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Abolitionist Traces, Interimperial Contexts: Briton Hammon's *Narrative* (1760) in Cuba and in Print

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Abstract

By taking seriously interimperialist contexts, this article reinterprets Briton Hammon's *Narrative* (1760). Due to Hammon's presence in Havana, Cuba, I read this piece of early American life writing against the grain to contest commonly accepted notions of canonicity centering the United States. Against a reading in which Briton Hammon's *Narrative* has been canonized as "the first slave narrative," I offer the term "abolitionist traces" as literary method to address how Briton Hammon's multilinguistic and interimperial contexts become suppressed due to the conditions of the text's publication by Green & Russell and advertisement in *Boston Post-Boy*, a pro-British and proslavery periodical. Rather than concede that this New England colonial context determines the text's ultimate scope, I read a revolutionary Caribbean context alongside Briton Hammon by way of hispanophone Havana. In Havana, Hammon spends eight and a half years in bondage and in service, both incarcerated and at liberty. Putting forth the Cuban context uncovers how Briton Hammon's *Narrative* does not subscribe to the common tropes of anglophone slave narratives, particularly "writing into being" and freedom as teleological finale. I stress the limitations of imposing national and monolingual frameworks for interpreting texts that take up bondage as key themes. Using Hammon's *Narrative* as example, this analysis forwards the notion that every singular context must be multiplied into plural contexts to account for overlapping geographies, politics, and lived experiences. Moving across and against US exceptionalism is therefore vital to an abolitionist method of interpretation, especially in making sense of how past bondage carries into our present, offering traces for resisting captivity when such resistance seems sparse in the archive.

The Problem of Canonicity, The Problematic of Abolition: Briton Hammon in Cuba

What if the first slave narrative is not actually what US-based scholars have typically understood as a "slave narrative" after all? This article details the various contexts

through which we may read Briton Hammon's eighteenth-century *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man*,¹ especially through the geography of Cuba and the early print culture of colonial New England. In so doing, genre-based conventions around the anglophone slave narrative are significantly unmoored, with a renewed focus on how abolition shapes reading practices. Upsetting these conventions matters, as Hammon's *Narrative* is understood to be the "first" within the genre of the anglophone slave narrative, so the way in which this text does not actually follow the conventions it supposedly originates bears significant consequences for genre-based reading practices.²

Notably, traditional readings of slave narratives have been substantially challenged, revised, and expanded to various degrees by early American scholars of Black diasporic literature, especially Keith Michael Green, Jeffrey Gagnon, Rhondda Robinson Thomas, Zachary McLeod Hutchins, and Cassander Smith.³ My work in this article follows the careful revisions by these scholars concerning literary criticism on early Black literature. As these researchers note, Hammon's *Narrative* depicts scenes of bondage that do not tend toward freedom; yet these scholars predominately focus on these implications in light of literature produced from what we now call the contiguous mainland United States as their geography of analysis. Hutchins and Smith, for example, write of Hammon's text "as an early illustration of self-making for black Africans in colonial Massachusetts."⁴ Gagnon and Green, with different points of focus, indicate the editorial interventions of Green & Russell as publishers of the *Narrative*, but without a significant analysis of colonial New England as peripheral to the Spanish empire by way of Havana, Cuba's revolutionary potential.⁵ Finally, Thomas, with an eye on legal writing throughout the Americas by African and African-descended people before 1800, only briefly notes Hammon as one of many who "inscribed themselves into the historical narrative of a developing new world controlled by Europeans," and does not linger with the text.⁶

Hammon's *Narrative* significantly engages across the various multilingual and interimperial sites of New England, Florida, Cuba, Jamaica, and London. Hammon faces servitude, slavery, kidnapping, capture, bondage, jail, and coerced military service imposed by white settler colonialists and European imperial forces.⁷ These forms of structural violence provide an account of Hammon's many "uncommon sufferings" as related in his brief fourteen-page *Narrative* (1760). Readers of the *Narrative*, whether or not they are familiar with what is later designated as the genre of the slave narrative, and whether or not they are familiar with the historical structural movements at play in the eighteenth-century Americas, will notice little to no liberation, at least not on the surface, available in this text.

In this way, Hammon's *Narrative* does not follow what becomes known in American literary criticism as the conventions of the anglophone slave narrative: There is no escape to freedom, no "writing into being,"⁸ although various escapes are detailed, and writing is indeed produced; Hammon ultimately ends his tale where he begins: in servitude in New England, to the very same slaveholder. While he encounters

“surprising deliverance”—which will take the form of the Christian God’s intercession into his sufferings, with a significant helping hand from a woman referred to as “Mrs. Betty Howard”—this deliverance seems to remain on the plane of the spiritual or theological, a hereafter liberation rather than a here-and-now freedom.⁹

This brutal and brief inauguration into the early print culture of Black letters¹⁰ in what is later designated as the United States—here, New England is part of several British colonial holdings in the Americas—falls outside of the generally understood readerly reception and circulation of the slave narrative: an abolitionist audience. Abolition became more widely understood in the Americas in the nineteenth century through creative and critical practices of lecturing, writing, and readership, enabling a public to confront the horrors of slavery.¹¹ Many who were Black both wrote and read these texts. To be an author is also to be a reader; we know that as early as Phillis Wheatley’s writing, there were those who shared her experiences who also responded to her work, such as Jupiter Hammon.¹²

However, abolition did not frame Briton Hammon’s *Narrative* in the sense that one associates with the writings of Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, and Harriet Jacobs. Hammon’s predating of this public intellectual exchange through the work’s publication by Green & Russell (which was not an abolitionist printing firm) did not allow for a public abolitionist readership, especially since Green & Russell also printed advertisements offering reward for the kidnapping of enslaved people who had freed themselves.

While this antiabolitionist conceptualization may be derived from the content of the *Narrative*, I will not primarily perform a conventional close reading of the *Narrative* in what follows. Instead, I am invested in the amount of time in the *Narrative* that takes place in nonanglophone contexts, particularly Cuba, followed by the context of this piece’s place of publication and advertisement by New England publishers Green & Russell. These competing interimperial contexts (the colonial domains of Spain and Great Britain) demonstrate a renewed investment in the political geographic possibilities summoned by Hammon in his *Narrative* but suppressed by the editors themselves. What is at stake is both the ways that a narrator *tells* us what they are not telling us, as Hammon relates that he has “omitted a great many things”¹³ from his story, and how to short-circuit a text whose context is interimperial racial capitalist slave culture.

The published context, then, has its own suppressed geographical context, which I endeavor to show by way of an abolitionist literary method, a style of reading and annotation that derives from the work of both economic geographer and abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore and philosopher Jacques Derrida. The revolutionary Black circum-Atlantic, featuring inter-Caribbean movement of Black subjects, haunts Hammon’s *Narrative*, especially in Cuba. What we might say, in short, is that the framing, surface, and immediately available concepts of Hammon’s text are in no way revolutionary, but that revolutions emerge through a search for the trace of abolition alongside the text rather than the negative absence produced by consistent suffering

immanent to the *Narrative*. As the work is stationed directly in the eighteenth century, a century that will also feature, famously, the Haitian Revolution, I am primarily interested in the abolitionist traces contained in a document that does not support an abolitionist thesis as directly as a text like C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*.¹⁴ Since I arrive at this work as a prison abolitionist, as a researcher who is against how modes of confinement and servitude persist today by way of race-, gender-, and class-based oppressions, the stakes of this reading remain open and ongoing. Hammon's text should not be read using canonicity, genre, and national boundaries as strict hermeneutical devices. Rather, Hammon should be more productively understood through a historical materialist analysis. This historical materialist analysis seeks after the abolitionist trace, which can be revealed by way of an abolitionist literary method.

An abolitionist literary method plumbs an archive speculatively in an attempt to deduce social and political rearrangements, especially as those situations are connected to yet distinct from the violence of the jail and enslavement. Prison writing and slave narratives—as two genres that have gained a distinct foothold in the “field imaginaries” of American Studies and African American literary studies in the North American anglophone academy¹⁵—are, from their very inception, misnomers, as the site of incarceration or slavery overdetermines the writing and narratives that are set “within” their boundaries. The writing in prison writing and the narrative in slave narrative are constantly seen as in a formation of resistance to the first term, as if prison and slavery were not imposed initially on writing and narrative to begin with. An abolitionist literary method seeks to identify how work within these categories should not be read necessarily as any and everything that is written from or about prison or slavery, however vital and crucial it is to analyze those material situations so that the contexts are seen vividly. By contrast, an abolitionist literary method is interested in how *abolition* appears in those contexts and elsewhere. Although abolition has of late received a great deal of attention in the United States, the politics of abolition are global.

