

## Biographies, Silences, and Teaching the Archive of Slavery

Mary Draper

*Midwestern State University*

TEACHING ABOUT SLAVERY entails teaching about the archive. We—and our students—must consider whose story is told and whose is silenced. As a scholar of the Early Republic and American slavery, Annette Gordon-Reed is very familiar with these issues. She encountered them when she wrote *The Hemingses of Monticello*—a prosopography of the Hemings family enslaved by Thomas Jefferson—and she reflected on them in *The New York Review of Books* in October 2020.<sup>1</sup> As Gordon-Reed detailed the challenges of reconstructing the lives of enslaved people who left few archival records, so did my students in “Slavery in the Atlantic World,” an upper-level undergraduate course. The same day that Gordon-Reed published her piece in the *NYRB*, my students turned in a short analysis of an advertisement for a runaway slave. Many of them came to the same conclusion as Gordon-Reed: “The archive can be maddening.”<sup>2</sup>

Punctuated with silences, scattered with compelling details, and laden with descriptions that oscillate between racist, harrowing, and heartbreaking, runaway ads provide a glimpse into the lives of enslaved people. The details embedded within them—or omitted from them—can also provide springboards for undergraduate research projects. As a result, in “Slavery in the Atlantic World,” I tasked my students with writing an eight- to ten-page biography of

an enslaved person living in the early modern Atlantic world. The only record they had of that individual was the text of a runaway ad printed in an eighteenth-century newspaper. Throughout their research, they followed every detail as they attempted to reconstruct the life of one of the millions of people who endured and resisted their enslavement in the Atlantic world.

I called this assignment a “Contextualized Biography.” The descriptor word “contextualized” gave students some insight into the process of historical research. In most instances, I explained, it would be difficult for them to locate additional primary sources about these individuals. Googling would yield little information. But, they could reconstruct the world—or the context—in which these individuals lived. This enabled students to develop their research skills as they considered what information could and could not be gleaned from these advertisements. At the same time, the word “biography” challenged students to center the experiences of the enslaved. They saw it as their historical duty, in the words of one student, “to give a voice to silenced people.”<sup>3</sup>

One of my pedagogical goals was to devise an assignment that encouraged students to analyze the lives and experiences of enslaved people, rather than those of enslavers (see the **Appendix** for complete instructions for the Contextualized Biography assignment). Indeed, *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* by the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Learning for Justice found that educators “tend to center on the white experience” instead of elevating the experiences, beliefs, and daily lives of enslaved people. Researchers also noted that educators routinely “rely on pedagogy poorly suited to the topic,” such as role-playing. This inappropriate and misguided pedagogy harms students by having them recreate—and even “gamify”—traumatic experiences.<sup>4</sup> Writing a biography, as opposed to engaging in role-playing or writing a fictitious autobiography, does not ask students to assume the identity of an enslaved individual. Instead, this assignment asks students to think critically and empathetically about the experiences of an enslaved individual through thoughtful analysis of primary and secondary sources. It also leaves room for students to reflect on the limits of these sources and the nature of the archive.<sup>5</sup>

Next, I wanted to go beyond in-class analysis of these sources. In college classrooms, professors routinely incorporate runaway advertisements into lectures and use them to anchor discussions.

Many scholars have reflected on the pedagogy of introducing and teaching these sources. Antonio T. Bly, for example, suggested having students annotate ads, either in groups or individually. He advised providing “little to no context” for this exercise, which allows students to “freely interpret, evaluate, and question the advertisements, exploring the words and wording of the notices.”<sup>6</sup> Other educators suggest dividing students into groups and having them present their findings to the class. Matthew Mason and Rita Koman, for example, provided discussion questions that help students parse advertisements for information about white servants and enslaved people who escaped together.<sup>7</sup> Still others focus on digital pedagogy, teaching students how to find ads in databases or code them for digital platforms.<sup>8</sup> These wide-ranging activities allow students to engage with these advertisements within classroom settings, but do not allow for sustained analysis outside of the classroom. Writing a biography, though, gives students more time to follow up, assess, and reflect on the details and silences embedded within these sources.

Above all, I hoped to introduce students to the methodological and archival challenges of studying Atlantic slavery. In many cases, students are unmindful of the false starts and dead-ends of historical research. They consume the final product: a neat narrative that weaves together a multitude of sources, makes sense of silences in the archive, and presents a complete story. Yet, as historians know, the archive and its sources are riddled with omissions. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Michel-Rolph Trouillot reflected on the four moments when these silences enter the historical record: “the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).”<sup>9</sup> As students completed their biographies, they had the opportunity to assess each of these moments. The resulting papers were models of historical inquiry. They were deeply researched, creative, and—in many ways—thoughtful meditations on the power and silences of the archive.

In this article, I use the same moments Trouillot identified to reflect on the pedagogical and historiographical value of this assignment. First, I explore runaway advertisements as sources, discussing how to introduce students to their contents and prepare them for

out-of-class research. Next, I survey the digital archives that make such an assignment possible. A growing list of online resources chronicle the efforts of individuals to escape enslavement. Many of these databases are freely accessible for classroom use and provide ample opportunities for historical engagement. Finally, I reflect on the narratives of Atlantic slavery. I offer suggestions for secondary sources—from trade paperback books to academic monographs—that can provide students with models of this type of biographical scholarship. I additionally highlight the narratives my students produced. By writing this paper, my hope is that educators of all levels will be able to integrate runaway advertisements into their classrooms, engage students in conversations about the archive of slavery, and develop assignments that center the lives of enslaved people.

### **The Moment of Fact Creation: Assessing Runaway Ads**

First, we concentrated on what Trouillot called “the moment of fact creation” or “the making of *sources*.” Runaway ads dotted the pages of early American newspapers. Though taken out by enslavers, when read carefully, the ads can reveal a wealth of information about the enslaved. My first task was to introduce students to these sources and the information embedded within them. Prior to discussing the Contextualized Biography assignment, I identified fifteen advertisements that contained notable details. The earliest ad came from an April 1711 edition of *The Boston News-Letter*. It chronicled the escape attempt of a man named Jack who “carried his Fiddle with him, and a considerable bundle of Cloaths” as he absconded from Fairfield, Connecticut.<sup>10</sup> The latest ad was published in February 1788 in *The Barbados Mercury*. It offered a £10 reward for a man named Answer (see **Figure 1**), “but known more currently by the name HANDSOME,” who had fled Demerara on the South American coast and was believed to have “returned to Barbados.”<sup>11</sup> Ads I compiled from the intervening decades similarly alluded to the diversity of the enslaved experience in the English-speaking Americas. Students researched Indigenous people enslaved in New England, women laboring on sugar plantations in the British Caribbean, and people fleeing Goochland County, Virginia during the American Revolutionary War, to name a few. This ensured that the biographies my students produced spanned decades, colonies, and states.

*From Demerara, January 25, 1788.*

**A** Reward of TEN POUNDS Barbados currency, will be given for apprehending a negro man named ANSWER, but known more currently by the name of HANDSOME, formerly the property of Col. Atkins of Oistins, the said negro having runaway from the subscribers in Demerara, who have great reason to think he has returned to Barbados. Any person delivering said negro to Mr. JOHN PENNINGTON in Bridge-Town, shall receive the above mentioned reward, **BABB and GILL**

**Figure 1:** Runaway advertisement for Answer in the *The Barbados Mercury*, February 12, 1788. From the *Early Caribbean Digital Archive*, Northeastern University Library, <<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20323571>>.

In class, I distributed these sources randomly. Students then discussed the text of these advertisements in pairs, with no guidance from me.<sup>12</sup> This allowed them to identify details—or silences—that immediately stood out to them. After reconvening to discuss their initial findings as a class, I then distributed a list of guiding questions that explored six themes: 1) place, 2) time, 3) name, 4) birthplace, 5) daily life, and 6) additional information (see the **Appendix** for the guiding questions). These questions model how students can use a short primary source as the basis for constructing a longer research paper. After receiving these questions, students then reconvened and went over them with their partners. This allowed them to begin to map out the details embedded within these sources. They could then focus their out-of-class research around these questions as they started drafting their biographies.

### *Place*

The first two sets of questions—focused on place and time—alluded to Ira Berlin’s 1980 article, “Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America.”<sup>13</sup>

They challenged students to think about the importance of geography and periodization. For enslaved individuals, place mattered. Place dictated the rhythms of everyday labor, as well as opportunities for escape. Some students investigated how slavery operated in towns, including Boston, Yorktown, New Bern, and Kingston. In doing so, they considered the possibilities and limitations posed by urban settings. Others explored the daily rhythms of sugar estates or tobacco plantations. They reflected on the importance of the task and gang systems in organizing everyday life. Still others researched individuals who fled from one colony to another, allowing students to better understand the mobility of enslaved people in the early modern Atlantic world. Students came to the realization that location mattered.<sup>14</sup>

### *Time*

Timing also mattered. As the students dissected these ads, they considered the importance of specific years and months. The actions of some individuals coincided with local, regional, and Atlantic events, from imperial wars to agricultural developments. Some students researched how knowledge of geopolitics and promises of freedom—such as Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation during the American Revolutionary War—might have prompted people to escape.<sup>15</sup> In other instances, especially in agricultural regions, timing was affected by the cycle of labor, which depended upon the calendar month. In South Carolina, as noted by Philip Morgan, more people chose to run away in June when rice fields were continually hoed. Morgan also charted how more people escaped in early spring than early winter, demonstrating how weather factored into a person’s decision to flee.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, some ads revealed that considerable time had passed between a person’s escape and the placement of the advertisement. Students were left pondering the significance of this delay.

