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Possibilities & Limits for Freedom: MaritimeFugitives in British North America, ca. 1713-1783

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"Possibilities & Limits for Freedom: Maritime Fugitives in British North America, ca. 1713-1783,"
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In 1724 Pompey fled his New England slave master. Found stowed away on a ship sailing to Portugal, the slave's maritime flight resulted in Boston ship captain Moffat being fined £50 for transporting a slave on a vessel without the consent of the slave's master. Unlike the three sixteen-year old slaves who had been "carried up the Delaware River" the prior year, Pompey did not find employment as a mariner. Nor did his voyage result in Pompey finding freedom in the Iberian peninsula. Instead, Pompey was returned to enslavement in New England.[1]

Near at the end of the period this essay discusses, Robert, a slave fled his Port Royal, in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, fled from his master. Robert hoped to obtain his freedom by reaching the British army. Prior to doing so he reached the Chesapeake Bay. There, along with some other fugitives, in 1781 Robert boarded a French ship stationed in the bay bound for Rhode Island. It is unknown why Robert the Virginian bondsman entered the French vessel. He mistakenly may have thought it to be a British man of war or entered based on a belief that freedom was more likely in Rhode Island. When the warship reached Newport, in clear violation of Rhode Island's 1774 outlawing slave imports, Robert and his companions found themselves sold back into slavery, in clear violation of Rhode Island's 1774 outlawing slave imports. Within a week of the sale, a contract was drafted between Robert and his new owner, Newport baker Gregory Wainwood. The contract provided that Robert would be freed after nine years of service. Not willing to wait the nine year term, Robert found freedom in 1789 by running away, obtaining the assistance of the Providence Abolition Society and suing Wainwood.[2]

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[1] Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in New England, 1620-1775* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 116; *New-England Weekly Journal,* Apr. 24, 1724; *American Weekly Mercury,* Apr. 25, 1723.
[2] John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in Early America, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2003), 377.

These stories evidence the diversity and commonality of slave maritime employment in British North America and the mobility of mariners of color in the eighteenth century Atlantic. They also evidence the opportunities for freedom British North American maritime fugitives could expect to find via the sea, while highlighting the importance that contingency, place and the British Navy played in shaping opportunities for freedom.[3]

This essay describes how slaves in Britain's northern colonies in North America attempted to obtain freedom and "competence in life" in the Black Atlantic via the sea. It considers their efforts to find the "content & ease" that many mariners, both white and colored, found difficult to obtain, and where they were able to "anchor" themselves after they escaped enslavement.[4] It also is the story of how during the eighteenth century enslaved northern mariners had been, as black watermen in southern colonies were in the

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[3] My identification of maritime fugitives has largely been based upon a review of more than 4,000 New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island fugitive slave advertisements. These advertisements alone cannot fully describe the world that maritime fugitives encountered and became part of when they fled slavery. To recreate that world my research has included the review of muster rolls, log books, High Court of Admiralty and Vice-Admiralty records, newspaper dispatches, ship captains' journals, account books, military pension records, and secondary sources. This research resulted in the creation of the Colored Mariner Database ("*CMD*") which now contains more than 8,700 colored mariners from throughout the Atlantic world. Who is included in the *CMD*? *CMD*'s colored mariners include maritime fugitives, any crew member on a ship that had a classical (e.g., Scippio), African (e.g., Quash) or place (e.g., Bristol) name, and those lacking a surname, which typically was an indication during the eighteenth century that an individual was or had been a slave. Due to most eighteenth century records not providing racial identification and many dark-skinned mariners having been given Christian surnames, the *CMB* undercounts the number of eighteenth century colored mariners, although the extent of that undercounting cannot be stated with certainty.

[4] Journal of William Richardson, 1780-1819, entitled "The Wandering Sailor," 3 Vols. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, United Kingdom, JOD/156. Escape via the sea in northern British North American colonies was largely a tool of resistance used by men. Charles R. Foy, "Ports of Slavery, Ports of Freedom: How Slaves Used Northern Seaports' Maritime Industry to Escape and Create Trans-Atlantic Identities, 1713-1783," Ph. d. Diss., Rutgers University, 2008, Chap. 3. This was due to women having less freedom of movement than male slaves, the masculine ethos of the maritime industry, and women's child-rearing responsibilities. Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had A Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Suzanne Stark, *Female Tars: Woman Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (Annapolis, 1996); Margaret S Creighton, and Lisa Norling, ed., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World: 1700-1920* (Baltimore, 1996); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985). However, there were some women, such as the unnamed Negro woman from Boston, who when they fled, were believed to have sought berths on vessels. *New-England Courant,* May 11, 1724.

nineteenth century, at the center of slave resistance.[5] And in telling the stories of these men's lives, this essay demonstrates that blacks' "relationship to the sea" was, as Paul Gilroy has observed, "especially important." These maritime fugitives were part of "movements of black peoples" across the Atlantic in which individuals crossed "borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity." For most blacks, their experience with European ocean faring vessels was the horrific Middle Passage. For others, ships represented both "slavery and exploitation." And for numerous northern slaves, maritime employment offered freedom of movement and the opportunity to escape the brutality of slavery ashore.[6]

During the eighteenth century, the sea served as a magnet for hundreds of fugitive slaves. Slaves who wore the striped ozenbrig clothing that marked them as bondsmen understood that a ship berth offered the possibility of permanent escape. Ships disappearing over the horizon provided strong visual images of escape that drew many slaves to northern wharves seeking berths. Slaves who sought to flee via the sea, individuals whom I classify as "maritime fugitives," comprised approximately one-fifth of known northern runaways.[7] Who were these maritime fugitives? What factors led these individuals to believe flight by sea offered opportunities for freedom? Where did they flee? Were they able to find freedom? And what were their lives at sea like?

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[5] David Cecelski, *Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina. (*Chapel Hill, 2001), xvi; Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (New York, 1972); Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 123-24, 200-205; Tom Costa, "What We Can Learn from a Digital Databases of Runaway Slave Advertisements," *International Social Science Review,* 76:1-2 (2001): 36-43; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill & London, 1998), 340-341.

[6] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 12; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 3, 11.

