Newspaper Notices,” pp. 307-344.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: James Crofton, “RUN-AWAY, from *James Crofton*,” Quebec Gazette, 14 May 1767, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

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Figure 6: William M'Donnald, “*Twenty Shillings Reward.*,” City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 9 June 1797, Charleston, South Carolina, Readex Early American Newspapers Digital Series, McGill University Library.

## CLOTHING, LANGUAGE, AND ADMITTANCE OF PERSONHOOD

Maddie Coombs

Fugitive slave advertisements are one of the very few ways that a person can recuperate information about the enslaved on an individual level. Placed by slave owners determined to reclaim enslaved people who had escaped, these published newspaper notices routinely described the clothing in which the enslaved were last seen. By examining the descriptions of the clothing of two enslaved men, Jack and Sam, we can explore the significance of clothing and its depiction as a means through which the enslaved were inadvertently individualized in this ubiquitous form of transatlantic print culture. Understanding the nature of slave dress will provide insight into the lives and experiences of Jack and Sam.

The essay will begin by exploring the life of an important Quebec politician, William Grant, who posted a fugitive slave advertisement for a man he owned named Jack. (Fig. 1) It is important to explore his life because it displays the political climate and attitudes towards slavery in late eighteenth-century Quebec. To be completely transparent, while reading Frank Mackey's "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices" in his book Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (2010) in which he transcribed slave auction, fugitive, and sale advertisements for black people in Quebec, I recognized that William Grant is likely a distant relative of mine. I had never heard of, or considered him, in the context of slavery. It was not until I saw the advertisement and associated it to his page on the Dictionary of Canadian Biography that I made the connection. His biography mentions nothing to do with his involvement with slavery but does mention his deep entanglement with politics and mercantilism.<sup>1</sup> Learning through Mackey that he was an adamant adversary to abolition inspired me to make the connection public and share the knowledge I had gained within this essay. Following this information, there will be a deep dive into the fugitive slave advertisements that Grant and Captain James Delancey of New York posted. They are linked through the ways they reluctantly grant individual identities to the men they held in bondage.

The first advertisement this essay will explore was posted by William Grant. Grant was born into a family of merchants. Sent by his brother from Scotland to Quebec at a young age, he became involved in Quebec trading by creating his own merchant trading company.<sup>2</sup> After a long period of difficult relationships and economic tension between Grant and other traders, he prevailed becoming the leading merchant in Quebec.<sup>3</sup> He soon found his way into politics with his appointment to the Council of Quebec where he continued his support for the merchants of the province.<sup>4</sup>

Later in his career, Grant's biggest political rival, Dr Adam Mabane, began to question the legality of slavery within

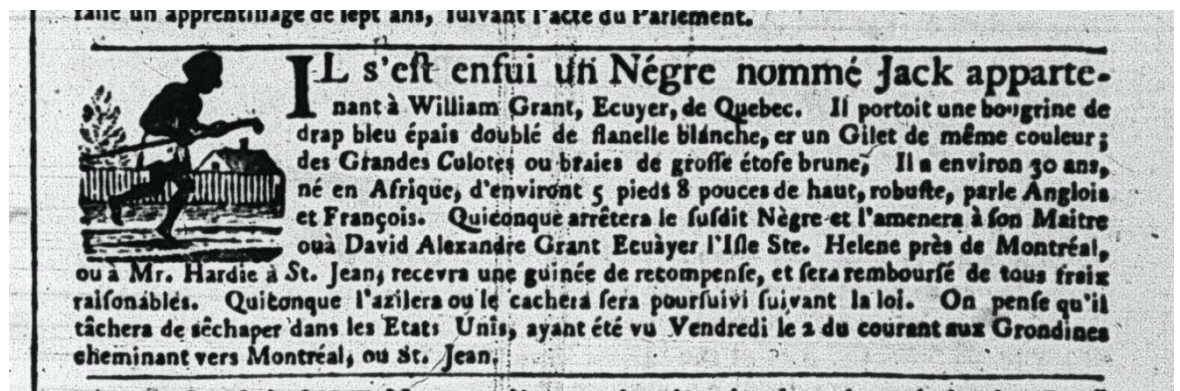


Figure 1: IL S'EST UNFUI UN NEGRE NOMME JACK APPARTENANT

Quebec's Legislative Council through an abolition bill. This bill stated,

“...That every Person or Persons who shall after the Publication of ye present Ordinance be brought or who shall come into this Province, shall be considered as free, and be entitled to claim their Freedom notwithstanding he she or they have been Slaves in the Country where they last resided.

And be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid that all Slaves who may have been brought or who may have come into this province since the Month of Sept. 1763 as well as those who may have been in it prior to that Period, shall at the Expiration of ye Term of five years from the Publication of this Ordinance be entitled to their freedom and may claim the same.”<sup>5</sup>

Mackey comments on this hearing claiming that, “By a vote of 14–3, the councilors adopted its lofty statement of principle, that slavery was contrary to religion and to the spirit of the laws of Canada.”<sup>6</sup> Grant was one of the three who voted against this bill, though his status as a slave owner does not account for the stance he took against it. Several of those who supported the bill were slaveowners as well. Following this vote, was the question of whether “all persons entering the province thereafter be recognized as free.”<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the legislators who had quickly deemed slavery immoral definitively voted against this proposal. In the year 1792, the same year that Grant posted this fugitive slave advertisement, Mabane passed away and the council members never again questioned the legality of slavery.<sup>8</sup>

William Grant's fugitive slave advertisement was printed in the Quebec Gazette on 15 March 1792, the first newspaper to be published in the province of Quebec.<sup>9</sup> The Gazette was posted once a week between 1775 and 1832.<sup>10</sup> It was bilingual and included information such as marriage announcements, passenger lists of incoming ships, as well as slave auction and fugitive slave advertisements.<sup>11</sup> At this time, the newspaper would have also run in Montreal, a city that did not have its own newspaper until 1785.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, the second advertisement, posted by Captain James Delancey, ran in the New-York Gazette, or, the Weekly Post-Boy. This newspaper ran for four years between 1762-1766 every week on Thursday.<sup>13</sup> The newspaper was sold in other towns in the northern parts of the state, which would have widely disseminated information about escapees. This would have caused trouble for people fleeing from slavery, because their escape routes would have taken them across territory inhabited by potential readers of the fugitive notices.

The advertisement describes an enslaved man named Jack, who Grant likely took ownership of through the connections he made in the merchant community. At the time of his escape Jack was 30 years old, a native of Africa, and stood five feet, eight inches tall. (Fig. 1) Most notably the advertisement includes that although Jack was not a native to Quebec, he spoke both French and English. It can be inferred that Jack learned both of these languages after his arrival in Quebec. The article also places great importance on the clothing that Jack wore when he escaped. His flannel shirt is described in immense detail. It was made out of thick blue cloth, lined with white flannel. He also wore a vest of the same color on top. On the bottom, he wore a pair of large brown pants that would have gone past the knee. (Fig. 1) The description of his clothing was included to make him easily identifiable, but it also sheds important light on the conditions of his enslavement and escape. These clothes would have likely belonged to Grant, Jack's owner, before they would have been handed down.<sup>14</sup> This is notable because the clothing may have had Grant's name sewn into the collar or waistband, or the buttons on his flannel coat may have been monogrammed. This would have been instrumental in the recapture and return of



a runaway enslaved person like Jack. The clothing is also a clear marker of the weather conditions experienced by this enslaved person. Not yet the end of winter, Jack's attire signals that he was clearly prepared to encounter cold weather. With his escape taking place halfway through March in Quebec City, the weather would have been quite cold.

The second slave advertisement was published by Captain James Delancey who is said to have been the new owner of an enslaved man called Sam. (Fig. 2) Delancey was the son of a very prominent politician in New York City.<sup>15</sup> Through these familial ties he amassed a great deal of wealth.<sup>16</sup> His involvement in the army granted him the title of Captain and he later became involved in the Revolutionary War as a British Loyalist.<sup>17</sup> Described as youthful and strong, Sam's birth origins were named as France and his current residence as New York, which would account for his ability to speak both French and English. Similar to Grant with Jack, Delancey took great pains to describe Sam's clothing. Wearing a hat, a brown coat, scarlet breeches, stockings and pewter buckles he is described as a well-dressed man for the late eighteenth-century. The advertisement touches on his individuality by describing the way that he wears his hat, "somewhat worn, cock'd on one side, which he commonly wore behind..." (Fig. 2) Although the advertisement put considerable effort into describing his clothing, it quickly follows the description by stating that it is possible for him to have changed his attire. It is worth noting that Sam's ability to attire himself as a well-dressed gentleman would have given him an opportunity to appear in a respectable way to the public. David Waldstreicher argues that such escapees were confidence men, men who,

"... use the assumptions of resource-rich whites to get what they want and need. They manipulate goods and texts to their advantage; they capitalize upon the ambiguities in the dominant racial classification system of eighteenth-century America; they employ their knowledge of the developing colonies, and the expanding marketplace in which they themselves were producers, consumers, and commodities, to change their identities and gain at least a measure of freedom."<sup>18</sup>

Jack and Sam, for the purpose of this comparative analysis, can be viewed as confidence men by their method of re-appropriating their owners' dress to their own advantage whether it be for braving the cold weather, or for passing as free men.

Sam is described as well-known in the city, likely due to the smaller population of enslaved people as well as his owner's establishment as a wealthy individual. Jan Kurth describes what enslaved life would have been like in the Hudson River Valley in the late eighteenth century, arguing that, "Slave men during this period were often skilled laborers who worked on a 'hired out' basis since the growing season was short, and there was no full-time crop to tend".<sup>19</sup> It can be inferred that Sam may have lived a similar lifestyle and such mobility and experience in multiple households would explain why he might have been so well known within his city. Surely then, Sam would have also been able to meet people outside of his immediate residence and community. Jack's experience as an enslaved man in Montreal would have been similar. There would have been a level of community surveillance that both men experienced. While it is certain that networks emerged to support fleeing enslaved people like Jack and Sam, some of the people who were willing to lend assistance may have done so for altruistic reasons and others to profit from or exploit the enslaved fugitive further. Regardless, that Grant and Delancey were clearly aware of this threat to the return of their "property" was exemplified in their descriptions of the lengths that they were prepared to go to in order to punish

any person who aided or harboured Jack or Sam. Both advertisements claim that any such person would have to face legal repercussions.

It is remarkable that there is such a heightened focus in these advertisements on the languages that these enslaved runaways spoke, especially during a time when enslaved people of African descent were not considered to be intelligent enough to receive, and benefit from, an education.<sup>20</sup> Craig Steven Wilder discusses this history in his book Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities (2013) when exploring early universities and their connection to slavery. Wilder makes the claim that during colonization, Native Americans were considered to be more "civilized" than enslaved Africans by the founders of early universities, and therefore more worthy of receiving educations.<sup>21</sup> By simply stressing Jack and Sam's knowledge and possible fluency in English and French, the flaw in this racist logic was made evident. If Jack and Sam, as well as many other enslaved people, were able to acquire these language skills then their owners were complicating the racist narrative of the "uncivilized and uneducated" African person by publicly acknowledging their skills in fugitive slave advertisements.

The slave advertisements explored in this essay are the closest scholars can come to understanding the lives of the enslaved men Jack and Sam. Authors of these advertisements had no choice but to divulge information they otherwise would have kept secret. In the process of disseminating information about the skills, languages spoken, and clothing of their enslaved men, Grant and Delancey were sharing that these men were intelligent and determined individuals. This was avoided in all other media representing the lives of the enslaved, for example auction advertisements and bills of sale. With so little first-hand documentation of the enslaved, when read critically, fugitive slave advertisements can help to fill the gaps in our knowledge about their lives and experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Roberts. "Grant, William."

<sup>3</sup> Roberts. "Grant, William." Grant was involved in the Canadian fur trade.

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<sup>6</sup> Mackey, Frank. "There Ought to Be a Law" in Done With Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840, p. 44. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Mackey, "There Ought to Be a Law." p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Mackey, "There Ought to Be a Law." p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Hopkins, J. Castell. "A Review of Canadian Journalism." in An Historical Sketch of Canadian Literature and Journalism, 221. Toronto: Linscott, 1898.

<sup>10</sup> Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. "The New-York Gazette, Or, the Weekly Post-Boy (New-York [N.Y.]) 1762-1766." <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn85025699/>.

<sup>11</sup> FamilySearch Wiki. "Quebec Newspapers." Accessed February 17, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Claude Galarneau, "Mesplet, Fleury," Dictionary of Canadian Biography (date of last access 31 July 2020) [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mesplet\\_fleury\\_4E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mesplet_fleury_4E.html)

<sup>13</sup> Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. "The New-York Gazette, Or, the Weekly Post-Boy (New-York [N.Y.]) 1762-1766."

<sup>14</sup> Waldstreicher, David. "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic." The William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 56, no. 2 (1999), pp. 252-54.

<sup>15</sup> In Search of the Elusive Immigrant. "James DeLancey - The Peopling of New York City." City University of New York, n.d. [https://macaulay.cuny.edu/seminars/wills08/articles/j/a/m/James\\_DeLancey\\_dd04.html](https://macaulay.cuny.edu/seminars/wills08/articles/j/a/m/James_DeLancey_dd04.html).

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<sup>16</sup> In Search of the Elusive Immigrant.

<sup>17</sup> In Search of the Elusive Immigrant.

<sup>18</sup> Waldstreicher. "Reading the Runaways", p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Kurth, Jan. "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, NY, 1785-1830." The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 1, no. 2 (1988-89), p. 201.

<sup>20</sup> Wilder, Craig Steven. "The Edges of the Empire." In Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> "The Edges of the Empire." p. 15.

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## **PLATE LIST**

### Figure 1: IL S'EST UNFUI UN NEGRE NOMME JACK APPARTENANT

Transcription [A negro named Jack fled from his owner William Grant, squire, of Quebec. He wore a (bougaine? basket) thick blue cloth lined with white flannel, and a vest of the same color; large culottes or braies of brown cloth. He is 30 years old, born in Africa, is 5 foot 8 inches, robust, speaks English and French. Whoever stops the above-mentioned negro and brings him to his owner or to David Grant squire l'Isle Ste Helene near Montreal, or to Mr. Hardie of St Jean will receive a reward and will be reimbursed for all reasonable costs. Whoever keeps him in hiding will be prosecuted by law. It is believed that he will try to escape to the United States, as he has been seen on Friday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of this month in Grondines on their way to Montreal or St Jean.] Translated by Coombs and Vincent

### Figure 2: RUN AWAY

Transcription [RUN AWAY, On the 5th Instant September from the Subscriber at the Province Arms, in New-York, A Negro Man named Sam, well Limb'd, round faced, about 30 Years of age, but looks younger; French born, but speaks pretty good English; is a good Cook, and was lately bought of Capt. James Delancy. He had on when he went away a narrow brimmed black Hat, somewhat worn, cock'd on one side, which he commonly wore behind; a light and brown Coat, Short Shirts; a Scarlet pair of Breeches, Pewter Buckles, and black Worsted Stockings.-But he may probably change his Dress. He is well known in this City, and it is supposed is now lurking, and concealed therein. Whoever will take up and secure the said negro, so that I may get him again shall have Forty Shillings Reward, paid by GEORGE BURNS. N.B. Master of Vessels, and all other persons, are desired not to carry off, conceal or harbour the said negro, as they will answer the Penalty of the Law, in such Cases made and provided.]

## THE INSCRIBED PASSPORT: COUNTRY MARKS, BRANDING, AND THE BODY OF THE ENSLAVED IN THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Roxanne Cornellier

What do France and Canada have in common? Aside from more obvious similarities, both countries still have a lot of work to do when it comes to recognizing their past involvement in the Transatlantic Slavery. France and Canada routinely suppress the participation of their citizens in slavery. But the archives do not lie. When browsing archives of newspaper holdings, the presence of runaway slave advertisements as well as bills of sales cannot be ignored. On the contrary, they are surviving written proof that both countries held humans in bondage. From the Halifax Gazette and Weekly Chronicle of 8 May 1783,<sup>1</sup> the notice for the return of Peter (fig. 1) demonstrates that African-born people were not only enslaved in the tropical climates such as the Caribbean, but they were also brought against their will to more temperate climates such as Halifax, Nova Scotia. Similarly, another fugitive advertisement placed in the local newspaper in Bordeaux, France (fig. 2) for “un Negre de nation *Congo*”<sup>2</sup> [sic] on 14 February 1771 is proof that despite the lack of scholarly resources available about enslaved people in France in the eighteenth century, they still existed.

In addition to being born in Africa, Peter and the unnamed boy from Bordeaux can also be identified by their “inscribed passports.”<sup>3</sup> According to their owners, Peter had “Country-Marks” and the *Congo* boy had been branded with his French owner’s last name. These marks were important details to disclose in a fugitive advertisement because they allowed for the individualization and confirmation of the identity of the runaway.

In the advertisement placed on 8 May 1783 in Halifax, Hugh Kirkham described Peter as “a smart Well looking Negro BOY”<sup>4</sup> of about seventeen years of age. Kirkham also revealed that Peter “speakes broken English,” [sic] has a “remarkable Smile on his Countenance” and that he has been “used to the carpenters business.”<sup>5</sup> (sic) The most interesting part of the advertisement is hidden under Kirkham’s name; in the nota bene, he stated that “if he is stript he has his Country marks on his back in the form of a Square, thus.”<sup>6</sup> (sic) This little piece of information was of profound significance to readers who had the potential to become co-conspirators since it revealed that Peter was almost certainly African-born.<sup>7</sup>

As Katrina Keefer has explained, “When people from Africa were taken from their communities and shipped across the ocean, languages, religions and names were ripped away.”<sup>8</sup> This erasure also included cultural practices such as scarification, which was forbidden once in

HALIFAX, 8th May 1783,

RAN AWAY a smart Well looking Negro BOY named Peter, about Seventeen Years of Age: had on when he went a way a blue jacket, round hat, New Trousers of white Duck, new Shoes, and large plated buckles; he is round faced, speakes broken English, and when spoke to has a remarkable Smile on his Countenance, short and stout made, has been used to the carpenters business, and may attempt to pass for a free Man, this is [to?] warn all Masters of Vessels and Others not to harbor or Carry [off] said Negro as he is the property of the Subscriber; any one that will apprehend the said Negro so that his Master may receive him, Shall receive Eight Dollars Reward from

HUGH KIRKHAM

N.B. If he is stript he has his Country marks on his back in the form of a Square, thus.

Figure 1: Hugh Kirkham, “RAN AWAY” Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle, 20 May 1783 transcribed in Harvey Amani Whitfield. Black Slavery in the Maritimes : A History in Documents, (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 32.

the colonies. Therefore, the presence of scarification - tribal or country marks - on an enslaved person's body almost certainly indicates their African birth.<sup>9</sup> According to Lisa A. Lindsay, these marks were "typically cut into the skin of children to show what political and geographic communities they belonged."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the fact that Peter had country marks on his back meant that he was born in Africa, survived the Middle Passage to the Americas, and was later transported again to Halifax.<sup>11</sup> It is not known if

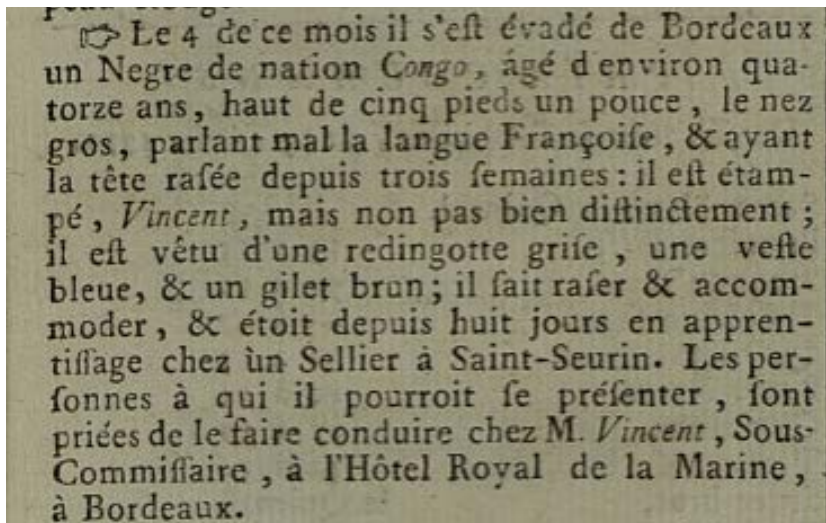


Figure 2: M. Vincent. "Le 4 de ce mois, il s'est évadé," *Annonces, Affiches et Avis Divers Pour la ville de Bordeaux*, issue 7, Jeudi, 14 Février 1771, p.31.

Peter came from Charleston, South Carolina at the end of the war with his Loyalist owner, Kirkham or if he bought him once he was settled in Halifax.<sup>12</sup>

The nota bene is also profound because of what it called other people to do to the bodies of the enslaved. Kirkham's fugitive notice suggested that the newspaper's readers physically seize and strip Peter in order to ascertain if such country marks were visible. However, given the prolific social devaluation and disenfranchisement of black people in the period of slavery, Kirkham and his fellow white citizens surely understood that such a directive would result in violent confrontations through which Peter, as well as various other black males who were mistaken for Peter, would also be accosted and man-handled.

On the other side of the Atlantic, a *Congo* boy ran away from M. Vincent on 4 February 1771. The boy is described as "âgé d'environ quatorze ans, haut de 5 pied 1 pouce, le nez gros, parlant mal la langue Française, & ayant la tête rasée depuis trois semaines: il est étampé, *Vincent*, mais non pas distinctement."<sup>13</sup> Vincent also mentions that he was doing an apprenticeship with a saddler in Saint-Seurin when he ran away.<sup>14</sup> This is a particularity of slavery in France; there were some conditions which the owners had to follow in order for their enslaved to remain in bondage. One of them was to justify the enslaved person's presence in the country which was either to learn new trade skills or to be instructed with the Catholic faith.<sup>15</sup> The owners were also obliged to register their enslaved people once they reached the country and had to submit a letter justifying the necessity for their enslaved to be in France.<sup>16</sup>

The major difference between Peter and the *Congo* boy lies in the origins of their marks. While Peter's country marks were probably inscribed on his body when he was very young, they are a sign of a tribal and cultural communal practices. On the other hand, the *Congo* boy's mark was created by his slave owner, to etch into his skin a symbol that he belonged to another human. Frederick Douglass, African American abolitionist who was born into slavery in Maryland described branding as:

“a person was tied to a post, and his back, or such other part as was to be branded, laid bare; the iron was then delivered red hot, and applied to the quivering flesh, imprinting upon it the name of the monster who claimed the slave.”<sup>17</sup>

This description by Douglass vividly illustrates the dehumanizing nature of branding and helps to provide a contrast with other types of body marks such as scarification. Paul Lovejoy defines the relevance of scarification and its cultural importance as “the result of individual actions and reactions.”<sup>18</sup> Scarification was the individual’s or the community’s choice; branding was not. Regarding this agency, Timothy Insoll notes that scarification and cicatrization were used for expressing personhood or simply for aesthetic purposes without necessarily being tied to an ethnic or tribal origin.<sup>19</sup>

Lovejoy also notes that while “Country marks” or “tribal marks” were markers of different ethnicities, geographical locations, cultures and spirituality, once enslaved on the other side of the Atlantic these marks “had no role, other than as a symbol of an African past that no longer had relevance.”<sup>20</sup> That is because scarification, or any other signs of self-fashioning were violently discouraged by slave owners. This resulted in the cultural practice dying out after only one generation of forced relocation to the Americas. This is why Lovejoy emphasizes that they are symbolic of an African past, although not all Africans practiced scarification. Lovejoy also explains that the “legacy of slavery, left no room for memorialization through body mutilation, which became the preserve of the slave masters, who crudely inflicted brands on their human property, where previously ritual scarification had prevailed.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, in the course of only one generation, an expression of individuality, culture and personhood was replaced with a humiliating and cruel act and symbol of possession.

The nature of triangular trade meant that Peter, and perhaps also the Congo boy, had to undergo multiple Middle Passages en route to the Americas and Europe.<sup>22</sup> When the ships departed from Europe with manufactured goods, they sailed to the African coast to exchange these goods for Africans who became enslaved cargo on voyages to the Americas.<sup>23</sup> Once the ship was filled with human cargo and ready to depart for the colonies, the ship would head for the Caribbean or other parts of the Americas to sell the enslaved for tropical products such as sugar, rum, vanilla, etc.<sup>24</sup> Then, the ship would sail back to Europe (or on to other colonies in the Americas like Canada), filled with these tropical staples.<sup>25</sup> For Peter then, these circuits meant that he had to endure being transported more than once, either by ship or by inland travel to Halifax. For the *Congo* boy, this meant that he had to suffer a second crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in order to accompany his owner back to France. The nature of triangular trade meant that it is unlikely that ships sailed from Africa directly to Europe, which is why the *Congo* boy likely sailed across the Atlantic twice to reach Bordeaux.<sup>26</sup>

Bordeaux and Halifax are both cities with a temperate climate. This means that the nature of the labour of the enslaved was often urban. The enslaved were not working on plantations typical in tropical climates in the Caribbean. Rather, they would perform domestic tasks and help with the labour of their owner, just like Peter who was trained as a carpenter.<sup>27</sup> In fact, according to Sara Elizabeth Chute, “the institution of slavery in the Maritimes had a similar labor basis to other areas of North America” such as New England.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, both Peter and the Congo boy would have had to live in close proximity to their owners and their families, if they had any.<sup>29</sup> The close proximity and constant surveillance by the owners, paired with the isolation and deprivation of the enslaved and any members of their communities sheds light on why they chose to flee.



Since they were not part of a plantation system like the American South or the Caribbean, the two young men were enslaved in slave minority sites and experienced the further isolation of being significantly outnumbered by whites. In fact, the black population in the mid-eighteenth century made up only 0.25% of the entire population of France.<sup>30</sup> Of that number, some were surely enslaved, but the census of the period does not differentiate between free blacks and enslaved blacks.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, it is important to note that the enslaved population at that time was lower than 0.25 % in France. As for Peter's experience in Halifax, it is generally acknowledged that there was not a significant enslaved population in Halifax prior to the arrival of the Loyalists after the Revolutionary War. As Harvey Amani Whitfield has argued, "In the 1780's, at least 30,000 Loyalists migrated to the Maritimes, including a few thousand free black people. Additionally, there were probably between 1,500 and 2,000 slaves."<sup>32</sup> Robin W. Winks contends that the reason for this is simply because "once the land was cleared it was not sufficiently productive to require an extensive labour force."<sup>33</sup>

Considering that the two runaways were African-born they most probably had memories of freedom, of their own families, communities and cultures. Given that they were young, their situations offer us a window on what childhood (or the lack thereof) would have looked like for the enslaved. The fact that they were born in Africa also illuminates why Peter spoke broken English and the Congo boy spoke a broken French. Significantly, they probably spoke various African dialects or languages which their owners did not think were essential to disclose in their fugitive advertisements. The marks on their bodies, either the "country marks" or the branding scar were far more significant for their potential recovery. Due to the small number of African-born people who became enslaved in Nova Scotia (and Canada), there were certainly not many enslaved people in Halifax or even in the Maritimes with a square brand mark on their back just like there was probably only one enslaved person in all of Bordeaux whose skin was marked by the Frenchman Vincent's last name.