### *Name*

The remaining questions guided students in learning more about the particular individual who fled. One set of questions guided students in analyzing the person’s name. Did they have an Akan day name, a classical name, or something else? Who might have given them that name and why?<sup>17</sup> In researching these questions, students

reflected on the power dynamics of naming. Some recognized that stripping a person of their birth name was one step in the process of commodification. Others acknowledged how individuals could retain some agency, choosing to go by a name that differed from the one used by their enslaver. When one man fled a Jamaican plantation in 1754, his enslaver reported that he was “called DAVY but perhaps he goes now by the name of CABENAH, his country name.”<sup>18</sup> With this move, his biographer argued, Cabenah reclaimed his identity. In asking questions about something as commonplace as a name, students were able to see how a single word could serve as a rich primary source.

### *Birthplace*

Another set of questions focused on the individual’s birthplace. An enslaver’s ad might mention a region in Africa, use an ethnic identifier such as Coromantee, or refer to someone as a “creole,” which labeled a person as American-born as opposed to African-born. In some instances, students could research events in West Africa, such as the conquests of Dahomey, to reconstruct the African background of individuals. Other times, these questions enabled students to infer whether a person endured—and survived—the trauma of the Middle Passage. Answering these questions enabled students to contextualize some of the earliest moments of a person’s life.<sup>19</sup>

### *Daily Life - Labor*

Students were also able to make inferences about a person’s daily life, such as what kind of labor they performed on a regular basis. Often, this was clearly stated in the ad. Nim, whose escape was chronicled in *The Boston News-Letter* in 1716, could “do something in the Carpenters trade.”<sup>20</sup> In 1746, *The Virginia Gazette* published an ad for Minas, described as “a Cooper by Trade” who fled Yorktown.<sup>21</sup> In 1778, *The North Carolina Gazette* announced that a “tolerable good house carpenter and shoemaker” named Abraham (see **Figure 2**) fled New Bern.<sup>22</sup> Another ad in 1780 in *The Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* chronicled the collective efforts of twelve people—including Chelsie, a shoemaker; Cyrus, a hostler and gardener; George, “a very good whiskey distiller”; Lucy, a washer and ironer; and Hannah and Nan, “exceedingly good flax

NEWBERN, NORTH-CAROLINA, Feb. 26.

**R**UN away from the subscriber, a mulatto man named *Abraham*, who he lately bought from *Mr. Isaac Patridge* of this place, he is very likely and well made, near or about six feet high, tolerable good house carpenter and shoemaker, about forty years of age, as to his clothes I cannot give any particular description of them, but he has a plenty, therefore make no doubt but he will appear well dressed, and have reason to believe he has a considerable sum of money with him, he was seen about ten days since on his way to *Holly Shelter*, in company with a mulatto man named *Lewis*, belonging to *Mrs. Barron*, of this town, both on horse-back, he was the property of the late Major *David Barron*, deceased, he is 18 years of age, and about 5 feet 6 inches high, well set, has black hair which curls naturally, remarkable large eyes, his face is much freckled, he will also appear well dressed, as he has a plenty of clothes and money; it is expected they will both keep together, and am very sure they will change their names, and endeavour to pass as freemen, they will make the best of their way for *South Carolina*, to enter on board some vessel, in order to make their escape to the West-Indies, as *Abraham* has relations in *St. Eustatia*. Any person apprehending the said slaves, and securing them in any goal where the owners can get them, shall have one hundred dollars reward, if taken out of the state two hundred dollars, and if brought here all reasonable expences paid by

WILSON BLOUNT.

*N. B.* They have been seen on their way to *Cross-Creek*, and are supposed to be lurking about that place.

Figure 2: Runaway advertisement for Abraham in *The North Carolina Gazette*, March 13, 1778. From *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/fou6bv9tVy2yuz96JDhtB4>>.

spinners”—to escape slavery in Goochland County, Virginia.<sup>23</sup> When such details were lacking, students researched the economic and environmental landscape in that particular region. Was it home to small family farms or sprawling plantations? Did planters dedicate their fields to sugar, tobacco, rice, or wheat? By researching these questions, students were able to contextualize the world in which these individuals lived and labored.



### *Daily Life - Language*

Other questions honed in on language. Enslaved individuals were forced to adapt to new regions, picking up different languages as they did. Ads placed in New York publications often chronicled the survival of Dutch in the colony. A woman named Jenney, who escaped in 1737, was described as having the ability to speak “English and some Dutch.”<sup>24</sup> Decades later in 1774, a man named Jack, described as someone who “speaks good English, and has a smattering both of French and Dutch,” was believed to have escaped by boarding a vessel.<sup>25</sup> Such comments reveal the cosmopolitan and mobile nature of Atlantic slavery. In other instances, enslavers used adjectives such as “thick” or “bad” to describe a person’s command of the English language. These words gave students insight into whether or not the person was a native English speaker, as well as whether they had been taught to read or write. These printed comments revealed the linguistic diversity of the Atlantic world’s enslaved population.<sup>26</sup>

### *Daily Life - Clothing*

Many ads also detailed the personal items that people took with them. Such descriptions attested to the “vital visual dimension” of these documents. As argued by Jonathan Prude, “It is impossible to overstate the role of dress in these advertisements.”<sup>27</sup> In his sampling of 1,724 people who ran away—a number that included enslaved individuals, indentured servants, and convict laborers, as well as a few soldiers, family members, and criminals—Prude found that more than three-quarters of advertisements included some reference to clothing.<sup>28</sup> Such references enabled the newspaper’s readers to better identify those who fled. For today’s readers, these details give insight into the material world of enslavement. Students realized that people carried a range of clothing when seeking freedom. The quality and style of these items could vary widely. One man carried a “homespun Coat”<sup>29</sup> whereas another carried “a very remarkable coat, having a great number of patches of different colours.”<sup>30</sup> Many had commonplace garments, like osnaburg linen shirts. Others had items with noticeable details. One woman fled wearing “a Callico Waistcoat with a large red flower, and a broad stripe,” as well as “a Callico Pettycoat with small stripes and small red flowers.”<sup>31</sup> Of

particular note, one man “carried a Womans Gown,” leading his biographer to surmise that he was hoping to conceal his identity as he traveled throughout the colonies.<sup>32</sup> Such details allowed students to think through the sartorial decisions people made as they attempted to secure their freedom.

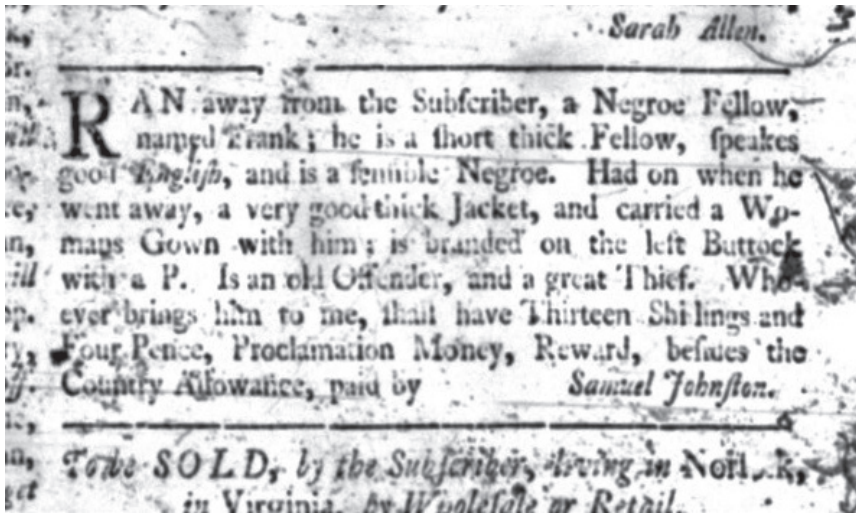
At the same time, detailed descriptions of garments encouraged students to consider the “language of dress,” or how enslaved people used clothing to fashion themselves in particular ways. Scholars such as Stephanie Camp, Steeve Buckridge, and Mary Hicks all considered the symbolic and tangible meanings of cloth and garments among enslaved people in the Atlantic World.<sup>33</sup> In particular, Camp showed how women embellished and accessorized their outfits throughout the antebellum American South. Such efforts enabled them “to make their bodies spaces of personal expression, pleasure, and resistance.”<sup>34</sup> In writing their biographies, my students looked for similar signs, reflecting on the ways in which clothing could be methods of disguise, markers of identity, or canvases for creativity.