[7] Foy, "Ports of Slavery, Ports of Freedom," Chap. 3. Frederick Douglass's description of "those beautiful vessels robed in white," that he believed would "yet bear me into freedom," characterized the views of many maritime fugitives. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself,* (New York, 2004), 90.

Maritime fugitives were young, tall, healthy males who often had prior maritime experience and possessed linguistic capabilities, attributes that made them attractive to ship captains. The average age of maritime fugitives from 1713-1783 was 23 years of age, younger than any other group of Atlantic seamen studied.[8] Most northern masters had small slave holdings, did not value slave children, and opposed slave marriages. With northern ports having imbalanced gender ratios, many maritime fugitives had limited family connections in northern ports, making fleeing via the sea an enticing option for those lacking with such ties.[9]

Fugitive slave advertisements indicate that most maritime fugitives had strong linguistic skills. For example, more than 70 percent of advertisements in which New York City maritime fugitives' linguistic abilities were noted characterized the slave as speaking English. In addition, many maritime fugitives also spoke a second European language. Such linguistic abilities enabled fugitive slaves to forge passes, obtain berths and fit in among multinational crews sailing from northern ports.[10]

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[8] Among the Atlantic seamen whose age was compared to northern maritime fugitives were Salem mariners (mid-20s), British Transatlantic seamen (27.6), Scarborough (25.6) and Plymouth (30.6) crews, New York mariners (26.8) and a sampling of Americans on British naval ships in North America (27.7). Daniel Vickers with Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven, 2005), 119, App. B; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987) 156; The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, ("TNA"), CUST 66/227; TNA CUST 91/111; TNA CUST 91/112; *New York Colonial Muster Rolls, 1664-1775,* 2 vols., *Third Annual Report of the State Historian of the State of New York,* Appendix "M" (Baltimore, 2000); and Foy, "Ports of Slavery, Ports of Freedom, Chap. 3.

[9] Vivienne L. Kruger, "Born to Run: The Slave Family in Early New York, 1626-1827" (Ph. D. diss. Columbia University, 1985), Chap. 4; Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves,* 8-9; *New-York Gazette & Weekly Mercury,* Oct. 15, 1770. Others who have conducted age analysis of northern fugitive slaves have found similarly youthful runaways, although maritime fugitives were younger than all fugitive slaves. Robert Fitts, *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth-Century Narragansett, Rhode Island* (New York, 1998), 118; Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, *Pretends to Be Free: Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey,* Table 2; Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves,* Table 1.

[10] David Waldstreicher, *"Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print* Culture and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *William & Mary Quarterly,* ("*WMQ*") 56:2 (Apr. 1999), 243-272; Charles R. Foy, "How Conflicts between Whites Shaped Slave Resistance in Colonial New York City" (M.A. thesis, Rutgers University, Newark, N.J., 2002), Table 1-5.

These young northern maritime fugitives were also taller, stronger and in better health than other northern slaves. In an era when the average American was 5 feet 7 inches, numerous maritime fugitives who were 5 feet 10 inches or taller could be found on northern waterways. Men such as Levi Hollingsworth's "remarkably strong" twenty-two year old six-foot slave, who worked on a Delaware River shalllop, were commonly found lurking about shipyards, fleeing in stolen boats, and working on privateers, British men of war, and merchant ships. Healthy slaves with maritime experience were particularly valued. Slave want and sale advertisements regularly highlighted the health of slave mariners. Over half of the Pennsylvania want advertisements indicating the physical traits sought in slaves listed "healthy" as a required characteristic. New York and Newport owners were only slightly less insistent on needing "healthy" slaves. Advertisements seeking strong young mariners, such as the one a New Yorker placed in 1769 seeking "6 or 8 stout …. Negroes, that have been used to the Sea," were common in northern newspapers.[11]

Many young slaves fled via the sea due to a lack of other good alternatives to obtain permanent freedom. Runaways seeking permanent freedom in southern and West Indian colonies often sought shelter in maroon colonies, such as in Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp, where they led what whites considered a "wild and savage freedom."

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[11] Foy, "Ports of Slavery, Ports of Freedom," Tables 3-3, 4-3 and 5-3; *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury,* Apr. 24, 1769; John Kolmos, "On the Biological Standard of Living Eighteenth Century Americans: Taller, Richer, Healthier," University of Munich, http://epub.ub.uni-muechen.de/archive /00000053/01/h-usa.pdf (accessed July 6, 2006), Table 2; *Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser,* Feb. 24, 1772; *New-York Mercury,* Dec. 27, 1762. Approximately 50% of all of Rhode Island's fugitives for whom their height was indicated were tall maritime fugitives. Some tall fugitives not described as maritime fugitives were owned by ship captains, making it likely that tall maritime fugitives exceeded 50% of all fugitives. See e.g., *Providence Gazette and Country Journal,* July 15, 1780. Examples of tall New York maritime fugitives include *New York Mercury*, Dec. 27, 1762, Feb. 14, 1763, July 25, 1763, Aug. 5, 1765, Dec. 23, 1765, June 30, 1766, May 25, 1767; *New-York Gazette & Weekly Mercury*, Feb.8, 1773, Sept. 20, 1773, May 4, 1778, Aug. 24, 1778; *Royal Gazette*, Oct. 22,1783, Feb. 8, 1773.

The geography of populated areas in northern colonies – flat with few hills – provided only limited areas in which fugitives slaves could find permanent refuge from their masters. Frontier areas north and west of northern port cities attracted some slave runaways.[12] Fugitives like the New Yorker Robin, who in 1765 fled northward believing freedom could be found in the northern frontier, were exceptions, not the rule, among northern runaways. Slaves who did escape to frontier areas tended to be Native Americans or mixed-race men who sought haven in remnant tribal structures in Rhode Island before attempting to pass as free and sail to England, or like the Mulatto named Tom, attempted "to pass for an Indian."[13]

Four factors led maritime fugitives to believe that freedom could be obtained by transforming themselves from wearers of striped ozenbrig clothing to Black Tars of the Atlantic. These factors were slaves: their prior maritime experiences; the nature of slavery in northern ports; ship captains' labor needs, especially during wartime; and the permanent freedom that flight onto a ship offered.