Meanwhile, the United States does not even exist when Briton Hammon pens *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man,--Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England; Who Returned to Boston, After Having Been Absent Almost Thirteen Years. Containing an Account of the Many Hardships He Underwent from the Time He Left His Master's House, in the Year 1747, to the Time of His Return to Boston.--How He Was Cast Away in the Capes of Florida;--The Horrid Cruelty and Inhuman Barbarity of the Indians in Murdering the Whole Ship's Crew; ---The Manner of His Being Carry'd by Them Into Captivity. Also, an Account of His Being Confined Four Years and Seven Months in a Close Dungeon,---and the Remarkable Manner in Which He Met with His Good Old Master in London; Who Returned to New-England, a Passenger in the Same Ship* (1760). I write out the full title here to indicate that Boston and “New-England” surface in the titular summary, but “Havana, Cuba” does not. Havana's suppression here will create part of the parameters sunken into the text whose gravity will then be neglected by many future readers.

How does this *Narrative* provide, as Frances Foster has written in what is probably the first analysis of this work, “some insights into beginnings”?¹⁶ What does it mean to claim, as Foster does, that “its content and form are the direct antecedents of the slave narrative, the first [African]-American literary genre,” but then to note later that Hammon’s writing “is not really part of the genre [of the slave narrative].”¹⁷ How can this be? What is both origin and not really part of what it is supposedly the antecedent of? What does the offering of origin do when the so-called origin itself—the “first”—does not even inscribe the very genre that later commentators claim the writing inaugurates? What if Briton Hammon begins the beginning by straying from that beginning which he is given? That so-called beginning is the United States and is also American Studies; it is Black literature viewed solely from the register of the slave narrative, whatever that genre may be.¹⁸ Before Equiano, before Douglass, Hammon is writing. He is reflecting on moving from New England to Florida to Cuba to London and back to New England, all in fourteen pages; a new refutation of time. As soon as the *Narrative* begins, he is gone. He has left what will become the United States, has left before one can leave an entity that has not yet been born. Even when he returns to New England, “a passenger on the same ship” as the one who enslaves him, Hammon returns to what has not yet happened. As Fred Moten might see through Hammon’s “nonperformance”: Hammon returns to the future, and might, we suspect, know far more than we do.¹⁹

All of these questions bear great weight for the question of the forming of a genre and a canon. The context, as it were, overwhelms the frame. As June Jordan writes in her “something like a sonnet for Phillis Wheatley”:

Was it a nice day?

Does it matter?

It was not natural. And she was the first: Phillis Miracle: Phillis Miracle
Wheatley: the first Black human being to be published in America.²⁰

Wheatley’s text *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral by Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England* is published in 1773.²¹ Also in New England resides Briton Hammon, whose fourteen pages are published in 1760. But June Jordan doesn’t have the facts wrong; rather, in this retrospective reading of early American Black literary production, the claim of “first” frustrates attempts at a reading. “Does it matter? / It was not natural,” Jordan asks and answers. Jupiter Hammon, another writer claimed as early, coming from Long Island, publishes a poem in 1761. Literary scholar Will Harris is right to link together these writers in what he calls “diaspora subjectivity,” insofar as they are not writing in an American tradition (of which there is no America nor tradition yet to speak of).²² But to incorporate Briton Hammon, Jupiter Hammon, and Phillis Wheatley into a canon does not actually address the context in which they are writing. There remains an aftermath of a kind of

Jeffersonian anxiety; that is, how Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* insists in Query XIV that Wheatley, and Black people more generally, cannot possibly produce poetry as art; while, at the same time, in Query VI, Jefferson feels slighted and annoyed by Abbé Raynal's remark that "America has not produced one good poet."²³ There *must* be poetry in this nascent, quarrelsome, fragmented nation-state yet to come; but these writers are not writing in service of producing their writing *for* America. An abolitionist literary method must account for what lies outside this economy of aesthetic nationalistic anxiety. Black revolutionary metonymy²⁴ marks an angular step across the law of genre, whereby these texts circumnavigate a circumspect coloniality. One could make this case with Wheatley or Jupiter, although here we are concerned with Briton Hammon, not because he is the first, however that may be counted, but because his narrative carries the structure of Havana's trace, a trace that suggests abolitionist dimensions.

The events told in Hammon's text take place between global imperial powers: Spain, Great Britain, and France. That his name—Briton—superficially holds the British holdings is not of consequence in the *Narrative* itself. Rather, it is not of consequence because the England which is "New" (of which he begins and ends the text) is not, in fact, the main arena of the text's unfolding, and does not become its primary geography. Really there is no such thing as an "internationalism" at work here, and barely even the lingering of a transnationalism. This is an interimperial set of stages, a jumping between competing empires. After all, to be pointed and philological about it, English philosopher Jeremy Bentham—known better to us as that theorizer of the Panopticon—begins to consolidate our more contemporary conception after coining the word "international" in 1770, a decade after this text appears.²⁵

Unlike those maps which falsely set up a border, Briton Hammon's *Narrative* shows us that, in the eighteenth century similarly and differently as now, the border is a malleable and contested demarcation. What if the very beginnings of American literature—if we were more bold, we might say literature in general—cannot attest to anything like what the nation-state imagines itself as, then or now? Here the metonymy at stake refers to an entity which seems to admit the erasure of its own supposed plan, leaving that, as Hammon writes, "to the Reader as he goes along."²⁶ This acknowledgement of an audience in the very first sentence of the *Narrative* indicates that Hammon knows: first, that the details of interimperialism will not be new to anyone living in Boston at the time, so therefore prove superfluous (though not to us); second, that any condescension toward him by an unjust reader (whom he dubs "as one in a higher Station")²⁷ is unwarranted from the start; and third, that he will "only relate Matters of Fact as they occur to my Mind."²⁸ We are at once invited into the *consciousness, the Mind*, of Briton Hammon, and this metonymic link sets out to set up more than *any* narrative can provide. "Mind" has Old English etymology, which Hammon delivers on the Briton of his name, but has a crucial element of combining meanings including sense-thought, emphasis, and especially memory/recollection. To come to mind, to bring to mind, to put in mind. It is at once reminder and introduction, the

introduction that comes into being as the first instance has vanished, or been left unattended. Mind is both already *reminder* of a remainder and an imperative: to *mind*, to remember in the future.²⁹ We must mind what would not even come to mind to the average Bostonian reader in 1760, nor, for that matter, what would not even come to mind to the reader in Havana. Where does Briton Hammon's *mind* place us?

Briton Hammon's mind places the reader in a geographic mood. The question of consciousness and placement together summons an abolitionist literary method. A contemporary theorization and practice of abolition comes from economic geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Referring to the activities of and from Black people in the United States following (Black) Reconstruction, Gilmore writes:

People didn't make what they made from nothing—destitute though the millions were as a result of the great effort to strike, free themselves, and establish a new social order. They *brought things with them*—sensibilities, dependencies, talents, indeed a complement of consciousness and capacity Cedric Robinson termed an “ontological totality”—to make where they were into places they wished to be. And yet they left abundant evidence showing how freedom is not simply the absence of enslavement as a legal and property form. Rather, *the undoing of bondage—abolition—is quite literally to change places*: to destroy the geography of slavery by mixing their labor with the external world to change the world and thereby themselves—as it were, habitation as nature—even if geometrically speaking they hadn't moved far at all.³⁰

Following Gilmore, I insist that an abolition reading practice interprets the world, and changes it. And in changing the world—and truly “the world,” not just one area of the world—changing ourselves and one another. All of that practice arrives by way of what has *already been brought*: It is “not from nothing” and not toward nothing. Abolition is tended to, collaborated on, spatialized, theorized: worked-through contradictions, beyond a boundary and a binary. What Gilmore elaborates is not so much annihilating absence nor simple replete presence; rather, the space between: abolitionist trace, changing places.

There are a lot of verbs one could use: But the point is that all that abolition geography doing and thinking does not come from sheer negativity; it follows more of a spiral pattern than anything else, the place-making of overturning ground.³¹ How does the abolitionist trace work through presence? What is “presence,” especially when the rhetoric of the day, in response to so many crises, recites and repeats neglect, scarcity, incapacity, abandonment, recanting or ignoring the ways that people still fight against those uses and abuses of their exploited time and labor? Presence will be difficult to locate immediately in Hammon's work.

Indeed, the first published print page of *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon*, an English-language text published in Boston in 1760 (and I will put pressure on “anglophone,” “Boston,” and “1760” in my consideration), confides “absence” not presence, as Hammon “returns to Boston after having been absent almost thirteen years.” When one is “absent” for “almost Thirteen Years,” where does one go? Is Hammon involved in some sort of disappearing act from the anglophone world (New England and Britain and the British Caribbean)? The text under the main title is an extension of the title and provides the following narrative in miniature, interpreting that all this time spent away was hardship for Hammon, that the Cape of Florida is nothing but a miserable captivity by way of a ruthless Indigenous critique of empire and settler colonialism, and that the Viceroyalty of New Spain, in which the island of Cuba sits in this narrative period 1747–1760, has a geography tremendously narrowed into an enclosed space, a vanishing trick of phrase, a “Dungeon.”