### *Daily Life - Possessions*

Individuals fled with items other than clothing, including personal possessions or stolen goods. When Jack fled Fairfield, Connecticut in 1711, he “carried his Fiddle with him.”<sup>35</sup> This led one student to highlight musical culture among enslaved people, drawing on recent research by Laurent Dubois on the banjo.<sup>36</sup> The student surmised that Jack might have attempted to earn money using his musical talents.<sup>37</sup> Other students reflected on the role of stolen goods in securing one’s freedom. When twelve individuals fled a Virginia plantation in 1780, they “stole some guns.”<sup>38</sup> Students recognized this decision as strategic. It was one way of protecting such a large group of freedom seekers. Similar to their sartorial decisions, the material choices that people made as they fled enslavement give insight into how they envisioned their future.

### *Daily Life - Physical Descriptions*

Physical descriptions of these individuals provided yet another avenue for analysis. Some advertisements attempted to estimate height or relay some sense of a person’s build. Others described



**Figure 3:** Runaway advertisement for Frank in the *The North Carolina Gazette*, February 12, 1788. From *North Carolina Runaway Slave Notices*, <<http://dilas.uncg.edu/notices/notice/1456/>>.

complexions or labeled a person as mixed-race. Of particular interest to students were descriptions of scars. These provided insight into the violence of Atlantic slavery, the process of commodifying people into property, and, in some instances, the African background of enslaved people. Some ads provided little context for analyzing scars, leading readers to wonder if they resulted from forceful punishment by an enslaver, overseer, or driver. Other ads referred explicitly to branding. Frank (see **Figure 3**), who fled from New Bern, North Carolina, was “branded on the left Buttock with a P.”<sup>39</sup> Such descriptions made clear to students how little control enslaved people had over their bodies as they became chattel property. Lastly, though none of my students wrote about individuals with “country marks,” many advertisements from the antebellum American South mention these markings. In *Exchanging our Country Marks* (1998), Michael A. Gomez detailed how some West African cultures used ritualized scarification. While these scars became ethnic identifiers among displaced enslaved populations that allowed for the creation of kinship networks, they also became tools of the planter class for identifying fleeing individuals.<sup>40</sup>

### *Daily Life - Disease*

In other instances, scars revealed the frequency of disease—and the constant threat of death—among enslaved populations. Smallpox repeatedly ravaged colonial America, affording survivors immunity, but often scarring them for life. Consequently, “pitted with the small Pox” became a frequent descriptor in runaway ads.<sup>41</sup> In tropical locations, other diseases threatened enslaved populations. Cabenah, whose story was recorded in the *Weekly Jamaica Courant*, “may be discovered by one of his ankles being somewhat bigger than the other, by a guinea-worm, and had some of these worms in his thigh when eloped.”<sup>42</sup> This disease, also known as *Dracunculiasis*, spreads when individuals lack access to clean drinking water. Disease, these ads make clear, was a constant threat—one that could result in death, disability, and permanent wounds.

### *Daily Life - Community and Relationships*

These ads also give insight into the communities and the relationships enslaved people forged. When relevant, enslavers included information about a person’s family and friends in ads. For example, a woman named Lucy fled Kingston, Jamaica in 1726. Her enslaver “believed she was inticed away by Ishmael, a free Mulatto Fellow (who is her husband).”<sup>43</sup> Lucy’s marriage demonstrates the possibility of intimate relationships between free and enslaved people of African descent. Although her enslaver recognized her marriage on paper—and printed it in the advertisement—Lucy was unable to live with her husband. Yet his proximity gave her the opportunity to escape. Another ad chronicled the escape attempt of an entire family—Hannah, Cyrus, and Chelsie—from a Virginia plantation in 1780.<sup>44</sup> For these individuals, their success depended upon collaboration. Running away became a collective, familial effort.

### *Daily Life - Geography and Destination*

In many ways, these advertisements reconstruct the mental map of enslaved people, giving us insight into the places that seemed to offer shelter and protection. Whereas some people fled to family members, others fled to cities where they hoped to find work or hide

among the growing free Black population. Still others took to the sea. Many students researched people who were believed to have fled via waterways. As a result, news of their escape was advertised in newspapers in other ports of call. The enslaver of Nim, who fled New Jersey in 1716, wrote, "'Tis believed he endeavours to get on board some Vessel."<sup>45</sup> Consequently, a description of Nim appeared in newspapers as far away as Boston. Others allegedly attempted to travel even further distances. Abraham, who left New Bern, North Carolina in 1778, was believed to have fled to St. Eustatius.<sup>46</sup> These ads recognized the wide-ranging maritime networks of enslaved people, revealing how they understood—and could potentially navigate—this increasingly connected world.<sup>47</sup>

These networks depended upon the growing population of enslaved sailors. Seafaring men were able to draw upon their maritime knowledge as they fled, and could use that knowledge to assist others. Enslavers knew of the potential power of these networks. One man warned readers that Jack, who fled New York in 1774, “has formerly been a sailor, he may probably take to sea; therefore all captains of vessels are forwarned carrying him off at their peril.”<sup>48</sup> Maritime experience equipped some enslaved people with immense geographic and practical knowledge that could guide their escape plans.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, other ads recognized the existence of maroon communities as well as the opportunities afforded by rival empires and nations. These comments provide further insight into how enslavers and the enslaved understood the geography of freedom in early North America. Advertisements in eighteenth-century Virginia and Carolina routinely listed the Dismal Swamp as a possible destination. There, a growing population of formerly enslaved people had found refuge. In South Carolina and Georgia, many fleeing people were thought to be destined for Florida. In nineteenth-century Texas, ads predicted that some individuals intended to travel to Mexico, where slavery was abolished in 1837. Time and again, these ads showcased the geographic knowledge that enslaved individuals acquired as they lived and labored in the Atlantic world.<sup>50</sup>

### *Additional Information*

The final set of questions encouraged students to analyze any additional information that the enslaver chose to include in the

advertisement. In some ads, enslavers revealed that this was not the first instance a person had attempted escape. Frank was described as “an old Offender, and a great Thief.”<sup>51</sup> The enslaver of Violet reported, “Any person who may take her up must secure her strictly or she will certainly escape again, being remarkably artful.”<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, Elijah, who fled Charleston, South Carolina, was labeled as “an artful sensible Fellow” who would “endeavor to pass a free Man.”<sup>53</sup> Meant as warnings to readers, these comments simultaneously revealed how the enslaved repeatedly resisted. People continually protested their enslavement, by seizing goods, running away, and attempting to secure their freedom by whatever means possible. Comments such as these—students realized—relayed this ongoing struggle.

### *Supporting Written Assignments*

To further help them in the research and writing process, I had students submit two short papers throughout the semester. In these one- to two-page papers, due during weeks five and nine of the fifteen-week semester, I encouraged students to begin to answer one of the guiding questions. This served two purposes. First, it ensured that students were actively researching and writing their biographies. Second, it allowed me to make suggestions about primary and secondary sources throughout the writing process. I also told students they were welcome to reflect on what they did not—and could not—know in these papers. I then encouraged students to incorporate these thoughts into their final drafts. Overall, these guiding questions enabled students to reflect on runaway advertisements as primary sources and break their research and writing into manageable sections.

When asking the right questions, students realized these short ads revealed a wealth of information about enslaved people. To be sure, this information reflected the perspective of enslavers, but it could also be read “along the bias grain”—a phrase that historian Marisa J. Fuentes uses to describe her methodology in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016).<sup>54</sup> This approach enabled students to reconstruct the lives and possible experiences of the enslaved. At the same time, though, these ads were punctuated with silences. For every reference students could follow up on, there

was another that they could not. Such reactions made for a fruitful discussion about the silences found in these sources, and what they mean for the historical study of enslaved people in the Atlantic world.

### **The Moment of Fact Assembly: Digitizing the Archive**

Using runaway advertisements in the classroom is not new. Indeed, Donald Lord published “Slave Ads as Historical Evidence” in *The History Teacher* in 1972.<sup>55</sup> Since then, though, access to these sources has changed considerably. Whereas Lord advised educators to consult printed histories of American slavery—or his own article—for images or transcriptions of runaway ads, we can now turn to the Internet. There is an ever-growing collection of online databases—many of which are open access—that chronicle the escape efforts of individuals throughout the Atlantic world. With ongoing digitization efforts and digital humanities initiatives, the number of these databases will only increase in the coming years, and the contents of existing ones will continue to evolve. Each of these databases provides a rich archive of biographical data.<sup>56</sup>

Although I did not take classroom time to introduce students to these databases, many of my students found them—simply by Googling—as part of their research process. Students then searched these databases for additional references to include in their biographies. Because so many students ended up exploring these digital archives on their own, I plan on doing more in-class instruction related to these databases in future iterations of this course. They would then be able to see how these databases are organized and how their contents—runaway advertisements—have been coded and categorized. After such instruction, I could task students with identifying at least two potential biographical subjects as homework. This would provide them with more opportunities to explore these digital archives. I would also be able to ensure that their sources contained enough detail to inform an eight- to ten-page paper. Finally, by introducing students to these databases and formulating assignments around them, we would be able to further explore the possibilities and limitations of the archive of Atlantic slavery through classroom discussions.