On a last note, although these two advertisements share many resemblances, they also differ in important respects. One difference between the two advertisements is the presence of a reward. Kirkham offered eight dollars for Peter's return.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Vincent offered no reward for the *Congo* boy. Another important distinction is the absence of a name for the enslaved adolescent in Bordeaux. It was a normal practice to disclose the name of the runaway along with other characteristics that facilitated their recovery.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, although Peter and the *Congo* boy were both running away from different sides of the Atlantic, their escapes have many similarities. Both Halifax and Bordeaux were temperate climate cities with an enslaved minority and similar labour practices in the eighteenth century. Both youths likely had to survive at least two "Middle Passages" in order to end up running away in Canada and in France.<sup>36</sup> Most importantly, both adolescents were marked; Peter had country marks, a symbol of his African past and origins, while the *Congo* boy was branded with his owner's last name. Both fugitive advertisements point to the presence of the enslaved in Canada and France despite both countries tendencies to deny slavery or to omit it from national curricula. It is shameful to have participated in such a cruel and dehumanizing institution, but it is morally and ethically reprehensible to keep denying an important part of the countries' histories on account of this shame.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hugh Kirkham, "RAN AWAY," *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, 20 May 1783 (Halifax, NS) 1785-1786, transcribed in Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Black Slavery in the Maritimes : A History in Documents* (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 32.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Vincent, "Le 4 de ce mois, il s'est évadé," *Annonces, Affiches et Avis Divers Pour la ville de Bordeaux*, issue 7, Jeudi, 14 Février 1771, p. 31.
- <sup>3</sup> The notion of the "inscribed passport" has been coined and explained by Trent University Professor Katrina Keefer when referring to scarification or "country marks".
- "Traditional African scars are helping researchers tell the stories of the slave trade," *CBC News* (date of last access 12 February 2020) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/scarification-trent-ocad-slave-trade-identity-1.5014143>
- <sup>4</sup> Kirkham, "RAN AWAY," transcribed in Whitfield, *Black Slavery in the Maritimes*, p. 32.
- <sup>5</sup> Kirkham, "RAN AWAY," transcribed in Whitfield, *Black Slavery in the Maritimes*, p. 32. Kirkham was himself a carpenter which may explain why he trained Peter in the same work; *The repares Wanted to the Goal of Halifax*, Hugh Kirkham, John Wisdon, 31 March 1787, RG 5 Series A, vol. 2, no. 57, Nova Scotia House of Assembly Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- <sup>6</sup> Kirkham, "RAN AWAY," transcribed in Whitfield, *Black Slavery in the Maritimes*, p. 32.
- <sup>7</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, "The African Diaspora in Atlantic Canada: History, Historians, and Historiography," *Acadiensis*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2017), p. 215.
- <sup>8</sup> "Traditional African scars," *CBC News* (date of last access 12 February 2020).
- <sup>9</sup> Lisa A. Lindsay, "Remembering His Country Marks: A Nigerian American Family and Its 'African' Ancestor," *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, eds. Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), pp. 192-94.
- <sup>10</sup> Lindsay, "Remembering His Country Marks," p. 192.
- <sup>11</sup> Slave ships did not arrive in Canada directly from Africa.
- <sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution Vol. 3* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1864), p. 541.
- <sup>13</sup> Vincent, "Le 4 de ce mois, il s'est évadé," p.31. English translation : Fourteen years of age, 5 foot 1 inch tall, a big nose, speaks broken French & has had his head shaven three weeks ago: he is branded, *Vincent*, but not distinctly.
- <sup>14</sup> Vincent, "Le 4 de ce mois, il s'est évadé," p. 31.
- <sup>15</sup> Samuel L Chatman, " 'There Are No Slaves in France': A Re-Examination of Slave Laws in Eighteenth Century France," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 85, no. 3 (2000), p. 147.
- <sup>16</sup> Chatman, "There Are No Slaves in France," p. 147. The letters that owners had to fill in order to declare and justify the presence of their enslaved to port authorities in France are other archival materials that scholars can recuperate to prove that slavery did exist in France and not just in its colonies.
- <sup>17</sup> Frederick Douglass and John W. Blassingame, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 377-78 (Yale University Press 1985); cited in Shontavia Johnson, "BRANDED: Trademark Tattoos, Slave Owner Brands, And the Right to Have 'Free' Skin," *Michigan Telecommunication and Technology Law Review*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2016), p. 232.
- <sup>18</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora," *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), p. 221.
- <sup>19</sup> Timothy Insoll, "Bodies and Persons," *Material Explorations in African Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 15-17.
- <sup>20</sup> Lovejoy, "Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora," p. 221.
- <sup>21</sup> Lovejoy, "Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora," p. 221.
- <sup>22</sup> On the concept of the second Middle Passage, see Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 7, 85, 127.
- <sup>23</sup> Patrick Rabeau, "Bordeaux au XVIIIe siècle: Le commerce atlantique et l'esclavage" *Musée d'Aquitaine*, hors-série (February 2002), p. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Rabeau, "Bordeaux au XVIIIe siècle" p. 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Rabeau, "Bordeaux au XVIIIe siècle" p. 2.
- <sup>26</sup> The route of the Congo boy is less certain since it is possible (although not probable) that he was forced to go to France on a ship which delivered a cargo to West Africa and then returned to Europe. However, he may also have been first delivered, like Peter, to the Americas (the French Caribbean for example) before being taken to France.
- <sup>27</sup> Kirkham, "RAN AWAY," transcribed in Whitfield, *Black Slavery in the Maritimes*, p. 32.
- <sup>28</sup> Sarah Elizabeth Chute, "Runaway Slave Advertisements from Loyalist Newspapers of the Maritimes Colonies," *Western Washington University, West CEDAR* (Fall 2018), pp. 16-18.

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- <sup>29</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, Black Slavery in the Maritimes: A History in Documents, The Broadview Sources Series (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup> Sue Peabody, "Slavery in France: The Problem and Early Responses," There are no slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Peabody, "Slavery in France," p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Whitfield, "The African Diaspora in Atlantic Canada," p. 215.
- <sup>33</sup> Robin W. Winks, "Slavery, the Loyalists, and English Canada, 1760-1801," The Blacks in Canada: A History, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 29.
- <sup>34</sup> Kirkham, "RAN AWAY," transcribed in Whitfield, Black Slavery in the Maritimes, p. 32.
- <sup>35</sup> Chute, "Runaway Slave Advertisements from Loyalist Newspapers of the Maritimes Colonies," p. 7.
- <sup>36</sup> Nelson, Slavery, Geography and Empire, pp. 7, 85, 127.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure. 1: Hugh Kirkham, “RAN AWAY,” Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle, 20 May 1783; transcribed in Harvey Amani Whitfield, Black Slavery in the Maritimes: A History in Documents (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 32.

Figure. 2: M. Vincent, “Le 4 de ce mois, il s’est évadé,” Annonces, Affiches et Avis Divers Pour la ville de Bordeaux, issue 7, Jeudi, 14 Février 1771, p. 3

## A PLAN TO OUT-MASTER THE MASTER

Ellie Finkelstein

Transatlantic Slavery was a brutal institution which routinely worked to dehumanize and objectify the enslaved. Slave owners believed that the enslaved were nothing more than “property,” objects that possessed little capacity for intellect and understanding of the social, political, and economic functions of the homes and societies to which they were bound. This notion is far from the truth. In fact, slave owners contradicted this belief in the very advertisements they printed to sell or hunt enslaved people. Specifically, in the context of fugitive slave advertisements, the act of running away itself challenged the idea that enslaved people were indolent sub-humans, rather than self-motivated people who were capable and knowledgeable of their societies. I will specifically examine the kind of intelligence demonstrated by enslaved people who had a premeditated plan of escape through comparing and contrasting the runaways: Cloe from Quebec and Charley from Jamaica. It is rare that slave notices reveal a runaway’s plan, because to do so would have disclosed the enslaved person’s ability to capitalize upon the expectations of their slave owner.<sup>1</sup> By contravening their role as enslaved people, and in turn, the infallibility of the slave owners, Cloe and Charley forced their owners to explain - literally to print - how they had executed their plans of escape, and in so doing gave proof that enslaved people were capable of out-mastering their masters.

On 28 July 1791, the merchant Judah Joseph printed an advertisement in the Quebec Gazette to give notice of Cloe, an enslaved woman who had run away from him (fig.1). Cloe’s escape is particularly noteworthy for her daring and decidedly sophisticated plan compared to the other runaway advertisements printed in Quebec. In the notice, Joseph gives uncanny detail saying, “She is supposed to have gone off in a canoe with a man of low stature and dark complexion, who speaks English, Dutch, and French. She got out of a garret window by the help of a ladder.”<sup>2</sup> With the thoroughness of detail Joseph provided in this advertisement, we can infer that one, Cloe was under hyper-surveillance, and two, she was familiar with her slave owner’s schedule, property, and possessions given that she had escaped after organizing the materials she needed, such as the ladder. The fact that Cloe needed to use a ladder to climb out of a garret window tells

us the lengths that she went to – quite literally - in order to escape; since we can assume that she climbed from at least the second or third floor of a building. Not only

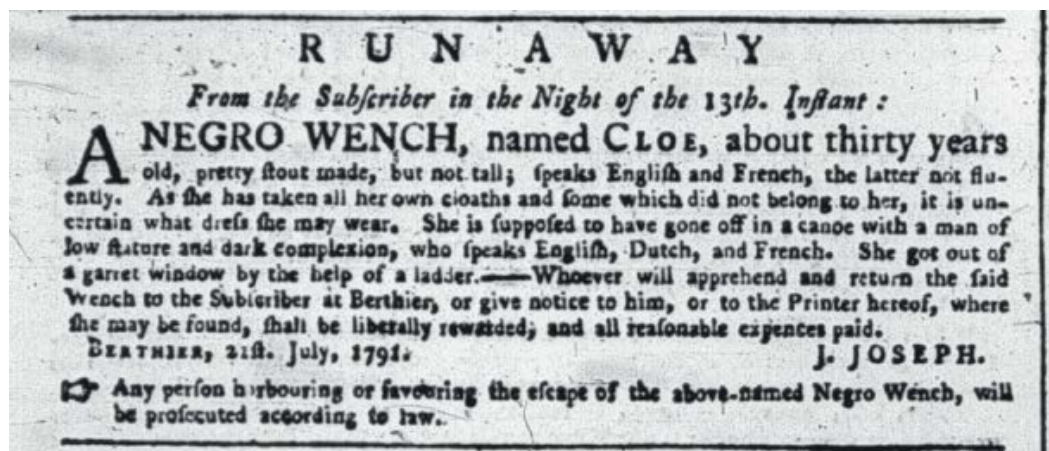


Figure 1: J. Joseph, “RUN AWAY From the Subscriber in the Night of the 13th Instant,” Quebec Gazette, 28 July 1791; transcribed in Frank Mackey, “Appendix I: Newspaper Notices,” Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760–1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010)

would this tactic have been physically risky, but it would have also necessitated very careful planning in order for Cloe to escape detection. Additionally, Joseph tells us that she ran away, “in the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> instant,”<sup>3</sup> therefore, Cloe understood that during the night she would be under less surveillance and have more time allotted to run without being detected.

Joseph’s notice also stated that, “she has taken all her own cloaths and some which did not belong to her, it is uncertain what dress she may wear.”<sup>4</sup> (sic) This is relevant in Cloe’s premeditated plan because she knew she must disguise herself to evade detection. David Waldstreicher discusses this tactic as essential for running away calling it, “roleplaying” and suggesting that enslaved people understood that they had to act in the character of a free person in order to be perceived as free.<sup>5</sup> Since slave owners rarely gave their enslaved people more than one set of clothing, describing the clothes that they were wearing was as good as describing the man or woman.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it was not uncommon that fugitive slave advertisements went into detail about all of the clothing items that an enslaved person wore at the moment of escape, and further, what items they might have been carrying with them. Cloe for instance, took all of her clothing because she would have understood that changing her clothing would have decreased her chances of being recognized and caught.

The most peculiar detail in the notice for Cloe is the unidentified man who assisted her in the escape. For reasons unknown, Joseph knew that this man spoke Dutch, English, and French, had a dark complexion, and was of “low stature,” but still could not identify him. Considering that Cloe was an enslaved woman, she would have had limited opportunity to leave Joseph’s property and form connections with many people, let alone to devise a complicated plan with others outside of the grounds. Typically, enslaved women in Quebec were domestic workers, and due to the fact that the man in the canoe was unidentified, we can assume that he was not known to Joseph, and therefore, would probably not have been in and out of the property to which Cloe was confined.<sup>7</sup> But regardless, Cloe still managed to conceptualize and carry out a complex plan with the unnamed man.

Cloe’s case is also rare due to the nature of her status in Quebec Slavery. The enslaved population of New France, later Quebec, was small and enslaved black females comprised the smallest portion of the minority population.<sup>8</sup> According to Marcel Trudel, in 1759 there were approximately 1132 enslaved blacks in New France, out of the estimated 4000 enslaved people in total.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the slave population in Quebec were the minority, whereas in comparison, in a colony like Jamaica, the slave population vastly outnumbered the white population at about fifteen to one.<sup>10</sup>

In 1776, Jamaica was the powerhouse of the British Empire. As the largest producer of tropical goods in the British Caribbean, Trevor Burnard refers to Jamaica as the “constant mine,” which helped to produce some of the richest white folk in all the British Empire.<sup>11</sup> The slave population in Jamaica grew dramatically, despite the fact that deaths constantly outnumbered births due to the exceptionally low female fertility rate, the brutality of the violence, and harsh working conditions inflicted on the enslaved.<sup>12</sup> White Jamaicans would have rather “bought than bred” their slave population, which attests to their intrinsic mentality that Africans were chattel; purely moveable objects for the purpose of exploitation.<sup>13</sup> The elite white class of Jamaicans thought of Africa as nothing but a supplier of slaves, having a ravenous eagerness for obtaining them since they would very often work their slaves to death.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the enslaved population of Jamaica suffered from natural decrease, the brutal nature of the slave regime resulting in their inability to reproduce themselves.<sup>15</sup>



Charley, the enslaved man who ran away from Thomas Brown, was a Creole born in Kingston, who laboured as a chef in Montego Bay on the northwest coast of Jamaica [fig. 2]. Charley, unlike Cloe, lived within a slave majority population, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that he would

15 November 1776  
*Cornwall Chronicle*  
 Montego Bay

Run away, from the Subscriber on Friday the 8th instant, a creole Negro fellow named CHARLEY, my cook; he was born in Kingston, and sold several years ago with his mother and her family to a person going to the Northward; who afterwards sold him to Capt. FITHER of the *Price Frigate*, of whom I bought him. He is tall, of a yellowish complexion, much pitted with the smallpox about the nose, very much in-kneed, talks good English, and is remarkably cunning; had on a dark brown cloth coat when he eloped. He went on board of a ship in this harbour and offered to ship himself as a cook, telling the Captain that he was just come from New York; that his master was dead, and had left him free, offering to shew a free paper (which if he has, is positively forged) [sic] as he called it. Any person securing him in any of the goals [sic] of this island, so that I can get him, shall receive two Pistoles reward, and all expenses paid; and any person harbouring him, or endeavouring to assist him shall be prosecuted to the utmost rigour of the law. THOMAS BROWN.

Figure 2: Thomas Brown, “RUN AWAY From the Subscriber on Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> Instant,” *Cornwall Chronicle*, 15 November 1776.; transcribed in Douglas B. Chambers, “Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I) Eighteenth Century,” *Documenting Runaway Slaves Project* (Hattiesburg, Mississippi: University of Southern Mississippi, 2013).

have undergone less surveillance than Cloe, at least once he escaped the immediate residence of his enslaver. Charley is particularly unique in this sense because his labour as a cook placed him within the domestic realm. Therefore, we cannot be sure how much, if any, less surveillance he was under. Charley’s domestic role would have placed him under more surveillance than most other enslaved people in Jamaica who worked in the fields of the island’s plantations. Charley’s duties, that required him to be primarily in the kitchen, subjected him to the watchful eyes of Thomas Brown, and potentially other white family members and employees who may also have had access to or lived in the house. Charley’s experience as an enslaved cook held a significant role in elite plantation culture.<sup>16</sup> His responsibility would have been to create lavish meals in a complex social space, created by, “racialized and gendered ideologies and fueled by the domestic wants of the mistress.”<sup>17</sup> His labour made him accountable for the full production of daily meals, the catering of banquets, and the quality of the dining.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Charley may have supervised other enslaved people and would have been kept on a tight schedule because his duties had to be performed at precise times. This, in addition to the details that Brown was able to describe about his obviously pre-planned escape, compares to the level of surveillance that Cloe would have experienced.

Proof of his premeditated plan derives from Brown’s in-depth explanation of Charley’s escape, and would have acted as a barrier to his efforts to run away without being noticed as easily:

“He went on board of a ship in this harbour and offered to ship himself as a cook, telling the Captain that he was just come from New York; that his master was dead, and had left him free, offering to shew a free paper (which if he has, is positively forged) [sic] as he called it.”<sup>19</sup>

This fundamental bit of information provided by Brown offers insight into the level of awareness Charley had of the social and political dynamics within his slave society. First, he understood that in order for him to be free, he would have to have been manumitted from his enslaver, and in Charley’s carefully crafted back story, he claimed that his enslaver had freed him upon his death which he clearly understood to be a common practice. Second, he was able to use his trade as a cook to offer incentive for the ship captain to allow him on board in exchange

for his labour. Third, Charley knew that he would require documents to confirm his free status. Although, it is difficult to ascertain from whom and where he got such papers, if correct, Brown's assertion may indicate the presence of literate people who acted as forgers and were willing to aid enslaved fugitives. However, Charley may have forged his own documents. The distinct possibility exists that he may have been literate given that Brown wrote he, "talks good English," and the fact that he was a cook, working within a domestic setting which may have brought him into contact with Brown's personal library, newspapers, and other publications. According to Kelly Deetz, a scholar in transatlantic food ways, it was not unusual that enslaved cooks were taught how to read by their mistresses, as this was a pragmatic solution to dealing with recipes and food production.<sup>20</sup> To cook the European dishes that Charley no doubt produced, there was a need for a level of understanding and performance from enslaved cooks. In addition to this, it would have also been essential for Charley to understand basic math since this was imperative for being able to double and triple recipes for the numerous occasions of many white guests at the slave owner's home.<sup>21</sup> That being said, Charley could have written his own papers to pass himself off as a free man since it is very probable that he was literate due to his unique experience as a cook.

As an enslaved woman in Quebec and an enslaved man in Jamaica, the experiences of Chloe and Charley differed in critical ways. Like all enslaved females, Chloe did not only contend with exploitation for her physical labour, but also sexual exploitation that derived from her ability to produce new labourers – her enslaved children – for her owner.<sup>22</sup> Chloe would have been at "the mercy of her owner," as Charmaine A. Nelson argues, considering that enslaved women persistently "bore the stigma of a compromised sexuality that was conflated with her marginalized racial identity."<sup>23</sup> Given that it is extremely likely that Chloe was enslaved domestically, Joseph, or any other men who was authorized by her owner, would have easily been able to assault her frequently. The manner in which Joseph addressed her in the foreword of the advertisement as, "A Negro Wench," and his sense of urgency to find her is indicative of a legal claim of possession which for him may have extended beyond mere physical labour and instead signalled an abject sexuality which he projected onto Chloe.<sup>24</sup> The sexual dimension of female enslavement must be weighed when we consider Chloe's strong determination to escape from Joseph.

An alternative difference in Charley and Chloe's experience based on their gender is their ability to foster connections with people outside of the grounds to which they were bound. Charley, who likely received more privileges in his role as an enslaved man, was certainly still treated in a brutal manner, nonetheless. Yet, he could have had more access to individuals who might have helped him in his escape, since his network would surely have been wider as an enslaved man in a slave majority population.

Regardless of the differences that Chloe and Charley would have experienced in their respective lives as enslaved individuals, their determination to escape was evident in their audaciously sophisticated execution of their premeditated plans. In Frank Mackey's Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760–1840 (2010), Appendix I is comprised of fifty-one fugitive slave advertisements, of which eight were printed for female escapees.<sup>25</sup> Three of these notices disclose some sort of plan or calculated strategy. However, none of the premeditated escapes were nearly as explicit in conspicuous nature of the planning as Chloe's. Likewise, although Charley was one of many runaways in a colony with large slave population, his utilization of his unique position and his knowledge about the institution of slavery for a successful escape sets him apart. Ultimately, Chloe and Charley's experiences differ drastically in

the nature of their enslavement due to their sex, labour, and location, but they are connected through their ability to claim their agency with sophistication and intelligence to do the unexpected, and out master their masters.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," The William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 56, no2, (April 1999), p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> J. Joseph, "RUN AWAY From the Subscriber in the Night of the 13th Instant," Quebec Gazette, 28 July 1791; transcribed in Frank Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760–1840 (McGill Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. 334, 540, note 58.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph, "RUN AWAY From the Subscriber," pp. 334, 540, note 58.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph, "RUN AWAY From the Subscriber," pp. 334, 540, note 58.

<sup>5</sup> Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," p. 244.

<sup>6</sup> Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," p. 252.

<sup>7</sup> In New France, enslaved females were preferred for indoor work and were thought to be especially docile. See Robin W. Winks, "Slavery in New France, 1628-1760," Blacks in Canada: A History, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 10

<sup>8</sup> The majority of the slave population in New France during the middle of the eighteenth century consisted of indigenous enslaved people called panis, while the minority were of African descent. African Canadians make up a small percentage of the total enslaved population because they would have had to endure at least two crossings, either a middle passage, or by foot; Winks, "Slavery in New France, 1628-1760," p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Winks, "Slavery in New France, 1628-1760," p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Trevor G. Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly F. Deetz, "Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories: The influence and function of West African foodways in the early British Atlantic," The Routledge History of Food eds. Carol Helstosky (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Deetz, "Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories," p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> Deetz, "Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories," p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Brown, "RUN AWAY From the Subscriber on Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> Instant," Cornwall Chronicle, 15 November 1776.; transcribed in Douglas B. Chambers, "Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I) Eighteenth Century," Documenting Runaway Slaves Project (Hattiesburg, Mississippi: University of Southern Mississippi, 2013). Ad found in Newspaper abbreviations: Cornwall Chronicle; Jamaica Mercury; Royal Gazette; Weekly Jamaica Courant.

<sup>20</sup> Deetz, "Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories," p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Deetz, "Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories," p. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Charmaine Nelson, "A Tale of Two Empires" in Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, "A Tale of Two Empires," p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master... a negro girl named Thursday': Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave advertisements," Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law, eds. Joshual Nichols and Amy Swiffen (NYC: Routledge, 2017), p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," pp. 307-40.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: J. Joseph, “RUN AWAY From the Subscriber in the Night of the 13th Instant,” Quebec Gazette, 28 July 1791; transcribed in Frank Mackey, “Appendix I: Newspaper Notices,” Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760–1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010)

Figure 2: Thomas Brown, “RUN AWAY From the Subscriber on Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> Instant,” Cornwall Chronicle, 15 November 1776.; transcribed in Douglas B. Chambers, “Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I) Eighteenth Century,” Documenting Runaway Slaves Project (Hattiesburg, Mississippi: University of Southern Mississippi, 2013).

## THE SATORIAL VIOLENCE ON ENSLAVED BODIES IN BRITISH NORTHERN REGIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUNAWAY SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS

Denisa Marginean

“To shun these ills that hoary my head / I seek in foreign lands precarious bread;” those were the words of Henry Erskine. His eighteenth-century poem *The Emigrant* depicts an old shepherd who speaks on the emigrations from Scotland and rejects a “Highland depopulation that would leave Britannia defenceless.”<sup>1</sup> This text shows Scottish people’s profound sense of patriotism as tied to the mainland; a sentiment which becomes uniquely pertinent in Scottish nation-building efforts in regions such as the Canadian Maritimes. However, Scotland and the Maritimes share more than just devotional nationalism. These northern states also have a deliberately hidden history of participation in Transatlantic Slavery. Using an analysis of two eighteenth-century runaway slave advertisements, I argue that the conditions of the enslaved in both Scotland and the Maritimes are comparable through isolation and sartorial violence.

In *The Royal Gazette and the New-Brunswick Advertiser*, the first advertisement for the enslaved man Ben, appeared on Tuesday, 7 March 1786.<sup>2</sup> (fig. 1) Ben is described as being *thirty years old*, five feet and six inches, and stout with “very” black thick lips.<sup>3</sup> The advertisement additionally denotes him as a “negro,” which at this time indicated an unmixed person of African descent.<sup>4</sup> Ben was “the property of Capt. Jones,” and he ran away with a light brown jacket, a plaid waistcoat, corduroy breeches, white stockings and a round hat. We can read the description of his clothing in multiple ways. First, it denotes a heightened level of surveillance inflicted upon the enslaved, which was a vital tool for the institution of slavery (particularly in the north, where the majority of the enslaved lived in close proximity to their owners).<sup>5</sup> Second, scholar Steeve O.

Buckridge tells us that dress (which he broadly defines as clothing as well as modifications to the body) in colonial society was never fully controlled by slave owners, which allowed for the oppressed population to resist through political statements about identity.<sup>6</sup> Control over identity can be taken further in the case of runaway slave advertisements, where there is clear evidence that the enslaved used dress and performance to “pass” as free.<sup>7</sup> However, Buckridge’s understanding applies to tropical regions and plantation-based slavery. What about slave dress in the understudied temperate areas? Through the lack of specificity in the runaway advertisement, we can hypothesize that Ben’s clothing was in good condition.<sup>8</sup> This feature leads me to my third consideration: Ben’s dress was an imposition from the slave owner to display status and possession.

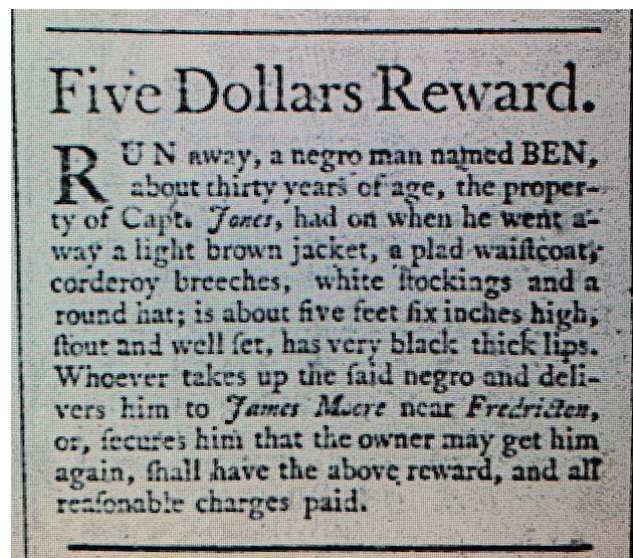


Figure 1: Capt. Caleb Jones, “Five Dollars Reward,” *The Royal Gazette and New-Brunswick Advertiser*, Tuesday 7 March 1786, vol. 1, no. 22, Rare Books Special Collection McGill Library, Montreal.



Historians Shane White and Graham White tell us that the “slaveholders’ intervention in the bodily appearance of their slaves could even extend to expectations about gesture, movement, and general demeanor.”<sup>9</sup> However, expectations of Ben’s behaviour could also mean displaying his owner’s patriotism with his own body. In the first advertisement, Ben ran away with a *plaid* waistcoat. This particular advertisement (with the same terminology) ran from March 7<sup>th</sup> to May 30<sup>th</sup>, which means that Ben managed to flee and remain at large for fourteen weeks since the newspaper was published once a week. The only change observable is the move of the advertisement from the third page to the fourth. Ben’s journey, unfortunately, ended with his recapture because on 25 July 1786, he was listed as a part of another runaway slave advertisement, but this time was a part of a group escape. (fig. 2) A few months after his first flight, Ben was *thirty-five years old*. The five-year difference marked the slave owner’s attempt to chart Ben’s aging.