Literary and historical archival analysis of Briton Hammon, coupled with speculative remarks on the eighteenth-century relationship between Black persons and Indigenous communities, has shown that Hammon “most likely [encountered] the Calusa Indians” in Florida, according to Jeffrey Gagnon.³² Gagnon also tells us, in a historical detail of which the *Narrative* makes no mention, that Hammon was married upon his return to New England.³³ Gagnon adds, in a geographical fashion complementary to the argument developed in this essay: “By providing this context and theorizing the identity of the Natives as the Calusa, I am reorienting away from conventional readings of the text that privilege perspectives rooted in British New England.”³⁴ Gagnon strongly suggests that, rather than being taken captive by the Calusa, Hammon forms anti-imperial alliances with the Calusa. This is a suppressed reading within the text, and Gagnon’s work suggests that Green & Russell, as publishers and editors, harbored anti-Native politics, which harmonizes with my conclusion that Green & Russell also obscured and demonized Hammon’s time in Havana.³⁵ However, Gagnon does not linger with Green & Russell’s *Boston Post-Boy*, a print context which will be developed in the next section of this essay, after considering Hammon’s time in Cuba. Gagnon’s main thread challenges Hammon’s *Narrative* being collected under the genre of “Indian captivity narratives.” This is a welcome reading that ultimately tells us how to carefully close read the specificities of Hammon’s case in Florida by way of speculation in the recorded archives. Here, I am considering the larger implications of canonicity, context, and genre in general as troubled by Hammon as example within a vast configuration of Black radicalism and abolition in the Caribbean. Hammon, I am arguing, points us away from an immanent close reading by means of his various movements into and out of conventional locales.

Historian of eighteenth-century Cuba Sherry Johnson offers a different light on Gagnon’s reading of the Indigenous presence in Hammon’s *Narrative* as Calusa, referencing the manner in which “[f]rom the 1770s onward, Florida Indians acted as valuable sources of information for the captain general in Havana, and they were

indispensable allies during the Gulf Coast campaigns.”³⁶ Gagnon’s reading of Hammon with the Calusa is then perhaps more decidedly anti-British empire than anti-imperialism writ large, since Hammon’s presence in Havana may have something to do with the Calusa after all. Essentially, 250 years later, Hammon’s readers are taking seriously his conclusion that “I have omitted a great many Things” and are looking for ways to supplement those omissions, speculative fabulation which the text invites.

We might note at this moment as well that the timeline in Havana already does not add up. Hammon spends four and a half years in confinement: What of the other years? The narrative, speeding through fourteen pages (a little more than a page per year), will provide suggestions as an answer. And the *Narrative*’s writer takes explicit pains to bury whatever hardship may have resulted from being “in the service of”—enslaved to—“General Winslow,” whose name is almost as large as Hammon’s on the title page. The narrative begins and ends in the anglophone, capitalistically slaveholding Atlantic world, but the majority of its “action,” so to speak, is not necessarily that world. So, what is that world? We have a timeframe without contents, boundaries set on the material imagination that do not hold, that insists on absence when we know, without even reading the first paragraph, that there must instead be the trace of something prior, something other, something alongside.

An abolitionist approach to this text refuses the blotting out, the narrowing: It refuses interpretive strictures and seeks the larger, more flexible, structure. It is not so much “recovery” as “prediscovery,”³⁷ as astronomical term I borrow and repurpose here to suggest that we are not so much dealing with a lack of evidence of things unseen as much as with things very much seen, which a too-scant understanding of the available evidence marks as invisible, unknown, or barely around. There is knowledge that was already known that has potentially been forgotten: We are not “discovering” or “uncovering” it, but recovering what has already been recovered and examined and put into motion. In the third century BCE, mathematician Aristarchus of Samos already created a model of this particular universe in which the sun was central; Copernicus reasserted knowledge that was already known; and someone probably figured out a heliocentric model before the Greeks too.³⁸ This is not solely speculation: It is a critique of a certain genealogy of thinking and doing that pretends that anything one does or says or thinks is the first time anyone ever did such a thing. If we also know that sailing and migratory (fugitive) navigation depended on reading the stars, then an abolition geography already takes into account “prediscovery,” and what I have done here is simply name or rename what has been interpreted.

Therefore, Hammon is not exceptional, but perhaps there is more prediscovery to perform with his text; to see what he saw, to know and feel and think with his example, to be in common with his movement. It may be exceptional that we have his *Narrative*, this document generally cited as the first slave narrative,³⁹ if our definition of such a genre means a piece of life writing generated through, by, and/or about an enslaved person in the anglophone world. The Library of Congress catalogues Ham-

mon's narrative with subject headings that give indices of "African-Americans," "Massachusetts," and "Florida," but "Cuba" is missing.⁴⁰ Additionally, as a narrative that is concerned with various modes of torture and bondage—Hammon's enslavement on land; British military service at sea; confinement in a dungeon; personal enslavement to military powers (General Winslow), political administrators (the colonial governor of Havana), and religious officials (a bishop in Cuba) across multiple continents and imperial powers—it would be apt to follow literary scholar Keith Michael Green's argument that the *Narrative* is "actually a quintessential example of several kinds of captivity Hammon's captivities may appear remarkable in the context of the slave narrative, but in the context of these conditions, his narrative appears eerily familiar, if not prophetic."⁴¹ Considering that Cuba is suppressed in the readings of the *Narrative*, in its editorial capsule description, and in the catalogue references, now it is time to turn to Hammon's own descriptions of Havana, seeing as this interimperial jump marks passages that are difficult to discern when Hammon's "uncommon sufferings" are simply listed as an inventory of pain.

Relevant paragraphs from the text will guide an understanding of this Cuban spatiality, in addition to a narrative timeline that more forthrightly centers the time Hammon is in bondage in Havana:

At the *Havanna* I lived with the Governor in the Castle about a Twelve-month, where I was walking thro' the Street, I met with a Press-Gang who immediately prest me, and put me into Goal, and with a Number of others I was confin'd till next Morning, when we were all brought out, and ask'd who would go on board the King's Ships, four of which having been lately built, were bound to *Old-Spain*, and on my refusing to serve on board, they put me in a close Dungeon, where I was confin'd *Four Years and seven months*; during which Time I often made application to the Governor, by Persons who came to see the Prisoners, but they never acquainted him with it, nor did he know all this Time what became of me, which was the means of my being confin'd there so long.

But kind Providence so order'd it, that after I had been in this Place so long as the Time mention'd above the Captain of a Merchantman, belonging to *Boston*, having sprung a Leak was obliged to put into the *Havanna* to refit, and while he was at Dinner at Mrs. *Betty Howard's*, she told the Captain of my deplorable Condition, and said she would be glad, if he could by some means or other relieve me...⁴²

... I lived with the Governor about a Year after I was delivered from the Dungeon, in which Time I endeavour'd three Times to make my

Escape, the last of which proved effectual; the first Time I got on board of Captain Marsh, an *English* Twenty Gun Ship, with a Number of others, and lay on board conceal'd that Night; and the next Day the Ship being under sail, I thought myself safe, and so made my Appearance upon Deck, but as soon as we were discovered the Captain ordered the Boat out, and sent us all on Shore—I intreated the Captain to let me, in particular, tarry on board, begging, and crying to him, to commiserate my unhappy Condition, and added, that I had been confin'd almost five Years in a close Dungeon, but the Captain would not hearken to any Intreaties, for fear of having the Governor's Displeasure, and so was obliged to go on Shore...⁴³

...I was employ'd in this Service about Seven Months, during which Time I lived very well, and then returned to the Castle again, where I had my Liberty to walk about the City, and do Work for my self;...⁴⁴

...I think I have not deviated from Truth, in any particular of this my Narrative, and tho' I have omitted a great many Things, yet what is wrote may suffice to convince the Reader, that I have been most grievously afflicted, and yet thro' the Divine Goodness, as miraculously preserved, and delivered out of many Dangers; of which I desire to retain a *grateful Remembrance*, as long as I live in the World.⁴⁵

In order to work out this compressed chronology, I have reconstructed a timeline that depicts Hammon's movements:

Briton Hammon's Narrative Timeline

*In Massachusetts for **two months** in 1747.*

*In Jamaica and Cape-Florida for **six months** in 1748.*

*In Havana for **eight and a half years** from 1748–1756.*

*In Jamaica and London for roughly **three years**, 1756–1759*

Returns to New England in 1760

Four and a half years of Narrative spent in anglophone British colonies or extensions.

Eight and a half years of Narrative spent in hispanophone Cuba, New Spain.

1747—Massachusetts

December 25—Leaves Marshfield, Massachusetts

December 26—Arrives in Plymouth, Massachusetts, ships out for 30-day voyage to Jamaica

1748—Jamaica, Cape-Florida, Havana

January 25—Arrives in Jamaica and stays until May 25, 1748 (period of four months)

May 25—Ships out from Jamaica

June 15—"cast away" on reef near Cape-Florida

June 17—Part of crew goes ashore, "(In three or four Minutes after,)" confronts "Indians," kept captive for five weeks

July 22—Spanish Schooner arrives from St. Augustine, goes aboard, then goes to Havanna, July 27—Indians come to Havana, application to Governor for Hammon,

application refused

July 30, 1748—July 30, 1749—Stays in Havana in Governor's castle for "about twelve months"

August 1749—February 1754—Havana

August, 1749—Captured off street and put in a dungeon due to refusal to join Spanish Crown Navy, held prisoner for four years and seven months

February 1754–1756—Havana

Released, lives with Governor, attempts three escapes out of Havana (once 1755, twice 1756)

Is free for seven months in 1756 in Havana and Cuba more generally

Lives with governor for a year 1755

First escape is not successful, on shore another year

Second escape attempted in 1756, confined to castle

Is "put at liberty," works for "the Bishop" for seven months in 1756

Third escape is successful in August 1756

1756—Jamaica, London

Escapes to Jamaica, then goes to London in military service, 1756

1756–1759—Atlantic, London, New England

Works in British navy (location indeterminate, but engages with French at war), sick in London, nearly goes to Guinea, but boards ship to New England with General Winslow.