These databases allow for a reflection on what Trouillot called “the moment of fact assembly.” In these databases, the names of people who might otherwise be excluded from historical narratives—

who often left no records of their own—undergo optical character recognition (OCR). Rather than having to go to a physical archive and consult individual newspapers, researchers can query fully searchable, digitized databases that are often sortable by name, location, and date. Some databases offer even more filters, allowing researchers to specify the language of the ad, who posted it, and specific details about the person who fled. The wealth of information embedded within these databases enables researchers to study these individuals collectively and individually.

### *Digital Archives for U.S. Colonies/States*

Some databases focus on specific colonies and states. For example, *North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements, 1750-1865* features more than 5,000 items published in North Carolina newspapers.<sup>57</sup> Each entry includes an image of the advertisement, as well as a transcription. Similarly, *The Geography of Slavery in Virginia* includes more than 4,000 advertisements from Virginia and Maryland from 1736 until 1803.<sup>58</sup> It, too, is searchable and includes maps associated with each individual. These maps pinpoint every location associated with a person, allowing researchers to better chart their real and possible movements. Both the *Texas Runaway Slave Project* and the *Lone Star Slavery Project* digitize the documentary record of Texas's slave society.<sup>59</sup> The former chronicles the efforts of more than 2,500 individuals to escape bondage. The latter seeks to digitize county records that pertain to slavery. Databases like these open up countless opportunities for biographical projects, as well as regionally specific activities.<sup>60</sup>

### *Digital Archives for England and Scotland*

Other databases look beyond the boundaries of the present-day United States, enabling research on self-emancipation efforts throughout the Atlantic world. *Runaway Slaves in Britain: Bondage, Freedom and Race in the Eighteenth Century* surveys English and Scottish newspapers between 1700 and 1780.<sup>61</sup> It includes more than 800 runaway advertisements for people who were enslaved or bound in Britain. The vast majority of these ads chronicle the efforts of people of African descent, yet there are also mentions of people



from the Indian sub-continent as well as Indigenous Americans. The documents included in this database not only reveal strategies for resistance, but also demonstrate how the labor of enslaved individuals on the island of Great Britain, as opposed to overseas, shaped the economies of England and Scotland.

### *Digital Archives for the Caribbean*

For research on the circum-Caribbean, both *The Early Caribbean Digital Archive* and the *Digital Library of the Caribbean* provide access to an array of sources. Neither focus specifically on digitizing newspapers, but materials relating to enslaved resistance are available in both. *The Early Caribbean Digital Archive* seeks to make accessible “a literary history of the Caribbean written and related by black, enslaved, Creole, indigenous, and/or colonized people.”<sup>62</sup> Its collections include first-hand narratives that chronicle the enslaved experience, accounts of Obeah, eighteenth-century histories of various islands, and excerpts from newspapers, which include some runaway ads. The *Digital Library of the Caribbean* likewise features a wide range of sources that can be filtered by country.<sup>63</sup> It includes items such as Douglas Chambers’ 330-page compilation of runaway slave advertisements from Jamaica. These 740 notices span from 1718 until 1795. Together, these two databases provide open access to sources from the circum-Caribbean that might otherwise be difficult to reference.

### *Digital Archives with Crowd-Sourced Collections*

For the largest collection of runaway ads from North American newspapers, students and educators should consult *Freedom on the Move*.<sup>64</sup> This collaborative, crowd-sourced database, which focuses on “rediscovering the stories of self-liberating people,” contains more than 30,000 ads. Its earliest ads date to 1704, when *The Boston News-Letter* began publication. These ads chronicle the efforts of people like Penelope, who fled with a “flowered damask Gown.”<sup>65</sup> The collection’s latest ads date to the 1860s, when enslaved people fled during the Civil War. These final advertisements make clear that enslaved people saw the Union Army as a liberating force. For example, Sanders (see **Figure 4**), who fled Caswell County, North

**TAKE UP THE RUNAWAY!**

**R**UNAWAY FROM THE SUBSCRIBER, ON THE 4TH February, 1865, my negro man SANDERS, (or SAM.) He is about twenty-three years old, near six feet high, rather spare built, but very perfect in form and action, speaks quick and distinct when spoken to, with a good set of front teeth; had on when he left, a cap, grey pants and blue round-about coat.

It is believed this man (a dark brown color nearly black,) is making his way to our army near Peter-burg, and it may be to the enemy. Now this notice is to request all persons in and out of the army to apprehend said boy so that I get him, and I will give, for his apprehension and delivery to me, five hundred dollars in Confederate currency or a corresponding sum, if apprehended and confined so I can get him.

WM. B. BOWE,  
Yang'sville, Caswell county, N. C.  
24-51\*

March 25, 1865

Figure 4: Runaway advertisement for Sanders in the *Daily Conservative*, March 25, 1865. From *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/9FxUWSivAs5DKyQy3k5wMm>>.

Carolina in 1865, was believed to be “making his way to our army near Petersburg, and it may be to the enemy.”<sup>66</sup> The database’s wide range of dates and newspapers opens up a variety of research and pedagogical opportunities.

*Freedom on the Move* is designed to be used by a variety of researchers, from students to genealogists to K-12 educators. Beyond compiling an incredible cache of documents, the database also invites users to contribute to the project in two ways: extracting data and grouping advertisements.<sup>67</sup> Both of these tasks provide educators with opportunities to introduce students to runaway ads as sources. When extracting data, volunteers first transcribe the ad using an image. They are asked to remain faithful to the original document, maintaining punctuation and misspellings. Then, volunteers are asked a series of questions relating to the ad. They must identify who posted it and when the person fled. Then volunteers answer a series of questions about the self-liberating person: What is their name? Are multiple names listed? Has the person attempted escape before? Might they claim to be free? Did anyone help them? Next are questions about gender, age, height, and weight, as well as details

about skills and languages. Lastly, volunteers input information about the enslaver, such as name and gender. The process of extracting data familiarizes volunteers with the anatomy of an ad. It would be a meaningful way of introducing students to these sources and could make for a productive in-class activity.

The second way to contribute to the project is to group advertisements. Those familiar with early American newspapers know that printers often ran the same ads in several issues. To help identify these repeat notices, *Freedom on the Move* curates a selection of advertisements that seem similar. Volunteers then read over and select those that contain the same content. This activity enables volunteers—and students—to track how enslavers continually placed advertisements for people who ran away, sometimes even years later. This meant that a person's physical description could continue to circulate in print, making their freedom even more precarious.

The immense data embedded in *Freedom on the Move* is unparalleled. Since it launched in 2019, its collection has grown from about 12,000 newspaper advertisements to more than 30,000.<sup>68</sup> That number will only swell in the coming years as more contributors add to the database. Moreover, its user-friendly interface and dynamic volunteer opportunities make it an invaluable classroom resource for those interested in North American slavery.

Lastly, the new database *Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade* seeks to discover, connect, and visualize the lives of enslaved people throughout the Atlantic World.<sup>69</sup> Its infrastructure allows for the importation of data from individual projects as well as existing databases. This enables researchers to connect records across sources and archives. In other words, an enslaved person whose name appears on a plantation inventory might also appear in a published runaway ad, in burial records, or in city registers of free Black people. By aggregating diverse sets of sources, the database helps reconstruct the stories of these individuals. Though the website was only officially launched in December 2020, it already includes over 675,000 people records—a number that will only increase as more datasets are added.

Because of its wide-ranging source base, *Enslaved.org* spans the Atlantic world. It includes plantation inventories from Brazil, records from the Notarial Archives in New Orleans, as well as data from *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. In the future, it will include datasets that highlight free people of color

in Savannah, Georgia, enslaved people on Casa Bianca Plantation in Florida, and people of African descent in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As a result, it provides researchers—including students—with access to sources that might otherwise be impossible to consult.

Similar to other databases, each entry is tagged with a variety of metadata. Users can search by name, sex, or age range. They can limit searches to a particular location or identity, including “Freed Person” (a person who was previously enslaved) or “Free Person” (a person who was born free). Researchers can also designate the type of event they would like to study or the type of source they would like to consult. *Enslaved.org* includes twenty-three types of events, including birth, death, military service, resistance and rebellion, emancipation or manumission, and disappearance. This latter event includes newspaper advertisements for enslaved people seeking freedom. The database also compiles information from nineteen types of sources, allowing researchers to limit their searches to items such as newspapers, censuses, letters, or wills and testaments. Some researchers have already published on these rich datasets in the *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation*,<sup>70</sup> but that body of scholarship will continue to grow as more researchers engage with *Enslaved.org*.

Moreover, *Enslaved.org* includes links to 150 individual biographies, adapted from *The African American National Biography*, *The Dictionary of African Biography*, and *The Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*.<sup>71</sup> They highlight people like Harry Washington, who was enslaved by George Washington, but escaped during the Revolutionary War. He joined the Ethiopian Regiment, accompanied British forces in South Carolina, and eventually relocated to Nova Scotia and later Sierra Leone as part of the Black Loyalist diaspora.<sup>72</sup> By piecing together archival snippets, these biographies model how researchers—and students—can weave together archival information in order to contextualize a person’s life.