Notably, Ben, along with Flora, Nancy and Lidge, were all “born in Maryland, and lately brought to this country.” The mention of their birthplace and the focus on forbidding “masters of vessels” from harbouring them indicated that Caleb Jones assumed that Maryland was a likely destination (perhaps because family separation was so prevalent in the North).<sup>10</sup> In the second flight description, Ben wore a “Devonshire Kersey (i.e. coarse wool)<sup>11</sup> jacket lined with Scotch plad, corduroy breeches, and a round hat.” (sic) The presence of plaid fabric in both escapes is worthy of greater attention. It has strong Scottish symbolism. At this time, the merchant class demonstrated themselves as supporters of tartan (originally plaid) to reflect their adoption of a mythic Highland national identity.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, in the nineteenth century, tartan was worn in North America as patriotic and cultural capital to relate North America to Great Britain visually.<sup>13</sup> Caleb Jones was an American planter and slave owner in Maryland who fled to New York with other Loyalists at the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War.<sup>14</sup> There, he served as a captain in the war and explored the land of New Brunswick, where he obtained land near Fredericton. Loyalists forced their enslaved people to relocate with them (to more northern territories that remained loyal to Britain) for the “fullest benefit of the unremunerated labour of that slave.”<sup>15</sup> Caleb Jones brought two enslaved people with him to Fredericton and returned to Maryland to bring back seven others.<sup>16</sup> Most slave owning households would not have retained that many slaves, which made Caleb Jones, “one of the most important slaveholders in Loyalist New Brunswick.”<sup>17</sup>

The slave owner, Jones, intervened in Ben’s bodily appearance through the imposition of symbols of a Scottish cultural heritage that were not his own, representing the enslaved man’s body as an assimilated and national flag. Slave owners felt so entitled to their “property” that they often changed their names upon acquisition, showing the enslaved that their life and identity were tied to their new owner.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, domestic labour was probably the most common

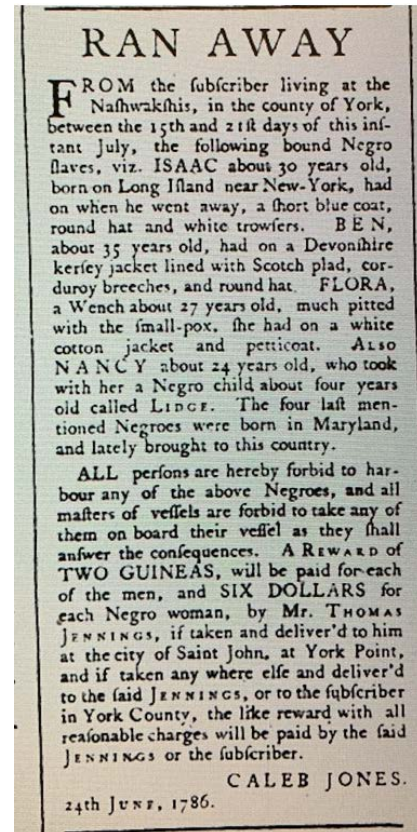


Figure 2: Caleb Jones, “Ran Away,” *The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser*, Tuesday 25 June 1786, vol. 1, no. 42, p. 3. Rare Books Special Collection McGill Library, Montreal.



form of slavery in the Maritimes. Enslaved people performed various tasks and even served as status symbols for wealthy families.<sup>19</sup> It is not inconceivable that Jones forced Ben to wear a British patriotic textile in his house to show status

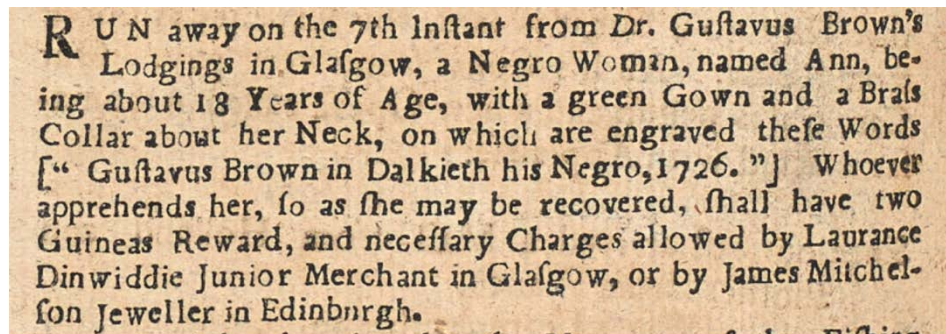


Figure 3: “Run away on the 7<sup>th</sup>,” Edinburgh Evening Courant, 13 February 1727, p. 4. Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

among the other Loyalists;<sup>20</sup> an act that fully attached Ben to his owner’s chosen identity, which simultaneously diminished his African Americanness.<sup>21</sup>

Remarkably, Ben escaped for the first time in March (a few weeks before Easter), and for a second time several weeks after his recapture. The winter season of his first getaway and his immediate escape after repossession are factors that reflect the terrible conditions in Jones’ household.<sup>22</sup> Caleb Jones was also back in Maryland, attempting to get his white family members to Fredericton when both flights occurred.<sup>23</sup> Either, his absence made for a better opportunity for escape or his enslaved people feared his return. Even another white slave owner, Stair Agnew, referred to Jones as a “corrupt person.”<sup>24</sup> Nancy and Lidge reappear in the public records,<sup>25</sup> implying that the group separated or they initially did not run together.<sup>26</sup> Lidge was only four years old at the time.<sup>27</sup> However, Ben does not reappear in the records, which leaves us with the unanswered question: was his escape to freedom finally successful?

Across the Atlantic, in the Edinburgh Evening Courant, on 13 February 1727, a runaway advertisement was placed for “a Negro woman, named Ann”. (fig. 3) It specifies that her escape was made on the 7<sup>th</sup> from her Scottish enslaver Dr. Gustavus Brown’s lodgings in Glasgow.<sup>28</sup> The advert was placed in Edinburgh and offered two contact names, a merchant in Glasgow and a jeweller in Edinburgh. Ben fled from his owner’s lands near Fredericton, but in the second advertisement, Jones asks the public to deliver him to Saint-John for compensation. Correspondingly with Ben’s situation, the mention of different cities in the notice for Ann indicates a strong network of pro-slavery advocates across key towns.<sup>29</sup> We also know that Ann was believed to be eighteen years old and wearing a green gown. But the most horrifying aspect of her described condition is the brass collar secured around her neck with the engraving of the slave owner’s name (Brown), his birthplace (Dalkieth) and year of manufacture (1726). Ann’s runaway advertisement reveals the pervasive entitlement of the slave owner concerning the bodies of the enslaved through the forced implementation of a violent and humiliating items of dress.

Author Iain Whyte, writing on the participation of Scotland in slavery, states that collars were more than decorative and were perhaps understood as a more “sophisticated and acceptable form of branding” than the rough plantation markings from the colonies.<sup>30</sup> It is hard to believe that such collars could have been associated with any form of sophistication. In 1756, a goldsmith marketed himself in the London Advertiser as someone who makes silver locks and collars for “Blacks or Dogs.”<sup>31</sup> Collars were directly associated with animals and property; they were a mark of objectification and physical confinement. In Southern plantations, owners placed iron collars upon the enslaved for punishment and to prevent escapes.<sup>32</sup>

In the eighteenth century, evidence suggests that seventy enslaved people lived in Scotland, the majority of whom were brought by owners who travelled to the West Indies or the American colonies.<sup>33</sup> The advertisement refers to Dr. Gustavus Brown's living situation as his "lodgings," not his home. Additionally, records indicate that Brown died in Maryland, so he was possibly a Scottish-born physician who moved to North America and often journeyed back.<sup>34</sup> Ann's collar could have been a practice Brown picked up from the American colonies. However, the low number of enslaved people in Scotland meant that slave-hunters tracked their victims easily since they stood out in the overwhelmingly white populations.<sup>35</sup> So, why were the enslaved forced to wear collars? By 1772, official numbers put the black population of London at fifteen thousand. This population was compromised of some who were still enslaved and some who had managed to escape and re-define themselves.<sup>36</sup> This gave rise to a growing concern by the white elite about the stability of their racist social order, which could have certainly been a factor in the use of a slave collar on Ann. The collar was perhaps an attempt to make her stand out if she attempted to flee to London and resettle as a free woman amongst the denser black population.<sup>37</sup> Evidently, runaway slave advertisements from London mention John White (1685) and "Lady Bromfield's black" (1728), who both fled with silver collars engraved with their owners' names around their neck.<sup>38</sup> These collars, which were heavy, suffocating, and difficult to remove without the aid of a white blacksmith, suggest that this was a common practice in Britain overall.

More than just prevention, collars must also be grasped as displays of white power. In the National Gallery of Scotland, the portrait of James Drummond by Sir John Baptiste de Medina, made in 1700, represents an enslaved boy with a metal collar (fig. 4). Whereas the owner is tall, pale, and nonchalant, the boy is depicted as small, dark and awestruck. Strategically relegated to the lower left-hand corner of the painting, his compositional marginalization echoes his social one. The didactic panel even declares that the painter is "unashamedly displaying him as the property of this wealthy and powerful man."<sup>39</sup> The painting gives us an excellent pictorial example of what Ann's collar would have looked like and the power inherent in constraining the enslaved with an engraved collar. Metal reflects light and thus becomes impossible to miss. But unlike delicate and refined jewelry, the nature of the metal was sized to inflict discomfort if not outright pain and to diminish and commodify the enslaved person as a possession. It visually connects the identity of the black wearer with the white owner. Our eyes go from the enslaved to



Figure 4: Sir John Baptiste de Medina, James Drummond, 2<sup>nd</sup> Titular Duke of Perth, 1673-1720. Jacobite (1700), Oil on Canvas, 147 x 123 cm, National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland.

the collar, and automatically to the owner, therefore it concentrates ultimately on the wealth and power that the white person possessed over another human being.

The collar was an overt signal of the entitlement of the owner, but also of other whites in the surveillance and handling of the enslaved person's body because to understand the engraving one had to be close enough to read it. This proximity also leads us to the contemplation of a significant aspect of black female enslavement: sexual labour. For enslaved females especially, Scottish Slavery, like the Canadian Maritimes, focused on domesticity. The enslaved were forced to attend to wealthy and aristocratic Brits.<sup>40</sup> The public records and paintings document the emphasis on young black servants, often mere children, which white households saw as "fashionable accessories."<sup>41</sup> Ann was treated as a status symbol, and her collar, race, sex, and young age would have also made her exceedingly vulnerable.<sup>42</sup> Sexual labour could have been expected by Brown during his travels away from his Maryland home, and perhaps this was even the reason he felt the need to bring her along. However, Scotland, like the Maritimes, had a conflicted lack of regulations concerning slavery, and the fear of returning to the colonies meant that many enslaved people attempted to fight for their freedom.<sup>43</sup> The fact that Ann's advertisement was repeated on 9 March 1727 should prompt us to ask if she was, possibly like Ben, successful in her escape from bondage?

Whereas Ben's bodily appearance in the runaway advertisement can be read as his forced display of his slave owner's cultural heritage, and Ann's as a means to deny her humanity and limit the possibility of escape, they both show a substantial characteristic of Northern slavery, status. Caleb Jones wanted to show his wealth and patriotism to other Loyalists, and Gustavus Brown sought to display his affluence and entitlement to Ann's body. Both of these cases shed light on how we can understand dress in northern slave regions, but they also raise more questions than they answer. Ultimately, the violence forced onto the bodies of the enslaved, sartorially and sexually, does not end there, because it transfers to the archives as well.<sup>44</sup> All the primary knowledge we have about Ben and Ann was made *by* whites *for* whites making any argument, a hypothesis, and once again turning the enslaved into disposable objects.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Marjorie, Harper, and Michael Vance, Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia, c.1700-1990. (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> The region that became the province of New Brunswick was included in Nova Scotia until 1786. The same year, Ben appears in the runaway records (although some sources put the separation in 1784). For the purpose of a broader understanding of northern slavery I have decided to refer to these two provinces as one region, the Maritimes, see William Renwick Riddell, "Slavery in the Maritime Provinces," The Journal of Negro History, vol. 5, no. 3 (July 1920), p. 364

<sup>3</sup> Capt. Caleb Jones, "Five Dollars Reward," The Royal Gazette and New-Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday 7 March 1786, vol. 1, no. 22, Rare Books Special Collection McGill Library, Montreal, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> By the nineteenth-century, "negro" also came to be a synonym and interchangeable with the word "slave," see Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2016), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova Scotia: 1750-1810," Journal of Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society, vol. 13 (2010), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Steeve O. Buckridge, The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890 (Kingston Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> An excellent account of the intricacy of performing free identities and the enslaved population's exploitation of the whites' understanding of race, and class is the case study of Ellen and William Craft's escape, see Amani Marshall, "'Will Endeavor to Pass as Free': Enslaved Runaways' Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina," Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies, vol. 31, no. 2 (2010), p. 161; In this case, Ellen

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Craft, an enslaved light-skinned woman, disguised herself as a white man and pretended to be her husband's slave owner to facilitate their escape. To disguise her illiteracy and feminine voice, they bandaged her arm and face so that she would not be asked to sign documents or to speak.

<sup>8</sup> In Jamaica, clothing was often given as second-hand items from the owner, or specific cloth rations (osnaburg) were provided which often involved enslaved women producing dress for the whole plantation community and remaining shoeless. Shoes were not part of clothing rations. Due to the proximity that defines northern slavery, and the smaller numbers of enslaved people, second-hand items would make more sense, see Buckridge, "The Language of Dress," p. 82. Regarding shoelessness and the enslaved in Jamaica see: Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscaped of Montreal and Jamaica (London: Routledge/Taylor and Francis, 2016), pp. 350,360, 373, 385 note #75.

<sup>9</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Journal of Southern History, 61, no. 1 (February 1995), p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Fredericton is also tied to Saint-John and is a major port city through access from the St-John River. Ships would have been a possible method of escape. Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova Scotia," p. 233.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, Black Slavery in the Maritimes: A History in Documents (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Harper, and Vance, "Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory," p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Michael, Newton, "Paying for the Plaid: Scottish Gaelic Identity Politics in Nineteenth-Century North America," From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History, and Myth, eds. Ian Brown, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> "Jones Caleb," Dictionary of Canadian Biography (date last accessed 3 February 2020) [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/jones\\_caleb\\_5E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/jones_caleb_5E.html)

<sup>15</sup> Isaac, Allen Jack, The Loyalists and Slavery in New Brunswick: Illus. (Ottawa: Library of Congress, 1898), p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> "Jones Caleb," (date last accessed 3 February 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Whitfield, "Black Slavery in the Maritimes," p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova Scotia," p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova Scotia," p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Of the group, Ben's clothing appears to have been in the best condition. Notably, his round hat was present both times. While it is unclear why Jones may have bestowed nicer clothing on Ben, their attire perhaps had a connection to the nature of his and the others' labour for Jones.

<sup>21</sup> What is particular about Ben is that he is the only one wearing plaid in the second escape and the one for whom the most detail about clothing was provided.

<sup>22</sup> The cold weather was also a tool used by the enslaved people of Maryland (Ben's birthplace) slaves to run vast distances on top of frozen rivers. This is not implausible in a water-connected port city such as Saint-John. The busy nature of Easter and the cold weather also indisposed slave owners and their proxy to hunt people over extended periods of time (perhaps this is why Ben's recapture happens only in late spring), see Tony C. Perry, "In Bondage When Cold was King: The Frigid Terrain of Slavery in Antebellum Maryland," Slavery & Abolition, vol. 38, no. 1. (2017), p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> "Jones Caleb," (date last accessed 3 February 2020).

<sup>24</sup> This was a statement made in the case in which Jones is accused of embezzlement, see: "Transcript of Publication addressed to the Freeholders of York County by Stan Agnew concerning Caleb Jones Military Record and Alleging Misuse of Public Funds (1802)," Saint John Public Library, (date of last access 10 February 2020) [http://0104.nccdn.net/1\\_5/10a/3b0/201/Transcript-of-Publication-addressed-to-the-freeholders-of-York-County-by-Sta.pdf](http://0104.nccdn.net/1_5/10a/3b0/201/Transcript-of-Publication-addressed-to-the-freeholders-of-York-County-by-Sta.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> There is another runaway advertisement for Lidge, thirty years later, see Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016), p. 4. Nancy, on the other hand, came back in the public's eye with the famous 1800 case in which she tried to claim her freedom. Still, Caleb Jones (put in charge by Stair Agnew) testified that her birth as an "African Negro" made her a slave for life, and she was returned to her master as a slave, see Riddell, "Slavery in the Maritime Provinces," pp. 370-372.

<sup>26</sup> Running away with children was particularly difficult, a successful escape meant quiet speed, perhaps the group abandoned the mother and child for a better chance of survival, or Nancy and Lidge simply happened to flee at the same time as them, see: Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, NY., 1785-1830," NWSA Journal, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1988-89), p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> Whitfield, "North to Bondage," p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> "Run away on the 7<sup>th</sup>," Edinburgh Evening Courant, 13 February 1727, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, p. 4.

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<sup>29</sup> Fredericton and Saint John are 108 kilometers apart, and Glasgow and Edinburgh are 67 kilometers apart, see “Distances between Cities on Map,” Distance From To (date of last access 13 February 2020)

<https://www.distancefromto.net>

<sup>30</sup> Whyte mentions the portraits of the Duke of Perth and the Duchess of Buccleuch, in which enslaved people with silver collars are represented. Iain Whyte, Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> F. O. Shyllon, Black Slaves in Britain, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> “Slave Collar, circa 1860,” The Henry Ford, (date of last access 15 February 2020)

<https://www.henryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/344612#slide=gs-183192>

<sup>33</sup> Whyte, “Scotland and the Abolition,” pp.11-13.

<sup>34</sup> The primary documents also put the birth of his first child, Margaret Stone, in 1710, Maryland, and all the following children afterwards. “Dr. Gustavus Adolphus Brown,” Geni, (date of last access 5 February 2020)

<https://www.geni.com/people/Dr-Gustavus-Brown/6000000001180101780>

<sup>35</sup> Shyllon, “Black Slaves,” p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> James Walvin, The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860, (London: Orbach & Chambers, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> The advertisement for Ann also does not mention any ships harbouring her, maybe because she attempted her journey on foot.

<sup>38</sup> Shyllon, “Black Slaves,” p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> “Sir John Baptise de Medina, James Drummond,” National Galleries Scotland, (date of last access 15 February 2020)

<sup>40</sup> There were also some enslaved people who were associated with a specific trade, although not that common, See: Whyte, “Scotland and the Abolition,” p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Whyte, “Scotland and The Abolition,” p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> For an understanding of the extraction of sexual labour as institutionalized sexual violence, see: Nelson, “Slavery, Geography and Empire,” pp. 62-74.

<sup>43</sup> There are multiple court cases in which the legality of slavery was debated. This was the situation in the Nancy Morton case in New Brunswick, see: Whyte, “Scotland and the Abolition,” p.17.

<sup>44</sup> This is a direct reference to Marisa Fuentes’s theory on female enslavement, see: Marisa J. Fuentes, “Introduction,” Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 5.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Capt. Caleb Jones, “Five Dollars Reward,” The Royal Gazette and New-Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday 7 March 1786, vol. 1, no. 22, Rare Books Special Collection McGill Library, Montreal.

Figure 2: Caleb Jones, “Ran Away,” The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday 25 June 1786, vol. 1, no. 42, p. 3, Rare Books Special Collection McGill Library, Montreal.

Figure 3: “Run away on the 7<sup>th</sup>,” Edinburgh Evening Courant, 13 February 1727, p. 4, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

Figure 4: Sir John Baptiste de Medina, James Drummond, 2<sup>nd</sup> Titular Duke of Perth, 1673-1720. Jacobite (1700), Oil on Canvas, 147 x 123 cm, National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland.



## **“WHOEVER TAKES UP SAID WENCH”: EXAMINING YOUNG ENSLAVED WOMEN/TEENAGERS’ LIVES IN ST. JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK AND HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP, PENNSYLVANIA**

Colin McCrossan

“There is simply no other place in the Maritimes,” the tourism website for the province of New Brunswick boasts about the city of St. John,<sup>1</sup> for it is “where the urban charms of a vibrant, historic city nestle up against the grand, natural allure” of the Bay of Fundy.<sup>2</sup> The “delightful port architecture” of the downtown area “makes a perfect backdrop to stroll along Market Square,” where visitors can watch “the cruise ships dock at the harbour,” - a prime location with “fine restaurants, galleries and shops along the way.”<sup>3</sup> Seven hundred and nineteen miles south of St. John, just 30 minutes outside of the city of Philadelphia is Haverford Township, a residential suburb with a similar population size.<sup>4</sup> Haverford Township “is primarily residential with retail and service businesses and some light industry” the municipal website states.<sup>5</sup> It includes “two shopping centers, Manoa with 28 businesses and Pilgrim Gardens,” that has “about 12.”<sup>6</sup> The township was settled by three Welsh families in 1682, who purchased the land from William Penn, according to the historical introduction on the website, and “the area was primarily agricultural until the second decade of the twentieth century.”<sup>7</sup> Today, “there is quite a mix of residential properties with single homes, duplex, and some row homes” which are situated on the “many pleasant tree lined streets.” Haverford Township, the website concludes, “is a great place to live.”

These two sites, in Canada and the USA, might appear to be completely different places disjointed by geography, time, and culture. What links these two sites is their histories and connections to Transatlantic Slavery and settler colonialism; both are places built and maintained by enslaved people of African descent. Re-inserting slavery back into historical narratives about St. John and Haverford Township works against the historic erasure and contemporary silences that characterize how the histories of Canadian and Northern American slavery are told and interpreted. This essay recuperates parts of those histories by analyzing and comparing fugitive slave advertisements posted in both sites for young enslaved black women/teenagers who ran away alone and together. Examining these

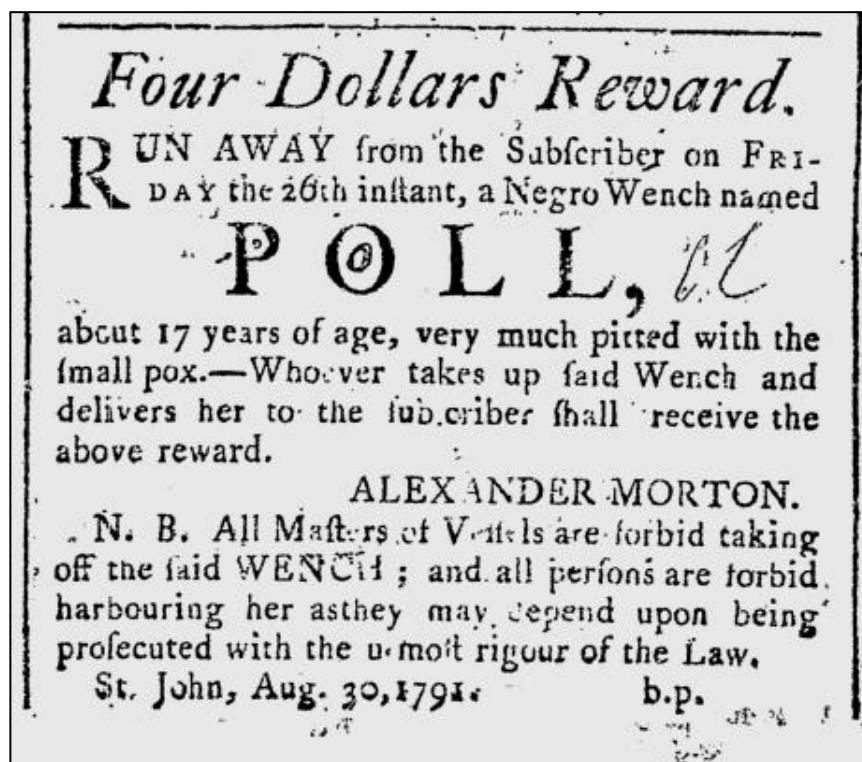


Figure 1: Alexander Morton, “Four Dollars Reward,” *The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* (St. John, NB), issue 281, Friday, 30 September 1791, p. 6.

notices helps to piece together fragments of their lives as young enslaved women/teenagers and highlights the sexual, physical, and social violence and isolation of their enslavement, but also their determination to resist by daring to escape. One fugitive slave advertisement from 1791 in St. John for a seventeen-year-old enslaved teenager named Poll will be compared with two sets of advertisements for a fourteen-year-old enslaved teenager also named Poll and a twenty-two-year old enslaved woman named Phillis in Haverford Township.

The first fugitive slave advertisement is from The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser and was posted on 30 September 1791 by a man named Alexander Morton.<sup>8</sup> (fig. 1) Morton begins the advertisement with the reward amount he is offering to anyone who recaptures the young woman he enslaved – a sum of four dollars. The advertisement continues stating that Poll, “a Negro Wench,” ran away from Morton on Friday, 26 August 1791, meaning that Poll had been on the run for over a month. Morton posted his original advertisements for Poll on 30 August 1791, just four days after Poll’s escape, but it is unclear from archival sources whether the content of the notice changed over the course of the month or if Morton printed more than two advertisements.<sup>9</sup> Morton does not describe Poll in great detail, only noting that she was “about 17 years of age,” and “very much pitted with the small pox.”<sup>10</sup> “Whoever takes up said Wench,” the advertisements goes on, “and delivers her to the subscriber, shall receive the above [four dollars] reward.”<sup>11</sup> The advertisement concludes with a warning to his fellow residents of St. John against helping Poll in her quest for freedom. “All Masters of Vessels,” Morton declares in the newspaper, “are forbid taking off the said WENCH ; and all persons are forbid harbouring her.” Indeed, if other “persons” did help Poll by letting her stay with them or allowing her to board their ship, Morton promised that he would prosecute them “with the utmost rigour of the Law.”<sup>12</sup>

As an enslaved young woman of African descent, Poll may have been subjected to sexual violence from Alexander Morton in St. John. The fugitive slave advertisement notes that Poll is “about 17 years of age,” indicating that Poll would have generally been considered younger by the slave owning class who rarely documented exact ages or wrote down personal details about those they enslaved, especially in the Maritimes where plantation ledger books were unnecessary.<sup>13</sup> The labour that Poll was forced to perform would have ranged from general domestic chores and maintenance to manufacturing and delivering goods to market.<sup>14</sup> Her age of “about 17 years” and the overt sexualizing term “wench” point to Poll’s reproductive capabilities that Morton could have exploited through rape and other forms of sexual violence to force Poll to “breed” with himself or a man of African descent that he enslaved or one from elsewhere in St. John. Forcing Poll to reproduce and give birth to enslaved children would have increased Morton’s wealth and property and perhaps satisfied his (disturbing) sexual desires.<sup>15</sup>

Poll would have also experienced debilitating physical and psychological abuse when she contracted smallpox. It is unclear from the fugitive advertisement alone when Poll contracted the disease (if Alexander Morton bothered to write this fact down), but what is clear from the advertisements is that Poll survived the illness and it left her “very much pitted” with scars from the disease that would remain all over the body.<sup>16</sup> Smallpox epidemics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ravaged communities across the Atlantic world, infecting indigenous, African, and white people with terrible fevers that caused eruptions on the skin that left scars and even blindness.<sup>17</sup> Those that did survive smallpox were unlikely to contract the disease again, but had endured physical anguish and suffering from the disease that especially affected the enslaved who were already deprived of adequate health care or material provisions to live.<sup>18</sup> Young enslaved women like Poll would have experienced smallpox on top of the physically debilitating

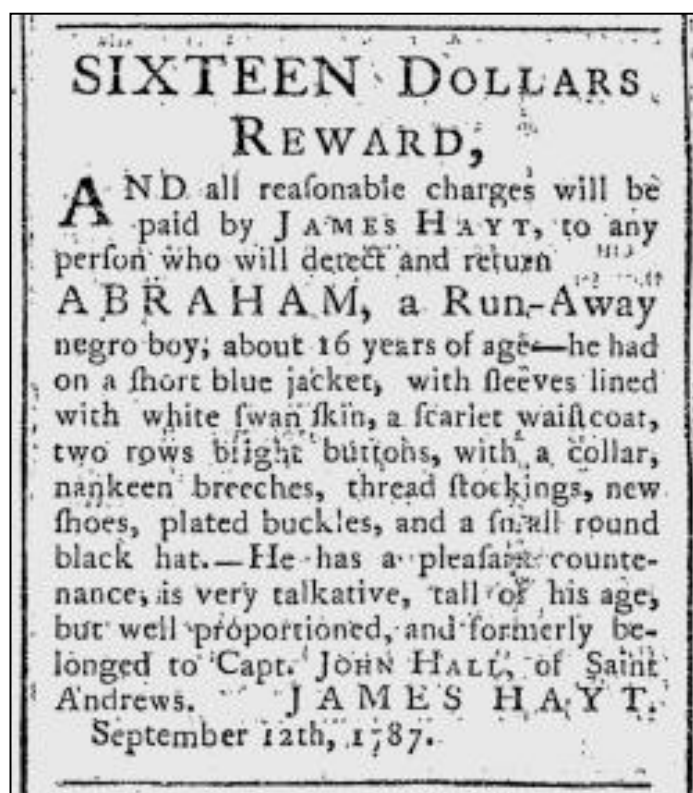


Figure 2: James Hayt, “SIXTEEN DOLLARS REWARD,” *The Saint John Gazette and The Weekly Advertiser* (St. John, NB), issue 75, vol. 11, Friday, 19 October 1787, p. 6.

constituted a minority population in St. John and the Maritimes generally, which made the identification and surveillance of the enslaved easier for white men, women, and children.<sup>20</sup> Slave owners would have known in St. John who was enslaved by whom as the apparatus of slavery was linked to the foundation of the town’s economy and social life. As such, it would have been extremely difficult to find a safe or permanent place to hide.<sup>21</sup> The multiple scars left on Poll’s body from smallpox would have made her even more identifiable and visibly different in an environment where the physical bodies of the enslaved were already sites of violent inspection, valuation, and objectification. Even with a disguise of different clothing or using different mannerisms to portray a new identity, any glimpse at Poll’s skin would reveal her history with smallpox which other slave owners may have been familiar with from either their direct interactions with Poll or the newspaper advertisement description. Alexander Morton, too, was well-connected with other white male slave owners in St. John, making her run for freedom even more dangerous. Although Morton’s occupation in St. John is unknown and slave owners in the Maritimes had a range of professions, most needed enough capital to be able to enslave in the first place.<sup>22</sup> Morton’s social ties are known, because he is listed as being a member of the local Freemason “Hiram” lodge; one of his fellow members was businessman James Hayt, who posted a fugitive slave advertisement in 1787 for a sixteen-year-old teenager he enslaved named Abraham.<sup>23</sup> (fig. 2) There are no other newspaper advertisements posted by Alexander Morton about Poll, leaving the outcome of her flight undetermined and the question of whether or not she was re-enslaved or able to permanently escape from bondage, unanswered.

The next fugitive slave advertisement is from Philadelphia and was posted by a man

and socially isolating conditions characteristic to enslavement in the Maritimes. Who could have or would have taken care of Poll while she was sick with smallpox?<sup>19</sup> Did other enslaved people in St. John help her, whether permitted by their owners or not? Was she able to rest at all from the labour Alexander Morton required of her day-in and day-out?

Poll’s age, gender, and physical markers from having smallpox would have made it easier for Morton to recapture her by himself or through a surrogate enlisted from the newspaper advertisements. Poll’s escape from bondage on August 26<sup>th</sup> lasted, from comparing the dates when Morton posted the original advertisements on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1791 to its iteration on 30 September 1791, over a month. From the moment her quest for freedom began, Poll would have had multiple structural barriers in St. John society working against her.