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[12] *New-York Mercury,* Oct. 16, 1765; *Providence Gazette,* Aug. 16, 1777; *New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), Apr. 17, 1782; *Pennsylvania Gazette,* May 9, 1751; *New-York Mercury,* Mar. 15, 1756; Bryan Edwards, *Observations on the Disposition, Character, Manners and Habits of Life, of the Maroon Negroes of the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1796), repr. as Appendix to vol. 1, *History of the West Indies* (London, 1789), 527. I want to thank Kathleen Wilson for this reference. Flight overseas offered the only realistic prospect of a permanent escape from smaller West Indian islands. N.A.T. Hall, "Maritime Maroons: Grand Marronage from the Danish West Indies," *WMQ* 42:4 (Oct. 1985), 481-82.

In their review of 662 New York and New Jersey fugitive slave advertisements Graham Hodges and Allen Brown noted only ten in which the runaway fled to the "backcountry." Graham Russell Hodges and Allen Brown, *Pretends to be Free: Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey* (New York and London, 1994), 345. **[**In contrast to Virginia and South Carolina's regular slave patrols, there were few slave patrols in the northern colonies. Sally E. Hayden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: 2004).**]**

[13] Billy G. Smith & Richard Wojtowicz. *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, 1989)*,* 12; John A. Sainsbury, "Indian Labor in Early Rhode Island," *New England Quarterly* 48:3 (Sept. 1975), 391-392; *Pennsylvania Gazette,* Nov. 3, 1763; *New-York Mercury,* Oct. 16, 1765; *Newport Mercury,* Sept. 28, 1772. See George Van Cleve, "Somerset's Case and its Antecedents in Imperial Perspective," *Law and History Review* 24:3 (Fall 2006), 601-602; Foote, *Black and White Manhattan,* 198. See *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, Sept. 30, 1773; and Gretchin Gerzina, *Black London, Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), 130 for examples of slaves who believed that if they reached England the *Somerset* decision would ensure their freedom.

Many slaves came to northern ports experienced in maritime work both from their labors before being transported to North America, and while in the northern colonies matters, having been mariners or worked in land-based maritime trades in the West Indies or Africa. Masters on Antigua, St. Croix, Bermuda, and Jamaica, from which considerable numbers of slaves were regularly sent to northern ports, frequently used slaves as seamen, with one-third of Antigua's mariners being black crew members.[14] Many other West Indian slaves were employed as fishermen and were often considered critical in providing island residents with sufficient sustenance.[15] The prevalence of West Indian-born slave seamen in northern ports is illustrated by New York Captain Robert Gibb regularly employing West Indies-born slave seamen. When Gibb made West Indies voyages during the 1760s and 1770s his West Indian-born slave, Falmouth, regularly worked as a crew member. In 1779 Captain Gibb had "three Negroe and one Mulatto sailors" flee his sloop, at least one of whom, thirty year old George, was described as a Negro Bermuda-born seaman.[16]

The West Indies was not the only region with rich maritime traditions from which slaves were imported into northern ports.[17] During the last quarter of the seventeenth and

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[14] Michael Jarvis, "Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783," *WMQ,* 59, 3 (July 2002), 612; David Barry Gaspar, *Bondsmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Baltimore, 1985), 110-13, 286-87n51; *New-York Evening Post,* June 19, 1749. **[**Between 1715 and 1770, more than 800 slaves were imported into New York from Jamaica, Antigua, the Dutch West Indies and Bermuda. TNA CO/5, Naval Office Returns.**]**

[15] Kevin Dawson, "Enslaved Watermen in the Atlantic World," (Ph. D. diss., University of South Carolina, 2005), 132, 144, 149, 196, 199; Lt. Gov. Hope to Council of Trade and Plantations, Mar. 20, 1724, TNA CO 37/11, ff. 113-117.

[16] Benjamin Douglas to the King, Recognizance Pursuant to the Condition of the Pardon of the Negroe Man Named Falmouth, Misc., Mss. B. Douglas, Nov. 28, 1770, N-YHS; *Rex v Falmouth,* New York County Supreme Court, July 31, Aug. 3, 1770, Parchment Rolls, G-334, K-314; *Royal Gazette,* Nov. 20, 1779.

[17] South Carolinian slaves with maritime experience were exported to northern ports. TNA CO 5/1222, p. 54, 224, 255; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 236-244, 310-311. **[**By the Revolution, slaves were so prevalent on Virginian boats that the state's Assembly passed an act requiring that "not more than one-third of the persons employed in the navigation of any bay or river craft...shall consist of slaves." L.P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution," *The Journal of Negro History*, 27:3

the first decades of the eighteenth century, English and French pirates sought Madagascar men as mariners due to their well-known seafaring skills. At the same time, New York merchants having established a trading post in Madagascar, to provision from which they provisioned pirates, and imported significant numbers of Madagascar slaves. Elias Neau observed that large numbers of Madagascar slaves were brought to New York, which Jacobus Van Cortlandt believed had been the cause for "the very slow" state of the slave trade at the end of the seventeenth century. Despite Parliament enacting legislation in the 1720s clearly barring private slave trade from Madagascar, slaves from the island continued to be regularly observed in northern ports during the first half of the eighteenth century.[18]

Malagasy slaves were not the only enslaved Africans with maritime skills imported to the northern colonies. The skills of West African fishermen had been long noted by European travelers. In the 1750s, at a time when a considerable number of Senegambian men had seafaring experience, both as Atlantic fishermen and on sailing boats with Portuguese sails and rigging, groups of Senegambian slaves with maritime experience were transported to New York, Philadelphia and Newport. Of the African slaves imported to Pennsylvania whose origins are known, 57.7 percent were from Senegambia. Senegambian slaves also comprised 53.5 percent of African slaves imported

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(Jul. 1942), 262. See also, Monticello Plantation Database, http://plantationdb.monticello.org (accessed Oct. 24, 2006) (five watermen listed as working on Thomas Jefferson's plantations in 1774).]