The proliferation of open-access databases, from the *Texas Runaway Slave Project* to *Freedom on the Move* to *Enslaved.org* means that students and educators no longer have to rely on subscription databases like *America’s Historical Newspapers* to access runaway advertisements. Instead, students can explore one or more of these databases on their own time, with classroom instruction, or as part of an assignment. For pedagogical purposes, the value of these databases is immeasurable, offering ways to engage students in annotation,

analysis, group work, and digital history. Above all, they offer dynamic springboards for discussions about the archive of slavery.

In many ways, these digital databases stand in stark contrast to the typical structure of the archive of Atlantic slavery. In her book on Black women in early New Orleans, Jessica Marie Johnson chronicled how African women and women of African descent constructed their own practices of freedom—practices that can only be recovered through creative readings of archival materials. In her conclusion, she reflected on the lives of these women: “These stories seem extraordinary because they appear in an archive structured to erase them.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, enslavers’ records did not always log names. Even if they did, other details can be sparse—attesting to what historian Marisa Fuentes called “ephemeral archival presences.”<sup>74</sup> But in these digital databases, the names of hundreds of thousands of enslaved people endure, attached to stories of resistance that testify to their strength, adaptability, and persistence.

### **The Moment of Fact Retrieval: Reading and Writing Biographies**

In *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot detailed how historical narratives are “premised on the distribution of archival power.”<sup>75</sup> A historical narrative reflects the contents of the archive, including what is recorded and what is not, as well as whose voices are highlighted and whose are silenced. As students researched and wrote their biographies, they witnessed this archival power first-hand. While digital databases have enabled access to a growing number of records relating to Atlantic slavery, these records provide a mere glimpse into the lives of the enslaved. I encouraged students to confront the silences they encountered—and the fragmentary nature of the archive—in their writing. These silences, I explained, were crucial to writing their biographies.

In recent years, historians of Atlantic slavery have modeled how to confront and question these silences. To introduce students to this approach, I assigned excerpts from Marisa Fuentes’ *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016). In her introduction, she discussed how her methodology “purposefully subverts the overdetermining power of colonial discourses.”<sup>76</sup> To do this, she turns the perspective of documents inside out:

By changing the perspective of a document's author to that of an enslaved subject, questioning the archives' veracity and filling out miniscule fragmentary mentions or the absence of evidence with spatial and historical context, our historical interpretation shifts to the enslaved viewpoint in important ways.<sup>77</sup>

In other words, Fuentes models how to read documents produced by enslavers in order to reconstruct the perspectives and experiences of the enslaved. This approach allowed Fuentes to recognize "persistent historical silences" in the archive to ensure that she did not "reproduce these silences" in her own scholarship on the lives of Black women in eighteenth-century Barbados.<sup>78</sup> Each chapter of *Dispossessed Lives* opens with a fleeting reference to a Black woman living and laboring on the island. One chapter reconstructs the world of Jane, an enslaved woman who fled from her owner according to a runaway ad published in 1789. Another examines the lives of freed woman Rachel Polgreen and a woman she enslaved named Joanna through an analysis of Polgreen's will. After teasing out the context around these women's lives, Fuentes concluded by recognizing the limits of the archive: "There will always be unanswerable questions from an archive that cannot fully redress the loss of historical perspectives and insights from the enslaved." After spending years combing through sources, she was struck by the "complete absence of material by enslaved women." Even so, she managed "to bring these women into history"—constructing a historical narrative out of silences and fragments.<sup>79</sup>

Approaches similar to that of Fuentes have led to a proliferation of biographies of enslaved men and women in the Atlantic world. These biographies model how students can use sparse sources to build out historical context. In my class, students read James H. Sweet's *Domingos Álvarez, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (2011). Using archival sources from Brazil and Portugal—including a 600-page Inquisition file—Sweet followed the life of Domingos Álvarez, a vodun priest who was born in Dahomey, enslaved in Recife and Rio de Janeiro, and tried for witchcraft in Portugal. Tracing Álvarez's life in the South Atlantic world, Sweet provided what he called a "layered history," taking references from archival materials, some of which are pitted with silences, and expanding on them.<sup>80</sup> One chapter, for example, reconstructs Álvarez's experience in the plantation world of Recife. Another

chapter spends several pages spatializing Álvarez's neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. This kind of deep reconstruction provides readers with a better understanding of how Álvarez moved about the city, what he saw on a daily basis, and how the urban fabric of Rio influenced the institution of slavery.

Fuentes and Sweet join a growing list of scholars writing biographies of freed and enslaved men and women. Vincent Carretta's *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (2005) considers the life and times of Oludah Equiano, paying close attention to conflicting archival evidence about his birth.<sup>81</sup> Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1968) recounts the life of Esteban Montejo, a man enslaved in Cuba who eventually joined its war for independence.<sup>82</sup> Randy Sparks' *The Two Princes of Calabar* (2009) traces how two slave traders from the Bight of Biafra became enslaved themselves, leading readers from Dominica to Virginia to England.<sup>83</sup> Lastly, the edited volume *As If She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Women and Emancipation in the Americas* (2020) brings together the stories of twenty-four women who attempted to gain their freedom in the Atlantic world.<sup>84</sup> The lives of these women span centuries and continents, from sixteenth-century Mexico to nineteenth-century Illinois. Together these wide-ranging biographies provide readers with a glimpse into the vast experiences of enslavement that people of African descent endured throughout the Atlantic world.

For those teaching about the early United States, Erica Armstrong Dunbar and Tamika Y. Nunley each provided useful classroom models for using runaway ads as primary sources that can reveal rich details about the lives of the enslaved. Both authors showed how Black women used urban landscapes to make claims to freedom in the early United States. Dunbar's *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge* (2017) examines the life of Ona Judge, an enslaved woman who lived in the Washington household and attended to Martha.<sup>85</sup> In May 1796, while Washington was President, Ona fled. In response, Frederick Kitt, the steward for the Executive Mansion, placed an ad in *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*. Dunbar traced Judge's quest for freedom, reconstructing her journey from Philadelphia to New Hampshire. The text of the runaway advertisement—which suggested “she may attempt to escape by water” and remarked that she “has many changes of very good clothes of all sorts”—is printed in full in the book.<sup>86</sup> So, too, are two

interviews that Judge gave later in her life. These interviews, printed in the *Granite Freeman* in 1845 and *The Liberator* in 1847, reveal the details of her escape and the precariousness of her newfound freedom. Accessible and engaging, *Never Caught* weaves limited evidence into a cohesive, engaging narrative.

In *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* (2021) Tamika Y. Nunley examined how African American women “made extraordinary claims to liberty in the nation’s capital in ways that reveal how they dared to imagine different lives.”<sup>87</sup> In her second chapter, “Fugitivity,” Nunley used the text of runaway ads to show how fugitive women engaged in a “multidimensional contest consisting of improvisation, self-making, and strategic navigation.”<sup>88</sup> For Nunley, these ads not only reveal a “narrative of surveillance,” but important details about how women remade their identities—through new names, clothes, and networks—in their quest for freedom.<sup>89</sup> By weaving together the stories of free, enslaved, and fugitive women in nineteenth-century Washington, D.C., Nunley places Black women and their visions of liberty at the forefront of the city’s history.

In many ways, Nunley’s discussion of self-making builds on Nell Irvin Painter’s scholarship in *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (1997).<sup>90</sup> In this biography, Painter chronicled how Isabella Van Wagenen reinvented herself, taking on the name Sojourner Truth in June 1843. Because of the dearth of sources relating to Truth’s life, Painter openly confronted silences in the archive. Indeed, in “A Note on the Sources” at the end of the monograph, Painter surveyed the few sources she had at her disposal, explaining:

Writing the biography of someone who did not write demanded my emancipation from purely verbal sources. I needed to learn to read the sources that Truth generated herself: her photographs. Her *cartes-de-visite*, I discovered, conveyed their own messages, needing as much to be heard as what she said in words.<sup>91</sup>

Painter’s creative use of the archive expands students’ understanding of sources. Images, like ads, make arguments.

While Painter’s subject is one of the most famous African American women in the nineteenth century, the subject of W. Caleb McDaniel’s *Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America* (2019) is not (yet) a household name.<sup>92</sup> McDaniel followed the life of Henrietta Wood—a woman who was enslaved twice. Wood



had been enslaved in Kentucky, yet in 1848 was taken to Ohio where she obtained her freedom papers. There, she lived as a freed woman until 1853, when she was kidnapped and re-enslaved. After regaining her freedom at the end of the Civil War, Wood returned north, where she eventually sued for damages for lost wages on account of her re-enslavement—and won. In tracing Wood’s journey from Ohio to Kentucky and eventually to Texas, McDaniel used shreds of archival evidence to reconstruct Wood’s experiences. At the end of this book, McDaniel included “An Essay on Sources” that takes readers through the archival challenges of reconstructing Wood’s life. Recognizing that “others might find different paths through the archive and might come to different judgments about the sources,” McDaniel invited readers to explore his research and archival notes online.<sup>93</sup> Access to his personal research journal opens up even more opportunities for classroom discussions about the nature of the archive and the practice of history.