This timeline centrally engages in a multilinguistic and spatially flexible commitment far beyond the *Narrative*'s beginning and ending in British colonial Massachusetts.

In the eighteenth century, North America was not the primary political and economic geography in the Atlantic; but this is harder to see if Hammon is only read alongside later developments in the genre exclusively considered from the anglophone canon.⁴⁶ Latin American historian Eliga Gould details the "Entanglement"

of the British and Spanish military, social, economic, and political disputes in the eighteenth century as follows:

Spain [was] the dominant military and naval power during the first century and a half of Europe's overseas expansion, but as late as the end of the eighteenth century, its American possessions far outstripped those of its rivals, including Britain and the United States, in both wealth and population. On the eve of the American Revolution, at a time when the combined indigenous, settler, and enslaved population of Britain's North American colonies was perhaps 3 million, the Spanish empire contained nearly three times as many inhabitants. ... If British America was a provincial fragment of Britain proper, it was also ... part of a Spanish periphery that included much of the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁷

Rereading Hammon's *Narrative* in light of a Spanish imperial backdrop seems, then, both inevitable and crucial to actually understanding Hammon's movements between various spaces of coerced labor and confinement.

If Hammon spends the majority of his narrative in Havana, but provides very little by way of detail, how might we understand Havana in this historical context to create a presence from an absence? In terms of religious power structures, Arelis Rivero Cabrera tells us that Cuba's first friars were Franciscans, and there was a corresponding period of Jesuit presence before their 1767 expulsion from Spain; this religious differentiation between a Catholic Cuba and a Protestant New England will be suppressed in the religious discourse surfacing throughout Hammon's *Narrative*.⁴⁸ Sherry Johnson indicates the reliance of Havana's local economy and social stratification on maintaining military fortifications at the port after its 1762 capture by the British, and that the experience of enslaved people in a context prior to the mid-to late eighteenth century (after 1763) was not predominately based on a sugar plantation economy on the island;⁴⁹ although enslaved persons were forced to work on sugar and coffee plantations and in mines by Spanish colonial powers, there was also an enormous increase of enslaved plantation structures following the Haitian Revolution, as work by historian Ada Ferrer indicates.⁵⁰ Hammon's experience of nearly five years of confinement following his refusal to join the Spanish military, then, indicates that the military economic apparatus was already deeply entrenched in the well-populated city of Havana, and we can ask what the relationship is between an economy structured on the military and the confinement of those individuals who, for whatever reason, refuse military service. In any event, it is clear that Hammon is unwilling to serve in the Spanish army, and his *Narrative* later produces an interpretation that he is perhaps more willing to serve for the British, but the pro-anglophone conditions of the *Narrative's* publication might make us skeptical of Hammon being on "one side or the other" of competing imperial domains. The

interpretation should instead stress the inter- prefix of interimperialism; that is, between empires, where ultimate place of publication, landing, and capture outweigh straightforward allegiances.

Social historical data for Havana during this period is a bit more difficult to parse, especially because Hammon returns to New England in 1760, and it is following this date that the Bourbon Reforms create a more exacting social, economic, legal, and bureaucratic structure, especially under Charles III of Spain.⁵¹ The majority of the information gathered about African groups and religious and social practices is also predominately focused on the nineteenth century, especially in the important work of anthropologist and practitioner Miguel Ramos on Lucumí (Yoruba) culture.⁵² That being said, free Black persons and enslaved Black persons maintained an important presence in the Havana region. Based on Frederick Marshall Rodríguez's archival research on early seventeenth-century surveys and interrogations, we can surmise that officials in Havana's local government long knew that slave revolts could only be suppressed because of the military fortifications in Havana,⁵³ especially because, as Richard Price's famous compilation work on Maroon societies tells us, the "*palenques* were, for many years, the only signs of resistance to the colonial system ... by 1788 ... 'there were large numbers of maroons on the Jaruco mountains ... surrounded by trenches and stockades.'" ⁵⁴ The Jaruco mountains are only as far as twenty miles east of the center of Havana. Ramos also relates that "[Cuban historian] Carmen Barcia attempted to reconstruct the lives of [Black people] ... in Havana, a city that she has stressed was in good part built by this population." ⁵⁵

Based on these considerations, I roughly estimate that Hammon's time as a person who wandered the streets in Havana and further out with "the Bishop," first in 1748–1749 and again in 1755–1756—these being the periods when he is not incarcerated—means that he most likely interacted with a great number of free and enslaved Black people, knew of maroonage and *palenques* in the Jaruco mountains and revolts, and had his own Protestant/North Atlantic Great Awakening-style Christian faith intermingled with those who were deeply Catholic and participated in syncretic traditions, especially as they came from Yoruba genealogies. This telling of the tale puts pressure on the closing paragraph of the *Narrative*, with its Biblical invocation praising the Christian God. Indeed, there is a caesura between this closing frame of Christianity and the penultimate paragraph, the latter of which instead references a more general "Divine Goodness," to which Hammon maintains a "grateful remembrance, as long as I live in the World." ⁵⁶ Reversing Hammon's *Narrative*, reading it inside-out, as this essay does, emphasizes "the World" over and above "the Providence of that G[od]," in effect flipping the theological superstructure of the *Narrative* so that one encounters, through abolition, the presence of the material world in its geographic expanse and various enclosures produced through racial capitalism.

Christianity, particularly of a New England variety, puts parameters on a story that is consistently bursting through its genre and colonial borders. Hammon's very

title, with its emphasis on his “surprising deliverance,” beyond its borrowing from other “captivity narratives” seems to come from British theologian Matthew Henry’s exhaustive early eighteenth-century commentary on the English-language Bible. Evangelist George Whitefield, who was a Henry devotee, was present in New England at the time when Hammon resided there. Gould keys us into a further political dimension of this Christian specificity: “In the Protestant revivals that swept the North American seaboard from the 1740s onward, the specter of militant [Spanish] Catholicism almost certainly helped missionaries such as George Whitefield begin to overcome white hostility toward evangelizing free and enslaved blacks ... Significantly, during the New York slave conspiracy of 1741, five of the plot’s alleged ringleaders were black sailors who had been taken from a Spanish corsair and, like Francisco Menéndez, sold into slavery.”⁵⁷ The particular Christian doctrine invoked here in the *Narrative* is therefore an anti-insurrectionary doctrine. Not only does the Christian rhetoric constrain our understanding of Hammon’s telling, but it also operates on the level of interimperial conflict more broadly, featuring the suppression of slave revolts and collective liberation efforts.

It is impossible to rehearse here the social, political, linguistic, and cultural complexities Hammon was involved in while in Havana. But we know, with hindsight, some of what is coming next. These interconnections of Black revolution, religion, culture, politics, and social life without a doubt reach across the Caribbean. Not far away, in Saint-Domingue, only a year after Hammon narrates a third, now successful, escape from Cuba, Mackandal will lead collective rebellions against the French slave plantation economy and systems of violence in 1757. Hammon’s narrative ends at least two decades before what we now know as the Haitian Revolution; it is quite possible that his own movements are part of a “common wind,” especially as that history is developed by historians Julius Scott, Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker.⁵⁸ The mid-to late eighteenth century experienced an enormous set of revolutionary changes and upheavals, both on the ground and in consciousness. The question might be, then, how to position Hammon’s *Narrative* alongside those considerations, as the *Narrative* has so often been read in isolation from these questions except on a particular anglophone and “American” literary basis. Recentring the Spanish-language Caribbean, as it were, would then open Hammon’s narrative to the later poetic and historical approaches by writers such as Juan Francisco Manzano and Esteban Montejo, or would even provide a different angle on Mary Prince’s experience in the “British West Indies” (which is never as far away from the non-British Caribbean as one may suspect).⁵⁹ Following the upheavals of the nineteenth century, and the growing imperial dominance of the United States in the twentieth century; considering, too, the famous “Tricontinental Congress” set up following the Cuban revolution, with Amílcar Cabral’s speech on “the Weapon of Theory,”⁶⁰ and the ongoing embargo on Cuba imposed by the United States, it is sometimes difficult to dislodge two centuries of historical sedimentation to understand the actual geographical context at stake in Hammon’s work, but doing

so is paramount to recreating our current realities and consciousness, especially as we call them abolition.