Enslaved people of African descent

named Hugh Queen on 11 February 1778, in The Pennsylvania Ledger.<sup>24</sup> (Fig. 3) In the advertisement Queen states that on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, “two mulatto girls” one named Phillis who was 22 and another named Poll aged 14 ran away.<sup>25</sup> Phillis is described as a “lusty wench” who is “full faced” and “had on when she went away, a linsey short gown and petticoat, men’s shoes, a white bonnet,” “several articles unknown” and “her hair very much in the negro fashion.”<sup>26</sup> Poll is described as “short and thick,” who “had on when she went away, a linsey short gown and petticoat,” “men’s shoes” a “black bonnet,” and also “several articles unknown.”<sup>27</sup> Queen continues in the advertisement by offering a reward of four dollars for each of the runaways and payment for “all reasonable charges” for those who re-captured the runaways and spent money on the re-capture itself. He ends the notice by giving his location of Haverford Township “nigh [near] Charles Humphrey’s mill.”<sup>28</sup>

**EIGHT DOLLARS Reward.**  
**R**UN AWAY, the 2d day of February instant, two mulatto girls; one named PHILLIS, twenty-two years of age, a lusty wench, full faced; had on when she went away, a linsey short gown and petticoat, men’s shoes, a white bonnet, her hair very much in the negro fashion, and several articles unknown. The other named POLL, fourteen years of age, short and thick, had on when she went away, a linsey short gown and petticoat, men’s shoes, a black bonnet, and several articles unknown. Whoever takes up said servants, and secures them either in the goal or workhouse, so that their master may have them again, shall for each receive Four Dollars, and all reasonable charges, paid by me, HUGH QUEEN, Chester county, Haverford township, nigh Charles Humphreys’s mill. \*

Figure 3: Hugh Queen, “EIGHT DOLLARS Reward,” The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.

Queen posted this advertisement a total of four times in 1778, beginning on February 11<sup>th</sup> and being printed on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and finally March 4<sup>th</sup>. All four of the advertisement are exactly the same.<sup>29</sup> The advertisement provides insights into the nature of Phillis and Poll’s enslavement by Queen, they both wore essentially the same clothing when they ran away, an outfit of a short gown and petticoat, men’s shoes, and a bonnet; clothing that would have still left both feeling cold in February winter weather. The “several articles unknown” that both Phillis and Poll took with them could have been extra clothing to keep warm or other provisions like food. Queen identifies Phillis’s hair as a distinguishable personal feature, as it was “very much in the negro fashion,” an indication that Phillis spent time taking care of her hair, a practice of self-care in a hostile world that viewed her as only a “lusty wench”.<sup>30</sup> Phillis and Poll, like Poll in St. John, were hyper-sexualized and would have been susceptible to rape and sexual violence from their enslavers, in this case Hugh Queen. Queen characterized Phillis and Poll as having white ancestry, claiming that they were “mulatto girls”.<sup>31</sup> Their partial European ancestry meant that they could have been descendants of Hugh Queen.

Poll could also have escaped from Hugh Queen before. Two fugitive slave advertisements placed in another Philadelphia newspaper (Fig. 4), the Pennsylvania Evening Post, on January 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of 1778 are for a runaway also named Poll.<sup>32</sup> Both advertisements are the same and stated that Poll was “about fourteen or fifteen years of age,” “thin made,” “of a fair complexion” who had “light colored hair,” and who “has an impediment in her speech, and

Philadelphia, Jan. 6, 1778.

**R**AN away from her master, on the second day of January inst. a fervant girl named POLL, about fourteen or fifteen years of age, thin made, of a fair complexion, light coloured hair, has an impediment in her speech, and stutters so much when hurried or frightened that she is hardly to be understood. Any person who will bring her to her master, who is to be heard of at the printer's, shall have TWO DOLLARS reward.

Figure 4: Anonymous, "RAN away from her master," *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia, PA), Issue 4, No. 440, 6 January 1778, p. 1.

stutters so much when hurried or frightened that she is hardly to be understood."<sup>33</sup> The slave owner is not named in the advertisement, with the reward being two dollars for "Any person who will bring her to her master, who is to be heard of at the printer's."<sup>34</sup> The mixed-racial status, age, and proximity in posting date also suggest that this could be the same enslaved teenager Poll who ran

away, though it is impossible to be certain from the advertisements alone. What is certain is that, like Poll in St. John, permanent escape and freedom proved difficult to attain and Phillis and Poll were both recaptured. Passed in 1780, The Gradual Abolition Act in Pennsylvania was the first in the United States to work to abolish slavery, and required that all slave owners register the individuals they enslaved with county offices.<sup>35</sup> The law stipulated that those born enslaved before the law's passage would still remain enslaved, those born after would be enslaved until they reached the age of 28.<sup>36</sup> If slave owners refused or neglected to register the people they enslaved, they would be freed, though this process was complicated by loopholes and lack of enforcement.<sup>37</sup> Hugh Queen registered three people he enslaved in 1780, two years after Phillis and Poll's escape. Listed as a "farmer," Queen "registered a negro woman, Phillis, aged 21 ; a negro boy, Peter, aged 7 years, slave for life ; and a mulatto girl, Poll, aged 16, a servant until she is 31 years."<sup>38</sup>

In their escape from bondage, Phillis and Poll would have probably tried to make their way to Philadelphia, which held the largest population of free African Americans in the North and which was being occupied by the British Army during the ongoing Revolutionary War.<sup>39</sup> Ideas and talk of liberty from both colonial rebels and Loyalists would have influenced Poll and Phillis, if not through reading printed texts, then from the social fragmentation and chaos that the war brought. Making new lives in Philadelphia during this time would have been especially attractive as enslaved people learned of Lord Dunmore's proclamation that promised freedom to any enslaved person willing to join the British ranks.<sup>40</sup> The city offered a community of free and enslaved black people preferable to an isolated location in Haverford Township.<sup>41</sup> Freedom, however, in Philadelphia for black residents born free, manumitted, or fugitives, was precarious as kidnapping of free black individuals and their re-enslavement was common and profitable.<sup>42</sup> Phillis and Poll, however, faced more immediate obstacles in trying to escape from Haverford Township. Like Poll in St. John, the community around Hugh Queen's farm was made up of fellow slave owners. Charles Humphreys, a neighbor of Queen as stated in the advertisements, enslaved even more individuals than Queen, and registered eight enslaved people in 1780, and other slave owners in Haverford Township included Robert Magorgan, Samuel Johnson, Heather Hortright, Richard Willing, John Lindsay, and Edward Hughes.<sup>43</sup>

Removed from the histories of St. John and Haverford Township, all three enslaved young women/teenagers, Poll, Phillis, and Poll, dared to escape from their enslavers and in so doing forced Alexander Morton and Hugh Queen to record their names and lives. Conventional wisdom regarding slavery in slave minority northern sites may minimize the role of slavery in the historical narratives written about locations like St. John and Haverford Township. Claims about a lack of detailed source material are used to excuse the deficit of scholarship about

slavery in the North, but the issue is not the number of sources, but what questions are asked of the archival strands about slavery and if there is a will to do so. There is still a lot of historical work and reckoning to be done in these communities that will be challenging but necessary to undertake in the future.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “City of Saint John,” Tourism New Brunswick, (date of last access 13 February 2020)

<https://www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca/Products/C/City-of-Saint-John/>.

<sup>2</sup> “City of Saint John,” Tourism New Brunswick, <https://www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca/Products/C/City-of-Saint-John/>.

<sup>3</sup> “City of Saint John,” Tourism New Brunswick.

<sup>4</sup> The estimated population of Haverford Township is 49,275 according to the U.S. Census, “QuickFacts Haverford Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania,” United States Census Bureau, (date of last access 13 February 2020) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/haverfordtownshipdelawarecountypennsylvania>, while the estimated population of St. John is estimated to be 58,341 according to Statistics Canada, “Census Profile, 2016 Census Saint John [population center, New Brunswick and New Brunswick [Province],” Statistics Canada, (date of last access 13 February 2020) <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=0734&Geo2=PR&Code2=13&SearchText=Saint%20John&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=0734&TABID=1&type=0>.

<sup>5</sup> “About Haverford Township,” The Township of Haverford County of Delaware, PA, (date of last access 13 February 2020) [http://havtwp.org/About\\_Haverford\\_Township.html](http://havtwp.org/About_Haverford_Township.html).

<sup>6</sup> “About Haverford Township,” The Township of Haverford County of Delaware, PA, [http://havtwp.org/About\\_Haverford\\_Township.html](http://havtwp.org/About_Haverford_Township.html).

<sup>7</sup> “About Haverford Township,” The Township of Haverford County of Delaware, PA, (date of last access 13 February 2020) [http://havtwp.org/About\\_Haverford\\_Township.html](http://havtwp.org/About_Haverford_Township.html).

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Morton, “Four Dollars Reward,” The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser (St. John, NB), issue 281, Friday, 30 September 1791, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> From my research and that of the historian Harvey Amani Whitfield, it appears that there is only one advertisement for Poll that remains posted by Alexander Morton, see Harvey Amani Whitfield, Black Slavery in the Maritimes : A History in Documents, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2018), p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Morton, “Four Dollars Reward,” The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser (St. John, NB), issue 281, Friday, 30 September 1791, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Morton, “Four Dollars Reward,” The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser (St. John, NB), Friday, 30 September 1791, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Morton, “Four Dollars Reward,” Friday, 30 September 1791, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage : Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), pp. 3-18.

<sup>14</sup> Whitfield, North to Bondage : Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, pp. 46-60.

<sup>15</sup> Whitfield, North to Bondage : Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, pp. 76-78. For an introduction to the forced reproduction of enslaved women in Trans-Atlantic Slavery see Deborah Gray White, Ar’n’t I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: Norton, 1999); Dorothy E. Roberts, Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997); and Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, They Were Her Property : White Women as Slave Owners in the American South, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Dayle B. DeLancey, “Vaccinating Freedom: Smallpox Prevention and the Discourses of African American Citizenship in Antebellum Philadelphia”, The Journal of African American History, vol. 95, no. 3-4, (Summer-Fall, 2010), pp. 296-319.

<sup>17</sup> Victoria Ackerman, “Smallpox and Fear of Inoculation,” The Loyalist Collection, University of New Brunswick Libraries, <https://loyalist.lib.unb.ca/atlantic-loyalist-connections/smallpox-and-fear-inoculation>, Allan Everett Marble, Surgeons, Smallpox and the Poor : A History of Medicine and Social Conditions in Nova Scotia, 1749-1799 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), pp. 5-34.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Ranlet, “The British, Slaves, and Smallpox in Revolutionary Virginia,” The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Summer, 1999), pp. 217-223, and Margo Minardi, “The Boston Inoculation Controversy of 1721-1722: An Incident in the History of Race,” The William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 1, (January, 2004), pp. 49-73.

- <sup>19</sup> Mary Prince, an enslaved woman of African descent, wrote in her autobiography that when she became sick in Antigua an elderly enslaved woman helped to take care of her, Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince : A West Indian Slave, Edited by Moira Ferguson, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 79, 85.
- <sup>20</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage : Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), pp. 61-84.
- <sup>21</sup> Permanent hiding places for enslaved people were difficult to find and create, though escaped enslaved people in Jamaica were able to create maroon communities away from slave owners and other white people. Jamaica's mountainous interior and the large size of the enslaved population enabled the establishment of such communities. For more on maroon communities, see, Barbara Klamon Kopytoff, "The Early Political Development of Jamaican Maroon Societies." The William and Mary Quarterly vol. 35, no. 2 (1978), pp. 287-307.
- <sup>22</sup> Archival records available online have proven agonizingly silent regarding Morton's identity, but searches done using the provincial and university library systems in New Brunswick may prove to hold more answers regarding Morton's life. I was unable to travel to New Brunswick thus these resources were inaccessible for this essay. For the range of professions held by slave-owners in the Maritimes, see: Whitfield, North to Bondage : Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), pp. 62-71.
- <sup>23</sup> William Franklin Bunting, History of St. John's lodge, F & A.M. of Saint John, New Brunswick : together with sketches of all masonic bodies in New Brunswick, from A.D. 1784 to A.D. 1894 (Saint John: J. & A. McMillian, 1895), pp. 16-18, B. Wilson, Benedict Arnold : a Traitor in Our Midst, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), p. 192, and James Hayt, "SIXTEEN DOLLARS REWARD," The Saint John Gazette and The Weekly Advertiser (St. John, NB), Issue 75, Vol. 11, Friday, 19 October 1787.
- <sup>24</sup> Hugh Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward," The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Though no specific research shows that "Poll" was a popular name for enslaved females, the usage of both Morton and Queen indicates at least some consistency across geographic distance. More research on the names of enslaved people in both St. John and Pennsylvania can shed light on this subject.
- <sup>26</sup> Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward," The Pennsylvania Ledger (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward," The Pennsylvania Ledger, (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>28</sup> Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward," The Pennsylvania Ledger, (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>29</sup> Hugh Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward", The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3; Hugh Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward", The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 21 February 1778, p. 3; Hugh Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward", The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 25 February 1778, p. 3; Hugh Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward", The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 4 March 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Journal of Southern History, Vol. 61, No. 1 (February, 1995), pp. 45-70. Queen did not further describe the Phillis' hair style yet his specific reference to it implies that other white people in Haverford Township would have recognized it and her.
- <sup>31</sup> Hugh Queen, "EIGHT DOLLARS Reward," The Pennsylvania Ledger : or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>32</sup> "RAN away from her master," Pennsylvania Evening Post (Philadelphia, PA), issue 4, no. 440, 6 January 1778, p. 1; "RAN away from her master," Pennsylvania Evening Post (Philadelphia, PA), issue 4, no. 442, 10 January 1778, p. 3.
- <sup>33</sup> "RAN away from her master," Pennsylvania Evening Post (Philadelphia, PA), issue 4, no. 440, 6 January 1778, p. 1; "RAN away from her master," Pennsylvania Evening Post (Philadelphia, PA), issue 4, no. 442, 10 January 1778, p. 3. Add to note that the speech impediment may have been a result of ongoing trauma, especially since the ad stated that it was triggered by fear
- <sup>34</sup> "RAN away from her master," Pennsylvania Evening Post, 6 January 1778, p.3. Newspaper printers acted as surrogates for slave owners, allowing them to pay for advertisements without disclosing their identities, a social protection that became increasingly more common as slavery waned in Pennsylvania.
- <sup>35</sup> Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees : Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 41-74.
- <sup>36</sup> Nash and Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees : Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath, pp. 99-136.
- <sup>37</sup> Nash and Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees : Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath, pp.137-166.

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<sup>38</sup> Henry Graham Ashmead, History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & co., 1884), pp. 204-206.

<sup>39</sup> Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 8-38.

<sup>40</sup> Martha K. Robinson, "British Occupation of Philadelphia," The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia (date of last access 14 February 2020), <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/british-occupation-of-philadelphia/>

<sup>41</sup> Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom : The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Julie Winch, A Gentleman of Color : the Life of James Forten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Richard S. Newman, Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church and the Black Founding Fathers (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Richard Bell, Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), Julie Winch, "The Other Underground Railroad," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, vol. 111, no. 1, (January 1987), pp. 3-25, Isaac T. Hopper and Daniel Meaders, Kidnappers in Philadelphia: Isaac Hopper's Tales of Opression, 1780-1843 (New York: Garland, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Henry Graham Ashmead, History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & co., 1884), pp. 204-206.



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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Alexander Morton, “Four Dollars Reward,” The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser (St. John, NB), issue 281, Friday, 30 September 1791, p. 6.

Figure 2: James Hayt, “SIXTEEN DOLLARS REWARD,” The Saint John Gazette and The Weekly Advertiser (St. John, NB), issue 75, vol. 11, Friday, 19 October 1787, p. 6.

Figure 3: Hugh Queen, “EIGHT DOLLARS Reward,” The Pennsylvania Ledger: or the Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey Weekly Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), 11 February 1778, p. 3.

Figure 4: Anonymous, “RAN away from her master,” Pennsylvania Evening Post (Philadelphia, PA), Issue 4, No. 440, 6 January 1778, p. 1.

## FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS IN NEW BRUNSWICK AND GEORGIA: A COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS

Jane O'Brien Davis

For many years, conventional conceptualizations of slavery have focused on the southern American and Caribbean experience. As a result, this experience of slavery has come to function as a proxy for all realities of slavery. This bias is further seen within slavery scholarship as well as in popular culture, where attention is paid mainly to tropical or semi-tropical plantation slavery. This singular depiction and analysis acts to erase practices of slavery which transpired in temperate climates like the northern parts of North America, including Canada. However, in more recent years scholars such as Frank Mackey, Charmaine A. Nelson and, Harvey Amani Whitfield have begun to centre the erased histories of Northern American and Canadian enslaved people.

As a result of the climate and geography, slavery in the North and South took on very different forms. Southern slavery was characterized by plantations, tropical climates, slave majority populations, and as a result, larger slave communities.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, slavery in the North was characterized by farm and multi-occupational labour, cold and seasonal climates, slave minority populations, and isolation.<sup>2</sup> However, regardless of these differences, in both regions enslaved people resisted their bondage through escapes, both attempted and successful. In this essay, I will contrast two fugitive slave advertisements: one published in the Georgia Gazette in 1790 in Savannah, Georgia<sup>3</sup> and the other in the Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser in 1786.<sup>4</sup> These advertisements differ in the context of escape and enslavement, however they both depict the escapes of groups of enslaved people.<sup>56</sup> Details of the lived experiences of the enslaved people within the Georgia and New Brunswick fugitive advertisements differ in many aspects. However, both groups of enslaved people aided in the creation of freedom for their descendants by actively engaging with each other and investing in their chosen relationships in collective resistance to bondage.

The fugitive slave advertisement published in The Georgia Gazette outlines the escape of four enslaved people from White Oak Plantation in Georgia. (fig. 1) White Oak Plantation was a rice plantation on Argyle Island, a few kilometers north of the commercial centre of Savannah.<sup>7</sup> On

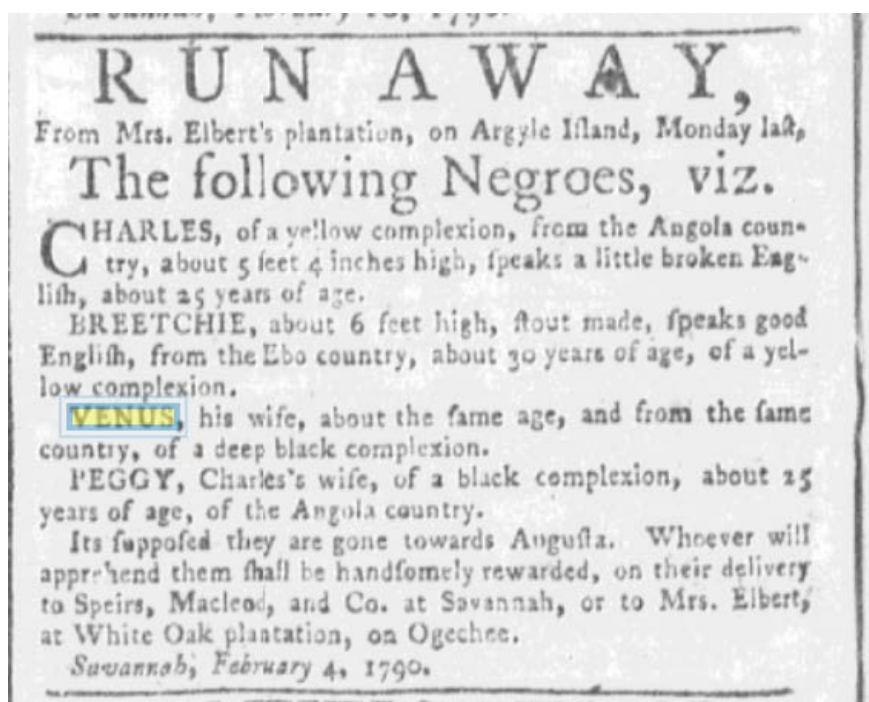


Figure 1: Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, Thursday, 4 February 1790 – 18 March 1790, issue 373, p. 4, Readex, American Historical Newspapers.

this plantation, the enslaved field labourers were cultivating rice, which was a complex and difficult crop to harvest.<sup>8</sup> The advertisement ran for six weeks, from 4 February 1790 until 18 March 1790, remaining unchanged over time. The advertisement offers a “handsome reward” for the individual who returned the runaways but does not specify the amount.<sup>9</sup> The fugitives were thought to be running towards Augusta, Georgia. (fig 1) The advertisement was published by Mrs. Elizabeth Elbert, wife of governor Samuel Elbert and owner of the White Oak Plantation.<sup>10</sup> She inherited the plantation and the enslaved labourers from her late father.<sup>11</sup> In naming Mrs. Elbert as the owner, the advertisement sheds light on the understudied topic of female slave ownership.<sup>12</sup> Her investment in slavery would have allowed her economic freedom and independence from her husband.<sup>13</sup>

The advertisement identified Charles, a twenty-five-year-old Angolan-born enslaved man described as speaking broken English, and being of “yellow complexion,”<sup>14</sup> meaning that he was light-skinned. Peggy, was identified as Charles’ wife, and described as twenty-five-years-old, also Angolan-born, and of black complexion. (fig 1) Next, Breetchie was identified as “of Ebo country,”<sup>15</sup> meaning that he was likely from what is now Southeastern Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> He was described as about thirty-years-old, six feet tall, speaking good English, and of “yellow complexion”.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, Venus is identified as Breetchie’s wife and an enslaved woman of “a deep black complexion”.<sup>18</sup> She was described as being the same age and of the same country as Breetchie. (fig 1) The description of the two distinct complexions (yellow and black) along with the African birth origins of all four people highlights physical diversity as a trait amongst African-born people, and not only between Africans and Creoles (blacks born in the Americas). The African-ness of the foursome points to the arrival of slave ships in the region directly from the African continent. Furthermore, the marriages *within* ethnicity (Angola for Charles and Peggy and Ebo for Breetchie and Venus) points to the ability of the enslaved to preserve ethnically-specific cultural, social, and spiritual traditions for longer than their northern peers. Tragically though, this ethnic specificity was mobilized against the foursome since Mrs. Elbert printed such details to aid in their recapture. Indeed, the advertisement implies that other white slave owners in the region, like Elbert, possessed the ability to identify the enslaved by their specific African ethnicities.

**RAN AWAY**

**F**ROM the subscriber living at the Nashwakishis, in the county of York, between the 15th and 21st days of this instant July, the following bound Negro slaves, viz. ISAAC about 30 years old, born on Long Island near New-York, had on when he went away, a short blue coat, round hat and white trowsers. BEN, about 35 years old, had on a Devonshire kersey jacket lined with Scotch plaid, corduroy breeches, and round hat. FLORA, a Wench about 27 years old, much pitted with the small-pox, she had on a white cotton jacket and petticoat. Also NANCY about 24 years old, who took with her a Negro child about four years old called LIDGER. The four last mentioned Negroes were born in Maryland, and lately brought to this country.

ALL persons are hereby forbid to harbour any of the above Negroes, and all masters of vessels are forbid to take any of them on board their vessel as they shall answer the consequences. A REWARD of TWO GUINEAS, will be paid for each of the men, and SIX DOLLARS for each Negro woman, by Mr. THOMAS JENNINGS, if taken and deliver'd to him at the city of Saint John, at York Point, and if taken any where else and deliver'd to the said JENNINGS, or to the subscriber in York County, the like reward with all reasonable charges will be paid by the said JENNINGS or the subscriber.

CALEB JONES.

24th JUNE, 1786.

Fig 2: Jones, Caleb, “RAN AWAY,” *The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser*, 24 June 1786, Tuesday 25 July 1786 – 23 January 1787 vol. I, no. XXIII, p. 3; Reel # 1, McGill University Library, Montreal.

From 25 July 1786 until 23 January 1787 The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser ran a fugitive slave advertisement for five escaped black enslaved people, two men, two women, and one child.<sup>19</sup> (fig 2) It should be noted that an escape with a group of this size in Canada is exceptional as most slave holding households had three enslaved people at most.<sup>20</sup> The advertisement offers a two-guinea reward for each man returned, and six dollars for each woman. (fig 2) No specific reward was listed for the child. Over the seven months during which the advertisement was published, it remained unchanged. The advertisement was published by Caleb Jones, a wealthy ship captain who was among the white Loyalists who came to the Canadian Maritimes from Maryland after the American Revolution, forcing his enslaved labourers to accompany him.<sup>21</sup> The advertisement states that the rewards would be paid “with all reasonable charges” if the fugitives were “*taken and deliver’d*” either to Jones in Nashwakshis, or Thomas Jennings at York Point in Saint John. (sic) [italics mine] (fig. 2) The use of the words taken and delivered served to objectify the enslaved group and to incentivize the public to physically manhandle and abuse them in the process of recapture. Like many other fugitive slave advertisements, Jones’ notice also attempted to dissuade those who were inclined to offer assistance by harbouring the enslaved fugitives, threatening that, “All persons are hereby forbid to harbour any of the above Negroes...as they shall answer the consequences.”<sup>22</sup>

The advertisement identifies four enslaved adults, and one enslaved child. (fig 2) Isaac was identified as a thirty-year-old enslaved man from Long Island, New York. Ben was listed as a thirty-five-year-old enslaved man. Flora was identified as a twenty-seven-year-old “wench,” who was “much pitted with the small-pox, leaving scars on her face”.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, Nancy was identified as a twenty-four-year-old who ran away with her four-year-old son, Lidge. The clothing worn by all of the escaped enslaved people is identified, except for that of Nancy and Lidge (fig 1). Moreover, it is also mentioned that “the four last mentioned Negroes were born in Maryland”.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that Ben had previously run away from Jones, as documented in an advertisement printed from 7 March to 30 May, 1786, when he was likely recaptured. (fig. 3) Additionally, thirty years later in 1816, Lidge escaped again as an adult. (fig. 4) Sadly, Lidge’s subsequent escape would seem to indicate that he, and perhaps the others, were recaptured by Jones after their 1786 escape. However, his ultimate fate is unclear since Jones’ died six months later with no will and Lidge was not documented again.<sup>25</sup>

Although the descriptors used in these advertisements seem realistic, they must be interrogated with a critical lens. In both advertisements, the age listed for each enslaved person can be understood as more of a marker of adulthood versus childhood, because the exact ages of the individuals were likely unknown due to a lack of birth documentation of enslaved people.<sup>26</sup> In The Royal Gazette, besides age, previous

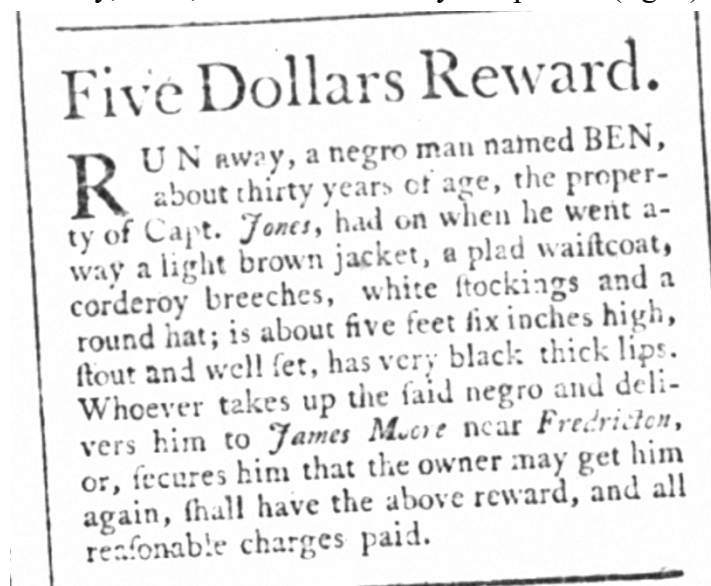


Figure 3: Jones, Caleb, “Five Dollars Reward,” The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday, 7 March 1786 – 30 May 1786, vol. 1-2, no. XXII - XVIII; Reel #1, McGill University Library, Montreal.

*Twelve Dollars Reward.*  
**RUN AWAY** from the Subscriber,  
 on the night of the 15th June, a Negro Slave, called **LIDGE**,  
 under five feet high, broad face and very large lips; brought him  
 from Maryland with my family;—he took with him a large  
**CANOE** with a Lathe across her; tared on the outside of the  
 head with raw Tar, which looks red---he was seen going down  
 the River. Any person that will apprehend him and get the  
 Canoe, shall receive the above reward.  
**CALEB JONES,**  
 9th July, 1816.