### **Results: Student-Researched Biographies**

As my students researched and wrote their own biographies, they drew on the methodologies of these scholars and many others. Although I provided guiding questions for their research, I did not dictate the details of their biographies. As a result, students could experiment with tone, structure, and writing style. This gave them choices—one of the key components for developing student writing. In *Why They Can’t Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities* (2020), John Warner argued that writing needs to be “open and exploratory.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education* (2017), authors Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner argued that “meaningful writing projects offer students opportunities for agency.”<sup>95</sup> This kind of assignment, I hoped, would encourage students to explore, experiment, and reflect. And it did.

At the end of the semester, my students produced biographies that were not only analytical, but were also thoughtful explorations of the archive and thoughtful reflections on the history of Atlantic slavery. Their writing showcased their curiosity. They were deeply committed to learning more about the subject of their biography and the world in which that person lived. They also modeled

“metacognition”—one of the habits of successful college writers identified by Warner. Metacognition refers to “the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge.”<sup>96</sup> In some instances, students narrated competing scenarios, unpacking the “what ifs” of the source. In other instances, they noted what they could not know about a person’s life. These reflections allowed them to meditate on their own experiences navigating and interrogating the archive of Atlantic slavery.

For example, one student wrote about Minas, a man owned by a naval officer in 1740s Yorktown, Virginia. Minas labored as a cooper, which meant that he had skills that would have been valued on nearby plantations. As a result, the student contemplated the possibility that Minas might have been hired out to a tobacco plantation where he could have trained others in cooperage. Given his location in Yorktown, though, it was also possible that Minas had extensive experience with the maritime world. As a result, the student reconstructed the connections and commerce of eighteenth-century Yorktown, thinking through what opportunities the port might have provided for escape. During this discussion, he noted that the enslaved constantly amassed information about the geographies around them, writing: “As he stood aboard Mr. Pride’s ship, Minas may have looked out across the river, eyeing the ferry and the ships, his eyes gliding along the banks, surveying his surroundings. He likely knew of the multiple escape routes, across land and sea, which Yorktown had to offer.”<sup>97</sup> At the end of the paper, the student confronted the silences embedded within the archive of slavery. He began his conclusion, “It seems this is where Minas fades into history. A notice of his capture does not appear in the *Freedom on the Move* database nor in the *Geography of Slavery in Virginia* database.”<sup>98</sup> For this student, this absence hinted at the possibility that Minas was indeed successful in seizing his own freedom.

Another student wrote about Cabenah, whose escape was advertised in 1754 in Kingston, Jamaica. This student interrogated the timing of Cabenah’s escape, which coincided with the end of the sugarcane harvesting season. He also considered where Cabenah might have fled. The advertisement noted that Cabenah was from the Gold Coast, so the student posited that he “may not have had great knowledge” of the island.<sup>99</sup> Even so, it was still possible that he knew of the powerful Maroon communities that lived in Jamaica’s

interior. Perhaps, he attempted to join their community. One of the most noteworthy details of the advertisement was the description of Cabenah's scars from guinea worm. The student used these details—and Vincent Brown's *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*<sup>100</sup>—to contextualize the landscape of death and disease in eighteenth-century Jamaica. In his conclusion, the student noted that while the ad allowed for sustained discussion of some parts of Cabenah's life, much was lacking. For example, he wondered about Cabenah's kinship networks, including his family. That information was absent from the archive.

While most students wrote about men and women in plantation America, a few students researched enslaved people living in the New England colonies. One student, for example, researched the life of Jack, a man who fled Connecticut with his violin in 1711. In her biography, the student reflected on the relationship between Puritanism and slavery. Though the enslaved experience in New England differed from Virginia or the Caribbean, the institution of slavery served a similar purpose: "to reinforce wealth, social status, and hegemonic patriarchal power."<sup>101</sup> The ad's reference to a violin, the student argued, only perpetuated these things. Playing the violin was a "marketable skill" in the colonies, and Jack's enslavers might have showcased his abilities at social events. When Jack fled, though, that skill might have opened up opportunities for wages, allowing him to continue living on the run. Jack's biographer concluded by recognizing the importance of uplifting stories about enslaved resistance, silences included.

Despite their wide-ranging subjects and differing structures, the biographies that my students produced mirrored some of the most thoughtful scholarship on Atlantic slavery. By contextualizing the lives of these freedom-seeking individuals, my students learned first-hand how to follow archival leads and employ creative methodologies. Above all, their experiences writing these biographies led to a semester-long discussion about how archives—through violence and erasure—shape the stories we tell about the enslaved. Throughout these discussions, students reckoned with two related questions. In "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman asked, "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?"<sup>102</sup> Similarly, in *The New York Review of Books*, Annette Gordon-Reed asked, "What threshold of evidence must exist before

a valid attempt can be made to rescue individuals from historical erasure?"<sup>103</sup> For my students, that threshold consisted of a few sentences. Though punctuated with silences, those sentences make possible the production of narratives. Those narratives, in turn, allow for histories of Atlantic slavery that center people rather than numbers, and the actions of the enslaved rather than those of the enslaver. Moreover, these histories highlight the everyday acts of resistance through which people seized their own freedom.

## Notes

1. Annette Gordon-Reed, "Rebellious History," *The New York Review of Books* 67, no. 16, October 22, 2020, 4. Gordon-Reed reviewed Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019).

2. Gordon-Reed, "Rebellious History," 4.

3. Kyle's paper excerpt assignment for "HIST 4933: Slavery in the Atlantic World."

4. Monita K. Bell, "Another Slavery Simulation: We Can and Must Do Better," Learning for Justice, Southern Poverty Law Center, March 11, 2019, <<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/another-slavery-simulation-we-can-and-must-do-better>>. For more on the history of and reactions to historical role-playing in history classes, see Rebecca Onion, "What It Felt Like," *Slate*, May 20, 2019, <<https://slate.com/human-interest/2019/05/history-classroom-role-playing-games-slavery-holocaust.html>>. For more on how students experience curriculum that mistreats slavery, see LaGarrett J. King and Ashley N. Woodson, "Baskets of Cotton and Birthday Cakes: Teaching Slavery in Social Studies Classrooms," *Social Studies Education Review* 6, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 1-18. Despite research on this harm, educators continue to use games to teach the history of slavery. See Patrick Rael, "Playing with the Past: Teaching Slavery with Board Games," *Perspectives on History* 59, no. 8 (November 2021): 18-20.

5. My pedagogical approach was also informed by P. Gabrielle Foreman, et al., "Writing about Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help," community-sourced document, <<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A4TEdDgYsIX-hlKezLodMIM71My3KTN0zxRv0IQTOQs/>>.

6. Antonio T. Bly, "'A Likely Negro': Using Runaway-Slave Advertisements to Teach Slavery," in *Understanding and Teaching American Slavery*, ed. Bethany Jay and Cynthia Lynn Lyerly (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2016): 263-282, quote from 271.

7. Matthew Mason and Rita G. Koman, "Complicating Slavery: Teaching with Runaway Advertisements," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 3 (April 2003): 31-34.

8. Joseph Yannielli, "My Runaway Class," DigitalHistories@Yale (blog), February 8, 2021, <<https://digitalhistories.yctf.org/2013/02/08/my-runaway-class/>>. Caleb McDaniel, "Homework #1: The Anatomy of an Ad," Digital History @ Rice, (blog), January 17, 2014, <<http://digitalhistory.blogs.rice.edu/2014/01/17/homework-1-the-anatomy-of-an-ad/>>. Also see "DIGITAL: Databases of Runaway Slave Advertisements," African Diaspora, Ph.D. (blog), April 20, 2018, <<https://africandiasporaphd.com/2018/04/20/digital-databases-of-runaway-slave-advertisements/>>.

9. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995, reprinted in 2015), 26.

10. Runaway advertisement for Jack, *The Boston News-Letter*, April 16, 1711, transcription accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/dEfKf4ijNa6y5XD6J3U73f>>.

11. Runaway advertisement for Answer, *The Barbados Mercury* (Bridgetown, Barbados), February 12, 1788, image accessible through *Early Caribbean Digital Archive*, Northeastern University Library, <<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20323571>>.

12. This mirrors what Antonio T. Bly outlines in his chapter, "'A Likely Negro': Using Runaway-Slave Advertisements to Teach Slavery," 271-272.

13. Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (February 1980): 44-78.

14. There is a rich body of scholarship on Atlantic slavery. Thus, these notes are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they reference the books my students found most helpful for their research. On the possibilities and limitations of urban settings, see Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury, eds., *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). For the rhythms and labor systems of Atlantic plantations, see Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by The University of North Carolina Press, 1972). On enslaved mobility, see Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London, United Kingdom: Verso, 2018); N. A. T. Hall, "Maritime Maroons: Grand Marronage from the Danish West Indies," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (October 1985): 476-498.

15. For more on slavery and war in Virginia, see Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013).

16. Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 151-153.