After Cuba, New England: Briton Hammon in Print

While it is notable that anti-Spanish and anti-Indigenous sentiments appear within Hammon's *Narrative*, we know from a simple gloss of the word "context" that we are also invested in and interested in texts that appear alongside of his text. Or, rather, because these sentiments appear in the text, narrowing it down to an anglophone world, and appearing to endorse that world, we may also seek out the text's "neighborhood" or "community," so to speak: How and where does a text like this narrative get published in the first place? I will begin by highlighting the structure of this text's movement within a literary-historical context before then closing by considering its advertisement and publishers.

As Jacques Derrida (in)famously phrased it, responding to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* in the section "The Exorbitant. Question of Method," from *Of Grammatology*: "There is nothing outside the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]," which follows Derrida's own surprise at Rousseau's use of supplement: "Rousseau's situation within the language and the logic that assures to this word or this concept sufficiently *surprising* resources so that the presumed subject of the sentence might always say, through using the 'supplement,' more, less, or something other than what he would mean [*voudrait dire*]." ⁶¹ Derrida later clarifies this remark as "there is nothing outside context." ⁶² This clues us into how context is related to what is not said, what is not exactly meant, by both the context and the language used: *surprising* resources. This trajectory of analysis is featured in Nahum Chandler's analysis of W. E. B. Du Bois's early writings and thought, offering precedent in combining Derrida's investigations with texts emerging from Black studies in the Americas. ⁶³ These considerations also follow Ronald A. T. Judy's analysis of slave narratives, specifically Hammon's, in connection to Romanticism and the Enlightenment: "[Rousseau] writes his self on the basis of self-reflective consciousness's rhetorical figuration as a tropological field ... In that regard, it is Rousseau's autobiographical writing that echoes the slave narrative, beginning with Briton Hammon's *Uncommon Sufferings of 1760*." ⁶⁴ Judy continues, ratcheting up the stakes of this analysis in order not to confuse us into thinking this is a phenomenon characteristic of only a few texts: "Reading for canon formation is a theoretical practice which involves bringing to light the interrelatedness of African American representations of experience with modernity's conception of subjectivity. To the extent that this is an accurate assessment of the formation of an African American canon, it is also the case for any canon formation, to wit, American literary studies (read American studies)." ⁶⁵ Rather than claim that the problems of subjectivity in general, or canon formation in general, or American Studies in general, derive from an ultimately different line of thinking or practice, Judy compels us to take up a history of African American canon formation via

textual analysis as itself entangled with the process of canonicity as such. In this way, American Studies has been nothing other than the comparative study of settler colonial slaveries and war, insofar as that study, in resistance to racial capitalism, is enabled in the narrative subjectivities of Black persons organizing for liberation, even when the so-called primary originary texts of the discipline of American Studies sometimes strain to suppress that very act of revolt. Judy rightly emphasizes as counterpoint Ben Ali's Diary, a text which is composed in Arabic and whose context is related to Islamic practice, to "disform" how American canonicity tries to baptize its own history in an unholy assemblage schematic of the ideas of Christianity, "Europe," "romance languages," masculinity, and the United States as a hermetically sealed synecdoche for the Americas writ large. Suffice to say, Hammon's text does not do all this, and we should continue to investigate how and why. Especially pertinent is examining early American print culture in New England as the post-Cuban context for Hammon. This is the context by and through which we "first" receive this "first" text in a genre today, although the publication technically comes after Hammon was in Havana.

Green & Russell, who publish and advertise Hammon's text, and who presumably also edit the text, provide a series of advertisements announcing the text's publication in their *Boston Post-Boy*. The advertisement of Hammon's *Narrative* almost exactly mirrors the title page in the print edition of the *Narrative*, providing more evidence for the fact that Hammon himself did not likely compose the abbreviated summary which suppressed any mention of Cuba. Under "Just publish'd," this excerpt in the July 21, 1760, issue of the *Boston Post-Boy* published by Green & Russell, features first the "life" of General James Wolfe, "the Conqueror of Canada." We may consider how this reflection on military victory, under the auspices of the British, is coupled with Hammon's *Narrative*, and that the advertisement lists James Wolfe's text as in high demand.⁶⁶ The coupling of these texts, in the same paper, by the same publisher, gives us an idea of their catalogue. What else are Green & Russell publishing in their newspaper?

On the first page, Green & Russell's weekly *Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser* is supplemented by the short description: "Concerning the freshest Advices foreign and Domestic," its rallying cry for what will be featured therein. This slogan is bookended by an illustration of a ship on the lefthand side and a person riding a horse on the right-hand side, perhaps a messenger or military man. The ship is sailing toward the title, and the man is riding in the same direction. They are nearly on a collision course. In this rush to provide the "freshest Advice," they are cartoonishly colluding to create Green & Russell's news fit to print. What sort of news are they bringing, always on the move and, like Xeno's paradox, never quite arriving at their destination?

From the same issue, the news. The next page takes us to a list of Harvard graduates. This celebratory passage is complemented by reported news from Jamaica, where Africans and African-descended persons create a second insurrection, extending an original revolt, correlating the same news from Philadelphia. This insurrection is

apparently put down, with those involved in the revolt captured and executed. This pairing of university accolades and the suppression of Black revolutionary sentiments, one above the other, provides some idea of the news that the *Boston Post-Boy* endeavors to show: an education in letters and in execution. Hammon's *Narrative* therefore is published in a context where Black insurrection is brutally suppressed, and where the boys of Harvard are celebrated in their commencement.⁶⁷

A further item is essential for understanding the interimperial racial capitalist structure the paper supports. *Boston Post-Boy* itself does not just report putting down insurrection by the enslaved: The weekly actively engaged in supporting the constitution of the slave economy. Alongside news of shipping imports, excerpts from letters of statesmen abroad, land lottery results, and assorted and sundry "lost & found" miscellanea, *Boston Post-Boy* also features, in its June 2, 1760, issue, approximately one month before the July publication of Hammon's *Narrative*, what came to be known as "runaway slave" advertisements, violent pieces of text demanding the "return" of people who have stolen themselves away from the horrors of being owned by slavemasters, who have escaped violation; and a financial "reward" for such capture. This particular instance of reward for kidnapping involves a person identified as "Simond," whose purported features and clothing are described. Finally, this paragraph ends with the following: "N. B. All masters of vessels and others, are caution'd against harbouring, concealing, or carrying of said slave, as they would avoid the penalty of the law."⁶⁸ Similar to the suppression of rebellion that Gould notes, particularly that rebellion occurring with a Spanish tongue, the *Boston Post-Boy* circulates advertisements that also extend penalties toward anyone who would support the freedom of the enslaved, especially those with the ability to move boats in the water between imperial domains, in maroon geographies and Indigenous-led areas. While there is not a simultaneous advertisement for Hammon's capture during his "absence" in Havana, a reader of the *Boston Post-Boy* will have been, by the summer of 1760, advertised the *Narrative* of Hammon's "deliverance" and also been advertised a financial reward for capturing African and African-descended persons, here at the price of "Four Dollars," within a month of the same weeklies. The person evading capture, fighting for freedom, whose name is given as Simond, is a person whose attempt at freedom violates the circulation of the interimperial economy, the law, political life, and property rights. It goes without saying, then, that Green & Russell are not only not abolitionists in their politics: They are thoroughly invested in the continual force of British domination through racial slavery and settler colonialism. Their publication and advertisement of Hammon's *Narrative*, our previous considerations of Caribbean revolution notwithstanding, are intended to subtend these racist violences.

In light of this context, one may reread two implications in Hammon's opening paragraph of the *Narrative*. First, although Hammon notes receiving "the leave of my Master" to depart colonial Massachusetts, he specifically remarks: "I immediately ship'd myself on board of a Sloop."⁶⁹ While the "leave of my Master" may have been part of the *Boston Post-Boy* context, Hammon's assertion that "I immediately ship'd

myself” recenters the decision-making process back to Hammon himself. Considering that those escaping for freedom were doing so by both land and sea, Hammon’s “ship’d myself” takes on an additional valence of abolitionist trace.⁷⁰ Second, Hammon’s attention to calendar date and time, initially, seems like a time-stamp: “On Monday, 25th Day of *December*, with the leave of my *Master*, I went to *Marshfield*, with an intention to go a Voyage to Sea . . .” Upon rereading, one does not only read December 25 as Christmas. In the wake of a revolutionary Caribbean context, December 25, 1521, is also known as the day of the very first uprising by enslaved Africans in the Americas.⁷¹ Hammon’s minor suggestions of time, place, and rhetoric—when read both extremely closely (on the level of clause and implicit citation of history) and extremely broadly (the context of the Americas)—opens the abolitionist trace of this text.