Figure 4: Jones, Caleb, "TWELVE DOLLARS REWARD," *Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser*, Tuesday 16 July 1816 – Tuesday 30 July 1816, vol. II. No. 19-21 p. 3; Reel #1, McGill University Library, Montreal.

individuality was paramount to their return.<sup>27</sup> This unfamiliarity also highlights the cultural and community erasure likely experienced by enslaved black people in this region, underscoring the isolation likely experienced by the enslaved in places like New Brunswick. Also distinct from Elbert, Jones neglected to mention the nature of the relationships between the five enslaved people. Like the marriages between Charles and Peggy and Breetchie and Venus, the relationships between the four enslaved adults – Isaac, Ben, Flora, and Nancy – could have been romantic and/or familial. Jones decision not to acknowledge them can be interpreted in two key ways: 1) as a denial of their humanity, autonomy, and individuality or (2) as yet another failing in his lack of knowledge of the intimate lives of those he enslaved.<sup>28</sup>

With Elbert's advertisement in the *Georgia Gazette*, her indication of African ethnicities highlighted her familiarity with African-born people within slave majority regions, such as the American South. However, she listed Breetchie and Charles as of "yellow complexion,"<sup>29</sup> which is typically understood as an indication of mixed race heritage.<sup>30</sup> While this may indicate that they were born in the colonies, it may also highlight the variations of complexion across African-born people. However, the fact that Elbert grouped them with "Ebo" and Angolan ethnicities, respectively, could possibly indicate that those were the communities they interacted with on the plantation. According to Gary A. Donaldson, enslaved people were known to self-segregate (if possible) to mirror their African ethnicities and therefore preserve their culture.<sup>31</sup> This point is further highlighted by the fact that each man "of yellow complexion" was married to dark-skinned women "of the same country".<sup>32</sup> What is more, the acknowledgement of the status of the kinship between Charles and Peggy and Breetchie and Venus highlights the commonplace nature of intra-slave relationships in the American South, underscoring the presence of black community in this region.<sup>33</sup>

The nature of slavery in these two regions was starkly different. In New Brunswick, enslaved women like Flora and Nancy commonly did domestic work, while the enslaved men were likely agricultural and/or artisan labourers.<sup>34</sup> The nature of this work allowed for enslaved black people to have regular encounters with white culture, behaviour, and language. However, their proximity to the slave owners and other whites created a constant state of surveillance, and an increased sense of isolation.<sup>35</sup> The harsh winters, which were standard in this region, may have created another type of torture for the enslaved, through forced labour and inappropriate clothing during the winter months.<sup>36</sup> As such, we must consider the impact of the winter weather

residence, and physical marks, Jones' advertisement also described the enslaved through their clothing. (fig 3) This highlights an ignorance of black cultural and ethnic identity amongst white Canadian slave owners within slave minority sites. Unlike Elbert in Georgia, Jones was unable to recognize and describe any other visual distinctions held by the enslaved in a moment where representing their



upon Ben, Isaac, Flora, Nancy, and Lidge who were still on the run throughout the winter months.<sup>37</sup> This would have increased the urgency to find suitable shelter to prevent frostbite or death from exposure.

In contrast, all of the enslaved people from White Oaks Plantation in Georgia were field labourers.<sup>38</sup> These community ties could have created a collective consciousness, empowering them to escape together in resistance. The nature of plantation slavery allowed for greater intra-community interaction. However, most field labourers enslaved on plantations were cut off from the outside world, denying the enslaved access to a wider society.<sup>39</sup> This could be the reason for their imperfect English language skills, creating another obstacle for their escape.<sup>40</sup> The location of White Oaks Plantation, on Argyle Island, would have posed another obstacle for their escape. Not only is Argyle Island over 200 km away from their presumed destination of Augusta, but they also would have had to cross the Savannah River.<sup>41</sup> While this task would have required access to a boat, the impoverishment of most enslaved people would have made the ownership of such property highly unlikely.

Both groups of enslaved people can be understood to have run away as a rejection of the terms of their bondage, bringing resistance, and individuality to their lives.<sup>42</sup> This rejection can be framed as a coping mechanism that allowed the enslaved to regain control and to challenge the assumption of inferiority that was put upon them.<sup>43</sup> The group nature of both escapes was a significant part of this coping mechanism. In this period, black family and kinship bonds played a powerful emotional function in challenging the psychological devastation endemic within slavery.<sup>44</sup>

This rejection of enslavement is seen within the two groups of runaways, however, how it was enacted varied geographically. With Jones' enslaved people in the Canadian landscape, the urban, domestic, and white approximate nature of their work allowed for them to become knowledgeable of white and free behaviour and culture. Attempting to escape demonstrated this knowledge.<sup>45</sup> The likely domestic nature of the enslaved women's work would have allowed them to know Jones' schedule due to their positions in his home, and therefore to plan their escape accordingly. However, the nature of their labour, the miniscule size of the black community in the region, and the negation of the validity of black chosen kinship would have worked to their detriment in the construction of communal ties.

In contrast, the collective nature of the work of enslaved field labourers on plantations allowed for the relatively easy creation of group bonds, although they were still being surveyed by an overseer.<sup>46</sup> These bonds allowed for the enslaved plantation labourers to exist as one of many and to be integrated into a culture and a community. However, the denial of wider societal influence prevented them from being accustomed to white culture and behaviour and thereby able to use it to their advantage in their escapes.<sup>47</sup> We can consider how unfamiliarity with white culture, behaviour, and schedule may have contributed to the shorter escape of the Georgia enslaved people compared to the New Brunswick group. Although both slave holders had the means to keep running the advertisements, Elbert chose to cease the publication after only six weeks, leading to the assumption that the escaped had been recaptured.

Both the enslaved runaways in New Brunswick and Georgia used running away as well as the maintenance of relationships as a form of resistance. Running away in groups exemplified the bonds of affection, loyalty, and trust that existed within the larger community of enslaved people and gave collective expression to the spirit of resistance.<sup>48</sup> Through running away, they were depriving their owners of their labour and control over their bodies, and those of their children.<sup>49</sup> For the group of New Brunswick enslaved runaways, they were using their

connections, the knowledge of the white society, and the skills they had acquired through urban and domestic slavery to change their condition, and resist the institution that created such a condition in the first place.<sup>50</sup>

For the enslaved runaways from Georgia, although they lacked knowledge of white society, they existed within a large community context. They were thought to be running towards Augusta, Georgia, where there was known to be a large black population.<sup>51</sup> Through this, it can be understood that they were running *towards* a community, where they may have had other relatives, or at the very least, more people from their two ethnic groups. Although, we do not know if the couplings between Charles and Peggy and Breetchie and Venus were forced upon them by their owner in a practice of breeding, the fact that the two women fled with their enslaved husbands would indicate a degree of affection or at least loyalty amongst the pairs.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, by running towards another community, they were not only depriving their owner of their labour, but also asserting their humanity by actively choosing to foster relationships of their own choosing, and to exist in a community outside of bondage.

The nature of the enslavement experienced by Ben, Isaac, Flora, Nancy, and Lidge in New Brunswick differed from that experienced by Charles, Peggy, Venus, and Breetchie in Georgia, however the rejection of and resistance to their condition was unwavering. In the New Brunswick case, they exerted their knowledge of white ways of life to escape and used their kinship bonds to reject the dehumanization enforced upon them. In Georgia, the escaped enslaved people used the power of their collective to resist their oppression and used their escape as a means to mobilize this resistance. These escapes can be framed within the idea of creating a collective consciousness of the realities of slavery within both enslaved and self-liberated communities, which eventually led to abolition. We can consider how Ben's first escape in New Brunswick may have inspired the group escape some months later. Lidge's escape as an adult may have been inspired by the resistance, loyalty, and bravery he witnessed as a child. The escapes of these two groups challenged the power of slavery, creating cracks in the institution that eventually gave way into freedom.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Marli F. Weiner, "Part One: Women's Work" Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), pp. 23-27.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, Thursday 4 February 1790 – 18 March 1790, Issue 373, p. 4, Readex, American Historical Newspapers.

<sup>4</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday 25 July 1786 – 23 January 1787 vol. I, no. XXIII, p. 3; Reel # 1, McGill University Library, Montreal.

<sup>5</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> F.N. Boney, "Reviewed work: Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867 by James M. Clifton," The Georgia Historical Quarterly vol. 63, no. 2 (Summer, 1979), pp. 305-307.

<sup>8</sup> F.N. Boney, "Reviewed work: Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867 by James M. Clifton," The Georgia Historical Quarterly vol. 63, no. 2 (Summer, 1979), pp. 305-307.

<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Anon, "Georgia Historical Archive." Georgia Historical Society, (date of last access: February 12, 2020). <https://georgiahistory.com/>.

- <sup>12</sup> Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, "Introduction" They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).
- <sup>13</sup> Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, "Introduction".
- <sup>14</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup> Anon, "The World Factbook: Nigeria," Central Intelligence Agency, (date of last access: February 1, 2020). <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>.
- <sup>17</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.
- <sup>19</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, pp. 3-4.
- <sup>21</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, p. 131.
- <sup>26</sup> Frank Mackey, "Appendix I Newspaper Notices" Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. 307-309.
- <sup>27</sup> Tony C. Perry, "In Bondage When Cold Was King: the Frigid Terrain of Slavery in Antebellum Maryland," Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies, vol. 38, no. 1 (2017), pp. 22-36.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slave and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," The William and Mary Quarterly vol. 38, no. 3 (July, 1981), p. 230.
- <sup>29</sup> Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.
- <sup>30</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Women in Slavery," Canadian Art and Race, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 3 February 2020.
- <sup>31</sup> Gary A. Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862," The Journal of Negro History, vol. 69, no. 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 63-72.
- <sup>32</sup> The sexual and romantic pairing of light-skinned men, with dark-skinned women also reveals the modern-day obsession with light-skinned black women as the Beautiful to be racist fabrication based in part upon the idealization of white women, which did not exist historically; Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, p. 4.
- <sup>33</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slave and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," p. 234.
- <sup>34</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, p. 131.
- <sup>35</sup> Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes, p. 131.
- <sup>36</sup> Tony C. Perry, "In Bondage When Cold Was King: the Frigid Terrain of Slavery in Antebellum Maryland," pp. 22-36.
- <sup>37</sup> Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, p. 3.
- <sup>38</sup> Anon, "Georgia Historical Archive." (date of last access: February 12, 2020).
- <sup>39</sup> Paul Finkelman, "Resistance to Slavery," Rebellions, Resistance, and Runaways within the Slave South, (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1989) p. 148.  
Enslaved domestics would have had a greater opportunity to learn of the outside world due to their ability to overhear the conversations of their white slave owners and possibly even to read newspapers and correspondence, if they were literate
- <sup>40</sup> Their English language acquisition also had much to do with the dates of their arrivals in North America, the emphasis placed on such things by Elbert and her surrogates, and the number of enslaved Creoles on the plantation.
- <sup>41</sup> Anon, "Argyle Island to Augusta, GA" Google Maps, (date of last access: 22 April 2020), <https://www.google.ca/maps/dir/Argyle+Island,+Georgia+31407,+USA/Augusta,+GA,+USA/@32.8308515,-82.6662681,8z/data=!3m1!4m1!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x88fb98f99fe230e1:0x298095383dd9b6d6!2m2!1d-81.1278901!2d32.1760356!1m5!1m1!1s0x88f9d097160baa41:0x3ee78afde3aa0be4!2m2!1d-82.0105148!2d33.4734978!3e2>
- <sup>42</sup> Paul Finkelman, "Resistance to Slavery," p. 141.
- <sup>43</sup> Ian Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830," NWSA Journal, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1988-1989), p. 219.
- <sup>44</sup> Ian Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830," p. 219.
- <sup>45</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, "Introduction," Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 1-8.
- <sup>46</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slave and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," p. 234.

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<sup>47</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slave and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," p. 234.

<sup>48</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slave and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," p. 230.

<sup>49</sup> Lucille Mathurin Mair, "Women Field Workers in Jamaica During Slavery," Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader, eds. Verene Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2000), p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Mid-Atlantic," The William and Mary Quarterly (April 1999), p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> Anon, "Georgia Historical Archive." (date of last access: February 12, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Breeding was a practice through which slave owners or their surrogates (like overseers) forced specific male and female enslaved people to have sexual relations in order to produce new enslaved children who were at birth, due to the enslaved status of the mother, the property of her slave owner. The forced couplings were at times only for the duration of the sex act or until pregnancy was detected, and at others, the enslaved were made to forsake their own chosen intimate partners and remain in a sexually-monogamous relationships with the partner who had been forced upon them for the duration of their fertile years. For more on breeding and its impact on enslaved females and males see: Thomas A. Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery," Journal of the History of Sexuality, vol. 20, no. 3 (September 2011), pp. 445-64; Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2016), pp. 133, 250-52.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Mrs. Elbert, "RUN AWAY," The Georgia Gazette, Thursday, 4 February 1790 – 18 March 1790, issue 373, p. 4, Readex, American Historical Newspapers.

Fig 2: Jones, Caleb, "RAN AWAY," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, 24 June 1786, Tuesday 25 July 1786 – 23 January 1787 vol. I, no. XXIII, p. 3; Reel # 1, McGill University Library, Montreal.

Figure 3: Jones, Caleb, "Five Dollars Reward," The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday, 7 March 1786 – 30 May 1786, vol. 1-2, no. XXII - XVIII; Reel #1, McGill University Library, Montreal.

Figure 4: Jones, Caleb, "TWELVE DOLLARS REWARD," Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser, Tuesday 16 July 1816 – Tuesday 30 July 1816, vol. II. No. 19-21 p. 3; Reel #1, McGill University Library, Montreal.



## CANADIAN AND AMERICAN WOMEN IN SLAVERY

Samuel Perelmuter

Advertisements for fugitive slaves littered the pages of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspapers calling for the return of lost or stolen “property”. Although these advertisements were designed to aid in the capture and return of enslaved people to their owners, through close analysis we may glean valuable information about these enslaved people - glimpses of individuality, strategies of resistance, even seemingly mundane facts concerning everyday life are essential to reconstructing the lives and identities of these people. Comparison between one such advertisement from the Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle (Fig. 1) with an advertisement from the Nashville Union (Fig. 2) sheds light on the similarities as well as the important differences in the lives of enslaved black women in the Canadian and American contexts. It is further essential to compare advertisements from these two contexts because while American Slavery has been widely studied and discussed, Canadian Slavery remains rarely discussed and its reality minimized.

Appearing in the 2 July 1776 issue of the Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle, an advertisement dated 18 June 1776 calls for the capture and return of a “Negro Woman named Florimell”.<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1) No specific owner is listed. This could be a result of slave owners not wanting to publicly be known as such in a moment of growing abolitionism, as well as that they preferred to rely on the printer to act as a surrogate.<sup>2</sup> Florimell is described as speaking “broken English” as well as being “not very black”. (Fig. 1) Although the majority of enslaved blacks in Canada were Creole – African Canadian, African American, or African Caribbean – some details in Florimell’s advertisement

indicate that she may have been African-born.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the combination of her poor English, head wrapping, and scarred face point to this possibility. Creole was used in the Atlantic world to indicate a person who was born in a colony and was frequently used to describe people of African and European descent. While the lack of English fluency in Nova Scotia likely indicated that she had not been born in the region, it also implied that she had not resided there long enough to gain a mastery of the language.<sup>4</sup> Since head wrapping was an African dress practice that survived the Middle Passage, Florimell’s choice and ability to adorn her head in this way may indicate an African birth or her cultural tutoring by another, likely elder black female who remembered how to practice the custom.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, while fugitive slave and slave sale advertisements routinely named smallpox scars as either a method of identifying the enslaved who had fled in the first instance, or as a way to indicate an enslaved person’s immunity to smallpox in the latter case, Florimell’s scars may have been neither.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the unnamed slave



**RAN AWAY,**  
On Monday the 10th of June last, between the Hours of 9 and 10 at Night, a Negro Women named FLORIMELL, she had on when she went away a red poplin Gown, a blue baize outside Petticoat and a pair Men's Shoes, she commonly wears a Handkerchief round her Head, has Scars in her Face, speaks broken English and is not very black; whoever will apprehend said Run-away and bring Word to the Printer shall have One Guinea Reward and all Charges paid for their Trouble.  
HALIFAX, June 18th, 1776

Figure 1: Anonymous, “RAN AWAY,” Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle (Halifax, NS), issue 303, Tuesday, 2 July 1776, <http://www.18thcjournal.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/NovaScotiaGazetteAndTheWeeklyChronicle>

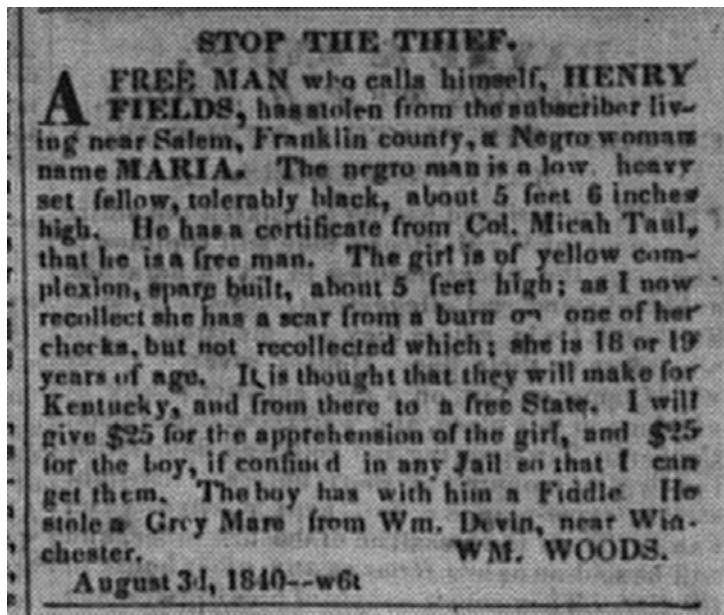


Figure 2: Wm. Woods, “STOP THE THIEF,” Nashville Union, 17 August 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/0c6da53c-d696-4370-9b55-cd03a48006f3?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>

Nashville Union, subscriber WM. Woods called for the capture of “A free man who calls himself HENRY FIELDS” and “a Negro woman name[d] MARIA.” (Fig. 2) The advertisement outlined how Henry had “stolen” Maria from Woods and called for them to be placed in jail so that Woods may retrieve his “property”. Maria was said to be eighteen or nineteen years of age and described as having a “yellow complexion.” (Fig. 2) Although there is little information given with which to speculate on Maria’s origins, the description of Maria’s lighter complexion, most likely reveals an ancestral lineage of sexual violation by white men.<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that she was in the United States, where ships arrived directly from Africa, Maria’s lighter skin suggests that she was most likely Creole, an African American born in the USA rather than being brought from Africa.

Additional advertisements for Maria and Henry’s capture appear eight more times in the Nashville Union - in the October 5<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> issues, in the November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup>, issues, in the December 7<sup>th</sup> issue, and finally in the 4 January 1841 issue.<sup>10</sup> Just as with Florimell, the ending of the printing of these advertisements may have indicated the owner’s success in securing Maria and Henry, although the length of time throughout which the advertisement ran before finally ceasing to be printed allows for increased optimism in regards to their successful escape. This advertisement is additionally significant because it concerns the (seemingly successful) escape of two people together, a rarity since group flights were less common than individual ones.

The question of Henry’s identity is also an important one. It is most likely that he was Maria’s husband or partner, since there are few records of women fugitives collaborating with men who were not their husband or family of some sort.<sup>11</sup> Slave owners controlled every aspect of an enslaved person’s life, including when and if they were allowed to be legally married. Permissions were often granted or withheld to manipulate or coerce the enslaved into engaging

owner may have been describing scarification, what was commonly referred to as “country marks” in the Americas. Scarification was aesthetic community-created marks of specific African ethnicities.<sup>7</sup>

An additional advertisement calling for Florimell’s apprehension and return appears in the 9 July 1776 issue of the Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle, but by the 10 September 1776 edition the advertisement had ceased to be printed.<sup>8</sup> We may hope that this indicates that Florimell’s escape was successful, but it may just as well imply her recapture and return to her owner.

In an advertisement titled “STOP THE THIEF,” dated 3 August 1840 and also appearing in the 17 August 1840 issue of the

in sexual relations which would benefit and enrich the slave owner or accord with their own sexual predilections. If indeed Henry was Maria's husband (via law or personal commitment), the tone of Woods' advertisements and the claim that Henry had "stolen" Maria from him clearly indicates that Woods believed that he held the legal right to disrupt their union.<sup>12</sup> Henry is stated to be a free man, with a certificate to prove as much from the Colonel Micah Taul. (Fig. 2) There are no mentions of Taul freeing an enslaved man named Henry in his memoirs,<sup>13</sup> although this does not discount the possibility that the certificate was authentic. However, if the certificate was forged, as was known to happen,<sup>14</sup> this may have indicated that Henry was literate - a rare and valuable skill for an enslaved person (or free black) to possess.<sup>15</sup> If literate, this raises further questions about when, where, and how Henry was able to acquire the ability to read and write.

Fugitive slave advertisements typically described the runaways clothing in great detail because enslaved people did not have many clothes, and therefore descriptions of their outfits were extremely valuable to their identification.<sup>16</sup> Florimell is described as fleeing in a "red poplin Gown, a blue baize outside Petticoat and a pair of Men's Shoes" and further characterized as "commonly wear[ing] a Handkerchief round her Head." (Fig. 1) The fact that Florimell ran away wearing an outfit with a coat, in August, could suggest some degree of premeditation - she was prepared for a journey that may have lasted several months and into the harsh Canadian winter. Additionally, that the advertisement stated that she ran away "between the hours of 9 and 10 at night," suggests a brief window in which Florimell perhaps knew she would be unsupervised and therefore able to slip away - again, indicating both premeditation and a state of extreme surveillance. Conversely, the lack of a time frame for escape as well as the conspicuous lack of a description of the clothing worn by Maria or Henry points to an escape when Maria may have had extended time away from supervision. Furthermore, the fact that Maria escaped with a free man as her partner could suggest a degree of premeditation, although we cannot eliminate the possibility of Henry's participation and their escape together as a spontaneous act. An important distinction between these two cases of attempted escape from bondage is the setting itself and how this dictated the runaways' final destination. In Wood's advertisement, it is suggested that Maria and Henry are attempting to escape to Kentucky, and finally to a free state. (Fig. 2) Maria and Henry's destination being Kentucky makes sense, as its unique geography made it a central destination for those attempting to flee the south to free northern states or Canada. Kentucky bordered both slave and non-slave holding states and is surrounded on three sides by rivers, creating a pathway for runaways which was commonly used.<sup>17</sup> The Underground Railroad was also more



Figure 3: Map of Underground Railroad in the United States, "Underground Railroad," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, (date of last access 17 February 2020) <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/underground-railroad>

formally established in the 1830s,<sup>18</sup> commonly cutting through Kentucky, and provided a pre-established route with a seemingly utopic destination for enslaved fugitives fleeing America.(fig. 3) On the other hand, no destination is suggested for Florimell. She was already enslaved in Canada and the United States was not an appealing destination for an enslaved fugitive. Where was she to go? We may speculate that Florimell was attempting to escape to a fugitive settlement in western Ontario or even a city like Toronto, which by 1856 had a black population of around 1000 inhabitants with its adult population mainly comprised of refugees from the South.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, given that both regions like Nova Scotia (and the rest of British North America) as well as the collection of states which were becoming the USA in 1776 were all still invested in slavery, Florimell's best bet for freedom would have been to remove herself to another region where she was unknown and could pass herself off as a free woman.

In addition to dictating the potential destinations for fugitives, the Canadian and American settings had different expectations for labour. In Nova Scotia the majority of enslaved people lived in close proximity to their owners and worked both as agricultural labourers as well as domestic servants.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand enslaved women in Tennessee, who were not performing domestic duties, would hoe fields, lay fences, and process wheat - demanding physical labour.<sup>21</sup> In both contexts, enslaved women were additionally valued and exploited for their sexual and reproductive capabilities, falling victim to frequent physical and sexual attacks.<sup>22</sup> It was known that the label of domestic work included the sexual exploitation and violation of these women. A letter from Elizabeth Fenwick, a white female slave owner who had resettled in Barbados, describes how a "respectable matron" advised a male friend to acquire a domestic servant who would "increase his domestic comforts," while also hinting that by only having sex (without consent) with one "object" he would better safeguard his health.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the rental of enslaved black females as prostitutes was a common practice in port towns in the Caribbean,<sup>24</sup> and it is possible that Florimell, living in the port town of Halifax, was being rented out in a similar manner.<sup>25</sup> Although these examples are in reference to the Caribbean context, the overall sentiment and actions of slave owners was much the same in Canada and the American South. Enslaved women were seen not only as labourers, but as objects capable of fulfilling their male owners aggressive sexual desires.<sup>26</sup> Both sexual labour and the concomitant by-product of mixed race enslaved children (owned by the enslaved females' slave owners), were seen as a normal parts of the "work" that white slave owners stole from enslaved females.

The sexual abuse endured by enslaved women, and all the consequences stemming from these acts, were a likely catalyst that pushed both Florimell and Maria to finally run for their freedom.<sup>27</sup> Enslaved women were forced to fulfill a dual role of productive labour and productive reproduction. Slavery was organized in a matrilineal order wherein the children of enslaved females were considered slaves regardless of their father's race or social status, while the children of white women were absolved from slavery even in the case of a black enslaved father. This organization served to incentivize the rape and sexual coercion of enslaved females whether it was institutionalized as "breeding" or not.<sup>28</sup> For example, an advertisement appearing in the 8 March 1787 issue of the Quebec Gazette calls for the recapture of a "NEGRO WENCH, named BETT," further describing Bett as "big with child, and within a few days of her time."<sup>29</sup> This unborn child very well may have been the mixed race child of one of her owners, James Johnston and John Purss, providing further incentive for her escape. Random or systematic assaults on enslaved women were common,<sup>30</sup> having significant impact psychologically as well as being extremely disruptive to these women's romantic and familial relations. Furthermore, the constant overhanging threat of forced separation as a result of the sale or gifting of human

“property” constantly destabilized enslaved families, as did slave owner’s practices of arranging marriages while withholding permission for others.<sup>31</sup>

All of these additional horrors inflicted upon enslaved women were known to them. The average enslaved woman on a plantation in the American South gave birth to her first child at age twenty or twenty-one,<sup>32</sup> and since Maria was described as eighteen or nineteen, it is reasonable to speculate that perhaps she escaped with Henry, a likely husband or partner, in order to ensure that she would avoid the constant terror that enslaved mothers, wives, their children, and their families faced. Similarly, it is also a clear possibility that Florimell was pushed to escape as a result of sexual abuse, her separation from family, or her desire to have children outside of the abhorrent conditions of slavery. In this vein it is also important to raise the question of who these women may have left behind (especially with Florimell whose age is not given), be it family members, partners, children or friends.

An additional consequence of the sexual abuse of enslaved women was the violence they suffered at the hands of their white mistresses. Violent acts of punishment, rage, jealousy, and anger by white women against enslaved women are well documented, with some even claiming female owners as more cruel than their male counterparts.<sup>33</sup> In her book, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present (2009), Jacqueline Jones posits that, “in the enslaved woman, the mistress saw the source of her own misery, but she also saw herself - a woman without rights or recourse, subject to the whims of an egotistical man”.<sup>34</sup> Such repressed anger could quickly turn into anxiety and jealousy over a husband’s infidelity and boil over into acts of violence against the enslaved female victim of white male sexual abuse. Jones further explains how white women were prone to attacking enslaved women and their offspring in response to husbands who did not hide their predatory sexual behaviour, attacking these women with “any weapon available”<sup>35</sup> and mutilating them to the point of permanent disfigurement.<sup>36</sup>

Florimell and Maria are both identified in the advertisements as having facial scars. It is simply stated that Florimell “has scars in her face,” (Fig. 1) which could be a result of smallpox or intentional scarification, but it was equally possible that her facial scarring was a result of corporeal punishment since the advertisement did not specify the scars as the result of smallpox, which would have been recognizable. The advertisement also does not refer to the scars as “country marks,” and the practice of scarification was banned immediately in the Americas and therefore did not persist beyond the first generation of African-born people.<sup>37</sup> Alternatively, it is stated that Maria’s facial scar was the result of a “burn on one of her cheeks,” clearly suggesting that this may have been the result of some sort of corporal punishment - perhaps by a jealous mistress. (fig. 2)

Fugitive slave advertisements can be seen as the first slave narratives<sup>38</sup> and it is therefore essential that we analyze them in order to further accurately reconstruct and reclaim the lives of enslaved people during the heinous years of Transatlantic Slavery. This is an especially pressing task in Canada, where the history of Canadian Slavery is widely unknown, denied, and understudied. Through the analysis and comparison of fugitive slave advertisements from the United States and Canada, we are able not only to reclaim the lives of enslaved men and women, but also to paint a larger picture of slavery in North America while shedding light on the important overlaps and distinctions between Canadian and American slavery.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Ran Away," *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* (Halifax, NS), issue 303, Tuesday, 2 July 1776, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=4p3FJGzxjgAC&dat=17760709&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>

<sup>2</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18th c. Mid-Atlantic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* (April 1999), p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "[A] tone of voice peculiar to New-England": Fugitive Slave Advertisements and the Heterogeneity of Enslaved People of African Descent in Eighteenth-Century Quebec," *Current Anthropology*, guest editors Ibrahim Thiaw and Deborah Mack (forthcoming 2020); also see: Harvey Amani Whitfield, "Slavery in English Nova-Scotia: 1750-1810," *Journal of Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society*, vol. 13 (2010), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Florimell's broken English may also have been the result of trauma, a strategic denial by her slave owner, or even an intentional choice made by Florimell herself as a form of resistance.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the hair care and hair styling practices of the enslaved in the USA see: Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 61, no. 1 (February 1995), pp. 45-76.