17. For more on naming, see Trevor Burnard, "Slave Naming Patterns: Onomastics and the Taxonomy of Race in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 325-346; Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, "Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650-1830," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1996): 685-728; Cheryll Ann Cody, "There Was No 'Absalom' on the Ball Plantation: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720-1865," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (June 1987): 563-596. For a more recent, public-facing discussion on the power of names, see Martha S. Jones, "Ida, Maya, Rosa, Harriet: The Power in Our Names," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/style/self-care/sojourner-truth-harriet-tubman-slavery-names.html>>.

18. Runaway advertisement for Cabenah, *Weekly Jamaica Courant* (Kingston, Jamaica), June 28, 1754, transcription accessible through Douglas B. Chambers, ed., "Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I): Eighteenth Century," *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, University of Florida, <<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021144/00001>>.

19. For more on Dahomey, see James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvarez, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press), 9-26. On the importance of African warfare to enslaved populations in the Americas, see Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020). For more on the Middle Passage, see Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Sowande' M. Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016); Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).

20. Runaway advertisement for Nim, *The Boston News-Letter*, July 23, 1716, transcription accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/vSLtqv7mtatmNLjLu3tGiM>>.

21. Runaway advertisement for Minas, *The Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, VA), July 31, 1746, transcription accessible through *The Geography of Slavery in Virginia*, <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1746&month=7](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1746&month=7)>.

22. Runaway advertisement for Abraham, *The North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern, NC), March 13, 1778, image accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/fou6bv9tVy2yuz96JDhtB4>>.

23. Runaway advertisement for Cyrus et al., *The Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), June 27, 1780, transcript accessible through *The Geography of Slavery in Virginia*, <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1780&month=6](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1780&month=6)>.

24. Runaway advertisement for Jenney, *The New-York Gazette*, December 19, 1737, transcription accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/91p11kA2oHPfJacFKw5mT7>>.

25. Runaway advertisement for Jack, *The New-York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury*, May 23, 1774, transcription accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/uUbpn2pZ25xmuTJiL6wuaU>>.

26. For more on language, see Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 560-579.
27. Jonathan Prude, "To Look upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (June 1991): 126.
28. Prude, "To Look upon the 'Lower Sort,'" 138, 143. The ads used for my assignment revealed a similar pattern of frequency. Of the fifteen advertisements, ten of them referenced clothing. Seven of those ten did so with vivid detail.
29. Runaway advertisement for Nim, <<https://fotm.link/vSLtqv7mtatmNLjLu3tGiM>>.
30. Runaway advertisement for Cyrus et al., <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1780&month=6](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1780&month=6)>.
31. Runaway advertisement for Jenney, <<https://fotm.link/91p11kA2oHPfJacFKw5mT7>>.
32. Runaway advertisement for Frank, *The North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern, NC), November 15, 1751, image accessible through *North Carolina Runaway Slave Notices*, <<http://dlas.uncg.edu/notices/notice/1456/>>.
33. Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 3 (August 2002): 561. For more on clothing and cloth among enslaved populations, see Steeve O. Buckridge, *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004); Mary E. Hicks, "Transatlantic Threads of Meaning: West African Textile Entrepreneurship in Salvador da Bahia, 1770-1870," *Slavery & Abolition* 41, no. 4 (December 2020): 695-722. For more on how clothing was created and distributed on one plantation, see "Slave Clothing," in *The Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington*, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2012, <<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/slave-clothing/>>.
34. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance," 561.
35. Runaway advertisement for Jack, <<https://fotm.link/dEfkF4ijNa6y5XD6J3U73f>>.
36. Laurent Dubois, *The Banjo: America's African Instrument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
37. For more on music among enslaved populations, see Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 580-594; Laurent Dubois, David K. Garner, and Mary Caton Lingold, "Musical Passage: A Voyage to 1688 Jamaica," <<http://www.musicalpassage.org/>>.
38. Runaway advertisement for Cyrus et al., <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1780&month=6](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1780&month=6)>. For a thoughtful discussion about the ethical distinction enslaved people made between stealing from enslavers and stealing from one another, see Randy M. Browne, *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 157-190.
39. Runaway advertisement for Frank, <<http://dlas.uncg.edu/notices/notice/1456/>>. For scholarship on branding as punishment, see Sharon Block, *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 132-134.

40. Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

41. Runaway advertisement for Minas, <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1746&month=7](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1746&month=7)>. For more on smallpox, see Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001). On disease more broadly among enslaved populations, see Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Londa Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); Rana A. Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

42. Runaway advertisement for Cabenah, <<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021144/00001>>.

43. Runaway advertisement for Lucy, *Weekly Jamaica Courant* (Kingston, Jamaica), transcription available through Douglas B. Chambers, ed., “Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I): Eighteenth Century,” *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, University of Florida, <<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021144/00001>>.

44. Runaway advertisement for Cyrus et al., <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1780&month=6](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1780&month=6)>.

45. Runaway advertisement for Nim, <<https://fotm.link/vSLtqv7mtatmNLjLu3tGiM>>.

46. Runaway advertisement for Abraham, <<https://fotm.link/fou6bv9tVy2yuz96JDhtB4>>.

47. On networks among enslaved people, see Camp, “The Pleasures of Resistance”; Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Verso Books, 2018).

48. Runaway advertisement for Jack, <<https://fotm.link/uUbnp2pZ25xmuTJiL6wuaU>>.

49. On the maritime world of the enslaved, see Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2018); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997); David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman’s Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

50. For an overview of maroon communities in North America, see Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exile: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). On the Dismal Swamp, see Marcus P. Nevius, *City of Refuge: Slavery and Petit Marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp, 1763-1856* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2020). On flight to Mexico, see Alice L. Baumgartner, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).



51. Runaway advertisement for Frank, <<http://dlas.uncg.edu/notices/notice/1456/>>.

52. Runaway advertisement for Violet, *The Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), July 1, 1771, transcription accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/jvHwwtA9CSSvebn8bFfxRU>>.

53. Runaway advertisement for Elijah, *The Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, VA), November 1, 1776, transcription accessible through *The Geography of Slavery in Virginia*, <[http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse\\_ads.php?year=1776&month=11](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1776&month=11)>.

54. Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 7. For more on writing “with and against the archive,” see Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 12.

55. Donald C. Lord, “Slave Ads as Historical Evidence,” *The History Teacher* 5, no. 4 (May 1972): 10-16. It should be noted that Lord advised educators to “recreate a socio-drama of a slave sale” at the conclusion of their lesson on ads. This kind of role-playing is traumatic and inappropriate, as discussed at the beginning of this article.

56. For other compilations of these databases, see Crystal Eddins, “On the Lives of Fugitives: Runaways Slave Advertisement Databases,” *Humanities Commons*, March 30, 2017, <<https://publishing-archives.hastac.hcommons.org/2017/03/30/on-the-lives-of-fugitives-runaway-slave-advertisement-databases/>>. See also the Twitter thread by Jessica Marie Johnson: “Because I ran into so many in my course prep this morning: Behold, a thread on runaway slave ad databases. Let’s begin.” Jessica Marie Johnson (@jmjafx), Twitter, April 18, 2018, 10:46 a.m., <<https://twitter.com/jmjafx/status/986632081957670913>>. This thread is also available on the African Diaspora, Ph.D. blog at <<https://africandiasporaphd.com/2018/04/20/digital-databases-of-runaway-slave-advertisements/>>.

57. *North Carolina Runaway Slave Notices, 1750-1865*, University Libraries of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the F. D. Bluford Library at North Carolina A&T State University, <<https://dlas.uncg.edu/notices/>>.

58. “Explore Advertisements,” *The Geography of Slavery in Virginia*, Tom Costa and The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia, <<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/explore.html>>.

59. *Texas Runaway Slave Project*, East Texas Digital Archives, Stephen F. Austin State University, <<https://digital.sfasu.edu/digital/collection/RSP>>; *Lone Star Slavery Project*, East Texas Digital Archives, Stephen F. Austin State University, <<https://digital.sfasu.edu/digital/collection/lonestarslave>>.

60. This list is not comprehensive. See also Julie DeMatteis and Louis S. Diggs, Sr., *Runaway Slave Ads: Baltimore County Maryland, 1842-1863*, AfriGeneas: African Ancestored Genealogy, <[https://www.afrigeneas.com/library/runaway\\_ads/balt-intro.html](https://www.afrigeneas.com/library/runaway_ads/balt-intro.html)>; Gwendolyn Hall, *Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1719-1820*, <<http://www.ibiblio.org/laslave/>>.

61. “The Project,” Runaway Slaves in Britain: Bondage, Freedom and Race in the Eighteenth Century, University of Glasgow, <<https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/>>.

62. *The Early Caribbean Digital Archive*, Northeastern University, <<https://ecda.northeastern.edu/>>. Quote from “About” page.

63. *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, Florida International University in partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands and the University of Florida, <<https://www.dloc.com/>>. In particular, see Douglas B. Chambers, ed., “Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I): Eighteenth Century,” *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, University of Florida, <<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021144/00001>>.

64. *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://www.freedomonthemove.org/>>. Quote from “About” page.