[18] Letter from Jacobus Van Cortlandt to Mr. Jenkins, New York, Apr. 15, 1698, in Letter book of Jacobus Van Cortlandt, 1698-1700; Jacob Judd, "Frederick Philipse and the Madagascar Trade," *New-York Historical Quarterly* 55:4 (Oct. 1971), 364; Letter from Elias Neau to David Humphreys, New York, June 23, 1721 in SPG Letter books; Daniel DeFoe, *A General History of the Pyrates,* ed. Manuel Schonhorn (London, 1724; reprint, Columbia, SC, 1972), 247; David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, Herbert S. Klein, and eds. *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. Vol. CD-ROM (Cambridge: 1999) ("*TASD*"), Voyages #25012 and #25014; *New-York Mercury,* Aug. 7, 1758, Oct. 11, 1762; Virginia Bever Platt, "The East India Company and the Madagascar Slave Trade," *WMQ* 26:3 (Oct. 1969), 548-77; Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America,* III:122. Madagascar slaves were also imported into New Jersey. *American Weekly Mercury,* Aug. 1, 1723, Oct. 15, 1724. *American Weekly Mercury,* Aug. 1, 1723, Oct. 15, 1724.

to New York. The Upper Guinea coast was known for its skilled African seamen. Europeans employed *grumetes* (Portuguese reference to an apprentice mariner or cabin boy) or *laptots* (derived from the Wolof word for sailor) from Africans familiar with maritime labor. These men included both free Africans and enslaved individuals who typically who gave half their wages to their masters or mistresses. By the end of the eighteenth century, large numbers of *grumetes* were working for the British along the Guinea Coast.[19] It is likely that some of the Senegambian and Madagascar mariners transported to North America would have gained exposure to European sailing practices during the Middle Passage. While the numbers of Madagascar and Senegambian slaves with maritime experience who were transported to North America cannot be stated with certainty, during the eighteenth century such men were regularly observed in northern ports. Prince, a man "of a Madagascar colour" who had "been much used to the sea," and other African "saylor[s]," regularly were subjects of fugitive and sale advertisements.[20]

When slaves disembarked in Philadelphia, New York and Newport they entered

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[19] Philip D. Morgan, "Black Experiences in Britain's Maritime World," in *Empire, the Sea and the Global History: Britain's Maritime World, 1760-1840,* ed. David Cannadine (New York, 2007), 105-33; George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, OH, 2003), 7, 52, 141, 177, 207, 297; James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860* (Cambridge, 1993), 93, 117, 122; New York City African Burial Ground History Final Report, ed., Edna Greene Medford, http://www.africanburialground.com/History/ABG.pdf (accessed Feb. 22, 2005), 93 (estimated that 77% of African imports to New York were from Senegambia). West African fishing practices were observed among slaves in other North American colonies. Wood, *Black Majority,* 200-202. Gold Coast West Africans were expert canoe men who regularly brought slaves to European ships, used their boats to fish in the Atlantic and transported large cargos of goods to European vessels. Roger Quarm, "An Album of Drawings by Gabriel Bray RN, HMS Pallas, 1774-1775," *The Mariner's Mirror,* 81:1 (Feb. 1995), 32-44. Canoe skills assisted North American slaves to escape their masters and obtain berths. *Newport Mercury,* June 24, 1734; *New-York Gazette,* Aug. 13, 1767.

[20] Philip Curtin, *Economic Changes in Pre-Colonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, WI, 1975), 95-100; Bolster, *Black Jacks,* 50-1, 58; Platt, "The East India Company and the Madagascar Slave Trade," 548-77; *Pennsylvania Gazette,* May 20, 1742; *New-York Mercury,* Dec. 27, 1762. Few Senegambian children were imported to the northern British North American colonies. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, "Fluctuations in Sex and Age Ratios in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1663-1864," *Economic History Review,* 46 (1993), 308-323; G. Ugo Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Trade," *WMQ* 58:1 (Jan. 2001), 47-68.

cities in which hundreds of blacks, free and enslaved, worked on the wharves and docks. These maritime workers were part of a larger Black Atlantic maritime community with thousands of mariners of color and maritime fugitives. This extensive Black Atlantic maritime community attracted fugitive slaves from both northern ports and distant rural communities.[21]

Mobility was central to the operation of northern ports. Immigrants, ships, refugees, and goods continually entered and left these cities. So did many slaves. Numerous slaves imported into northern colonies came with considerable knowledge of the larger Atlantic world. They included Muslims from Senegambia, mariners from the Dutch and Danish West Indies, and considerable numbers of Spanish Negroes. Men like Robert and London from St. Christopher, who were brought to northern ports on trips with their masters, came with an understanding of the larger Atlantic world. Slaves' lives in northern colonies, despite strict social and legal controls, involved regular movement around and between those cities.[22] As one master observed, northern bondsmen often "never staid long in one place" and were said to have more free time than their northern rural counterparts. Their movements brought slaves in frequent contact with peoples from throughout the Atlantic world providing them with knowledge of the opportunities available elsewhere. Slaves' mobility in northern cities can be seen in newspaper

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[21] Foy, "Ports of Slavery, Ports of Freedom," Chap. 1.

[22] Irving H. Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1954), 14; Edward H. Knoblach, "Mobilizing Provincials for War: The Social Composition of New York Forces in 1760," *New York History* 78 (1987), 147-72; *New-York Gazette & Weekly Post-Boy,* Aug. 29, 1768. As Paul Lovejoy has demonstrated, enslaved Muslims transported to the Americas tended to have come from urban settings in Africa and were experienced with in dealing with peoples of varied cultural backgrounds. Paul Lovejoy, "The Urban Background of Enslaved Muslims in the Americas," *Slavery and Abolition* 26:3 (Dec. 2005), 349-376. It is not clear how many Muslim were imported into northern colonies, but given that Muslim slaves were transported from Senegambia and northern colonies imported considerable numbers of Senegambian slaves, it is reasonable to conclude that Muslim Senegambian slaves were in northern ports in the eighteenth century. Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2005), 371.