That Hammon is confined throughout the *Narrative*, but that only certain confinements (those of the Calusa Indians; those of the Spanish) are considered horrific, is intended by Green & Russell to show that forced service, whether through domestic racial slavery or military adventures, is all well and good with the British empire, but not with other empires, and that movement by those enslaved to other empires will be met with carceral rebuke. When Hammon begins and ends his *Narrative* by relating that he sustained a head injury and disability through British military service, and that his “Capacities and Conditions of life are very Low,” one can certainly see how a critique of the British empire is also enabling the subsurface of his narrative. While one does not wish to homogenize the uneven horrors experienced in this *Narrative*, the traditional narrative trajectory from bondage to freedom is here complicated considerably by understanding the interimperial networks at play in the early modern Americas. Escape and flight, with the exception of the possibilities of maroonage, travel from one bondage to another for Hammon. While Hammon expresses “relief” at seeing General Winslow, as a consequence of not being sent to Guinea from London, it is hard to not read Hammon’s final sentiment of “returning to my own Native land” (here depicted as New England, not the west coast of Africa) without a cruel ironic inversion at the forefront of a reading. When Hammon says “native land,” anticipating Aimé Césaire’s poetic book *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* set in the early twentieth-century francophone Caribbean, a book featuring Césaire insisting on anticolonialism,⁷² one may note a diasporic nativity, a natal alienation that necessarily shifts, displaces, and condenses any idea of “home” that would somehow only be found at one margin of the global map. As Keith Michael Green rightly refers to a “dizzying network of unfreedoms suggested by Hammon,” Briton Hammon provides early insight into the spatialization of moveable confinements in what will become the United States and its environs, especially as the United States supplants the British empire in its global military-based hegemony.⁷³

Abolitionist traces, then, continually consider movement and changing place: not “over here” or “over there,” but consistently between and among. To do this work means taking seriously a nonanglophone and non-North American register, perhaps

especially with those works that, given as they are to the process of establishing singular contexts through literary canon-making, seem the furthest on their surface from those multilingual possibilities. By working through Hammon's text by way of what he does not say except in hints—the extension and stretch of time in Havana and the Caribbean—and exposing the proslavery ideology of newspaper *Boston Post-Boy* and publishers Green & Russell, I have endeavored to show that a singular context is insufficient for addressing the movements in a text taking place across borders and across languages. Hammon's work demonstrates that there are always at least two contexts: where someone goes, and where one's representation of that movement is published. For Hammon, these places are Cuba and Green & Russell and heightening the contradiction between them indicates how an abolitionist literary method reveals the problematic scene of literary production, circulation, and interpretation. Rather than successfully move from one place to another in a teleological vein, the *Narrative* suggests that the linear development of genre, politics, and nation are never given, and a teleologically tinged analysis fails at making the past present, as literary scholar Stephen Best might argue.⁷⁴ The collision and overlapping of interimperial contexts, of which there is no “outside” or “out-of-context,” demonstrates that Briton Hammon is in a constellation of writers who precede and exceed the United States, whose arrival before us may mark a future beyond the United States yet.

Historical representations of experiences in the Americas, plural, have remained confined to mythologically uniform single languages and nation-states imagined homogeneously. In a crucial intervention, historian Herman Bennett challenges those considering the experience of Africans and African-descended persons in the Americas to ask: “How does our understanding of the black present change when we configure complexity into the Spanish American slave past?”⁷⁵ Particularly in his reading of ecclesiastical records in seventeenth-century Mexico, Bennett insists that answering this question relies on working through what is provided in archives and not taking the archive as a given: “Rather than being convinced that the archive and its stories can speak for themselves, an insurgent strategy of representation is necessary.”⁷⁶ Tarrying with an insurgent strategy of representation, here defined as abolitionist traces, has been vital to rereading and reinterpreting Briton Hammon's challenge to our common context of reading. Looking at what Bennett calls the “Spanish American slave past” in connection to the North American slave past—as an interimperial representation of the Americas together—allows us to read Hammon as part of Cuban spatiality and abolition: a literature unbound, finally; away from America as founding genre, canon, or context.

Notes

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- ¹ Briton Hammon, *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man,--Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England; Who Returned to Boston, After Having Been Absent Almost Thirteen Years. Containing an Account of the Many Hardships He Underwent from the Time He Left His Master's House, in the Year 1747, to the Time of His Return to Boston.--How He Was Cast Away in the Capes of Florida;---The Horrid Cruelty and Inhuman Barbarity of the Indians in Murdering the Whole Ship's Crew;---The Manner of His Being Carry'd by Them Into Captivity. Also, an Account of His Being Confined Four Years and Seven Months in a Close Dungeon,---and the Remarkable Manner in Which He Met with His Good Old Master in London; Who Returned to New-England, a Passenger in the Same Ship:* (Boston: Printed and sold by Green & Russell, 1760; conserved Library of Congress, 1982), <https://www.loc.gov/item/06009041/>

- ² For an earlier scholarly reading of Briton Hammon's Narrative that emphasizes the origin point of this text within a tradition, see Frances S. Foster, "Briton Hammon's Narrative: Some Insights into Beginnings," *CLA Journal* 21, no. 2 (1977): 179–86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44329343>. I will use Foster's identification of this contradiction as a jumping-off point to address canonicity and interimperialism. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. also locates Hammon as an origin point, emphasizing "writing into being" as the central genre convention of the slave narrative, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Charles T. Davis, eds., *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 1985), especially Gates's "Introduction: The Language of Slavery." In his introduction, Gates stresses and riffs off of theologian Theodore Parker's 1846 insistence on the "the originality, the peculiarly American quality, of the slave narratives" (Gates, xxii). It is precisely this narrow context of America solely meaning the United States which my essay will critique in the rereading of Briton Hammon's *Narrative*. In quoting Parker, Gates sets up a US-based context for the genre and further argues for how "the slave narrative represents the attempts of blacks to write themselves into being" (Gates, xxiii, emphasis original). Precisely because Hammon's *Narrative* inscribes a repressed interimperial context that is non-US in totality, indeed predating the United States, the work cannot be adequately understood as participating in an uncomplicated linear humanization in writing. This is another way of saying, as the essay will specifically endeavor to show, that Hammon's *Narrative* involves a geography and place of publication which puts it out-of-step with slave narratives, despite Gates's alignment of the text as part of a "[B]lack textual tradition ... that had commenced in 1760 with Briton Hammon's

slave narrative" (Gates, xix). Hammon's *Narrative* is better read as a nonorigin of a genre whose parameters it exceeds even while commentators claim that its appearance inaugurates said tradition. Hammon's writing becomes positioned at the beginning of a genealogy without making sense within the definitional limits of that genealogy. Gates will later jettison Hammon's *Narrative* in the follow-up anthology, *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives, 1772–1815* (Basic Books, 1998), without much justification, only referring to Hammon in passing as "the author of what is generally considered the first English slave narrative" (Gates, *Pioneers*, 8n4). This footnoting, in a passive voice, of Hammon is precisely the kind of making minor of Hammon within a larger ensemble that this essay tries to undo, reading Hammon instead of indexing him as first and easy to forget in an inventory.

- ³ See Keith Michael Green, "Uncommon Sufferings: Rethinking Bondage in A *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man*," in *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas*, ed. Nicole N. Aljoe and Ian Finseth (University of Virginia Press, 2014); Jeffrey Gagnon, "'They us'd me pretty well': Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances in the Maritime Borderlands of the Florida Coast," in *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas*, ed. Nicole N. Aljoe and Ian Finseth (University of Virginia Press, 2014); Rhondda Robinson Thomas, "Black Life Writing and Print Culture before 1800," in *A History of African American Autobiography*, ed. Joycelyn K. Moody (Cambridge University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108890946>; and Zachary McLeod Hutchins and Cassander L. Smith, "Toward a Theory of the Early American Literary Archives," in *The Earliest African American Literatures: A Critical Reader*, ed. Zachary McLeod Hutchins and Cassander L. Smith (University of North Carolina Press, 2021).
- ⁴ Hutchins and Smith, "Toward a Theory of the Early American Literary Archives," 15.
- ⁵ Gagnon, "Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances," 79–82 and Green, "Rethinking Bondage in Briton Hammon," 110.
- ⁶ Thomas, "Black Life Writing and Print Culture before 1800," 24.
- ⁷ Keith Michael Green focuses extensively on the connectivity between these variations of bondage for African and African-descended persons in Briton Hammon's *Narrative*. Green comments that "the generic instability present at the inauguration of the slave narrative offers a singular opportunity to reimagine what narratives of black bondage are and how we might read them, to think more critically about the kinds of bondage Hammon's narrative recounts and its implications for the genre of the slave narrative ... multiple kinds of captivity, confinement, and bondage structured the lives and stories of people of African descent" (Green, "Rethinking Bondage in *Briton Hammon*," 102–103). I expand Green's considerations by thinking through abolition more explicitly in this article. In Green's later reconsideration of Hammon, Green focuses on a comparative

understanding of Florida, and Cuba, writing: “Just as [Hammon’s] bondage in Florida is relative, uneven, and ambiguous, so is his captivity in Cuba” and surfaces the complex political geographies navigated in these places by Hammon, stating that Hammon refused naval surface for the Spanish because of his “experiencing what appears to be the relative autonomy of urban life in Havana” (Green, *Bound to Respect*, 3 and 4). My argument is therefore very much in conversation with Green’s analysis of Hammon’s Cuba.