<sup>6</sup> Fugitive slave advertisements also routinely detailed the scars of corporal punishment like those from whipping, branding or physical assaults. See: Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her master...a negroe girl named Thursday': Examining evidence of punishment, isolation, and trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive slave advertisements," *Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law*, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, "Traditional African Scars are helping researchers tell the stories of the slave trade," *CBC*, 11 February 2019 (date of last access 14 April 2020) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/scarification-trent-ocad-slave-trade-identity-1.5014143>

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous, "Ran Away," *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* (Halifax, NS), issue 303, Tuesday, 9 July 1776, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=4p3FJGzxjgAC&dat=17760709&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>; *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* (Halifax, NS), issue 303, Tuesday, 10 September 1776, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=4p3FJGzxjgAC&dat=17760910&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>

<sup>9</sup> Caution must be used here since although so-called yellow or light brown complexions often indicated a mixed race lineage (and more customarily a white father and black mother) there are cases of African-born people being described in a similar manner. For instance, as discussed by Jane O'Brien Davis, the fugitive slave advertisement placed on 4 February 1790 for the escape of four African-born people (two men and two women) from Mrs. Elbert's plantation on Argyle Island, Georgia described the two men, Charles of the Angola country and Breetchie of the Ebo country, as having yellow complexions. See: Jane O'Brien Davis, "Fugitive Slave Advertisements in New Brunswick and Georgia: A Comparative Analysis," in this publication.

<sup>10</sup> W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 17 August, 1840 (date of last access 3 August 2020) <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/0c6da53c-d696-4370-9b55-cd03a48006f3?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 5 October, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/7023892c-deff-4197-8d7d-7b5524bb2d50?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 29 October, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/8ca52d99-8b41-456a-83eb-7692a1c1e5d4?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 2 November, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/78800971-754f-42c8-9e56-3a04d277219?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 9 November, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/8a5ce0c3-d427-4251-9aad-ed09d07965a0?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 19 November, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/ec767f6d-d6db-400c-ab1b-ed62ea6ca76f?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 26 November, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/10123831-0bbc-4bf2-a49f-a95d6dcb75a7?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 7 December, 1840, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/2dff3977-a2ee-49ab-86ae-27aad5ad4a51?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>; W.M. Woods, "STOP THE THIEF," *Nashville Union*, 4 January, 1841, <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/0c62646b-b6df-47f1-a178-b156d9fclcf1?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>

<sup>11</sup> Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830," *NWSA Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1988-1989), p. 202.



- <sup>12</sup> Another important example of white slave owner interference with enslaved black marriage was documented in the slave narrative of Mary Prince. After her marriage to a free black man named Daniel James, Prince recounted how her female slave owner Mrs. Wood “stirred up Mr. Wood to flog me dreadfully with his horsewhip.” Although Mrs. Wood expressed alarm that the marriage would bring her white family into untenable proximity with a black man, she and her husband were of course living within the same household with enslaved black people. The problem seemed then not to be about proximity to blackness, but about James’ freedom. Furthermore, as a wife, Mary and her husband would have had expectations that some of her labour would be directed towards their own household (and away from that of the Woods). Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave Related by Herself, ed. Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 85.
- <sup>13</sup> Micah Taul, “Memoirs of Micah Taul,” Register of Kentucky State Historical Society, vol. 27, no. 79, 1929, pp. 343–380; Micah Taul, “Memoirs of Micah Taul (Concluded),” Register of Kentucky State Historical Society, vol. 27, no. 81, (1929), pp. 601–627.
- <sup>14</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 263.
- <sup>15</sup> Henry’s possession of a pass may also indicate his access to a network willing to provide such documents to enslaved people.
- <sup>16</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 252.
- <sup>17</sup> Although at times difficult or even lethal to navigate, if pursued with tracking dogs, rivers also offered the enslaved a way to eliminate their scents and to throw the dogs off of their trails.
- “Kentucky’s Underground Railroad: Passage to Freedom,” KET Education, (date of last access 17 February 2020) <https://www.ket.org/education/resources/kentuckys-underground-railroad-passage-freedom/#making-their-way-to-freedom-runaway-slave-advertisements-from-louisville-newspapers-1788-1860-excerpt-by-pen-bogert>
- <sup>18</sup> Natasha L. Henry, “Underground Railroad,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, (date of last access 17 February 2020) <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/underground-railroad>
- <sup>19</sup> Benjamin Drew, North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee: Or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada Related by Themselves (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1856), p. 94.
- <sup>20</sup> Whitfield, “Slavery in English Nova-Scotia,” p. 27, 28.
- <sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2009), p.15.
- <sup>22</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, p. 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Hilary McD. Beckles, “White Women and Slavery in the Caribbean,” Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader, Eds. Verene Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle. 2000), p. 664.
- <sup>24</sup> Beckles, “White Women and Slavery,” p. 663.
- <sup>25</sup> For further discussion of enslaved and free black prostitution in Montreal see: Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), pp. 62-75.
- <sup>26</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, pp. 18-19.
- <sup>27</sup> Kurth, “Wayward Wenches and Wives,” p. 208.
- <sup>28</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “Lecture,” ARTH 353 Black Subjects in History and Popular Culture, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 14 January 2020.
- <sup>29</sup> Johnston & Purss, “RAN-AWAY from the subscribers, between the hours of seven and eight o’clock yesterday evening,” Quebec Gazette, 8 March 1787; transcribed in Frank Mackey “Appendix I: Newspaper Notices,” Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), p. 329.
- <sup>30</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, p. 35.
- <sup>31</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, pp. 31, 32, 33.
- <sup>32</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, p. 31.
- <sup>33</sup> Beckles, “White Women and Slavery,” pp. 665-66.
- <sup>34</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, p. 23.
- <sup>35</sup> Jones, Labor of Love, p. 23.
- <sup>36</sup> For example, mistresses were known to attack enslaved women with near-by kitchen instruments such as knives or pans of boiling water. A specific example would be Roswell King’s wife when she learnt that he had fathered children by the slaves Judy and Scylla and subsequently had the two women whipped and sent to the estate’s “penal colony” out of spite. For further discussion see Jones, Labor of Love, pp. 23-25.
- <sup>37</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, “Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora,” Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 221.
- <sup>38</sup> Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” p. 247.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Fugitive Slave Advertisement, Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle (Halifax, NS), issue 303, Tuesday, 2 July 1776,  
<http://www.18thcjourneys.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/NovaScotiaGazetteAndTheWeeklyChronicle>

Figure 2: Fugitive Slave Advertisement, Nashville Union, 17 August 1840,  
<https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/0c6da53c-d696-4370-9b55-cd03a48006f3?enFirst=WM%20woods&limit=36&page=1>

Figure 3: Map of Underground Railroad in the United States, “Underground Railroad,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, (date of last access 17 February 2020)  
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/underground-railroad>

## BLACK KINSHIP IN SLAVEHOLDING SOCIETIES: INVESTIGATING FAMILY TIES IN FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS FROM NOVA SCOTIA AND SOUTH CAROLINA

Nicholas Raffoul

Fugitive slave advertisements serve as one of the most prominent pieces of recorded evidence of resistance by enslaved populations during Transatlantic Slavery. As Peter Wood remarks, “No single act of self-assertion was more significant among slaves or more disconcerting among whites than that of running away.”<sup>1</sup> Attempts to escape by the enslaved population impaired slave owners economically, such that escape equated to an absolute theft of movable property. Flight was an effective means of diminishing an owner’s property.<sup>2</sup> Even under the unfortunate circumstance that an enslaved person was recaptured, their worth was reduced due to their self-directed status as fugitive.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, enslaved populations departed during the busiest times of the agricultural calendar, sabotaging property and crops, exasperating their owners, and undermining economies of racial domination.<sup>4</sup>

These escape narratives, written by white slave owners and made legitimate by a colonial print culture that scaled and amplified the reconnaissance of enslaved runaways, unintentionally undermine a reductive and bigoted perception of slavery that enslaved individuals were docile or merely discontent with their enslavement, dispossession, and imposed social death.<sup>5</sup> While enslaved people were “naturally alienated” and ceased to belong independently to any formally recognized community, the social immobilization inflicted upon them by the slaveholding class did not undercut the strong informal relations enslaved individuals forged among themselves.<sup>6</sup> However, regardless of the depth of these informal relationships, they were never accepted as legitimate or binding in North American slaveholding societies. Enslaved people had regular sexual unions that were never recognized as marriages, and marital and parental bonds between enslaved individuals had no social or legal authority.<sup>7</sup>

The refusal of slaveholding societies to formally recognize such relations among enslaved communities had destructive social implications: enslaved couples could be forcibly separated, “wives” of enslaved males were routinely subjected to sexual abuse by their owners, and enslaved parents had no custodial claims or power over their children.<sup>8</sup> Crippling social disenfranchisement imposed on enslaved populations thus transformed the behavior of the enslaved who lived in fear of the threat of separation from their kin. In *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Orlando Patterson surveyed hundreds of interviews with ex-enslaved people in the USA and asserted that “Nothing comes across more dramatically [from slave narratives] than fear of separation.”<sup>9</sup> George Rawick’s forty-one-volume set of oral histories of formerly enslaved people *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* from 1941 reveals - to the extent of which can be put into words - the enduring anxiety of kin separation. Peter Clifton, an eighty-nine-year-old formerly enslaved man from South Carolina recounted the terror of the *possibility* of forced separation, “Master Biggers believe in whipping and working his slaves long and hard: then a man was scared all the time of being sold away from his wife and children. His bark was worse than his bite though, for I never knowed him to do a wicked thing like that.”<sup>10</sup> (sic)

The constant fear of separation and the tensions which arose from a lack of recognition of family structures built within enslaved communities by the slaveholding population can be further illuminated by group or family fugitive slave advertisements. These advertisements record the attempted escapes of groups, including those with kin relations, individuals described as “wives,” “husbands,” and “children,” by the slave owner demanding their re-enslavement. Attempts of

several enslaved individuals to escape with kin reflects a resilient determination on the part of the enslaved to build cohesive family units despite bondage, revealing an effort to consolidate these relationships without a constant and unwavering fear of separation.

Although group and/or family runaway

attempts were more common in societies with a slave majority population commonly found in the American South, advertisements recording the escape of families were prevalent across both slave majority and slave minority sites. An example of a slave minority site is Loyalist Nova Scotia and the rest of the Canadian Maritimes, where the enslaved population constituted typically around ten percent of the population of each settlement.<sup>11</sup> Southern USA states like South Carolina, however, instituted large scale plantation regimes, which had considerable slave majorities. By 1760, the enslaved people constituted more than ninety percent of the population in many parts of South Carolina Lowcountry.<sup>12</sup> Despite these contrasting demographics and differences in social formations, similar fugitive slave advertisements recording the attempted escapes of enslaved families were prevalent in both of these contexts.

Published on 12 October 1785 in the Nova Scotia Packet and General Advertiser, Reverend Samuel Andrews sought to recapture “Four Negroes, A Man, his Wife, and two Children, [named] *James, Bet, Frank, and Judy*”.<sup>13</sup> (fig. 1) This notice seems to represent an example of a fugitive family in Nova Scotia. Andrews was offering the captor an eight dollar reward for delivering the family to the local jail, and compensation of five dollars for any knowledge regarding the runaways whereabouts.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, Andrews recaptured the family, leaving few details of their return.<sup>15</sup>

While Andrews provided scarce details of the runaways in his published advertisement, few traces of James and his family otherwise exist that provide insight into the lives and their troubled fate. Andrews enslaved several people who worked at his two hundred and fifty-acre farm in Yarmouth, and produced and tended numerous crops, cattle, and sheep.<sup>16</sup> Andrews, born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1737 travelled to Nova Scotia in 1784 as a parishioner wishing to settle there after having resided in East Florida.<sup>17</sup> Upon his departure from East Florida, Andrews evacuated with his wife, children, and three black people.<sup>18</sup> In Shelburne County Court, Nova Scotia on 25 August 1785, James Singletary, a black man held as a slave legally challenged his enslavement and made an affidavit that he was not owned by Samuel Andrews, the Loyalist who had brought him from East Florida.<sup>19</sup> The Shelburne court recorded Singletary’s case as such:

James Singletary a negro Man, having applied to James McEwen Esq praying he might be discharged from the service of Samuel Andrews late of Augustine, who claims him as his slave[.] [Andrews claims] that he paid Fifty pounds for said Negro James, together with his Wife and Child but had lost the bill of sale, but if he had time allowed him, would get such documents.<sup>20</sup>

RUN AWAY from the Subscriber

Four Negroes,  
A Man, his Wife, and two Children, [named] *James, Bet, Frank, and Judy*, who all speak good English; the man is a carpenter by trade. WHOEVER apprehends the said negroes, and delivers them to the gaol keeper, or to Capt. John William, in Maiden-lane, shall receive EIGHT DOLLARS Reward, or any person that will give information to said Williams, of said negroes, so that he gets hold of them, shall receive a Reward of FIVE DOLLARS from Said Williams.  
SAMUEL ANDREWS

Figure 1: Samuel Andrews, “Run away from the subscriber,” *Nova Scotia Packet and General Advertiser* (Shelburne), Wednesday, 12 October 1785. Transcribed by Sarah Elizabeth Chute in “Runaway Slave Advertisements from Loyalist Newspapers of the Maritime Colonies,” (Bellingham: Honours Program Senior Projects, Western Washington University, 2018).

The court gave Andrews a year to get the proof of a bill of sale, during which time James, his wife, and child were to live with him as servants. While proof was never provided, the case does not appear again in court records.<sup>21</sup> This case demonstrates a clear motivating force for the Singletarys' attempted escape less than two months after the court's decision to give Andrews one year to prove his ownership over the three individuals. James and his family's efforts to resist enslavement furthermore illuminates an important detail that Andrew omitted in his description of the runaways: James and his wife Bet had only one child at the time of their escape, indicating that at some point in their decision to run away, James and Bet attempted to rescue another child from enslavement and be responsible for their protection as guardians.

I assume that Frank was James and Bet's child brought with them from East Florida, while Judy was an enslaved girl that the family encountered in Andrews' residence. "The Book of Negroes," records the names of 3,000 black enslaved people who were evacuated to Nova Scotia during the American Revolution.<sup>22</sup> An entry in the document records the arrival of nine-year-old Jude, an enslaved girl property of a Francis Wood, to Port Roseway (Shelburne, Nova Scotia) in late September 1783, which may have been the same *Judy* in Andrews' fugitive advertisement from two years later.<sup>23</sup> Sharon Robart-Johnson infers that Francis Wood sold Jude to Andrews upon his arrival in Nova Scotia.<sup>24</sup> Very few details of the lives of James, Bet, and Frank after their attempted escape in 1785 are documented. In the case of Jude/Judy—if Jude and Judy were in fact the same person - documents exist that reveal her heinous murder. Trial documents from 19 May 1801 reveal that Jude, now "a Negro woman," was beat and violently murdered the previous year by Samuel Andrews, and his sons John and Samuel Jr with blunt sticks.<sup>25</sup> Andrews and his sons justified the murder by claiming that Jude/Judy would cut off pigs' ears and tails to roast them during the night, would often be disobedient and steal, and that they had found her attempting to jump over the garden fence.<sup>26</sup> Jude/Judy's mutilation and consumption of animal parts, if true, was likely due to the fact that Andrews underfed his enslaved, a malnutrition that was common among enslaved populations.<sup>27</sup> The lethal violence of the Andrews' men gives insight into why James and Bet decided to risk their lives to flee with their child and Jude/Judy from their ownership. It is possible, if not probable, that they had witnessed the Andrews' display of physical violence against other enslaved people (or themselves) prior to their escape. The jury acquitted the Andrews family.<sup>28</sup> In the Short History of All Saints Anglican Church (1968) which neglects to mention church Minister Andrews' murder of Jude/Judy or his status as a slaveowner, Andrews is described, "in modern terms," as, "a gentleman...an informed, kindly, sociable church leader who believed in his work."<sup>29</sup>

James, Bet, Frank, and Jude/Judy's fate is very specific to their social and geographic context, considering that the legal context of Nova Scotia ensured that James and Jude/Judy's efforts to resist enslavement were not only recorded, but were put to trial and discussed in detail. With a large contingent of free black Loyalists, and an unclear legal definition of slavery, slavery remained legally insecure in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Although it was recognized under common law as a form of private property, slavery had no statutory basis, such as a slave code.<sup>30</sup> While this lack of clarity could have been an asset to some black people in the Maritimes, it also heightened uncertainty; a black individual could live in Nova Scotia as a free person, be (re)enslaved, and eventually regain freedom, or be sold to a buyer in a stricter slaveholding society, such as the Caribbean, despite the ability to challenge their enslavement in court.<sup>31</sup>

In South Carolina, the enslaved population could pursue one of two strategies when seeking to marry and establish a family. First, they could choose a spouse from their home plantation, which represented co-residential relationships, or they could marry an enslaved person who lived

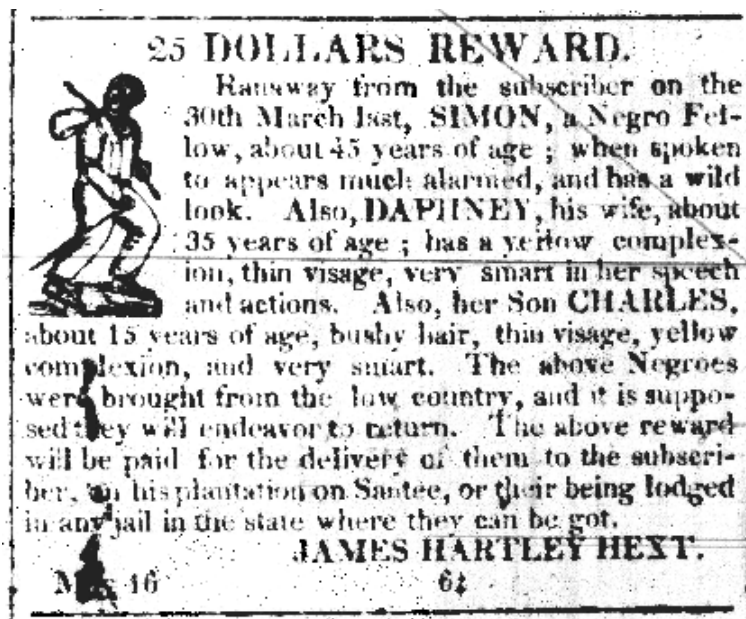


Figure 2: James Hartley Hext, "25 Dollars Reward" *Charleston Courier* (Charleston), Wednesday, 25 May 1822. Found on: <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/012b94fa-a081-4602-a019-e858abbcd77?limit=12&page=1&q=james%20hartley%20hext>

outside of their home place, forming cross-plantation relationships.<sup>32</sup> Larry Hudson found that in the Lowcountry, "the larger the plantation on which slaves lived, the more likely it was that a significant proportion of the slave population would find partners at home."<sup>33</sup> Landowner James Hartley Hext (1787-1850) enslaved many people and owned hundreds of acres of land in Florida and South Carolina, including in the Charleston District and Santee River.<sup>34</sup> On 16 May 1822, Hext published an advertisement in the *Charleston Courier* for the return of "Simon, a Negro fellow, about 45 years of age," "Daphney, his wife about 35 years of age," and "her son Charles, about 15 years of age."<sup>35</sup> Considering Simon, Daphney, and Charles "were brought from the low country," Simon and Daphney constituted a co-residential

relationship. The advertisement specifies that Charles was "her son," in reference to Daphney, suggesting that Charles was not Simon's biological son, but by attempting an escape with Daphney and Charles, he believed he had a duty to protect and take responsibility for Charles, similarly to James and Bet's fostering of Jude/Judy. Relationships between single mothers and single men were prevalent within South Carolina counties.<sup>36</sup> It is also notable to mention the advertisement details Simon's abuse and fear from/of his owner, considering he is described as "alarmed," and with "a wild look." Such an unsettling image speaks to Simon's mental health living under what Trevor Burnard has called "radical uncertainty," which included the ongoing surveillance of a slaveowner.<sup>37</sup> Restricted from physical and social autonomy, enslaved people were, "always vulnerable to the depredations of whites and fellow slaves," violence that was both physical and "intolerable psychological stress," which possibly explains Simon's "alarmed," reaction when looking at his owner.<sup>38</sup> Specific details regarding the attempted escape of Simon, Daphney, and Charles are not available, but it is almost certain that the family was re-captured. On the 7 June of 1823, a year after the escape, Hext sold a woman named Phoebe and Simon, both listed as about forty years old in a bill of sale, to Christopher G. Morris, also suggesting that the family initially escaped to avoid being sold away from each other and separated.<sup>39</sup>

In both of these cases, the enslaved families failed to secure their freedom and stay united with one another for an extended period of time after their recapture. The majority of enslaved individuals attempting escape did so alone, and especially without children.<sup>40</sup> Jan Kurth writes that "running away required speed and low visibility, and the presence of a child contributed to neither," suggesting one reason for which the two families were re-captured with ease. For women who did not dare to escape an unbearable situation with a child, to "abandon their children to a retaliatory owner was unthinkable," suggesting that running away with an entire family was an

escape from the most drastic situations, such as a slave owner threatening the family structure or efforts to separate kin from one another.<sup>41</sup>

Most importantly, these advertisements reflect brave attempts at consolidating a family outside of the servitude of slavery despite militant efforts by slave owners and slave holding societies to disenfranchise and socially immobilize the enslaved population. In many colonies, repeated sales by the slave owner diminished loyalty to the master or mistress, and raised fears which necessitated flights for many enslaved individuals desiring to preserve or create a family.<sup>42</sup> Attempts to escape physical confinement with other individuals and/or kin were thus attempts to strengthen family ties, create a stronger sense of stability, and to have some power over the lives of their children.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Peter H. Wood, Black Majority: Negroes In Colonial South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) p. 235.
2. Wood, Black Majority, p. 236.
3. Bett, an enslaved woman in Quebec was advertised as having ran away including extensive details about her appearance, published in the Quebec Gazette on 8 March 1787 by her owners James Johnston and John Purss. Four months later, Bett was advertised for sale, the advertisement neglecting to list her name or that of her two owners. This was clearly meant to avoid reminding prospective buyers of Bett's attempt at running away earlier that winter, a tactic by Johnston and Purss to disguise Bett as a docile and maintain her profitability. Frank Mackey, Done with Slavery: The Black fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010) pp. 308, 329.
4. Graham Russell Gao Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, "Pretends to be Free" (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. xiv.
5. David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Mid-Atlantic," The William and Mary Quarterly (April 1999), pp. 243-72.
6. Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 6.
7. Mary Prince was the first black British woman to escape from slavery and publish a record of her experiences, detailing her marriage to a free black man, Daniel James. In her book, Prince divulged that Mrs. Wood, who owned Mary alongside her white spouse, often physically abused her for her decision to marry claiming that she "would not have nigger men about the yards and premises, or allow a nigger man's clothes to be washed where hers were washed." Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave: Related by Herself, ed. Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) p. 85.
8. Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, p. 6.
9. Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, p. 6.
10. George P. Rawick, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, vol. 2 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972) p. 207. Quote adjusted for clarity.
11. Sarah Elizabeth Chute, "Runaway Slave Advertisements from Loyalist Newspapers of the Maritime Colonies," (Bellingham: Honors Program Senior Projects, Western Washington University, 2018).
12. Thomas D. Wilson, The Ashley Cooper Plan: The Founding of Carolina and the Origins of Southern Political Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016) p. 124.
13. Samuel Andrews, "Run away from the subscriber," Nova Scotia Packet and General Advertiser (Shelburne), Wednesday, 12 October 1785.
14. Andrews, "Run away from the subscriber," Nova Scotia Packet (Shelburne), 12 October 1785.
15. Harvey Amani Whitfield, North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016) p. 81.
16. Whitfield, North to Bondage, p. 54.
17. J.C Medeof, Short History of All Saints Anglican Church, St. Andrews, New Brunswick 1783-1967 (Charlotte County, New Brunswick, 1968) p. 10.
18. Carole Watterson Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists: Mary Postell in South Carolina, East Florida, and Nova Scotia," Acadiensis, vol. 37 no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2008), p. 75.
19. Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists," p. 75.
20. Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists," p. 75.



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21. Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists," p. 76.
  22. Sharon Robart-Johnson, Africa's Children: A History of Blacks in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009) p. 31.
  23. Book of Negroes, Guy Carleton, 1st Baron Dorchester: Papers, The National Archives, Kew, 1783, (PRO 30/55/100) 10427.
  24. Robart-Johnson, Africa's Children, p. 31.
  25. R. v. Andrews, 19 May 1801, Shelburne County Special Court of Oyer and Terminer, RG 42 SH vol. 1 file 4, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax.
  26. Robart-Johnson, Africa's Children, p. 31.
  27. Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845) p. 27.
  28. R. v. Andrews, 19 May 1801, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax.
  29. J.C Medeof, Short History of All Saints Anglican Church, p. 8.
  30. Whitfield, North to Bondage, p. 9.
  31. Whitfield, North to Bondage, p. 13.
  32. Damian Alan Pargas, "Boundaries and opportunities: Comparing Slave Family Formation in the Antebellum South," Journal of Family History vol. 33, no. 3 (July 2008), p. 320.
  33. Larry Hudson, To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 143.
  34. Bill Of Sale For A Slave Named Phoebe, About 40 Years Old And A Slave Named Simon, About 40 Years Old, James Hartley Hext to Christopher G. Morris, 7 June 1823, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
  35. James Hartley Hext, "25 Dollars Reward," Charleston Courier (Charleston), Wednesday, 25 May 1822.
  36. Pargas, "Boundaries and opportunities," p. 322.
  37. Trevor Burnard, "The Sexual Life of an Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Slave Overseer," Sex and Sexuality in Early America, ed. Merrill D. Smith (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 165.
  38. Burnard, "The Sexual Life of an Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Slave Overseer," p. 165.
  39. Bill Of Sale For A Slave Named Phoebe, About 40 Years Old And A Slave Named Simon, About 40 Years Old, James Hartley Hext to Christopher G. Morris, 7 June 1823, South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The reduction of Simon's age from forty-five in the fugitive slave advertisement, to forty in the bill of sale, may have been deliberate on Hext's part; a way to increase Simon's sale price in a world where the mortality rates of the enslaved were customarily high and younger enslaved people were typically more expensive.
  40. Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830," NWSA Journal, vol. 1 no. 2 (Winter, 1988-1999), p. 207.
  41. Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives," p. 208.
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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Samuel Andrews, “Run away from the subscriber,” *Nova Scotia Packet and General Advertiser* (Shelburne), Wednesday, 12 October 1785. Transcribed by Sarah Elizabeth Chute in “Runaway Slave Advertisements from Loyalist Newspapers of the Maritime Colonies,” (Bellingham: Honors Program Senior Projects, Western Washington University, 2018).

Figure 2: James Hartley Hext, “25 Dollars Reward” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston), Wednesday, 25 May 1822. Found on:  
<https://app.freedomonthemove.org/advertisements/012b94fa-a081-4602-a019-e858abbcd77?limit=12&page=1&q=james%20hartley%20hext>

## CHILDREN TAKEN AND CHILDREN LEFT: THE ROLE OF MOTHERHOOD IN THE ESCAPE OF TWO FEMALE FUGITIVES

Emma Ridsdale

For four centuries, millions of black people were held in bondage, exploited, and tortured within the institution of Transatlantic Slavery. No aspect of their lives was left untouched; the enslaved status seeped into every day, every hour, every second from the moment of their births. The unwavering oppression sought to push its subjects into accepting their own subservience, despite the wretched nature of their conditions.

Although the brutality of their oppression made it a harrowing prospect, enslaved people engaged in acts of resistance throughout the existence of slavery. During the Middle Passage, enslaved captives carried out insurrections against the slave ship crews who guarded them during their voyages to the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Slave rebellions were an active concern for slave owners, especially after the 1790's revolt in St. Domingue (now Haiti).<sup>2</sup> Even within the regular, daily life of an enslaved person, resistance could be found in the preservation of heritage and the performance of self-care. Although the oppressive force of slavery was pervasive, resistance was nevertheless performed throughout all aspects of enslaved life. Lucille Mathurin Mair has shown that among these aspects, motherhood was “a catalyst for much of women’s subversive and aggressive strategies directed against the might of the plantation.”<sup>3</sup> This essay will consider how two enslaved mothers resisted their bondage by fleeing from their owners and how their motherhood impacted their choice to escape.