dispatches concerning slaves finding lost watches on docks, shooting bears in the outlying marshes, bringing goods to market, and drowning while at sea.[23] The daily routines of slaves such as William Chancellor's three sail makers required them to purchase needles and other supplies throughout the Philadelphia's Southwark and Center City districts, work in Chancellor's sail loft, and make deliveries of sails to ships docked at wharves along the Delaware River. They and other slaves were often unsupervised by their masters for extended periods of time. Slaves' movement was also a function of their masters frequently hiring them out to other whites for temporary employment. Often hired out over time to a number of different employers, slaves gained familiarity with a variety of neighborhoods, including maritime quarters of various cities. Slave masters also were willing to hire their slaves out to distant employers. For example, in 1761 Philadelphian William Masters hired out twelve slaves, some to employers in Wilmington, Delaware. Owners were not hesitant to hire slaves to work on ships. When lacking work for the bondsman, Bostonian Samuel Lynde hired his Negro slave out as a ship's cook. Similarly, during the Seven Years War, Dr. Amos Throop of Providence hired out his slave Newport Greene as a mariner.[24] Movement of slaves could also

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[23] *New-York Mercury,* Apr. 13, 1767; *New-York Gazette & Weekly Post-Boy,* June 16, 1768, Nov. 24, 1777; *New-York Journal or General Advertiser,* Mar. 19, 1772; *Pennsylvania Gazette,* Sept. 8, 1774; Frank J. Klingberg, *Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York* (Richmond: The Church History Society, 1940), 127.

[24] Charles Nicolls Account Book, 1758-1760, N-YHS; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, New York and London, 1998), 47; *New-York Gazette & Weekly Mercury*, Nov. 24, 1777; James Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers and Profits* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1970), 44-48, 193-4, 242; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 5, 1743, Aug. 29, 1754; *Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, May 9, 1768; *New-York Gazette or Weekly Post-Boy,* July 24, 1758. See *American Weekly Mercury*, June 18, 1730; Ann Elizabeth Schuyler Account Book, 1737-1769 (BV Sec. Schuyler, N-YHS, 111 [May 1, 1737] and 185 [April 12, 1740]); James Pitcher Ledger, 1766-1782, N-YHS for examples of slaves being hired out. See Thomas Witter Ledger Account Book, New York City, 1747-1768, N-YHS, Jan. and July, 1747 and May, 1750; William D. Faulkner, Brewer, Ledger Book D, 1773-1790, N-YHS; and Inventory and Administration of the Estate of Adolph Philipse, NYPL for examples of slaves hired out as sailors. Hiring out slaves was also a common practice in Philadelphia and Newport. Nash, *Forging Freedom,*11,15-16, 286n27. Examples of hiring out in those cities include

involve them around and between northern cities. Newspaper dispatches indicate slaves were frequently traveling via sea or on ferries with their masters.[25] The mobility of urban slaves helped create networks of information that assisted maritime fugitives when they sought to find berths at sea.[26]

Slaves' involvement in the northern maritime industry was not limited to working on wharves and docks. Slaves were employed in maritime-related occupations such as shipmasters, pilots, and ferry crewmembers. They also worked on northern fishing boats, oyster shallops, whaling vessels, ferries, transatlantic ships, and their masters or others' privateers.[27] Fugitive slave advertisements indicate that a substantial portion of northern slave runaways were mariners or were familiar with maritime matters. Almost one-quarter of New York City and thirty-seven percent of Rhode Island masters believed their slaves to have fled via the sea. Certain maritime sectors, such oyster and whaling ships, attracted significant numbers of fugitive mariners. For example, William West, Gideon Cheat, George Gregory, Titus and Jeffrey, and many others, ran from their Rhode Island masters for service on whalers. Owners understood these men intended "to go to

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Newport Mercury, Feb. 6, 1764, Jan. 9, Feb. 3, 1775, Sept. 28, Nov. 8, 1776, Jan. 2, 1778; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 4, 1768; *Pennsylvania Chronicle & Universal Advertiser*, June 3, 1771, Nov. 7, 1772; *Pennsylvania Packet or General Advertiser*, Apr. 27, 1772; and *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, Mar. 1, 1777, July 11, 1778.

[25] *New-York Weekly Post-Boy,* Apr. 10, 1749; *New-York Gazette & Weekly Mercury,* Feb. 8, 1768. Examples of such movements include Flag of Truce, Aug. 2, 1778, Aaron Burr Correspondence, Folder 3, Burr Correspondence, AAS; HMS *Mermaid* Muster Roll, 1754, TNA ADM 36/6075.

[26] Lawrence William Towner, *A Good Master Well Served: Masters and Servants in Colonial Massachusetts, 1620-1750* (New York, 1998), 112. The networks of information maritime fugitives used were not limited to other enslaved blacks but often included whites who "harboured" slaves. *New-York Gazette, Revived in Weekly Post-Boy,* June 27, 1748.

[27] Charles Nicoll Day Book, 1780-1781, New-York Historical Society; *New-York Mercury,* Apr, 17, 1758; *American Weekly Mercury,* Feb. 7, 1721, Oct. 12, 1732, Apr. 8, 1736; *Newport Mercury,* Feb. 9, 1762, Oct. 20, 1766, June 27, 1768, Sept. 15, 1774; TNA CO 5/1222, p. 136; Graham Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill, NC: 1999), p. 110; James G. Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers and Profits* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1970), p. 193-4, 242. Slaves "fit for sea service" were regularly sold in northern ports. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* Dec. 3, 1741, May 26, 1748, Oct. 9, 1755; *New-York Gazette, Revived in the Weekly Post-Boy,* Mar. 6, 1749; *New-York Gazette,* Mar. 14, 1758; *New-York Mercury,* Dec. 13, 1756; *Providence Gazette & Country Journal,* Oct. 7, 1769; *Pennsylvania Packet or General Advertiser,* Nov. 4, 1780.