- ⁸ Especially relevant to and influential for my argument here is Ronald A. T. Judy’s extensive critical reading of Gates’s interpretation of slave narratives; see Ronald A. T. Judy, *(Dis)Forming the American Canon: Africa-Arab Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsr8m>), particularly “Critique of American Enlightenment: The Problem with the Writing of Culture” (Judy, 33–62) and “Writing Culture in the Negro Grammatology of Civil Society and Slavery” (Judy, 63–98). Although I cannot in a single footnote do justice to Judy’s reading of Gates, the issue, for Judy, boils down to Gates’s adherence, in his “deft and profoundly elegant critique of Western modernity’s insistence on the putting-together of reflection and the grapheme” (Judy, 63) through the definition “writing into being,” that Gates subscribes to a “metaphysics of language” which turns out to be a “supreme linguistic illusion” (Judy, 47). Where I will deviate and extend from Judy’s considerations comes after Judy’s argument that Hammon’s *Narrative*, along with Gronniosaw’s, “describe the rhetorical terms by which subsequent slave narratives, up until that of Fredrick Douglass (1845), achieve humanization in writing” (Judy, 68–69).
- ⁹ J. Kameron Carter, “The Birth of Christ: A Theological Reading of Briton Hammon’s 1760 *Narrative*,” in *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 255–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195152791.003.0012>.
- ¹⁰ Frances S. Foster reexamines this context, offering a revision whereby *A Narrative*’s status as first slave narrative is displaced by “a dictated narrative” from “[Ayuba Suleiman] Diallo” in 1731, a text that “predates by nearly 30 years the narrative of Briton Hammon, which is generally cited as the first African-American autobiography” (Frances S. Foster, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and [Somewhat] Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture,” *American Literary History* 17, no. 4 [2005]: 723, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3567947>). While the introduction of Diallo is warranted, Foster’s revision of Diallo for Hammon does not then lead to a rereading of Hammon’s *Narrative* within a multilingual and interimperial frame that Diallo’s work maintains for Foster. For the full analysis, see Foster, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins,” 714–40. The aforementioned note raising Ronald A. T. Judy’s reading would, of course, problematize any simple supplement and displacement of Diallo for Hammon as “first” that Foster performs

here, while Foster's multilingual and transnational approach is still deeply appreciated and needed. Green helpfully adds, as jumping-off questions for this work: "More specifically, if Hammon's text is 'not really part' of the slave narrative genre, then what genre or genres is it a part of, and, just as importantly, what texts proceed from those genres? In short, if we do not read Hammon's text retroactively—that is, as always having already produced the seemingly discrete genre of the antebellum African American slave narrative—what other historical, rhetorical, and representational possibilities emerge from this account?" (Green, *Bound to Respect*, 7).

- ¹¹ For a fuller account of the interplay between early feminist history in the United States and abolitionist movement-making, see, for example, the initial chapters of Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (Vintage, 1981).
- ¹² Foster makes this reading-writing circulation in Black print culture plain: "Moreover, correspondence between African Americans such as Wheatley and Arbour Tanner suggest multicolony networks of friends and acquaintances, among whose activities were writing letters and reading one another's productions. Wheatley's letters make it clear that Tanner distributed copies of Wheatley's 1773 publication, *Poems on Various Subjects*. And the concluding lines of a 1778 poem published as 'An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly [sic], Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston' by Hartford, Connecticut, African [...] American poet Jupiter Hammon suggest an organized literary circle when Hammon writes, 'The above lines are published by the Author, and a number of his friends, who desire to join him in their regards to Miss Wheatly'" (Foster, "Narrative of Interesting Origins," 721).
- ¹³ Hammon, *Narrative*, 14.
- ¹⁴ C. L. R. James. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Vintage, 1963. Considering that James's writing narrates the tremendous overthrow of colonial slavery by the enslaved, it is rightly defined as abolitionist.
- ¹⁵ Donald Pease, "National Identities, Postmodern Artifacts, and Postnational Narratives," *boundary 2* 19, no. 1 (1992): 1–13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/303448>. For the influence of the radical archives and contemporary projects of critical ethnic studies and Black studies via abolition producing "recent rearticulations of American studies," see Dylan Rodríguez, "Black Studies in Impasse," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5816/blackscholar.44.2.0037>
- ¹⁶ Foster, "Some Insights into Beginnings."
- ¹⁷ Foster, "Some Insights into Beginnings," 179 and 185.
- ¹⁸ In asking after this framing, I am indebted to scholar of early African American literature Rhondra Robinson Thomas. Thomas writes: "Scholars frequently cite

Briton Hammon's [Narrative] as the first published autobiographical narrative by a person of African descent in the Americas. Yet more than two centuries earlier, Juan Garrido, an African whom Spanish explorers had enslaved ... included autobiographical details in a probanza (proof of merit) that he wrote in 1538 to support his claim for a land grant from King Charles V" (Thomas, "Black Life Writing and Print Culture before 1800," 23). Like Thomas, I am invested in reading across, between, and among multilingual and multi-genre formations to study Black life writing in the Americas. My move in this essay involves studying Hammon's text more closely and widely still—not as origin or non-origin—but as evidence of interimperial movement and abolition, as Thomas does not significantly focus on Hammon's work in her expansive versioning of Black life writing.

- ¹⁹ Variations on this formulation by Fred Moten are elaborated in his essay on "Betty's Case," which also takes place in New England, but by way of the nineteenth century, in "The Erotics of Fugitivity," closing the volume *Stolen Life (consent not to be a single being)* (Duke University Press, 2018), 241–267. Following Sora Han's reading of *Betty's Case*, Fred Moten phrases the following "nonperformance is fugitivity's irreducible futurity," in order to glimpse the manner in "the relation between freedom and slavery is not mutually exclusive but mutually metonymic" (259 and 251). All of this interlocking underscores how Moten follows Han's suggestion about the "freedom to be a slave" in US jurisprudence, is amplified in contract law, rather than property law (248). If *Betty's Case* takes place in 1857, between Tennessee and Massachusetts, then the circular travel out of and back into enslavement presented by Briton Hammon's *Narrative* nearly one hundred years prior to Betty's nonperformance opens up Moten's improvisation (Moten's preferred term) of Han's legal interpretation to geographies and histories not immediately given in *Betty's Case*. This is not to say that Hammon presents us with material that *Betty's Case* does not, but that considerations of *Betty's Case* extend and expand beyond the nineteenth century United States as site for definitions of slavery. Just as Moten takes pains to come close to how Betty "refuses to perform the terms of the contract she had been forced to enter, the contract of the mere petitioner" (264), we might further understand how Briton Hammon's *Narrative* is, in fact, a nonnarrative, one that refuses performance in lieu of suspension, rearrangement, movement, and the resistance to national or imperial closure, especially in instances of the most terrifying bondage and displacement. Briton and Betty are therefore related in their exceeding of the typical boundaries of interpretation, whether historical or speculative.

- ²⁰ June Jordan, "The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America: Something like a sonnet for Phillis Wheatley," in *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (Basic/Civitas Books, 2002), 176. Jordan's essay makes a nearly

unimaginable context, where torture and writing meet, “before the revolution that produced these United States” (175) felt and visible in Wheatley’s writing.

- ²¹ Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England (London: Printed for A. Bell, Bookseller, Aldgate and sold by Messrs Cox and Berry, King-Street, Boston, 1773; digitized University of South Carolina, 2007) <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/pwp/id/12>
- ²² Will Harris, “Phillis Wheatley, Diaspora Subjectivity, and the African American Canon,” *MELUS* 33, no. 3 (2008): 27–43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20343489>. For an insightful reading of Wheatley’s potential relationship to Islam, see Will Harris, “Phillis Wheatley: A Muslim Connection,” *African American Review* 48, nos. 1 and 2 (2015): 1–15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24589724>
- ²³ Thomas Jefferson, “Query XIV: Laws” and “Query VI: Productions Mineral, Vegetable, and Animal” in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Prichard and Hall, 1787; digitized University of North Carolina, 2006), 150 and 69. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>
- ²⁴ For “Black revolutionary metonymy” in relation to abolition, see John Rufo, “The Rhetoric of Abolition: Metonymy and Black Feminism” *Diacritics* 50, no. 3 (2022): 30–57, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dia.2022.a908407>
- ²⁵ Thomas J. Knock, “Internationalism,” in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford University Press, 2001), 391.
- ²⁶ Hammon, *Narrative*, 3. Emphasis in original.
- ²⁷ Hammon, *Narrative*, 3. Emphasis in original.
- ²⁸ Hammon, *Narrative*, 3. Emphasis in original.
- ²⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “mind (v.),” 2002, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7123258323>
- ³⁰ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” in *Abolition Geography: Essays Toward Liberation* (Verso, 2022), 480–481, emphasis mine.
- ³¹ Gilmore’s work on these points has been stretched throughout Black geographies. See, especially, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (South End Press, 2007); and, more recently, Emily Holloway, “Jumping Scale in the Black Atlantic: Critical Visuality in the Archives of Slavery,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 45, no. 5 (2025): 896–915, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758251331822>