Running away was a massive undertaking. A prospective fugitive would have to evade the notice of their owner, whatever staff they might have, and every free person they encountered on their travels,

continuously dodging recapture until they reached a safe destination - if such a thing could be found. For a young woman named Bett, this flight was complicated by the physical limitations of being in the third trimester of her pregnancy. In an advertisement posted in the *Quebec Gazette* (fig. 1), Bett was described as being “about eighteen years old,” and fluent in English, French, and German. (fig. 1) She was wearing a blue coat and petticoat, an “Indian shawl,” and a hat with a yellow fringe, and she was “big with child, and within a few days of her time.” Alarming also, Bett ran away in the midst of a Quebec winter on 7 March 1787.

The advertisement described Bett in such detail to make her identifiable. Anyone who may have attempted to recapture her would have been able to look out for a heavily pregnant black woman speaking German: a specific enough image to greatly reduce her ability to remain inconspicuous. While fleeing during pregnancy was a physically demanding task, the obvious and difficult to disguise visual identifier - the protruding stomach - complicated the requirements of stealth. Since running while pregnant would serve primarily to worsen Bett’s odds of a

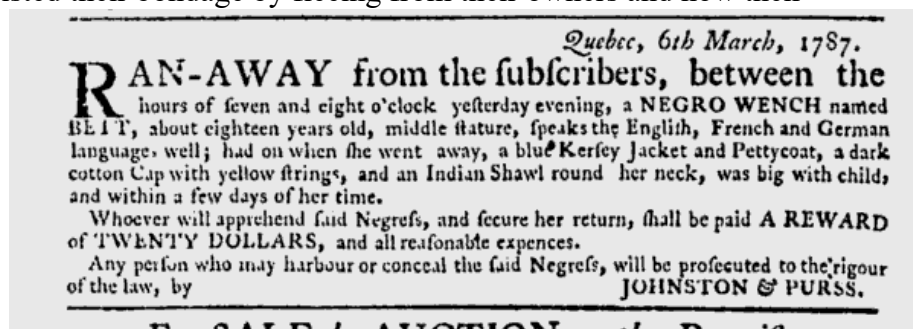


Figure 1: “RAN-AWAY from the subscribers,” print, *Quebec Gazette* (Quebec City, QC), issue 1125, 8 March 1787, p. 2.

[https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=F\\_tUKv7nyWgC&dat=17870308&printsec=frontpage&hl=en](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=F_tUKv7nyWgC&dat=17870308&printsec=frontpage&hl=en)

successful escape, the fact that she chose to do so anyway is significant. The advertisement acknowledging her escape was written by her owners, the West Indian merchants James Johnston and John Purss, and therefore does not disclose her reasons for running when she did. This lack of the perspective of the enslaved is an issue persisting throughout documentation of Transatlantic Slavery.<sup>4</sup> While Bett's story cannot be fully recovered, there has been enough scholarship about the conditions of motherhood within slavery to draw some conclusions about her reasons for fleeing.

The most likely explanation for her escape was her desire to save her unborn child from bondage, along with herself. Slavery rendered enslaved people objects without human rights; part of that objectification was taking away their own right to their children. The children of enslaved black women were not considered their own and could be seized or "disposed of" at the will of the forces controlling them. Indeed, the separation of children and parents was commonplace.<sup>5</sup> The only way for Bett to be sure that she could keep her child was to flee with that child and find freedom for them both. By doing so, she laid claim to her baby in an attempt to ensure that her baby would not be taken from her.

Although running away is one of many strategies that "enslaved mothers adopted... to protect their children," doing so while pregnant had advantages and disadvantages when compared to taking a young child or infant on the run.<sup>6</sup> The physical strain of escape was compounded by late term pregnancy and because Bett was "within days of her time," we can assume that her belly would have been very large and visible. However, waiting until after her baby was born would have required her to escape with an infant. If a pregnant belly makes stealth harder to accomplish, a newborn would likely have been even worse. In order to achieve the goal of escaping with her child and ensuring freedom for them both, doing so before the birth was likely the superior of two difficult options. The institution of slavery sought to "control black movement - and, indeed, most aspects of black bodily experience".<sup>7</sup> Running while pregnant required that Bett flaunt that restriction of movement while reclaiming her own bodily experience as a mother.

This interpretation of Bett's flight is predicated on the assumption that she was strongly compelled by her familial bond to her child. Due to the free exchange of enslaved people and the frequent separation of black families under slavery, families "played a significant role in a slave woman's life... [and] defining what her freedom meant to her."<sup>8</sup> For Bett, freedom seems to have included her ability to keep her child.<sup>9</sup> However, the nature of the exploitation of black women did not always lead them to develop deep attachments to their children.

In 1846, a Missourian enslaved girl named Nelly was tried for having murdered her own newborn child. The child had been conceived as a result of sexual abuse committed against Nelly by her slave owner; the traumatic



Figure 2: "RUNAWAY," print, The Daily Picayune (New Orleans, LA), 10 January 1838. <https://fotm.link/qFswGyPiZJAsYivVsZu1S>

conditions of the conception led Nelly to reject the child, and thus refuse to be a mother against her own will.<sup>10</sup> While Eliza, the enslaved woman described in an advertisement posted in the Daily Picayune from New Orleans (fig. 2), was not driven to such an extreme course of action, she also seemed to have been disconnected from her children.<sup>11</sup>

The description of Eliza was sparser than that of Bett. Her age was given, as was the fact that she was a “negro woman” wearing “an old sun bonnet and dark calico dress.” There was nothing so identifying as Bett’s pregnancy or language abilities offered in Eliza’s advertisement. However, her owner took an unusual extra step and mentioned that she “left two children at [his] residence.” Although the detail did not contribute to Eliza’s recognizability, it did serve another purpose. The fact that Eliza had run away, literally stolen herself from her owner, already made her a criminal under colonial law.<sup>12</sup> However, the abandonment of her children served to further vilify her in the eyes of the reading public. Although it is tempting to take Eliza’s flight without her children as a sign of her neglect or a deep lack of emotional connection to her children, other things may have been at play. For instance, it is impossible for us to understand the ways in which enslaved mothers sought to cope, consciously or not, with their utter disempowerment within slavery. To what extent did some enslaved mothers purposely seek *not* to bond with their children in order to protect themselves from the suffering of witnessing their children’s abuse, sales, or deaths. Furthermore, while Sylvester’s advertisement claimed that Eliza had not run away with her children, it gave no details about whether or not she had attempted to do so.

The isolation imposed upon enslaved people via denying them familial connections has been referred to as “natal alienation.”<sup>13</sup> This alienation often took the form of separating mothers from children, but as demonstrated in Nelly’s case, it could also manifest through the conception of children against the will of the mother. A child conceived through sexual abuse by a slave master was not a child that the enslaved woman wanted (at least not initially), and while no child of an enslaved woman was considered hers, these children may not have *felt* like hers either. The ethnic designation of the children Eliza left behind are not given, but when considering their apparent importance to her owner and the high number of mixed race people born on Louisiana plantations as a result of non-consensual intercourse between slave owners and enslaved women, it seems likely that the children were fathered by her owner.<sup>14</sup> If Eliza indeed abandoned her children, her disconnection from them makes sense in this context: they were not children she chose to have, and they were indicative of her inability to form a family of her own choosing.

For Bett, taking ownership of her unborn child by fleeing while pregnant may have been a way of reclaiming the family that had been taken out of her hands. Eliza, however, did not hold onto family by taking her children along with her. Perhaps the children were a form of natal alienation for her - a familial tie that she had no control over. Leaving them behind was a way to leave behind that lack of control and decide what her family would mean to her, giving her a chance to build a new one after she escaped.

Johnston, Purss, and Sylvester were all forced to humanize their subjects, as was typical of fugitive slave advertisements. In order to be useful resources for identifying and recapturing the runaways, the notices acknowledged their names, their choices of dress, and often their skills and personalities; all of which are features that contradicted the “lie of the supposed homogeneity, inhumanity, inferiority, dependency, and lack of civility of the enslaved population.”<sup>15</sup> The institution of slavery depended upon this claim that black people were less than human and thus incapable of living a fulfilling life. Their bodies did not belong to them. But these advertisements document incidences of enslaved people “asserting [their] humanity” and reclaiming their bodies by running and asserting their autonomy.<sup>16</sup> The women in these

advertisements were not only reclaiming their bodies, but reclaiming their own motherhood: Bett by taking her unborn child with her and reclaiming both of their lives at once, and Eliza by leaving her children behind and perhaps deliberately eschewing a motherhood that was imposed upon her.

It must be acknowledged that much of this is supposition. Another feature of the dehumanization of black people under slavery was the lack of preservation of their perspectives and stories. The true motivations of Bett and Eliza were not recorded, and as such cannot be known with certainty. How can one be sure that Bett chose to run while pregnant so that she could keep her child, rather than because she knew that if she left her owners while pregnant and was later seen not pregnant, she would be harder to identify?<sup>17</sup> Could Eliza's potential decision to leave her children behind have been something she greatly regretted, and not at all an indication of her lack of emotional connection to them? The reality is that there is no way to be sure. Understanding the stories of enslaved people requires critical reading of the archival sources that exist, a practice described as reading "along the archival grain."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps Bett did feel no connection to her unborn child, and her flight while pregnant was a result of unfortunate happenstance rather than an indication of her desire to maintain and build her own family. However, the difficulty of running while pregnant (in the winter) suggests that if one could have avoided doing so, then it would have been wise to favour that option. Bett would not have fled if she were not hoping to secure her freedom and doing anything to worsen her own chances of securing it required a very compelling reason. It is also worth noting that enslaved women did not always have to keep pregnancies that they did not want. Abortifacients, or natural substances that could terminate a pregnancy, were commonly "used among slaves as a form of political resistance."<sup>19</sup> Comparisons of child spacing between mainland Africa and enslaved people in the West Indies suggest that delays in weaning were also a method of forestalling pregnancy - another method of avoiding an unwanted baby.<sup>20</sup> By having kept the pregnancy and taken the extra trouble and risk involved in fleeing in her state suggests that it was wanted.

There is no way to recover the full truth of Eliza's story, but her owner's specific mention of the children left behind is a detail worth considering. Nelly's aforementioned acquittal of the charge of infanticide is a demonstration of the worthlessness of enslaved children; the decision was partially founded on the fact that she was a more valuable economic resource than the lost child, and so her owner's estate benefited from keeping her from execution.<sup>21</sup> The importance that Sylvester placed on the children that were left behind is unusual and the nature of slavery in Louisiana makes the explanation that he considered them to be his, a viable one. If he valued the children (even economically), then it may have been difficult for Eliza to take any measures to rid herself of them. In such a situation, her only option to escape this forced motherhood and remove herself from the trauma of her sexual exploitation may have been to escape the plantation entirely.

The act of fleeing from an oppressive slave owner was one of the ultimate forms of resistance in which enslaved people could engage. It allowed them to resist the control of their movement and the restriction of their bodily autonomy, while giving them a chance to achieve actual freedom if they were so able. The fugitive slave advertisements describing the escaped women Bett and Eliza represent two opposite approaches to this reclamation of life and body, both directly related to their motherhood. Whether they were trying to salvage a family before it could be lost or escape from an unsalvageable family, the role of motherhood in the pursuit of freedom was of central importance to them both.



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gomer Williams, History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1744-1812 (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), p. 588.

<sup>2</sup> Donald R. Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806," Journal of the Early Republic, vol. 2, no. 4 (Winter 1982), p. 361.

<sup>3</sup> Lucille Mathurin Mair, "Women Field Workers in Jamaica During Slavery," Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader, eds. Verene Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2000), p. 396.

<sup>4</sup> The "paucity of material about enslaved women" is thoroughly discussed in Marisa J. Fuentes's Dispossessed Lives, where it is considered within its historical context and as a form of archival violence. Marisa J. Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> An example of this tendency is a piece of legislation dealing with exactly how to dispose of the children of slaves born in prison.

Brett Josef Derbes, "'SECRET HORRORS': ENSLAVED WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY, 1833-1862," The Journal of African American History, vol. 98, no. 2 (Spring 2013), p. 280.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Bush, "African Caribbean Slave Mothers and Children: Traumas of Dislocation and Enslavement Across the Atlantic World," Caribbean Quarterly, vol. 56, no. ½ (March-June 2010), p. 83.

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861," The Journal of Southern History, vol. 68, no. 3 (August 2002), p. 534.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N.Y., 1785-1830," NWSA Journal, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1988-1989), p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> Further details about Bett's fate after her escape can be found in Mackey's Done with Slavery. She lost her baby and was "briefly held on suspicion of murdering the child," although whether she committed this crime or not was unclear.

Frank Mackey, Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montréal, 1760-1840 (McGill-Queen's Press, 2010), p. 309.

<sup>10</sup> While Nelly was eventually acquitted for what appeared to be financial reasons, this explanation was the foundation of her insanity defence in court.

Wilma King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts," The Journal of African American History, vol. 92, no. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 37-46.

<sup>11</sup> "RAN-AWAY from the subscribers," print, Quebec Gazette (Quebec City, QC), issue 1125, 8 March 1787, p. 2. [https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=F\\_tUKv7nyWgC&dat=17870308&printsec=frontpage&hl=en](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=F_tUKv7nyWgC&dat=17870308&printsec=frontpage&hl=en)

<sup>12</sup> Marcus Wood describes running away as an act of self-theft. Marcus Wood, "Rhetoric and the Runaway: The Iconography of Slave Escape in England and America," Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865 (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 79

<sup>13</sup> Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 25, 56-58.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, "'Un Nègre nommé [sic] Lubin ne connaissant pas Sa Nation': The Small World of Louisiana Slavery," Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World, ed. Cecile Vidal (Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her master ... a negroe girl named Thursday': Examining evidence of punishment, isolation, and trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec fugitive slave advertisements," Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Amani T. Marshall, "'THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE LURKING ABOUT THE CITY': ENSLAVED WOMEN RUNAWAYS IN ANTEBELLUM CHARLESTON," The South Carolina Historical Magazine, vol. 115, no. 3 (July 2014), p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> This possibility seems more far-fetched though since this would imply that Bett had already arranged for someone to assist her with the birth or that she was willing to give birth alone.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," Archival Science, vol. 2, (2002), p. 100.

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<sup>19</sup> Londa Schiebinger, Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, "Fertility Differentials between Slaves in the United States and the British West Indies: A Note on Lactation Practices and their Possible Implications," The William Mary Quarterly, Third Series, vol. 35, no. 2 (April 1978), p. 358.

<sup>21</sup> King, "Mad Enough to Kill," pp. 46, 52.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: “RAN-AWAY from the subscribers,” print, Quebec Gazette (Quebec City, QC), issue 1125, 8 March 1787, p. 2.

[https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=F\\_tUKv7nyWgC&dat=17870308&printsec=frontpage&hl=en](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=F_tUKv7nyWgC&dat=17870308&printsec=frontpage&hl=en)

Figure 2: “RUNAWAY,” print, The Daily Picayune (New Orleans, LA), 10 January 1838.

<https://fotm.link/qFswEGyPiZJAsYivVsZu1S>

## HAIR EXPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS OF HANNAH AND THURSDAY

Bella Silverman

The infrastructure of Transatlantic Slavery was premised on the understanding of the “slave as property.”<sup>1</sup> Slave owners strove to create controlled landscapes that would determine the uses and locations of enslaved peoples.<sup>2</sup> However, many enslaved peoples violated these prescribed spatial boundaries. These violations are acutely documented in fugitive slave advertisements of the era. Eighteenth-century runaway advertisements written by slave owners, paradoxically, often subverted the dehumanizing nature of slavery by forcing owners to list individual characteristics, effectively rendering the enslaved individuals human.<sup>3</sup> Notably, descriptions of enslaved peoples’ hair varied greatly, functioning both as a means of expression and resistance against the dominate trends of the white ruling class.

Stephen Dence’s fugitive slave advertisement for Hannah published in the *Virginia Gazette* dated 26 March 1767 (fig. 1) and John Rock’s advertisement for Thursday in the *Halifax Gazette*, dated 1 September 1772 (fig. 2) typify the rhetoric used in descriptions for African hairstyling practices throughout the period of Transatlantic Slavery.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I seek to deconstruct the slave owner’s perspective and illuminate the enslaved women’s lived experiences, highlighting their ability to both quietly and physically resist enslavement through their hairstyles. I will use Hannah and Thursday’s fugitive slave advertisements to analyze the resistance methods embodied in enslaved women’s hairstyling and the ways in which slave owners represented African haircare practices through fugitive advertisements. In addition, I will compare the experiences of enslaved women in both regions by contrasting Virginia’s communal plantations and religiosity with Halifax’s sparsely populated slave community.

In addition to outlining Hannah and Thursday’s hairstyles, Dence and Rock make explicit their use of corporal punishment in their fugitive slave advertisements, which informs their perceptions of African women’s hairstyling and other self-fashioning practices popular at the time. In Hannah’s advertisement, Dence wrote that she had, “remarkable long hair, or wool,” and went on to note that she “has many scars on her back, occasioned by whipping.” Regarding Thursday, Rock stated, “she has a lump above her Right Eye... and red Ribbon about her Head.” If the slave body was “property,” their personality was not. Corporal violence, therefore, manifested out of the desire to break down the personality and individuality of the enslaved, similarly to the evocation of racist tropes and language that was designed to homogenize and render the enslaved non-human.<sup>5</sup> Both slave owners’ hair descriptions and admission of the use of corporal punishment confirmed their all-encompassing racist sentiments

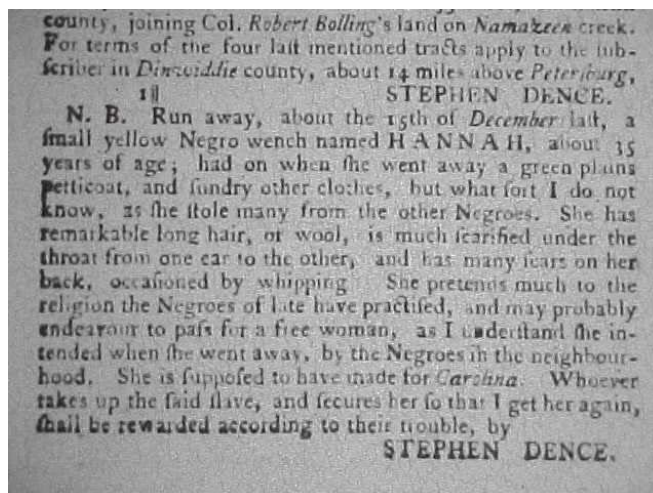


Figure 1: Stephen Dence, “N.B. Run Away,” *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), p. 3, (March 26, 1767), The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia, United States of America.

<https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=67.PD.14&page>



Figure 2: John Rock, “Ran Away from her Master,” *Halifax Gazette*, p. 3, (September 1, 1772), Nova Scotia, Canada.

art forms and vehicles which facilitated messages in a non-verbal manner.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the codes or meanings behind headwraps varied between regions in specific countries.<sup>15</sup> Once enslaved, the expression through one’s hair was equally, if not more important, as it was one of the few forms of self-expression in an otherwise oppressive environment. According to a vast array of fugitive slave advertisements, and the analysis of Shane White and Graham White, hair was a vestige of the enslaved self that was left relatively untouched by slave owners.<sup>16</sup> For example, enslaved women who attended outlaw parties in the South often donned their favorite headwrap. Others removed the scarf to display a hairstyle underneath: cornrows, plaits, straightened hair, or tidy Afros were just some of the styles fashioned by

and belief that enslaved Africans are non-subjects: a people with no histories, memories, or emotions.<sup>6</sup>

The naturalization of white supremacist violence inflicted on Africans and the derogatory labels for African hair reveal the widespread white belief that Africans were non-human.<sup>7</sup> “Wool,” the term employed by Dence, was utilized by white people to insist that black hair was closer to animals like sheep and goats.<sup>8</sup> The expression “wool” conflated Africans with animals to better differentiate their hair from the “superior” white variety.<sup>9</sup> In Thursday’s case, her headpiece may have been a “ribbon,” as Rock termed it, but more likely, it was a headwrap.<sup>10</sup> Headwraps were worn by enslaved women as a means of expression, cultural connection, or for cleanliness.<sup>11</sup> Further corroborating the presence of Thursday’s headwrap is an 1890 marketplace photograph in Halifax that documents an African Canadian woman wearing a head-wrap in this region. (fig. 3) Thus, if Thursday was in fact wearing a headwrap, Rock’s misrepresentation confirmed that he lacked a conception of African dress practices, supporting the idea that he viewed Thursday as a non-subject.

Traditionally, African cultures valued hairstyling as a mode of communication.<sup>12</sup> Various hair designs and headwrapping practices conveyed social affiliations such as ethnicity, marital status, sex, age, and occupation.<sup>13</sup>

Shaving, cutting, wrapping, and braiding were centuries-old



Figure 3: George H. Craig, *The Basket sellers are mainly Mi'kmaq, but the group also includes African Nova Scotians*, (1890), image no. A8289; acc. No. 94.55.207, Dartmouth Heritage Museum, Nova Scotia, Canada.  
<https://novascotia.ca/archives/africans/archives.asp?ID=148>

enslaved women.<sup>17</sup> By taking pride in their hair, as they or their ancestors had done in Africa, enslaved women implicitly challenged the dehumanizing, oppressive nature of slavery.

Hannah's long hair and Thursday's accessorized head functioned as a form of resistance throughout their enslavement. Hannah's hair, "worn long," as Dence described, was an act of defiance in and of itself; having long hair was an active and resistive decision for enslaved people because they had to set aside time and manufacture implements to tend to their hair.<sup>18</sup> By wearing her hair long, Hannah deliberately subverted the meanings behind labels such as "wool," thus challenging the race-based beauty ideals that dominated the South. The contempt of white people for African women's long hair is evident in Sarah Rice's autobiography wherein she recounts her great-grandmother's "gorgeous [African] hair."<sup>19</sup> Rice tells that during the time that her grandmother lived, women were wearing their hair in big round curls, so she ringletted her hair as well.<sup>20</sup> Her grandmothers' mistress, upon seeing her hair, disapproved of this style and subsequently cut it all off.<sup>21</sup> Although Dence's description lacks stylistic details, by simply wearing her hair long and exposed, Hannah both challenged white insecurities surrounding black beauty and took pride in a biological trait that was deemed inferior by whites.

Thursday's "red ribbon," or headwrap, was a method commonly employed by enslaved women as both a symbol of expression and freedom. This is exemplified in the aftermath of Virginia's Emancipation Proclamation, when enslaved people were said to have been "stealing," owners' household goods.<sup>22</sup> According to a slave holding woman, "[r]ibbons and trinkets were among the collection of stolen finery," extracted by enslaved women.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the "pink ribbons" and "dozen bows" that an enslaved woman named Peggy tied into her children's hair exhibited "the pride of their freedom."<sup>24</sup> The custom of head covering was also employed as a method of self-preservation, particularly among urban mulatto women. Wearing headwraps allowed mulatto women to hide their beauty and shield themselves from the attention of white men.<sup>25</sup> Artfully tied and shaped, headwraps, subsequently, developed into an elaborate practice and subverted its initial purpose of de-beautification.<sup>26</sup>

African women retained their headwrapping traditions during their years of enslavement. According to Steeve O. Buckridge, enslaved women and their descendants regarded headwraps as a "helmet of courage that evoked an image of true homeland - be that Africa or the new homeland, the Americas."<sup>27</sup> Thus, headwraps were not only used as materials of resistance, but they also facilitated a connection to African cultural heritage. The style of headwrap worn was determined by the length of the fabric and colours used, as well as the

To be SOLD to the biggest bidder, on  
Monday the 11th of MAY next, at  
Buckingham court-house, being court  
day,  
TWO hundred and fifteen acres of  
LAND in the said county, lying on Williams creek,  
and formerly the property of Allen Tate, of Dinwiddie county;  
one half the money to be paid at the signing a deed, and the  
other half in twelve months. Also to be sold, four other  
tracts of LAND, viz. 277 acres in Dinwiddie, with 60,000  
corn hills and 50,000 tobacco hills under a good fence, about  
300 bearing apple trees, two barns, overseer's house, and  
Negro quarters; the land lies on Butterwood creek, joining  
Bath parish new glee. Also 140 acres, in the said county,  
whereon are two new barns 32 by 20, Negro quarters, over-  
seer's house, corn crib, and corn and tobacco ground sufficient  
to work six hands, lately cleared. Also 144 acres, in the  
said county, about 16 miles from Petersburg, whereon is a  
small plantation and orchard. Also 135 acres, in Amelia  
county, joining Col. Robert Bolling's land on Namackow creek.  
For terms of the four last mentioned tracts apply to the sub-  
scriber in Dinwiddie county, about 14 miles above Petersburg,

Figure 4: Stephen Dence, "Two Hundred and fifteen acres," *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)*, p. 3, (March 26, 1767), The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia, United States of America. <https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=67.PD.14&p-age=3&res=LO>



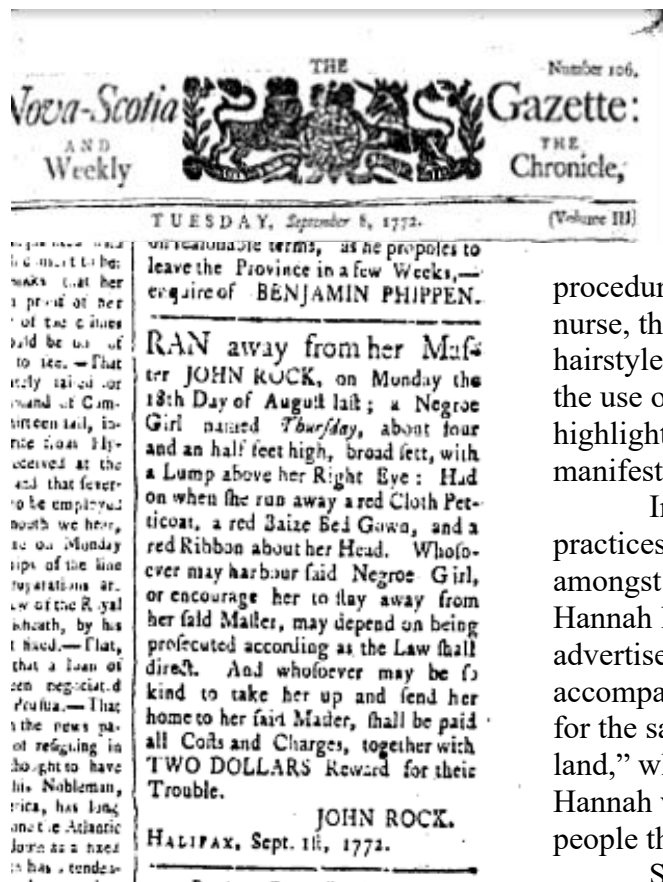


Figure 5: John Rock, “Ran Away from her Master,” *Halifax Gazette*, p. 6, (September 8, 1772), Nova Scotia, Canada.

twist, and spread his tail,” while another Black man, “[began] combing and pulling the wool of the Man... till he was completed the Coiffure.”<sup>31</sup> Latrobe further noted that African men “mutually shav[ed] and dress[ed] each other.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in recalling haircare practices on a Georgia plantation for a Federal Writers’ Project interview, a former enslaved person described: “On Sundays, the old folks [adults] stayed home and looked one another’s heads over for nits and lice. Whenever they found anything, they mashed it twixt their finger and thumb and went ahead searching. Then the woman’s wrapped each other hair the way it was to stay fixed ‘til the next Sunday.”<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, it is evident that through the act of communal haircare practices on plantations, enslaved people in Virginia had the ability to provide each other with a sense of connection and comfort amid their oppressive circumstances.

Hannah’s plantation lifestyle in Virginia starkly contrasts with the cultural isolation likely experienced by Thursday in Halifax. Virginia’s 1790 census records indicate that there were 300,213 black people in the state, 12,254 of whom were free, and 287,959 of whom were enslaved.<sup>34</sup> Nova Scotia’s 1767 Census, on the other hand, lists its total population (blacks and whites) at 13,374, only 104 of whom were of African descent, spread throughout 12 of the 30 townships, the majority being found in the Halifax area.<sup>35</sup> Considering the period and evidence of slavery, it can be assumed that the African population were mainly enslaved. In Canada, there

women’s cultural norms.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the method of tying headwraps was important in conveying messages and meanings amongst communities. For example, in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the headwrap conveyed the woman’s occupation.<sup>29</sup> There were specific headwraps and tying

procedures for the cane-cutter, the laundress, the nurse, the house servant and the field worker.<sup>30</sup> The hairstyles employed by Hannah and Thursday speak to the use of their bodies as mediums of resistance and highlight how the smallest amount of agency could manifest into empowerment.