Nantucket…to sail on a whaling voyage." Connecticut and Long Island slaves similarly fled to Nantucket to go whaling.[28]

Who provided berths to these runaways? Privateer, merchant and naval captains all employed these men. Privateer captains found maritime fugitives to be particularly attractive. Requiring large crews to be able to board enemy ships, privateer captains were frequently willing to ignore a dark-skinned man's possible enslaved status to fill out their crews. Men like Quam, Strode, Mingo, the Governor of Maryland's slave and the twenty-three blacks on Alexander McDougall's privateer *Tyger* were among the scores of black privateers.[29] Merchant captains similarly were also willing to hire maritime fugitives. As a 1743 census of North American vessels in Jamaica that found forty-one black mariners among the ships' one hundred thirty-one sailors demonstrates, colored mariners, free, enslaved and runaways, were commonplace in the eighteenth century Atlantic. Colonial officials complained of their port cities "filling up with foreigners" seeking berths and the British Admiralty bemoaned the "evil" of "wooly haired" sailors. Despite such attitudes, British privateers, including naval officials manning their privately owned cruizers, used slaves as crew. As the Governor of Cuba acknowledged, without mariners of "a broken color" West Indies privateers would have lacked sufficient numbers of mariners.[30]

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[28] *Connecticut Gazette,* Feb. 17, 1775; *Newport Mercury,* Aug. 15, 1774; Richard Shannon Moss, *Slavery on Long Island: A Study of Local Institutional and Early African-American Communal Life* (New York & London, 1993), 109.
[29] Carl E. Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748," *WMQ,* 42 (Jul. 1985), 368; *Pennsylvania Gazette,* Oct. 31, 1745; Lydon, "The Role of New York in Privateering Down to 1763," 14-15, 244; McDougall Papers, N-YHS, Reel 1, "List of Men Belonging to the Privateer Tyger."
[30] Hall, "Maritime Negroes,"490; Lawrence A. Clayton, "Life at Sea in Colonial Spanish America: The New World Experience," in *Seamen in Society,* ed. Paul Adam (Bucharest, 1980), III, 22 quoting a Letter from Lima's Merchant Guild to the Real Tribunal del Consulado, 1753-1754. Examples of ship-jumping include *New York Weekly Post-Boy,* Apr. 19, 1756; *New York Mercury,* Apr. 19, 1756.
[30] Edward Trelawny letter to Lords of Admiralty, 21 Dec. 1743, TNA ADM 1/3917; Letter from Thomas

The havens where northern maritime fugitives sought freedom included what Jane Landers calls the "Negroid Littoral" - Spanish Florida, Puerto Rico, Cuba, villages on the Central and South American coast, as well as England, especially after the *Somerset* decision provided legal protection for those who could reach England.[31] Maritime fugitives who reached these havens found employment in the French and Spanish navies and privateers, whose vessels had multinational crews and often included slaves or fugitive slaves.[32]

St. Augustine attracted fugitives not merely from Georgia and South Carolina, but as far away as New York. In 1721 John Cannon, the commander of New York's oyster fleet, advertised that six Spanish Indians and several Negroes stole his sloop with the intent of making for the Spanish stronghold. Twelve years later three slaves stole Cannon's sloop and headed south. Like the group of Havana-born slaves who stole a boat in South Carolina and headed to Cuba, Cannon's slaves understood that the Spanish would welcome them, and if the slaves converted to Catholicism, provide them with freedom.[33]

Porto Rico similarly attracted maritime fugitives. By 1770 their numbers became so great that a British naval vessel was sent to the island in a fruitless effort to reclaim fugitive slaves. Treaties between several nations, including Spain and Denmark

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Franklin to John Cleveland, Esq., 28 April 1757, TNA ADM 1/306; Jane B. Landers, "Garcia Real De Santa Teresa De Mose: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida" in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*, edited by Stanley N. Katz, John M. Murrin and Douglas Greenberg (New York, 2001), 609.

[31] Landers, "Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose," 595-619.

[32] In 1758 a French privateer captured in the West Indies had thirty-four sailors "of the woolly race" out of a crew of eighty. This crew was not unusual as Spanish and French privateers operating in the West Indies could not "get their Privateers mann'd" without black mariners. Feb. 10, 1758 Letter from the Board of Trade to the Crown, TNA CO 318/3, p. 365.

[33] *New-York Gazette,* Jan. 30, 1732; and Daniel E. Meaders, "South Carolina Fugitives as Viewed Through Local Colonial Newspapers with Emphasis on Runaway Notices, 1732-1801," *Journal of Negro History* 60 (1975), 304.

specifically dealt with the need for the return of slaves who fled via the sea.[34]

England also served as a haven in the Atlantic world for fugitive slaves long before it formally outlawed slavery. With the British Navy often "regard[ing] a man-of-war as a little piece of British territory in which slavery was improper," slaves coming to England before the American Revolution found naval officers helpful allies in their attempt to become free. For example, in 1751 William Castillo, a slave seamen on a merchant vessel in Boston, suspected he might be sold on shore. Castillo convinced ship Captain James Jones to purchase him, as Castillo preferred life at sea. Captain Jones promised to emancipate Castillo when the sailor's wages equaled his purchase price. Five years later not wishing to wait any longer, Castillo fled. In 1758, while in Portsmouth, England Castillo ran into Captain Jones who had him arrested, put into an iron collar and threatened to sell the black mariner in the West Indies. Being literate, Castillo was able to write to the Admiralty seeking its intervention. The Admiralty's response was to tell Portsmouth officials "the laws of this country admit of no badges of slavery," and that Castillo should be placed back on the warship's books as a free able-bodied seaman.

Thus, in the years preceding the American Revolution, as English slave ships transported enormous numbers of Africans to slavery in the Americas, slave mariners from North America had opportunities, albeit slim ones, to find freedom. These opportunities expanded with Justice Mansfield's decision in *Somerset v Stewart*.[35]

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[34] Julius Scott, "Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Robert Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainsville, FL, 1998), 135.

[35] N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1988), 160; F. Holbourne, 17, 22 & 29 Dec. 1758, TNA ADM 1/927; *TASD*. See, George Van Cleve, "Somerset's Case and its Antecedents in Imperial Perspective," *Law and History Review* 24:3 (Fall 2006), 601-602; Foote, *Black and White Manhattan,* 198. See *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, Sept. 30, 1773; and Gretchin Gerzina, *Black London, Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), 130 for examples of slaves who believed that if they reached England the *Somerset* decision would ensure their

In 1772 Justice Mansfield's *Somerset* decision held that slavery could only be supported by "positive law," which England lacked. The decision emphasized that slavery was defined differently within the Atlantic world, not merely as between different nations, but also as between the metropolis and its colonial possessions. Although Justice Mansfield's decision was ambiguous in its reach, slaves throughout the colonies came to believe that if they reached England they would be freed. Slaves throughout the Atlantic shared and acted upon this understanding that England was a land of liberty.[36] British naval officers shared a similar belief. For example, in May 1776 when the Danish sloop *Lawrence* proceeding from New York to Copenhagen was forced to dock at Portsmouth to make repairs, naval Captains Cooley and Stiles believed the ship's four slave mariners' presence in England meant they were "*emancipated* from …Slavery." The *Lawrence's* slave mariners (a North American, two West Indians, and an African) apparently believed Justice Mansfield's decision served to free them when they touched English soil and on that basis, petitioned "not [to] be carried out of the Realm." Their petition evidences an understanding that the English legal system could serve as the means to make England a "Happy Territory" for themselves and others fleeing slavery in the Americas.[37]