- ³² Jeffrey Gagnon, “‘They us’d me pretty well’: Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances in the Maritime Borderlands of the Florida Coast,” in *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas*, ed. Nicole N. Aljoe and Ian Finseth (University of Virginia Press, 2014), 75. For more on resistance to conventional lines of reading concerning Blackness, see Fred Moten, “Music against the Law of Reading the Future and ‘Rodney King,’” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 51–64, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1315058>
- ³³ Gagnon, “Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances,” 77.
- ³⁴ Gagnon, “Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances,” 75.
- ³⁵ Gagnon, “Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances,” 80–81.
- ³⁶ Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (University Press of Florida, 2001), 100.
- ³⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, “pre-discovery (n. & adj.),” July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2811110436>
- ³⁸ George Kish, *A Source Book in Geography* (Harvard University Press, 1978), 51–53.
- ³⁹ Foster, “Narrative of the Interesting Origins,” 723
- ⁴⁰ Briton Hammon, *A narrative of the uncommon sufferings* (Green & Russell, 1760; conserved Library of Congress, 1982), <https://www.loc.gov/item/06009041/>
- ⁴¹ Keith Michael Green, “Uncommon Sufferings: Rethinking Bondage in A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man,” in *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas*, ed. Nicole N. Aljoe and Ian Finseth (University of Virginia Press, 2014), 101 and 119. Green reads Hammon broadly across the several types of bondage depicted through, but not exclusively in, chattel slavery in the Americas, and is especially attuned to how incarceration and slavery were coextensive and mutually sustaining regimes. Green’s piece, especially in his concluding remarks gesturing toward the contemporary situation, rightly works against the common argument, frequently invoked in the United States, that incarceration “follows” the abolition of slavery, as if one regime of violence replaces another. As Green accurately shows, “[in the] menacing historical reality of the New World ... multiple kinds of captivity, confinement, and bondage structured the lives and stories of people of African descent” (103). I aim to heighten and expand on what Green calls here “[B]lack captivity writing that exists both inside and in excess of American narratives of slavery” (104–105). Comparing Hammon’s writing to that of Gronniosaw, Equiano, Venture Smith, and Robert Adams, Green displaces the US-centric narrative in which Hammon is frequently placed (107). While he does suggest interimperial contexts, Green lands on the word “extranational” (106 and 108) and the phrase “citizen of the world” (106) to name Hammon’s “maritime movements.”

As is clear here, I am more concerned with how interimperialism—and regimes of empire that are not so clearly interchangeable, even when their violences are comparable and complementary—structures and disrupts our reading practices. Green's scholarly sensitivity to Hammon's long time in jail in Havana, a period of almost five years, is unique in the scholarship on Hammon, but this analysis brings Hammon back to the experience of antiblackness in the US South; while the implication of the text is that this experience, which Green picks up on, is the experience of bondage between eighteenth-century empires across the Americas, plural (114–115). In Green's reading, Havana's jail is compared to carceral sites in Baltimore, the District of Columbia, Kentucky, and Louisville. In this essay, I am concerned with lingering for a longer time in Havana specifically, as I believe that the implications of maroonage, suppressed in Hammon's text, speak against the vast representations of various confinements.

⁴² Hammon, *Narrative*, 8.

⁴³ Hammon, *Narrative*, 9.

⁴⁴ Hammon, *Narrative*, 10.

⁴⁵ Hammon, *Narrative*, 14.

⁴⁶ For a comparable contextualization of Hammon's presence in Havana with different points of emphasis, see Keith Michael Green, *Bound to Respect: Antebellum Narratives of Black Imprisonment, Servitude, and Bondage, 1816–1861* (The University of Alabama Press, 2015, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/41361>), 3–5 and 15.

⁴⁷ Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3, (2007): 768, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40006670>

⁴⁸ Arelis Rivero Cabrera, "Missionaries and Moralization for the Franciscan Province of Santa Elena: The Dilemma of an Exported Reform," *The Americas* 61 (2005): 673–700, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4490976>

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba*, 9, 40–41, 67–68, and 84–85.

⁵⁰ See Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁵¹ Kenneth J. Andrien, "The Bourbon Reforms" in *Oxford Bibliographies: Latin American Studies*, ed. Marcela Echeverri Muñoz (Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0043.xml>

- 52 See Miguel Ramos, “Lucumí (Yoruba) Culture in Cuba: A Reevaluation (1830s–1940s)” (PhD diss., Florida International University, 2013), 161–189.
- 53 Frederick Marshall Rodríguez, “Cimarron Revolts and Pacification in New Spain, the Isthmus of Panama, and Colonial Columbia, 1503–1800” (PhD diss., Loyola University, 1979), 68–73.
- 54 Richard Price, *Maroon Societies* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 42.
- 55 Ramos, “Lucumí (Yoruba) Culture in Cuba,” 42
- 56 Hammon, *Narrative*, 14.
- 57 Gould, “Entangled Histories,” 776.
- 58 See Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (Verso, 2020) and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Verso, 2012).
- 59 See Juan Francisco Manzano, *Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba, Recently Liberated* (Thomas Ward and co, 1840; digitized University of North Carolina, 2001, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/manzano/manzano.html>); Juan Francisco Manzano, *The Autobiography of a Slave* (Wayne State University Press, 1996); Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave: Revised Edition* (Curbstone Press, 1994); and Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (F. Westley and A. H. Davis, Stationers’ Hall Court 1831; digitized by University of North Carolina, 2000, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/prince/prince.html>)
- 60 Amílcar Cabral, “the Weapon of Theory” in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings* (Monthly Review Press, 1979), 119–137.
- 61 Jacques Derrida, “The Exorbitant. Question of Method” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 157–158. Emphasis in original.
- 62 Jacques Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” in *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber (Northwestern University Press), 136.
- 63 Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (Fordham University Press, 2013). Chandler writes: “[S]ince with regard to the history of African American autobiographical practices, Derrida’s contributions arrive quite late on the scene in which these practices have emerged, yet he remains a thinker whose work offers one of the strongest possible justifications for recognizing the remarkable resources of the autobiographical” (217–218n22).
- 64 Judy, *(Dis)Forming*, 90.

- ⁶⁵ Judy, (Dis)Forming, 94.
- ⁶⁶ "Advertisement," Boston Post-Boy (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 153, July 21, 1760: [4]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.kenyon.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1089C7C672FD2D48%40EANX-1089CD26A8D14F70%402364089-1089CD2723065EA0%403-1089CD27E982D0D8%40Advertisement>; and Boston Post-Boy (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 153, July 21, 1760: [1]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.kenyon.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1089C7C672FD2D48%40EANX-1089CD26A8D14F70%402364089-1089CD26C2CEC3E8%400>
- ⁶⁷ Boston Post-Boy (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 153, July 21, 1760: [3], Readex: America's Historical Newspapers, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.kenyon.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1089C7C672FD2D48%40EANX-1089CD26A8D14F70%402364089-1089CD27083D1D9%402>
- ⁶⁸ "Advertisement," Boston Post-Boy (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 146, June 2, 1760: [3], Readex: America's Historical Newspapers, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.kenyon.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1089C7C672FD2D48%40EANX-108D81EDD115FA48%402364040-108D81EE158BB770%402-108D81EEA15E7718%40Advertisement>
- ⁶⁹ Hammon, *Narrative*, 3. Moving beyond designated boundaries was heavily regulated by enslavers and those who were overseers on plantations, as such "permission" could be an opportunity for escape for those enslaved. See Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 13.
- ⁷⁰ I am thankful to Lisa Ze Winters for suggesting that I engage, with greater clarity, Hammon's narration of actively shipping himself, as opposed to being shipped by another. By contrast, Jeffrey Gagnon posits an alternate reading based on historical context and archival letters sent to General Winslow, Briton Hammon's enslaver. Gagnon strongly contends that Hammon's going aboard is an instance of "naval captivity" enforced against naval workers who were, at the time, rioting "up and down the Atlantic seaboard." See Gagnon, "Briton Hammon and Cross-Cultural Alliances," 82–84. While I agree with Gagnon that the condition of possibility for Hammon's boarding was endorsed by his enslaver, the archive of slavery in the Americas is filled with "permission" by enslavers being stretched and contested into fugitive possibilities for the enslaved. To the point for this consideration: Hammon's presence in Havana is not circumscribed by Winslow, even if Winslow required Hammon's boarding in the first place.
- ⁷¹ For an immersive study of the 1521 "Christmas rebellion" as a node in a Black liberation network throughout the Americas, see Allison Marie Guess, "Plotting on

the Plot in Hispaniola: A 16th Century (Dis)continuous Black Land Story and the Insistent Unsettling Crisis of the New World” (PhD diss., The Graduate Center, CUNY, 2021). Notably, another Black-led uprising against slavery will occur on December 25, 1831, in Jamaica.

- ⁷² Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Trans. Clayton Eshleman (Wesleyan University Press, 2001).
- ⁷³ Green, *Bound to Respect*, 8.
- ⁷⁴ See Stephen Best, “On Failing to Make the Past Present,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (September 2012): 453–474, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-1631478>
- ⁷⁵ Herman L. Bennett, “Writing into a Void: Representing Slavery and Freedom in the Narrative of Colonial Spanish America,” *Social Text* 25 no. 4 (93): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2007-012>
- ⁷⁶ Bennett, “Writing into a Void,” 69.

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