In plantation colonies, such as Virginia, hair practices were often a communal and collective effort amongst enslaved people. It can be presumed that Hannah lived on a plantation because her advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* was accompanied by an additional advertisement by Dence for the sale of “Two hundred and fifteen acres of land,” which had “Negro quarters.” (fig. 4) Therefore, Hannah was likely surrounded by numerous enslaved people that shared her unfortunate circumstances.

Sources indicate that communal hair practices were frequently mobilized in Virginia plantations. For example, in 1797, the white architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe observed while visiting a Virginia plantation that an African American, “[took] his hair out of a

were approximately one to two enslaved people per owner.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Thursday's experience in Halifax was likely one of isolation and void of profound cultural and community connection.

Further proving Thursday's isolation in Halifax is a record of John Rock's will and testament. In 1776, documented in the Halifax probate court, the "Inventory of John Rock," states that amongst his property, including a varied list of possessions, was "A Negro wrench, named Thursday."<sup>37</sup> Notably, Thursday was valued by the appraisers at twenty-five pounds in Halifax's currency; but the final account of the estate report records her sale to John Bishop at twenty pounds.<sup>38</sup> Ostensibly, if Rock had owned other enslaved people at the time of his death, their presence would also have been recorded as "inventory" in his will. Therefore, one can conclude, that for at least the period before his death, Thursday was Rock's only enslaved person. Unfortunately, this record also proves that after two printings of Thursday's advertisement in the Halifax Gazette, on September 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 1772, she was recaptured and resold after Rock's death. (fig. 5) Thus, one can deduce that Hannah and Thursday's bondage experiences diverged greatly due to the regions in which they lived, although they both shared the practice of expression and resistance through hair.

In his advertisement, Dence explicitly referenced the communal structure Hannah aligned herself with: religion. Dence claimed that Hannah, "pretend[ed] much to the religion the Negroes of late have practiced."<sup>39</sup> One can deduce that Hannah used religion as an escape from the obscenities she experienced and witnessed daily.<sup>40</sup> In Hanover, Virginia, after the year 1750, whites began to more fervently impose Christianity onto African Americans and were successful in converting them in large numbers.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it can be deduced that Hannah likely partook in Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Evangelical clergymen, such as Samuel Davis, a Presbyterian of Hanover, was active in converting the black population of Virginia.<sup>43</sup> He stated, "There is a great number of Negroes in these parts; and sometimes I see a 100 and more among my Hearers". Moreover, Reverend Mr. Todd, also of Hanover, told of his success on November 18:

"The sacred hours of the Sabbath, that used to be spent frolicking, dancing, and other profane courses, are now employed in attending upon public ordinances, in learning to read at home, or in prayer together, and singing the praises of God and the Lamb."<sup>44</sup>

Virginia, according to multiple sources, was the home to a substantial Christian black community.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, alongside the communal haircare practices that Hannah likely participated in, religion was also a source of community within Virginian plantations.

In Halifax, Thursday's religious experience was in stark contrast to that of the black Christian community in Virginia. Due to Nova Scotia's small African population, there was not a comparable black Christian community during the period of Thursday's enslavement.<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, Thursday's religious exposure was probably facilitated by her owner, Rock. Records of Halifax's St. Paul's Church show that occasional meetings of the wardens and vestry were held at Rock's residence.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, in the list of donors to St. Paul's, his name stands second for the largest amount.<sup>48</sup> Notably, ministers in Nova Scotia were heavily involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade; religious officials adjusted their biblical beliefs to be slave owners, baptizers, and convertors of enslaved Africans.<sup>49</sup> Thus, it is highly likely that Thursday was exposed to and participated in religious activities. However, due to Rock's and Nova Scotian slave owners' widespread affiliation with Christianity, religion probably did not act as a form of communal solace for Thursday, but as a reminder of her enslavement.

Both Hannah and Thursday asserted themselves through symbolic resistance expressed through hairstyles. Hannah's and Thursday's experiences of being enslaved, however, differed starkly due to the varying conditions of the regions in which they lived. Polarizing their

experiences further is the knowledge that Thursday was recaptured and Hannah may have successfully escaped. According to Dence's advertisement, Hannah was a "small yellow Negro," and she "is supposed to have made for Carolina." Therefore, it is fair to assume that Hannah was mulatto, and was attempting to return to her home or to her family, in Carolina. There is no further evidence that indicates Hannah was recaptured. Thomas Watson Smith contends that since Nova Scotia was a port province, seafaring was the most common method of escape.<sup>50</sup> However, while his deduction was almost certainly true for enslaved males, it was likely not the case for enslaved females like Thursday, for whom escape by ship opened the possibility of physical and sexual violence at the hands of the crew. Advertisements often cautioned sea captains not to harbour fugitive slaves. Rock's advertisement stated, "[w]hosoever may harbor said Negroe Girl, or encourage her to stay away from her said Master, may depend on being prosecuted according as the Law shall direct." Although Rock did not explicitly mention sea captains, he was clearly stating that others were not to aid in her escape. Additionally, of the one hundred and four Africans in the 1767 Nova Scotia census, 49 of them were female and 55 were male.<sup>51</sup> Due to this small number, locating a fugitive slave was surely easier in Nova Scotia than in Virginia.

For enslaved women, hairstyling was an act of resistance that both facilitated cultural connection and subverted white supremacist ideologies. In Virginia, haircare was a communal practice, allowing the enslaved to physically support one another and remind them of their African ancestral heritage. Halifax's sparse African population starkly contrasted the experience of a Virginia plantation. While Hannah was likely surrounded by various other enslaved blacks, Thursday was probably the only enslaved person in her owner's home.<sup>52</sup> Communal structures related both to hair and religion offered enslaved people a sense of cohesion amid the oppressive conditions of Transatlantic Slavery. Hair acted as an aesthetic fixture of agency for Hannah and Thursday, allowing them to express vestiges of identity, community, and African origins within an otherwise oppressive life of enslavement.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Wood, "Representing Pain and the Describing Torture: Slavery, Punishment, and Martyrology," Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865, (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp. "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861." The Journal of Southern History 68, no. 3 (2002), p. 534.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Wood, "Rhetoric and the Runaway: The Iconography of Slave Escape in England and America," Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865 (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Dence, "N.B. Run Away," Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), p. 3, Williamsburg, Virginia, March 26, 1767, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.; John Rock, "Ran Away from her Master," Halifax Gazette, p. 3, September 1, 1772.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Wood, "Rhetoric and the Runaway: The Iconography of Slave Escape in England and America," Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865 (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 216.

<sup>6</sup> Angela Rosenthal and Agnes Lugo-Ortiz eds., "Introduction: Envisioning Slave Portraiture," Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." The Journal of Southern History 61, no. 1 (1995), p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> White and White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture," p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> White and White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture," p. 56.

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- <sup>10</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Fugitive Slave Advertisements," ARTH 411 Seminar, James McGill was a Slave Owner: Slavery and the History of Universities McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 10 February 2020.
- <sup>11</sup> Steeve O. Buckridge, The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890, (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), p. 87.
- <sup>12</sup> White, Shane, and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." The Journal of Southern History 61, no. 1 (1995), p. 49.
- <sup>13</sup> White and White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture," p. 49.
- <sup>14</sup> White and White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture," p. 49.
- <sup>15</sup> Steeve O. Buckridge, The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890, (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), p. 88.
- <sup>16</sup> White, Shane, and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." The Journal of Southern History 61, no. 1 (1995), p. 49.
- <sup>17</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement," Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South, Gender and American Culture, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 84.
- <sup>18</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." The Journal of Southern History 61, no. 1 (1995), p. 50.
- <sup>19</sup> Sarah Rice and Louise Hutchings Westling, He Included Me: The Autobiography of Sarah Rice, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Rice, He Included Me, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> Rice, He Included Me, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp, "To Get Closer to Freedom," Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South, Gender and American Culture, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 121.
- <sup>23</sup> Camp, "To Get Closer to Freedom," p. 121.
- <sup>24</sup> Camp, "To Get Closer to Freedom," p. 121. The term "ribbon" was likely the word used by Southern white people when referring to head-wraps.
- <sup>25</sup> Kym S. Rice and Martha B. Katz-Hyman, World of a Slave: Encyclopedia of the Material Life of Slaves in the United States [2 volumes]: Encyclopedia of the Material Life of Slaves in the United State, (ABC-CLIO, 2010), 267.
- <sup>26</sup> Rice and Katz-Hyman, World of a Slave, p. 267.
- <sup>27</sup> Steeve O. Buckridge, The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890, (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), p. 88.
- <sup>28</sup> Buckridge, The Language of Dress, p. 88.
- <sup>29</sup> Buckridge, The Language of Dress, p. 88.
- <sup>30</sup> Buckridge, The Language of Dress, p. 88.
- <sup>31</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." The Journal of Southern History 61, no. 1 (1995), p. 46.
- <sup>32</sup> "Slave Hair and African American Culture," White and White, p. 46.
- <sup>33</sup> Kym S. Rice and Martha B. Katz-Hyman, World of a Slave: Encyclopedia of the Material Life of Slaves in the United States [2 volumes]: Encyclopedia of the Material Life of Slaves in the United State, (ABC-CLIO, 2010), p. 268.
- <sup>34</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States," (Working Paper No. 56, 2002) <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>, p. 79.
- <sup>35</sup> Linda Carty, Afua Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, Adrienne Shadd, and Peggy Bristow, "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia," We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 15. This census number may have been free blacks, as enslaved people were likely not counted as human. However, I could not find information that would indicate this discrepancy.
- <sup>36</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p. 87.
- <sup>37</sup> Thomas Watson Smith, The Slave in Canada, v. x (Halifax, N.S.: Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1899). 13. For further analysis of Thursday's representation in John Rock's fugitive slave advertisement and estate inventory, see also: Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master...a Negroe Girl named Thursday': Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements," Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (NYC: Routledge, 2017), p. 79-81.

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<sup>38</sup> Watson Smith, The Slave in Canada, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave: Related by Herself, DocSouth books ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2017), p. 84. Hypocritically, whites ridiculed black religion and spiritual practices while they used Christianity as a weapon for slavery. For example, in her slave narrative, Mary Prince relates that she was married in the Moravian Chapel because English Churches did not marry enslaved people, and no free man can marry an enslaved woman. Therefore, whites both alienated enslaved people from mainstream religions as well as converted them, which may have been the case in regards to Hannah's experience in Virginia.

<sup>40</sup> Dena J. Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War, (University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 105.

<sup>41</sup> Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, p. 103.

<sup>43</sup> Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> Although individual slave owners surely imposed Christianity on the enslaved in Halifax, the isolated living situations of most enslaved people who were forced to live in households in which they were one of few or the only enslaved person, meant that group religious congregations would have been far less common than in Virginia. I have found no sources indicating that there was a black Christian community during this period in Nova Scotia.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Watson Smith, The Slave in Canada, v. x (Halifax, N.S.: Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1899). 13.

<sup>48</sup> Watson Smith, The Slave in Canada, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Linda Carty, Afua Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, Adrienne Shadd, and Peggy Bristow, "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia," We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Watson Smith, The Slave in Canada, v. x (Halifax, N.S.: Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1899), p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Linda Carty, Afua Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, Adrienne Shadd, and Peggy Bristow, "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia," We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Watson Smith, The Slave in Canada, v. x (Halifax, N.S.: Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1899), p. 13.

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<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: Stephen Dence, “N.B. Run Away,” Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), p. 3 (March 26, 1767), The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia, United States of America.

<https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=67.PD.14&page=3&res=LO>

Figure 2: John Rock, “Ran Away from her Master,” Halifax Gazette, p. 3 (September 1, 1772), Nova Scotia, Canada.

Figure 3: George H. Craig, The Basket sellers are mainly Mi’kmaq, but the group also includes African Nova Scotians, (1890), image no. A8289; acc. No. 94.55.207, Dartmouth Heritage Museum, Nova Scotia, Canada. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=148>

Figure 4: Stephen Dence, “Two Hundred and fifteen acres,” Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), p. 3, (March 26, 1767), The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia, United States of America. <https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=67.PD.14&page=3&res=LO>

Figure 5: John Rock, “Ran Away from her Master,” Halifax Gazette, p. 6 (September 8, 1772), Nova Scotia, Canada.



# FUGITIVE SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS AS SITES OF VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE: A COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ESCAPES OF BELL AND BELLOW

Sosena Tilahun

Fugitive slave advertisements, initially shamelessly published in newspapers with the intent to expose and subsequently recapture runaway enslaved people, today serve as a major tool in uncovering some examples of enslaved populations' resistance under the institutions of slavery. Their extensive use of individualized descriptions for the fugitives ranging from physical to personality markers, whilst a reflection of the slave owners' perspectives, are nonetheless important as they offer remarkably more detailed descriptions than most other records.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, if one considers the erasure and suppression of enslaved individuals within North American history as an active process of archival violence,<sup>2</sup> it is important to recognize that fugitive slave advertisements, while very limiting and biased, still serve as one of the very few documented descriptions of enslaved individuals, and memorializations of the acts of resistance and defiance.<sup>3</sup> Critical analysis of such colonial documents can ultimately act against the inherent archival violence and erasure of the institution of slavery, especially in regions like Canada. By examining two very different cases of fugitive slave advertisements, insights can be gained on the varied factors which could potentially play major roles in the escapees' situations.

One should note that fugitive slave advertisements were some of the most detailed records of enslaved individuals. Shane White and Graham White have referred to them as, "the most detailed descriptions of the bodies of enslaved African Americans available."<sup>4</sup> Of course their contention applies to most regions where Transatlantic Slavery transpired. However, as Charmaine A. Nelson has argued, fugitive slave advertisements remain the most useful resource for the recuperation of the lives and experiences of the enslaved in regions where abolition predated the development of photography.<sup>5</sup> The desire to recapture fleeing enslaved people provided an incentive for those who paid for the advertisements (mainly slave owners) to describe them with a remarkable specificity. This was a result of the financial stakes that slave owners had in the loss of people who they deemed to be their property. Given the nature of slavery as an institution, freeing oneself was the most commonly recorded form of resistance, because it was perceived as a crime that fundamentally challenged property relations.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, fugitive slave advertisements are archival evidence of the prolific resistance of enslaved people.

Upon analysis, these published advertisements serve as a remarkable source of knowledge regarding not only the individuals described within them,<sup>7</sup> but further, the potential constraints and opportunities

they were met with, inferred within the context and details of such instances of rebellion. For example, two particularly interesting cases in which

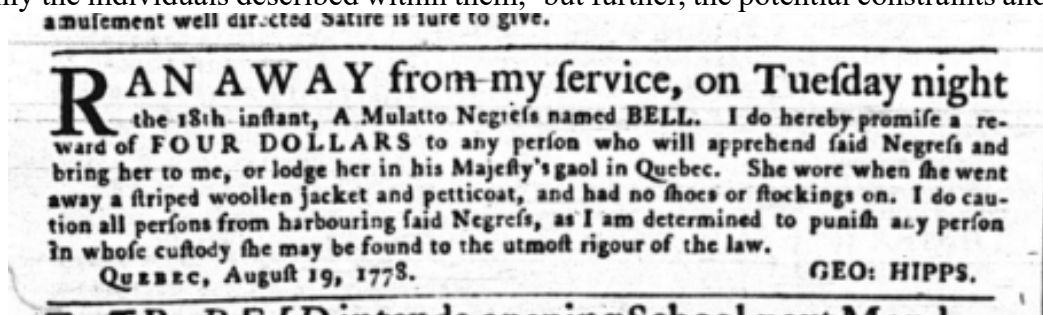


Figure 1: "RAN AWAY from my service, on Tuesday night," *Quebec Gazette*, Issue No. 677 (August 19, 1778), Newspaper Notice, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal

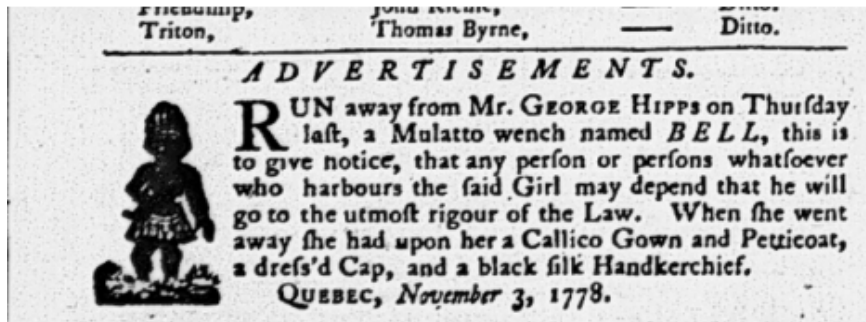


Figure 2: “RUN away from Mr George Hipps..., a Mulatto wench named BELL,” *Quebec Gazette*, (November 5, 1778), Newspaper Notice, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal

young women fled within vastly different contexts are interesting to contrast. The first, an instance of a runaway named Bell, was first reported in the *Quebec Gazette* in August of 1778 (fig. 1), with a second case reported a few months later in late October.<sup>8</sup> (fig. 2) The second example was an advertisement published in

the *Fog's Weekly Journal* in January of 1731, announcing the escape of an enslaved woman named Bellow.<sup>9</sup> Notably, both involve young women in contexts which are understudied within History and Slavery Studies: mid-eighteenth-century Canada and Europe.

In both of these advertisements, the slave owners of the enslaved women in question were forced to explicitly admit the resistance of the fugitives they sought to recapture, not voluntarily but rather as a necessary strategy to secure them. In the escape published in the *Quebec Gazette*, the subscriber, George Hipps, was forced not only to publish the initial escape notice, but later to post a second one, as a result of another instance of rebellion. The increasing aggressiveness of the tone in the attempts to capture Bell gives us insight into Hipps' likely frustration with regards to Bell's continued demonstrations of resistance. While in the first notice Hipps referred to Bell as a “Mulatto Negress,” in the second, he called her a “Mulatto wench.”<sup>10</sup> The second advertisement for Bellow, highlights the extent to which the enslaved woman had prepared her departure, describing the various items of clothing with which she fled. (fig. 3) In stark contrast, during her initial flight in August, Bell fled “with no shoes and stocking on”; and exceedingly rare occurrence in Quebec, regardless of the season.

Overwhelmingly, when observing fugitive slave advertisements in the Canadian context, a seasonal trend becomes clear. The vast majority of escape attempts occurred in the milder months, particularly following April.<sup>11</sup> This, above all was a result of harsh weather conditions in the colder months which would have greatly shaped one's ability to successfully escape and survive. Quite literally, escaping in the winter would have put enslaved people's lives at risk since the inability to seek suitable shelter quickly would have led to frostbite or death from exposure.<sup>12</sup> Bell's choice to depart not only originally in August, towards the end of the summer, but once again at the eve of November, when the harsh Canadian fall and winter weather became a more urgent concern, is thus an important detail which may indicate the extent of George Hipps' violence.

Although it is not explicitly stated, because this document was only circulated from George Hipps' perspective with the ultimate goal of incentivizing others to recapture Bell, one must consider the realities of sexual violence, particularly within the domestic forms of labour which dominated enslaved women's roles in the northern context of slavery.<sup>13</sup>

The second advertisement (figure 3), while in South East London rather than Quebec, similarly announced the escape of a “negro woman, named Bellow, run away from Captain Healey Harris on Christmas day”. Given that the advertisement later stated that she left with “two other gowns...a bed and one pair of blankets, &c.,” one can assume that she had likely devised a plan to some degree prior to her escape, which contrasts with what we know of Bell's first escape. (fig. 3)

Thus,  
despite the  
likely hyper-  
surveillance  
and isolation  
of European  
Slavery,  
Bellow  
clearly

managed not  
only to  
escape, but

further to gather provisions to aid her in her journey through the British winter. Thus, while Bell's initial escape reads more like a sudden flight, Bellow's attempt seems like a more coordinated affair. Later, however, Hipps' second advertisement may indicate that Bell's second attempt was a slightly more prepared endeavour because he stated that she fled with "a callico Gown and petticoat" as well as a hat and handkerchief. (fig. 2) While not adapted for extreme cold, the belongings she fled with may indicate that this attempt was less sudden when compared to her previous departure.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, another common theme, as in many fugitive slave advertisements, is the use of varying strategies for incentivizing the newspapers' readers to report enslaved runaways ranging from monetary rewards to overt threats.<sup>15</sup> Both Hipps and Harris adopted threatening tones in their advertisements. This may likely be a result of rising anxiety amongst slave-owning classes with regards to the threat of abolitionist movements in the decades preceding the 1833 Abolition Act, implemented in 1834 throughout the British Empire.<sup>16</sup> In fact, it was not uncommon for slave owners to employ litigious and threatening tones within their postings, so as to dissuade potential readers from sympathizing or colluding with runaways. For instance, Harris stated that any person who harboured the fugitive "shall be prosecuted according to Law." (fig. 3)

Similarly, Hipps used threatening language in his first advertisement, and further, his tone shifted with Bell's second escape. The latter notice simply glazes over her actual physical description, mainly centring the clothes with which she absconded and even avoided the convention of offering a reward to incentivize readers, contrasting with his original offer of four dollars. Instead, he threatened any potential allies and explicitly reminded the reader of his legal right to pursue anyone who may have impeded his search. Nelson writes "the arrogance of the slave owning class can often be deduced in the tone of the notices which, when the enslaved made a habit of escape, became more aggressive."<sup>17</sup> This arrogance and entitlement was legitimized not only through the institution of slavery, but as evidenced in these documents, through the intersecting institutions which upheld it as well, such as the press.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note that the publication of fugitive slave advertisements in weekly newspapers implies that the fugitive in question was able to successfully remain in hiding (or on the run) for long enough to have been noticed and subsequently reported by their slave owners, otherwise it is likely no records would have been produced about such escapes. This ultimately means that shorter and/or less successful attempts were unrecorded in print culture. Thus, it is unclear how many times Bellow and Bell may have attempted to escape in actuality, and one cannot discount the possibility of such additional unrecorded acts of resistance.

**A Thin Negro Woman, named Bellow, run away from Captain Healey Harris on Christmas-day in the Morning; when she went away had on a Blue Stuff Gown, and took with her two other Gowns, one a Strip'd Cotton Gown, the other an Olive Colour Gown fac'd with Blue; and likewise a Bed and one Pair of Blankets, &c. Whoever will bring the said Negro Woman to the above said Capt. Harris in Dolphin-Court in Tower-Street, shall have Two Guineas Reward. If any Person shall harbour the said Negro Woman, he shall be prosecuted according to Law.**

Figure 3: "A Thin Negro Woman named Bellow, runaway from Captain Healey Harris," *Fog's Weekly Journal* (January 9, 1731) p. 3, Newspaper Notice, British Library: Online Burney Collection, London

Finally, one should note however that there is later evidence of Bell's recapture, through a bill of sale indicating the sale of a young enslaved woman named Isabella to Theophile Cramahé, Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec<sup>19</sup> on 14 November 1778.<sup>20</sup> This would suggest that she was not only caught, but almost immediately sold to another man. Although there is no clear evidence, one might infer that this was potentially a result of Hipps' frustration with regards to her continued resistance.

Ultimately, both women escaped in regions with slave minorities and as such, endured not only the winter cold but further, likely faced heightened levels of isolation and surveillance<sup>21</sup> relative to the American South, Caribbean, and northern South American contexts. This suggests that both women's escapes, regardless of the degree of planning, would have constituted a tremendous level of resistance and endurance to carry out. Broadly speaking, these cases exemplify how fugitive slave advertisements serve as important historical documents. They not only memorialize the violence of slavery as an institution, but further provide knowledge with regards to the very active and *varied* forms of resistance and agency enacted by enslaved black people in response to such atrocious conditions.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A fugitive slave advertisement would not only have listed the first name and age, but also often an extended description which went above and beyond as compared to, for instance, slave sale advertisements, bills of sale, and inventorial/estate records.
- <sup>2</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, "Introduction," Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) p. 6
- <sup>3</sup> Here one considers the act of running away from an oppressive and hyper-violent institution as inherently an act of resistance. One should note, however, that resistance was obviously not limited to such an act, as it was also characterized by various other forms of rebellion.
- <sup>4</sup> Graham White and Shane White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Journal of Southern History, vol. 61, no. 1 (February 1995), p. 49.
- <sup>5</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master...a Negroe Girl named Thursday': Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements," Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (NYC: Routledge, 2017), p. 72.
- <sup>6</sup> Jan Kurth, "Wayward Wenches and Wives: Runaway Women in the Hudson Valley, N. Y., 1785-1830," NWSA Journal, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1988-1989), p. 200.
- <sup>7</sup> Though represented through the slave owners' gaze, these documents are some of the most detailed records of enslaved individuals.
- <sup>8</sup> Hipps, George "RAN AWAY from my service, on Tuesday night," Quebec Gazette, Issue No. 677, 19 August 1778.
- <sup>9</sup> Healey Harris, "A Thin Negro Woman named Bellow, runaway from Captain Healey Harris," Fog's Weekly Journal, 9 January 1731, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master...'," p. 70.
- <sup>11</sup> Frank Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," Done With Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 310
- <sup>12</sup> In the Quebec newspaper notices transcribed by Mackey, one features an advertisement (notice #87) for a runaway named Charles who is described as having lost the ends of his two big toes as a result of frostbite. While it is unclear whether this was a result of a cruel punishment or hinted at a potential previous escape attempt, frostbite was a very real threat nonetheless. See: Azariah Pretchard, "RUN away from the Subscriber," Quebec Gazette, 22 May 1794; transcribed in Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," p. 337.
- <sup>13</sup> The situations of Bell and Bellow can be contrasted with slave societies like Jamaica in which enslaved women were more numerous and they frequently comprised the majority of field labourers. In such cases, field labour could provide distance from predatory slave owners. One should note however that sexual violence was imbedded in various forms, varying but omnipresent in different contexts. See: Lucille Mathurin Mair, "Women Field Workers in Jamaica

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During Slavery,” Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader, eds. Verene Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2000)

14. Note that Bell’s first departure was in late August and likely would have been more bearable climate-wise. However, one should note that the notice describing the initial escape details that Bell had fled with neither shoes nor stockings, a unique case amongst Mackey’s findings, even during the warmer seasons. This would likely have been the result of a continuously violent living situation which would explain Bell’s unplanned, urgent escape.

See: Charmaine A. Nelson “ ‘Servant, Seraglio, Savage or ‘Sarah’: Examining the Visual Representation of Black Female Subjects in Canadian Art and Visual Culture,” Women in the “Promised Land”: Essays in African Canadian History, eds. Nina Reid-Maroney, Boulou Ebanga de B’béri, and Wanda Thomas Bernard (Toronto/Vancouver: Women’s Press, 2018), p. 57.

15. Such threats were aimed mainly at those who collaborated with or harboured fugitives, as well as masters of vessels in some cases, often urged not to board or hire-on escapees.

16. Marcel Trudel mentions the rising anxiety of slave owners as observable through bills of sale in the late eighteenth century, namely Pierre Joinville’s contract for the sale of Cynda, a young girl from John Lagord. The deed featured an additional clause serving to protect Joinville with the option of reimbursement should there be any new abolitionary laws introduced which would *undermine his entitlements*. While the use of legal frameworks to protect slave owners was not new, the increasing reliance on such tools is what Trudel notes may suggest heightened anxiety. Tangentially, this may also be mirrored in other types of documents, such as the fugitive slave advertisements observed herein. Moreover, Trudel writes that while there is no clear evidence of cohesive anti-slavery movements in Quebec, the threat became more clearly prominent in the 1790’s.

See: Marcel Trudel, “Slaves Disappeared One by One,” Canada’s Forgotten Slaves Two Hundred Years of Bondage, trans. George Tombs (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2009), pp. 233-34.

17. Nelson, “ ‘Ran away from her Master...’,” p. 70.

18. For more on the intersection of slavery and the press see: Nelson, “ ‘Ran away from her Master’,” p. 70 and David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the 18th c. Mid-Atlantic,” The William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 56, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 243-72.

19. William Renwick Riddell, “Notes on the Slave in New France,” The Journal of Negro History, vol. 8, no. 3 (July 1923), p. 323.

20. This agreement took place just 19 days following her second escape on November 3rd. See: Mackey, “Appendix I: Newspaper Notices,” p. 321.

21. For more on settings which contrast with such solitary experiences, namely wherein enslaved people were permitted to participate within varying degrees of community building and cultural exchange, see: Gary A. Donaldson, “A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862,” The Journal of Negro History, vol. 69, no. 2 (Spring 1984), p. 63-72.

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## **PLATE LIST**

Figure 1: “RAN AWAY from my service, on Tuesday night”, The Quebec Gazette, Issue No. 677 (August 19, 1778), Newspaper Notice, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal.

Figure 2: “RUN away from Mr George Hipps..., a Mulatto wench named BELL”, The Quebec Gazette, (November 5, 1778), Newspaper Notice, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal.

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