Although maritime fugitives found haven in some Atlantic ports, others were closed to them. Sometimes this was due to maritime labor market dynamics, and other times due to legal and cultural restrictions. For example, in 1748-1749 only seven

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freedom. Although Admiralty regulations prohibited slaves enlisting as seamen (they could be employed as servants and stewards), naval officers were known to use slave mariners in their private ventures. During the Seven Years War Admiral Douglas, Commander of the West Indies fleet, manned his private sloops in the Leeward Islands partly with slaves, some free mulattoes and Negroes captured as prisoners of war and condemned to slavery. *Wooden World*, 159-160; N.A.M. Rodgers, "The Douglas Papers, 1760-1762" in *The Naval Miscellany,* Vol. V, p. 264 & 275.

[36] *Somerset v Stewart,* 20 How. St. Tr. (1772) in Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Washington, D.C., 1926), 1:15.

[37] TNA CO 5/148, folio 70-71 (May 17, 1776), folio 75 (May 19, 1776), folio 86d (May 2, 1776) and folio 92-93 (May 21, 1776).

identifiable colored mariners sailed among the more than 3,000 crewmembers on ships out of Scarborough on Britain's northeast coast. While racist attitudes on the part of Scarborough's mariners and ship captains may have played a part in this, Scarborough's crew lists and seamen hospital's records demonstrates a different reason for the lack of black mariners on the port's vessels. Scarborough's ships were small with crews of between five and nine men. Scarborough's crews came largely from the local area, with only a sprinkling of foreign seamen in the crews. The crews frequently included multiple family members. Elderly family men often served as cooks on the ships and with the local seaman's hospital lacking financial resources, the hiring of young boys and elderly fathers served as a means of providing for family members. Thus, it was Scarborough's close-knit family culture that limited opportunities for colored sailors.[38]

Flight onto ships did not result in permanent freedom for many fugitives as they often were captured and re-enslaved. British and American captains regularly had captured mariners of color condemned by Admiralty Courts. For example, in the 1730s and 1740s, New York's Captain Lush and Boston's Captain Rouse each had parcels of Spanish colored sailors condemned as prize goods, and in 1780 Stephen Decatur brought a series of Admiralty Court proceedings to condemn captured mariners of color. Even maritime fugitives who reached England and joined the British Navy could find themselves re-enslaved. For example, during the Seven Years' War, John Incobs, a New York slave, found his way to England where he entered HMS *Garlands* as an able bodied seaman. Unfortunately for Incobs, when the *Garlands* docked in New York he found

[38] Prior to 1747 Scarborough "crews were not paying the [required seamen's sixpence] dues," resulting in "distress amongst the seamen of the Town." The 1750s saw renewed enforcement of the duty and construction of additional hospital beds. Records of Scarborough Trinity House, North Yorkshire Record Office, ZOX 10/1. Out of the more than 3,000 Scarborough crew members in the period between 1748 and 1759, only seven were colored mariners. Scarborough Crew Lists, 1748-1759, TNA CUST 91/111-112.

himself discharged for "being a slave," most likely due to his former owner asserting a claim to him.[39]

The varied experiences of eighteenth century enslaved seamen can be contrasted by the stories of two New England mariners of color, Ben Freebody and Venture Smith. In June 1775 Ben was hired out by his slave owner, Samuel Freebody, a Newport distiller, on a slaving voyage to Guinea with Captain James Brattle. Ben understood that when he was hired to Captain Brattle he would be paid "Sailors Wages." He also believed the wages would be divided between himself and Samuel Freebody. Ben intended to use his share to purchase his freedom.[40] Within a short time of coming on board Captain Brattle's ship, Ben was so severely whipped that his "blood ran down the deck," after which Ben was "pickled with brine." Captain Brattle's harsh treatment led Ben to run away while in the West Indies. Luck was not with Ben, as he was recaptured and brutally lashed by Grenada's Public Whipper. Ben then was compelled to serve on several slaving voyages between Grenada and Africa with Captain Brattle.[41] Despite Captain Brattle's abuse, Ben may have believed his fortune turned for the better when, after the slaving

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[39] *Pennsylvania Gazette,* March 3, 1743; Zabin, "Places of Exchange," 102; Richard Bond, "Spanish Negroes and Their Fight for Freedom," *New York Archives* 3 (Summer 2003), 13-15; *Boston Gazette,* Oct. 5, 1741; *Boston News-Letter,* Oct. 1, 1741; HMS *Garlands,* Muster Rolls, 1764, TNA ADM 36/7390. For some slave mariners freedom resulted not through active resistance, but rather the capture of their master's ship. In 1781 after the New London privateer *Mercury* was captured by a British war ship, the ship's slave cook Romeo found himself "Set at Liberty being a Slave." Romeo's experience was not an isolated event, as a number of British naval officers interpreted Dunmore's Declaration to require them to free other captured slave mariners. Louis F. Middlebrook, Undated biographical sketch of Elisha Lathrop, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport, VFM 405; and HMS *Monk,* Muster Roll, 1781, TNA ADM 36/1999. The risk of mariners of color being sold was not limited to periods of war. For example, in 1725 Peter Van Trump, a free black mariner from St. Thomas, signed onto for a voyage to Europe only to find the ship captain steered the ship into North Carolina where he sold Van Trump. Bolster, *Black Jacks,* 31.

[40] Letter from Ben, dated 1774 [1784?], RIHS Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 99; June 16, 1774 [1784?] Letter from Ben to "Dear Master," RIHS Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 97. Captain Battle made slaving voyages to the Gold Coast in the *Happy Return* and *Hawke* in 1776 and 1777. *TASD* # 25017 and 27302. I want to thank Philip D. Morgan for providing the documents from the Rhode Island Historical Society ("RIHS") regarding Ben Freebody.