65. Runaway advertisement for Penelope, *The Boston News-Letter*, June 26, 1704, transcription accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/rdREtRnxx7ByUpFkDLLZTf>>.

66. Runaway advertisement for Sanders, *Daily Conservative* (Raleigh, NC), March 25, 1865, image accessible through *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://fotm.link/9FxFUWSivAs5DKyQy3k5wMm>>.

67. To volunteer, you must make a free account. See “Contribute,” *Freedom on the Move*, <<https://app.freedomonthemove.org/>>.

68. Vanessa Holden, “Announcing the Launch of Freedom on the Move,” *The Junto* (blog), February 14, 2019, <<https://earlyamericanists.com/2019/02/14/announcing-the-launch-of-freedom-on-the-move/>>.

69. *Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade*, Enslaved.org, <<http://www.enslaved.org>>.

70. *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation*, Enslaved.org, <<https://jsdp.enslaved.org/>>.

71. These biographies can be accessed under “Stories,” Enslaved.org, <<https://enslaved.org/stories/>>.

72. “Stories: Harry Washington,” Enslaved.org, <<https://enslaved.org/fullStory/16-23-126804/>>.

73. Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2020), 230.

74. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 1.

75. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 53-58, quote from 55.

76. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 4.

77. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 4.

78. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 5. Should you be unable to assign excerpts from the book, Fuentes’s interviews with *The Junto* and *Black Perspectives* detail her approach as well. See Emily Owens, “Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive: An Interview with Marisa Fuentes,” *Black Perspectives* (blog), October 4, 2016, <<https://www.aaihs.org/enslaved-women-violence-and-the-archive-an-interview-with-marisa-fuentes/>>; Jessica Parr, “Q&A, Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*,” *The Junto* (blog), May 15, 2017, <<https://earlyamericanists.com/2017/05/15/qa-marisa-fuentes-dispossessed-lives/>>. For more on the violence and silences of the archive of slavery, see Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts.”

79. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 144.

80. James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4.
81. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
82. Miguel Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave: 50th Anniversary Edition*, trans. W. Nick Hill (New York: Curbstone Books, 2016).
83. Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
84. Erica L. Ball, Tatiana Seijas, and Terri L. Synder, eds., *As If She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Women and Emancipation in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
85. Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge* (New York: Atria, 2017).
86. Quoted in Dunbar, *Never Caught*, 111.
87. Tamika Y. Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 2.
88. Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty*, 40-69, quote from 41.
89. Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty*, 47-48.
90. Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).
91. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 291.
92. W. Caleb McDaniel, *Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
93. McDaniel, *Sweet Taste of Liberty*, 257. McDaniel refers to his site at <http://wiki.wcaleb.rice.edu/>.
94. John Warner, *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 16.
95. Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner, *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2016), 4.
96. Warner, *Why They Can't Write*, 25.
97. Nate's final paper, "HIST 4933: Slavery in the Atlantic World."
98. Nate's final paper, "HIST 4933: Slavery in the Atlantic World."
99. Kevin's final paper, "HIST 4933: Slavery in the Atlantic World."
100. Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
101. Izzy's final paper, "HIST 4933: Slavery in the Atlantic World."
102. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 3.
103. Gordon-Reed, "Rebellious History," 4.

## Appendix

### **Contextualized Biography** HIST 4933: Slavery in the Atlantic World

#### **Syllabus Assignment Description**

Contextualized Biography (25%): Using the text of a runaway ad as your basis, you will write a contextualized biography of an enslaved person that reconstructs their life as much as possible. This paper, which will be 8-10 pages long, is an opportunity for you to think like a historian. What clues does the ad give about the person's life, family, and labor? There will be several benchmark assignments related to this paper throughout the semester, including a one- to two-page paper due on September 17 and October 22. The final draft will be due the day of your final exam, Tuesday Dec. 8. More information about this paper will be on D2L.

#### **Further Information**

Think of this paper as part research project and part meditation on the archive of slavery. To reconstruct the lives of enslaved people, historians creatively engage with sources produced by enslavers. They think through the silences of these sources and follow small details in hopes of learning more information. James Sweet's book on Domingos Álvarez is one example of this kind of approach. The paper that you are writing this semester is a similar project, but on a much smaller scale. Using a runaway ad as a springboard for research, you will reconstruct the life of one of the millions of people who endured—and resisted—their enslavement in the Atlantic world.

Your paper will be 8 to 10 pages long, but you will have the opportunity to write portions of it throughout the semester. As you write your paper, you are welcome to muse on the silences and limitations of the source. You can think through and acknowledge the many possibilities that could characterize a person's life and explain their background.

Your paper should include at least 5 secondary sources and 1 primary source beyond those that are assigned in this class. (You are welcome to—and I expect that you will want to—cite some of the assigned readings, especially Equiano's *Narrative*.) Both secondary and primary sources will help you build out the details of a person's life. To find these sources, consult Google Books, the library catalog, article databases such as JSTOR, and me. I am happy to recommend (and lend) books, databases, and articles.

#### **Guiding Questions**

To help you analyze the ad, consider the following questions. They will guide your research as well as your writing.

## Guiding Questions

### *Location*

- Where is this ad taken out? Where did the person flee from?
- Was the ad taken out in the same place from which the person fled? Or was the ad placed in a newspaper in a different colony/state?
  - What might this information reveal about the person’s movements?
- Where did this person live?
  - Did they live in a sugar colony? A tobacco colony? A city? A plantation? Analyze slavery in that location. What (if any) other places were mentioned in the ad? Why?

### *Year*

- When was this ad taken out?
  - What was happening in that colony? A war? A rebellion? An agricultural revolution?
  - Does the month/season reveal anything about the agricultural season?
- How much time had passed between the person’s escape and the ad?
  - What could have happened in the intervening time?

### *Name*

- What was the individual’s name?
  - Does their name reveal anything about their ethnic identity?
- Any notable discussion about the person’s name? What do those comments reveal?
  - Some ads will mention that a person preferred a different name from that which their enslaver gave them.

### *Birthplace*

- Does the ad give any hints as to where or when the person was born?
  - An enslaver might mention a specific region in Africa or refer to someone as a “creole.”

### *Daily Life*

- What type of labor did the person perform on a daily basis?
  - What was the occupation of the enslaver? Does the enslaver’s occupation provide any hints as to what kind of labor the person might do in the enslaver’s household and/or business?
- Any comments about the person’s language?
  - What do those comments reveal?
- What did the individual take with them? What do those items reveal?
- Any discussion of the person’s family?
- Any mention of scars from diseases?

### *Additional Information*

- Did the enslaver have any idea where the person escaped to? Why?
- Who did the person escape with?
- Did they suspect the person would attempt to pass as free?
- Did the ad mention any previous attempts to resist enslavement?

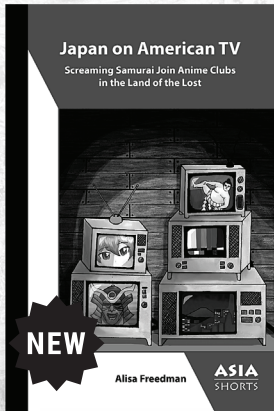
# ASIA SHORTS

an Association for Asian Studies Book Series



**AAS MEMBERS  
SAVE ON AAS  
PUBLICATIONS**

## NEW BOOK RELEASES:



**Japan on American TV: Screaming Samurai Join Anime Clubs in the Land of the Lost**

**Alisa Freedman**

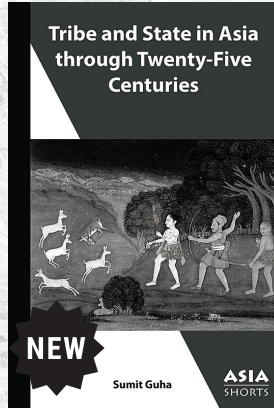
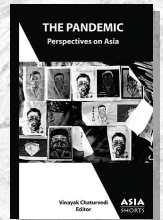
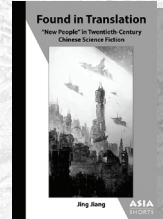
ISBN: 9781952636219

202pages

FORMAT: Paperback

AAS MEMBERS: \$12.80

NONMEMBERS: \$16.00



**Tribe and State in Asia through Twenty-Five Centuries**

**Sumit Guha**

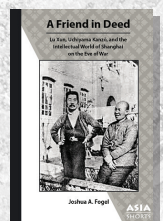
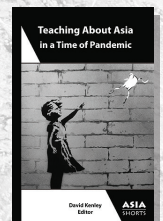
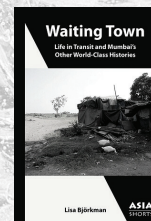
ISBN: 9780924304958

142 pages

FORMAT: Paperback

AAS MEMBERS: \$12.80

NONMEMBERS: \$16.00



**Association for  
Asian Studies  
PUBLICATIONS**

Distributed by  
Columbia University Press

**EXPLORE THE WHOLE RANGE  
OF PUBLICATIONS AT:**

 [asianstudies.org/bookstore/](http://asianstudies.org/bookstore/)