[41] Deposition of George Irish, July 1, 1786, RIHS, Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 102. The brutality of public whipping in Grenada is described in some detail in the Deposition of James Duncan, July 1, 1786, RIHS, Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 103.

voyages, Captain Brattle's crew captured two American prizes. As a seaman entitled to "sailors wages" Ben would have anticipated receiving a share of the prize monies for the captured vessels. While other crew members received £90 in prize monies, Ben received some clothes and a single dollar to be shared with another slave mariner. Ben's misfortune only got worse. Despite his being illegally detained by Captain Brattle and harshly treated, Ben still believed the ship captain would abide by his agreement with Samuel Freebody and allow him to return to Newport. Sadly, Ben was mistaken. After he got aboard another ship bound for Newport, Captain Brattle had him forcibly removed and sent to work on a Captain Hart's vessel.

In the ensuing years Ben suffered the loss of an eye due to small-pox. Having little value as a half-blind seaman, Ben was left to "shift [sic] for myself" in New York. When Captain Hart, with whom he had lived for a period of time, left New York for Nova Scotia, Ben remained behind in New York.[42] Having "little remaining part of my cloaths," Ben was "near being sold for payment" of his room rent. He was spared that fate when New York wine merchant Garret Roorback paid his back rent and took him "in out of Charity." In August 1784 Ben was returned to Newport when a Captain Norris brought "[him] to Rhode Island by [Samuel Freebody's] order." When he got back to Rhode Island, Ben found himself a witness in a proceeding brought by Samuel Freebody

[42] Bryan Rommel-Ruiz mistakenly believed that Ben Freebody "sailed to live in Nova Scotia as a freedman." Rommel-Ruiz, "Atlantic Revolutions: Slavery and Freedom in Newport, Rhode Island and Halifax, Nova Scotia in the Era of the American Revolution," Ph. d. Diss., University of Michigan, 1999, 2. Although a "Ben Freebody" owned by a Samuel Freebody is listed in the *Black Loyalist Directory* as boarding the sloop *Cato* to sail to Nova Scotia in 1783, subsequent proceedings in Rhode Island concerning Samuel Freebody's claim against Captain Brattle for compensation for the ship captain having kidnapped Ben make clear that Samuel Freebody's Ben Freebody detained by Captain Brattle did not go to Nova Scotia, but returned to Rhode Island. *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile After the American Revolution,* ed Graham Hodges (New York, 1996), 162; Deposition of George Irish, July 1, 1786, RIHS, Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 102; Aug. 10, 1790 Note from Samuel Freebody, RIHS, Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 103.

against Captain Brattle for having improperly detained the slave for nine years and to recover Ben's wages for his service to Captain Brattle. During the proceedings neither the slave owner nor the ship captain acknowledged that Ben had any right to wages. The result was that the poor man appears never to have obtained his freedom. Instead, his wealthy master kept him until 1790, at which time he deigned to allow Ben to "look out in the Country for a Person to buy him, as he is discontented with living with me." Discontented! Little wonder; fifteen years after first being hired out as a slave mariner believing his time at sea would provide him with an opportunity to buy his freedom, Ben was forced to accept being resold to avoid not having to daily face a man who betrayed him.[43] Unlike Ben Freebody, Venture Smith found freedom at sea. An African-born slave brought to New England by a steward on a Rhode Island slaver, Smith initially was employed doing house work and agricultural duties for his master on Fisher Island. After attempting to flee by boat to the Mississippi River and then returning to his master, Smith found himself sold three times, a common occurrence among northern slaves. By fishing and other ventures, Smith was able to purchase his freedom and the freedom of other members of his family. Maritime employment enabled Venture Smith to establish a comfortable life as the owner of a number of sailings vessels.[44]

In conclusion, the Black Atlantic into which northern maritime fugitives fled needs to be understood as a dynamic and changing environment in which men of color often found themselves enslaved, freed and enslaved again. The maritime life fugitives

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[43] Ben's belief that Samuel Freebody's "goodness" would result in his freedom and being paid sailor's wages was obviously misplaced. June 16, 1774 [1784] Letter to "Dear Master," RIHS, Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 97. Captain Brattle unsuccessfully tried to settle the matter for $200. The ultimate outcome of the dispute is unknown. Deposition of George Irish, July 1, 1786, RIHS, Mss 9003, Vol. 16, p. 102.

[44] Venture Smith, "A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa," (New London, 1798), in *Five Black Lives* (Middletown, 1971), 8-24; Desrochers, "Not Fade Away," *Journal of American History* 84:1 (Jun., 1997), 42, 50-51.

sought was for some a "virtual incarceration," while for others it was "a relatively easy life."[45] Ports in which maritime fugitives at one time found haven over time could prove to be less than welcoming.[46] Moreover, ships changed course, nations declared war, seamen betrayed mates, and captains could not always be trusted. Naval officers often proved to be allies of slaves seeking freedom, but also could prove quite willing to use profit through the condemnation of colored mariners as prize goods. For maritime fugitives such as Romeo who found freedom when captured by the Royal Navy, the ship they chose took away them from their masters and to freedom. For others, such as the unfortunate John Incobs, life at sea led to re-enslavement. Seeking freedom in the eighteenth century Anglo-American Atlantic often was a game of roulette in which the ships maritime fugitives entered onto could lead to freedom or even harsher enslavement than that they had fled.

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[45]Paul C. van Royen, "The National Maritime Labour Market" in *"Those Emblems of Hell"? European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market, 1570-1870* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1997): 6, quoting Marcus Rediker and N.A.M. Rodgers.

[46] Salem, Massachusetts was a port that underwent such a significant change. From the 1750s into the mid-nineteenth century, Salem had a vibrant black community in which one-quarter of the black men worked as mariners. By the end of the Civil War only eighteen black mariners from Salem were listed on the port's crew lists, and by 1880, only three black mariners, all over fifty years old, remained on the port's vessels. Gary Wills, *Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power* (Boston and New York, 2003), 19; Brian S. Kirby, "The Loss and Recovery of the Schooner *Amity:* An Episode in Salem Maritime History," *New England Quarterly,* 62 (1989), 553-60.